

# **CJS Hayward: The Complete Works**

**From the "The Major  
Works" series**

**CJS Hayward**

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This book is dedicated to one of the smallest dustbunnies under my  
bed, which taught me to feel shame at being an overprivileged and  
overeducated white male.

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# 1054 and All That

## The Confused Person's Guide to Being Even More Confused About Orthodoxy

Eastern Orthodoxy is exactly like Roman Catholicism, except that it is Oriental and exotic. The Catholic Church split off from the Orthodox Church because the Orthodox would not accept the *filioque* clause, an anti-Arian shibboleth which offended the traditional Orthodox reverence for Constantine (a baptized Arian). The Orthodox Church is very wise because it has traditionally used the Julian Calendar to have an extra thirteen days to prepare and contemplate before each day. Each year, the Orthodox Church also rolls a die and holds Easter up to six weeks later than in the West, just to make things more confusing.

The Orthodox Church, sometimes called the Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, held seven ecumenical councils in response to controversies that arose. The main results were that the Church officially ruled out certain misunderstandings of Christ. The first council was the Council at Nicaea, modern day Nice, where Saint Nicholas of Myra and Lycia (our jolly old Saint Nick) boxed Arius on the ear. The Council at Nicaea rejected Aryanism, which teaches that Christ had blonde hair and blue eyes (a misunderstanding which is still prevalent in the land of blonde hair and blue ears). The other councils are really not that important, as they dealt with abstruse ancient controversies and don't

have much to say about the modern and practical questions people struggle with today, such as whether Jesus was really tempted like us, or was just play-acting. The word "ecumenical" comes from the Greek οικουμενη, meaning the whole civilized world. Catholics and Orthodox disagree whether there are still being ecumenical councils; the Catholics, who are traditionally more universal and embracing, believe that a council without Orthodox bishops can still be ecumenical, while the Orthodox (considered by the Catholics to be schismatic) do not believe one can hold an ecumenical council without healing certain divisions, a task which faces any number of daunting obstacles, ranging from the Catholic Church's progressive Westernization to the Archbishop of Canterbury's demonstration that [an Anglican can be a Druid](#). (If you find this confusing, don't worry. Most Orthodox don't understand it either.) Most devout Orthodox are wary at best of ecumenism as Protestant in spirit, but even these Orthodox should none the less be distinguished from the "True Orthodox", the preferred designation for a loose confederation people and groups who regard themselves as properly Orthodox and Novatians as liberal ecumenists.

Understanding the Orthodox understanding of understanding is a point that is not often appreciated, partly because the syntax of "understanding the Orthodox understanding of understanding" is very confusing. The Orthodox believe, as Catholics still do on paper if not in practice, that we have a logos (from the Greek λογος, meaning the part of the mind we use to keep track of facts related to corporate logos), and a noose (from the Greek νοος, meaning the part of the mind we use to grasp spiritual realities), and with typical ingenuity the Orthodox insist on using the noose for practical matters. The noose is very different from any Western understanding of mind, but if I explained it you wouldn't believe the claim that Orthodoxy is ordinary, concerned with the here and now, and not exotic in the way people assume. Some Orthodox, caught up in the Celtic culture boom, want to represent the noose with a stylized knot.

The words at the institution of Holy Communion, λαβετε φαγετε (literally, "Take, eat") have been misunderstood in the West (i.e. Catholics and Protestants) to mean "Take, understand." In the East, among Orthodox, people have insisted on preserving the apostolic meaning unchanged and have therefore reacted against the West and taken the text to mean "Take, but do not understand." The Orthodox is

taken the text to mean, Take, but do not understand. The Orthodox is free to say that the Eucharist is a symbol, on the understanding that this does not mean anything like the Western understanding of "just a symbol." The Orthodox is also equally free to claim that transubstantiation occurs, on condition that "transubstantiation" does not mean what the Catholic doctrine says it means.

Grace is like the sun in Orthodoxy: not only do we see it, but it allows us to see everything else. "Grace" characteristically means different things for Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant; for Catholics "grace" is what we create by our works, for Orthodox "grace" is when God gives himself, and for Protestants "Grace" is a woman's name. Grace is behind works, sacraments, and everything else—food and drink, for that matter. Orthodox believe that God's grace rains down from Heaven, and because "He has established the *round* world so sure, it shall never be moved," God's grace then collects at the center of the earth.

Fully Orthodox believers may be divided into cradle Orthodox, who don't understand Orthodoxy very well and tend not to take it seriously, and convert Orthodox, who overdo *everything*. Orthodox are required to remain in communion with their bishops, which means community and a degree of submission to authority; people who fail to do this are called non-canonical, schismatic, etc. Non-canonical "Orthodox" are notorious for a rigid legalism in their interpretation of ancient canons. Canonical Orthodox take the matter much more lightly and often do not know the difference between a canon and a cannon.

There are many ranks of clergy, including (but not limited to) readers\*, subdeacons, deacons, archdeacons, proper subdeacons, sub-sub-deacons, ostriches, priests, arch-priests, archimandrites, bishops, arch-bishops, bishops of the caves, metropolitans, patriarchs, prophets, ascetics, protons, neutrons, and Abednegons. There is a proper way of addressing each of these ranks, and it is traditional to embarrass your priest by not knowing how to address the higher ranks of clergy or (at your option) not being sure how to address *any* clergy.

\* Remember that Orthodoxy originated at a time when most people didn't know how to read and write, and Orthodoxy hasn't seen mass literacy as reason to change its practices. The positive way of stating this is that Orthodoxy, while incorporating the act of writing, preserves many of the attributes and the essential spirit of an oral tradition and culture, an achievement which may be appreciated in light of the anthropological

observation that the opposite of "literate" is not "illiterate" but "oral". In other words, a Catholic is an Orthodox who can read.

Orthodoxy has been blessed by many great theologians, including Saint Dionysius the Aeropagite, who was not Saint Dionysius the Aeropagite but another writer known as Saint Dionysius the Aeropagite, and Saint Maximus Confessor, who stalwartly resisted the heresy that Christ lacked a human will, and whose intricate analysis of will concluded that we have something called a "gnomic" will and Christ does not. Augustine is not revered nearly so much in the East, owing to the fact that he became a Christian and in fact a bishop without realizing he was supposed to stop being a Manichee. (This is why Augustine is considered the founder of American Catholicism.) The Orthodox consider the patristic era to be a golden age for theology; it ended in the ninth century and has produced a small number of patristic theologians since its close.

In contrast to American individualism, the Orthodox Church talks about how when we come closer to Christ the more closely we resemble each other. This spirit of uniformity is demonstrated by her saints, who have been known to live on top of a pillar, make acts of public foolishness a form of spiritual discipline, or walk around after their deaths.

Icons are called "windows of Heaven" and, apart from being an emblem of matter drawn into spiritual glory, provide a place where saints can look in and see how people like them were on earth. This is a humbling enough experience for the saints, so that they no longer have problems with pride.

Please *do* ask why we aren't up to date enough to have women priests. Some Orthodox consider feminism to be an interesting spot of local color in our time and place, and at any rate the Orthodox will remember feminism as it remembers other challenges which lasted a mere century or two and which you probably haven't heard of. The Orthodox Church will continue discipling boys and girls, men and women, to be the men and women God created them to be, long after feminism is one more -ism that people of the future will learn about when they study the history of abandoned fashions. And besides, Orthodoxy is gender balanced. Cradle Orthodoxy is a woman thing, and convert Orthodoxy is a man thing.

It is an Orthodox principle that there should be one Orthodox Church in each country. That is why, if you are an American, you have your choice of Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Orthodox Church in America, Antiochian Orthodox

America, Antiochian Orthodox...

Metania (μετανοια) is from meta (μετα) as in "metacognition" or "metaphysics", for a philosophical analysis of other things, and noia (νοια), which means mind but is not to be confused with the noose above. Hence "metania" means a philosophical discussion of how our minds should be functioning if we are Orthodox. This is very important in convert Orthodoxy; cradle Orthodox think converts miss metania completely. "Metania" also refers to an action performed with the body in worship, thus exemplifying the Orthodox penchant for conflating mind and body.

One closing word. Part of what distinguishes Orthodox theology is that it is no more systematic than the Church Fathers. In keeping with this tradition, this introduction is proudly disorganized.

# An Abstract Art of Memory

**Abstract.** Author briefly describes classic mnemotechnics, indicates a possible weakness in their ability to deal with abstractions, and suggests a parallel development of related principles designed to work well with abstractions.

Frances Yates opens *The Art of Memory* with a tale from ancient Greece<sup>[1]</sup>:

At a banquet given by a nobleman of Thessaly named Scopas, the poet Simonides of Ceos chanted a lyric poem in honor of his post but including a passage in praise of Castor and Pollux. Scopas meanly told the poet that he would only pay him half the sum agreed upon for the panegyric and that he must obtain the balance from the twin gods to whom he had devoted half the poem. A little later, a message was brought in to Simonides that two young men were waiting outside who wished to see him. He rose from the banquet and went out but could find no one. During his absence the roof of the banqueting hall fell in, crushing Scopas and all the guests beneath the ruins; the corpses were so mangled that the relatives who came to take them away for burial were unable to identify them. But Simonides remembered the places at which they had been sitting at the table and was therefore able to indicate to the relatives which were their dead.

After his spatial memory in this event, Simonides is credited with having created an art of memory: start with a building full of distinct

places. If you want to remember something, imagine a striking image with a token of what you wish to remember at the place. To recall something naval, you might imagine a giant nail driven into your front door, with an anchor hanging from it; if you visualize this intensely, then when in your mind's eye you go through your house and imagine your front door, then the anchor will come to mind and you will remember the boats. Imagining a striking image on a remembered place is called *pegging*: when you do this, you fasten a piece of information on a given peg, and can pick it up later. Yates uses the terms *art of memory* and *artificial memory* as essentially interchangeable with *mnemotechnics*, and I will follow a similar usage.

There is a little more than this to the technique, and it allows people to do things that seem staggering to someone not familiar with the phenomenon[2]. Being able to look at a list of twenty items and recite it forwards and backwards is more than a party trick. The technique is phenomenally well-adapted to language acquisition. It is possible for a person skilled in the technique to learn to read a language in weeks. It is the foundation to some people learning an amount of folklore so that today they would be considered walking encyclopedias. This art of memory was an important part of the ancient Greek rhetorical tradition[3], drawn by medieval Europe into the cardinal virtue of wisdom[4], and then transformed into an occult art by the Renaissance[5]. Medieval and renaissance variations put the technique to vastly different use, and understood it to signify greatly different things, but outside of Lullism[6] and Ramism[7], the essential technique was the same.

In my own efforts to learn the classical form of the art of memory, I have noticed something curious. I'm better at remembering people's names, and I no longer need to write call numbers down when I go to the library. I was able, without difficulty, to deliver an hour-long speech from memory. Learning vocabulary for foreign languages has come much more quickly; it only took me about a month to learn to read the Latin Vulgate. My weaknesses in memory are not nearly so great as they were, and I know other people have been much better at the art than I am. At the same time, I've found one surprise, something different from the all-around better memory I suspected the art would give me. What is it? If there is a problem, it is most likely subtle: the system has obvious

benefits. To tease it out, I'd like to recall a famous passage from Plato's *Phaedrus*[\[8\]](#):

*Socrates:* At the Egyptian city of Naucratis, there was a famous old god, whose name was Theuth; the bird which is called the Ibis was sacred to him, and he was the inventor of many arts, such as arithmetic and calculation and geometry and astronomy and draughts and dice, but his great discovery was the use of letters. Now in those days Thamus was the king of the whole of Upper Egypt, which is in the district surrounding that great city which is called by the Hellenes Egyptian Thebes, and they call the god himself Ammon. To him came Theuth and showed his inventions, desiring that the other Egyptians might be allowed to have the benefit of them; he went through them, and Thamus inquired about their several uses, and praised some of them and censured others, as he approved or disapproved of them. There would be no use in repeating all that Thamus said to Theuth in praise or blame of the various arts. But when they came to letters, This, said Theuth, will make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories; for this is the cure of forgetfulness and folly. Thamus replied: O most ingenious Theuth, he who has the gift of invention is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance a paternal love of your own child has led you to say what is not the fact: for this invention of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters. You have found a specific, not for memory but for reminiscence, and you give your disciples only the pretence of wisdom; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome, having the reputation of knowledge without the reality.

There is clear concern that writing is not what it appears, and it will endanger or destroy the knowledge people keep in memory; a case can be made that the phenomenon of Renaissance artificial memory as an occult practice occurred because only someone involved in the occult would have occasion to keep such memory after books were so easily available.

What kind of things might one wish to have in memory? Let me quote

one classic example: the argument by which Cantor proved that there are more real numbers between 0 and 1 than there are counting numbers (1, 2, 3...). I paraphrase the basic argument here:

1. Two sets are said to have the same number of elements if you can always pair them up, with nothing left over on either side. If one set always has something left over after the matching up, it has more elements.
2. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that there are at least as many counting numbers as real numbers between 0 and 1. Then you can make a list of the numbers between 0 and 1:

```

1: .012343289889...
2: .328932198323...
3: .438724328743...
4: .988733287923...
5: .324432003442...
6: .213443765001...
7: .321010320030...
8: .323983213298...
9: .982133982198...
10: .321932198904...
11: .000321321278...
12: .032103217832...

```

3. Now, take the first decimal place of the first number, the second of the second number, and so on and so forth, and make them into a number:

```

1: .012343289889...
2: .328932198323...
3: .438724328743...
4: .988733287923...
5: .324432003442...
6: .213443765001...
7: .321010320030...
8: .323983213298...
9: .982133982198...
10: .321932198904...
11: .000321321278...
12: .032103217832...

```

Result:

-----

.028733312972...

4. Now make another number between 0 and 1 that is different at every decimal place from the number just computed:

.139844423083...

5. Now, remember that we assumed that the list has all the numbers between 0 and 1: every single one, without exception. Therefore, if this assumption is true, then the latter number we constructed must be on the list. But where?

The number can't be the first number on the list, because it was constructed to be different at the first decimal place from the first number on the list. It can't be the second number on the list, because it was constructed to be different at the second decimal place from the second number on the list. Nor can it be the third, fourth, fifth... in fact, it can't be *anywhere* on the list because it was constructed to be different. So we have one number left over. (Can we put that number on the list? Certainly, but the argument shows that the new list will leave out another number.)

6. The list of numbers between 0 and 1 doesn't have all the numbers between 0 and 1.
7. We have a contradiction.
8. We started by assuming that you can make a list that contains all the numbers between 0 and 1, but there's a contradiction: any list leaves numbers left over. Therefore, our assumption must be wrong. Therefore, there must be too many real numbers between 0 and 1 to assign a separate counting number to each of them.

Let's say we want to commit this argument to memory. A mathematician with artificial memory might say, "That's easy! You just imagine a chessboard with distorted mirrors along its diagonal." That is indeed a good image if you are a mathematician who already understands the concept. If you find the argument hard to follow, it is at best a difficult thing to store via the artificial memory. Even if it can be done, storing this argument in artificial memory is probably much more trouble than learning it as a mathematician would.

Let me repeat the quotation from the Phaedrus, while changing a few words:

*Jefferson:* At the Greek region of Thessaly, there was a famous old poet, whose name was Simonides; totems seen with the inner eye were devoted to him, and he was the inventor of a great art, greater than arithmetic and calculation and geometry and astronomy and draughts. Now in those days Rousseau was a sage revered throughout the West, and they called the god himself *Rationis*. To him came Simonides and showed his invention, desiring that the rest of the world might be allowed to have the benefit of it; he went through it, and Rousseau inquired about its several uses, and praised some of them and censured others, as he approved or disapproved of them. There would be no use in repeating all that Rousseau said to Simonides in praise or blame of various facets. But when they came to inner writing, This, said Simonides, will make the West wiser and give it better memory; for this is the cure of forgetfulness and of folly. Rousseau replied: O most ingenious Simonides, he who has the gift of invention is not always the best judge of utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance a paternal love of your own child has led you to say what is not the fact; for this invention will create forgetfulness in the learner's souls, because they will not remember abstract things; they will trust to mere mnemonic symbols and not remember things of depth. You have found a specific, not for memory but for reminiscence, and you give your disciples only the pretence of wisdom; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome, having the reputation and outer shell of knowledge without the reality of deep thought.

It is clear that if we follow Thomas Aquinas's instructions on memory to visualize a woman for wisdom, we may recall wisdom. *What is less clear is that this inner writing particularly helps an abstract recollection of wisdom.* It may be able to recall an understanding of wisdom acquired without the help of artificial memory, but this art which allows at times stunning performance in the memorization of concrete data is of more debatable merit in learning abstraction. It has been my own experience that abstractions can be forced through the gate of concreteness in artificial memory, but it is like forcing a sponge through a funnel. While I

admittedly don't have a medieval practitioner's inner vocabulary to deal with abstractions, using the artificial memory to deal with abstractions seems awkward in much the same way that storing individual letters through artificial memory[9] is awkward. The standard artificial memory is a tool for being reminded of abstractions, but not for remembering them. It offers the abstract thinker a seductive way to recall a great many concrete facts instead of learning deep thought.

The overall impression I receive of the artificial memory is not so much a failed attempt at a tool to store abstractions as a successful attempt at a concrete tool which was not intended to store abstractions. It is my belief that some of its principles, in modified form, suggest the beginnings of an art of memory well-fitted to dealing with abstractions. The mature form of such an endeavor will not simply be an abstract mirror image of a concrete artificial memory, but it is appropriate enough for the first steps I might hazard.

Consider the following four paragraphs:

1. Physics is like music. Both owe something of substance to the Pythagoreans. Both are aesthetic endeavors that in some way represent nature in highly abstracted form. Both are interested in mechanical waves. Many good physicists are closet musicians, and all musical instruments operate on physical principle.
2. Physics is like literature. Both are written in books that vary from moderately easy to very hard. Both deal with a distinction between action and what is acted on, be it plot and character or force and particle, and both allow complex entities to be built of simpler ones. Practitioners of both want to be thought of as insightful people who understand reality.
3. Physics is like an adventure. Both involve a venture into the unknown, where the protagonist tries to discover what is happening. Both have a mystique that exists despite most people's fear to experience such things themselves. To succeed in either, one is expected to have impressive strengths.
4. Physics is like magic. Both flourished in the West, at the same time, out of the same desire: a desire to understand nature so as to control it. Both attract abstract thinkers, are practiced in part through the manipulation of arcane symbols, and may be found in the same

person, from Newton to Feynman[10]. Magical theory claims matter to be composed of earth, air, fire, and water, while physics finds matter to be composed of solid, liquid, gas, and plasma.

What is the merit of these comparisons? They recall a story in which a literature professor asked Feynman if he thought physics was like literature. Feynman led him on with an elaborate analogy of how physics was like literature, and then said, "But it seems to me you can make such an analogy between any two subjects, so I don't find such analogies helpful." He observed that one can make a reasonably compelling analogy even if there's no philosophically substantial connection.

*The laws of logic and philosophy are not the laws of memory.* What is a liability to Feynman's implicit philosophical method is a strength to memory. The philosophical merit of the above comparisons is debatable. The benefit to memory is different: it appears to me that this is an abstract analogue to pegging. A connection, real or spurious, aids the memory even if it doesn't aid a rigorous philosophical understanding. In pegging, it is considered an advantage to visualize a ludicrously illogical scene: it is much more memorable than something routine and sensible. Early psychological experiments in memory involved memorization of nonsense syllables. The experimenters intentionally chose meaningless material to memorize. Why? Well, if the subject perceived meaning, that would provide a spurious way for the subject to remember the data, and so proper Ebbinghausian memory study meant investigating how people investigate memory material which was as meaningless as possible. Without pausing to develop an obvious critique, I'd suggest that this spurious route to memory is of great interest to us. Meaningful data is more memorable than meaningless, and this is true whether the meaning perceived is philosophically sound or obviously contrived. I might suggest that interesting meaning provides a direct abstract parallel to the striking, special-effect appearance of effective images in pegging.

I intentionally chose not to compare physics to astronomy, chemistry, computer science, engineering, mathematics, metaphysics, or statistics, because I wanted to show how a different concept can be used to establish connections to a new one. Or, more properly, different concepts. *Having a new concept connected to three very different ones will capture different facets than one anchor point, and possibly cancel out some of*

*each other's biases.* A multiplicity of perspectives lends balance and depth. This isn't to say similar concepts can't be used, only that searching for a partial or full isomorphism to a known concept is easier than encoding from scratch. If memorable connections can be made between physics and adventure, music, English, and magic, what might be obtained from comparison with mathematics, chemistry, and engineering? A comparison between physics and these last three disciplines is left as an exercise to the reader, and one that may be quite fruitful.

Is this a desirable way to remember things? I would make two different comments on this score. First, when learning Latin words, I would first peg it to an English word with a vivid image, then later recall the image and reconstruct the English equivalent, then recall the image and remember the English, then the image would drop out so I would directly remember the English, and finally the English word would drop out too, leaving me with a Latin usage often different from the English equivalent used. Artificial memory does not circumvent natural memory; instead it streamlines the process and short-circuits many of the disruptive trips to the dictionary. Pegs vanish with use; they are not an alternate final product but a more efficient route for concepts more frequently used, and a cache of reference material. Therefore, even if remembered comparisons between physics and adventure/music/English/magic fall short of how one would desire to understand the concept, a similar flattening of the learning curve is possible. Second, I would say that *even if you fail to peg something, you may succeed.* How? In trying to peg a person's name, I hold that name and face in an intense focus—quite the opposite how I once reacted: "I'll never remember that," a belief which chased other people's names out of my mind in seconds. That focus is relevant to memory, and it has happened more than once that I completely failed to create a peg, but my failure used enough mental energy that I still remembered. If you search through your memory and fail to make even forced connections between a new concept and existing concepts, the mental focus given to the concept will leave you much better off than if you had thrown up your hands and thought the self-fulfilling prophecy: "I will never remember that!"

Certain kinds of emotional intelligence are part of the discipline.

Learning to cultivate *presence* has to do with an emotional side, and I have written elsewhere about activities that can help to cultivate such presence[[11](#)]. We learn material better if we are interested in it; therefore consciously cultivating an interest in the material and seeing how it can be fascinating is another edge. Cultivating and guarding your inner emotional state can have substantial impact on memory and learning abstractions. Much of it has to do with keeping a state of presence. Shutting out abstractions is one obvious way to do this; another, perhaps less obvious, is to avoid cramming and simply ploughing through material unless it's something you don't really need to learn. Why?

If there is a sprinkler that disperses a fine mist, it will slowly moisten the ground. What if there's a high-volume sprinkler that shoots big, heavy drops of water high up in the air? With all that water pounding on the ground, it looks like the ground is quickly saturated. The appearance is deceptive. What has happened is that the heavy drops have pounded the surface of the ground into a beaten shield, so there really is water rolling off of a very wet surface, but go an inch down and the soil is as parched as ever. This sort of thing happens in studying, when people think that the more force they use, the better the results. Up to a point, definitely, and perseverance counts—but I have found myself to learn much more when I paid attention to my mental and emotional state and backed off if I sensed that I was leaving that optimal zone. I learn something if I say "This is important, so I'll plough through as much as I can as quickly as I can," but it's not as much, and keeping on task needs to be balanced with getting off task when that is helpful.

Consider the following problem:[[12](#)]

In the inns of certain Himalayan villages is practiced a most civilized and refined tea ceremony. The ceremony involves a host and exactly two guests, neither more nor less. When his guests have arrived and have seated themselves at his table, the host performs five services for them. These services are listed in order of the nobility which the Himalayan attribute to them: (1) Stoking the Fire, (2) Fanning the Flames, (3) Passing the Rice Cakes, (4) Pouring the Tea, and (5) Reciting Poetry. During the ceremony, any of those present may ask another, "Honored Sir, may I perform this onerous task for you?" However, a person may request of another only the least noble of the tasks which the other is performing. Further, if a

least noble of the tasks which the other is performing. Further, if a person is performing any tasks, then he may not request a task which is nobler than the least noble task he is already performing. Custom requires that by the time the tea ceremony is over, all the tasks will have been transferred from the host to the most senior of the guests. How may this be accomplished?

Incomprehensible appearances notwithstanding, this is a very simple problem, the Towers of Hanoi. Someone who has learned the Towers of Hanoi may still solve the tea ceremony formulation as slowly as someone who's never seen any form of the problem[13]. A failure to recognize isomorphisms provides one of the more interesting passages in Feynman's memoirs[14]:

I often liked to play tricks on people when I was at MIT. One time, in a mechanical drawing class, some joker picked up a French curve (a piece of plastic for drawing smooth curves—a curly, funny-looking thing) and said, "I wonder if the curves on this thing have some special formula?"

I thought for a moment and said, "Sure they do. The curves are very special curves. Lemme show ya," and I picked up my French curve and began to turn it slowly. "The French curve is made so that at the lowest point on each curve, no matter how you turn it, the tangent is horizontal."

All the guys in the class were holding their French curve up at different angles, holding their pencil up to it at the lowest point and laying it along, and discovering that, sure enough, the tangent is horizontal. They were all excited by this "discovery"—even though they had already gone through a certain amount of calculus and had already "learned" that the derivative (tangent) of the minimum (lowest point) of *any* curve is zero (horizontal). They didn't put two and two together. They didn't even know what they "knew."

What is going on here is that Feynman perceives an isomorphism where the others do not. There may be a natural bent to or away from perceiving isomorphisms, and cognitive science suggests most people have a bent away. The finding, as best I can tell, is not so much that people *can't* look for isomorphisms, as that they *don't*. The practice of

looking for and finding isomorphisms has something to give, because something can be treated as already known instead of learned from scratch. I might wonder in passing if the ultra-high-IQ rapid learning and interdisciplinary proclivities stem in part from the perception and application of isomorphisms, which may *reduce* the amount of material actually learned in picking up a new skill.

The classical art of memory derives strength from a mind that works visually; a background in abstract thought will help one learn abstractions. It has been thought[15] that people can more effectively encode and remember material in a given domain if it's one they have worked with; I would suggest that this abstract pegging also creates a way to encode material with background from other domains. An elaborate, intense, and distinct encoding is believed to help recall[16]. Heightening of memorable features, in what is striking or humorous[17], should help, and mimetics seems likely to contain jewels in its accounts of how a meme makes itself striking.

Someone familiar with artificial memory may ask, "What about places (*loci*)?" Part of the art of memory, be it ancient, medieval, or renaissance, involved having an inner building of sorts that one could imagine going through in order and recalling items. I have two basic comments here. First, a connection could use traditional artificial memory techniques as an index: imagine a muscular man with a tremendous physique running onto the scene, grabbing an adventurer's sword, shield, and pack, sitting down at a pipe organ which has a large illuminated manuscript on top, and clumsily playing music until a giant gold ring engraved with fiery letters falls on the scene and turns it to dust. You have pegged physics to adventure, music, literature, and magic; if you wanted to reconstruct an understanding of physics, you could see what it was pegged to, and then try to recall the given similarities. Second and more deeply, *I believe that a person's entire edifice of previously acquired concepts may serve as an immense memory palace*. It is not spatial in the traditional sense, and I am not here concerned with the senses in which it might be considered a topological space, but it is a deeply qualitative place, and accessible if one uses traditional artificial memory for an index: these adaptations are intended to expand the repertoire of what disciplined artificial memory can do, not abolish the traditional discipline.

Symbols are the last unexplored facet. Earlier I suggested that a chessboard with mirrors along its diagonal may be a good token to

chessboard with mirrors along its diagonal may be a good token to represent Cantor's diagonal argument, but does not bring memory of the whole proof. Now I would like to give the other side: an abstraction may not be fully captured by a symbol, but a good symbol helps. A sign/symbol distinction has been made, where a sign represents while a symbol represents and embodies. In this sense I suggest that tokens be as symbolic as possible.

Why use a token? Aren't the deepest thoughts beyond words? Yes, but recall depends on being able to encode. I have found my deepest thoughts to not be worded and often difficult to translate to words, but I have also found that I lose them if I cannot put them in words. As such, thinking and choosing a good, mentally manipulable symbol for an abstraction is both difficult and desirable. My own discipline of formation, mathematics, chooses names for variables like 'x', 'y', and 'z' which software engineers are taught not to use because they impede comprehension: a computer program with variable names like 'x' and 'y' is harder to understand or even write to completion than one which with names like 'trucks\_remaining' or 'customers\_last\_name'. The authors of *Design Patterns*[18] comment that naming a pattern is one of the hardest parts of writing it down. The art of creating a manipulable symbol for an abstraction is hard, but worth the trouble. This, too, may also help you to probe an abstraction in a way that will aid recall.

To test these principles, I decided to spend a week[19] seeing what I could learn of a physics text[20] and Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*[21]. I considered myself to have understood a portion of the physics text after being able to solve the last of the list of questions. I had originally decided to see how quickly I could absorb material. After working through 10% of the physics text in one day, I decided to shift emphasis and pursue depth more than speed. In reading Kant, the tendency to barely grasp a difficult concept forgotten in grasping the next difficult concept gave way, with artificial memory, to understanding the concepts better and grasping them in a way that had a more permanent effect. I read through page 108 of 607 in the physics text and 144 of 669 in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

The first day's physics ventures saw two interesting ways of storing concepts, and one comment worth mentioning. There is a classic skit, in which two rescuers are performing two-person CPR on a patient. Then one of the rescuers says, "I'm getting tired. Let's switch," and the patient

gets up, the tired rescuer lies down, and the other two perform CPR on him. This was used to store the interchangeability of point of effort, point of resistance, and fulcrum on a lever, based on an isomorphism to the skit's humor element.

The rule given later, that along any axis the sum of forces for a body in equilibrium is always zero, was symbolized by an image of a knife cutting a circle through the center: no matter what angle of cutting there was, the cut leaves two equal halves.

These both involved images, but the images differed from pegging images as a schematic diagram differs from a computer animated advertisement. They seemed a combination of an isomorphism and a symbol, and in both cases the power stemmed not only from the resultant image but the process of creation. The images functioned in a sense related to pegging, but most of the images so far developed have been abstract images unlike anything I've read about in historical or how-to discussion of the art of memory.

The following was logged that night. The problem referred to is a somewhat complex lever problem given in three parts:

In reviewing the day's thoughts at night, I recognized that the problems seem to admit a shortcut solution that does not rigorously apply the principles but obtains the correct answer: problem 12 on page 31 gives two weights and other information, and all three subproblems can be answered by assuming that there are two parts in the same ratio [as] the weights, and applying a little horse sense as to which goes where. It's a bit like general relativity, which condenses to "Everything changes by a factor of the square root of  $(1 - (v^2/c^2))$ ." I am not sure whether this is a property of physics itself or a socially emergent property of problems used in physics texts.

I believe this suggests that I was interacting with the material deeply and quite probably in a fashion not anticipated by the authors.

In reading Kant, I can't as easily say "I solved the last exercises in each section" and don't simply want to just say, "I read these pages." I would like to demonstrate interaction with the material with excerpts from my log:

...I am now in the introduction to the second edition, and there

are two images in reference to Kant's treatment of subjective and objective. One is of a disc which has been cut in half, sliced again along a perpendicular axis and brought together along the first axis so that the direction of the cut has been changed. The other is of a sphere being turned out by [topologically] compactifying  $R^3$  [Euclidean three-space] by the addition of a single point, and then shifting so the vast outside has become the cramped inside and the cramped inside has become the vast outside. Both images are inadequate to the text, indicating at best what sort of thing may be thought about in what sort of shift Kant tries to introduce, and I want to reread the last couple of pages. Closer to the mark is a story about three umpires who say, in turn, "I calls them as they are," "I calls them as I see them," and "They may be strikes, they may be balls, but they ain't nothing until I calls them!"

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Having reread, I believe that the topological example is truer than I realized. I made it on almost superficial grounds, after reading a footnote which gave as example scientific progress after Copernicus proposed, rather than that the observer be fixed and the heavens rotate, the heavens are fixed and the observer rotate. The deeper significance is this: prior accounts had apparently not given sufficient account to subjective factors, treating subjective differences as practically unimportant—what mattered for investigation was the things in themselves. Thus the subjective was the unexamined inside of the sphere. Then, after the transformation, the objective was the unexaminable inside of the new sphere: we may investigate what is now outside, our subjective states and the appearances conformed to them, but things in themselves are more sealed than our filters before: before, we didn't look; after, we can't look. What is stated [in Kant] so far is a gross overextension of a profound observation.

The below passages refer to pp. 68-70:

Kant's arguments that space is an *a priori* concept can be framed as showing that there exists a chicken-and-egg or bootstrapping gap between them and sense data.

What is a chicken-and-egg/bootstrapping gap? In assisting with English as a Second Language instruction, I was faced with a difficulty in explanation. Assuming certain background, it is possible for a person not to know something while there is a straightforward way of explaining—perhaps a very long way of explaining, but it's obvious enough how to explain it in terms of communicable concepts. Then there is the case where there is no direct way to explain something: one example is how to explain to a small child what air is. One can point to water, wood, metal, stone, food, and a great many other things, but the same procedure may not yield understanding of air. It may be possible with a Zen-like cleverness to circumvent it—in saying, for example, that air is what presses on your skin on a windy day—but it is not as straightforward as even an involved and difficult explanation where you know how to use the other person's concepts to build the argument.

owner person's concepts to build the one you want.

In English as a Second Language instruction, this kind of gap is a significant phenomenon in dealing with students who have no beginning English knowledge, and in dealing with concepts that cannot obviously be demonstrated: 'sister' and 'woman', when both terms refer to an adult, differ in a way that is almost certainly understood in the student's native tongue but is nonetheless extremely difficult to explain. When I first made the musing, I envisioned a Zen-like solution. Koans immortalize incidents in which Zen masters bypassed chicken-and-egg gaps in trying to convey enlightenment that cannot be straightforwardly explained, and therefore show a powerful kind of communication. That is what I envisioned, but it is not how English is taught to speakers of other languages. What happens in ESL classes, and with younger children, is a gradual emergence that is difficult to account for in the terms of analytic philosophy—a straightforward explanation sounds like hand-waving and sloppy thinking—but with enough repetition, material is picked up. It may have something to do with a mechanism of learning outlined in Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge*, which talks about how i.e. swimmers learn from coaches to inhale more air and exhale less completely so that their lungs act more as a flotation device than a non-swimmers, *even though neither swimmer nor coach is likely aware of what is going on on any conscious level*. People pick things up through at least one route besides grasping a concept consciously synthesized from sense data.

Kant's proof that a given concept is *a priori* essentially consists of argument that the concept that cannot be synthesized from sense data through the obvious means of central route processing. He is probably right in that the concepts he classifies as *a priori*, and presumably others as well, cannot just be synthesized from sense data through central route processing. It does not follow that a concept must be *a priori*: there are other possibilities besides the route Kant investigates that one can acquire a belief. I do believe, though, that we come with some kind of innate or *a priori* knowledge: the difficulties experienced in visualizing four dimensional objects suggest that our dealing with three-dimensional space is not simply the result of a completely amorphous central

nervous system which we happen to condition to deal with three dimensions; there is something of substance, comparable in character to a psychologist's broader understanding of memory, that we are born to. An investigation of that would take me too far afield.

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P. 87. "Now a thing in itself cannot be known throu[gh] mere relations; and we may therefore conclude that since outer science gives us nothing but mere relations, this sense can contain in its representation only the relation of an object to the subject, and not the inner properties of the object in itself."

There is a near-compatibility between this and realist philosophy of science. How?

Recall my observation about chicken-and-egg gaps and how they may be surmounted (here I think of Zenlike short-circuiting of the gap rather than the vaguely indicated gradual emergence of concepts which haven't been subject to a detailed and understood explanation). What goes on in a physics experiment? The truly famous ones since 1900—I think of the Millikin oil-drop experiment—include a very clever hack that tricks nature into revealing herself. People, not even experimental physicists, can grab a handful of household items and prove that electric charge is quantized.[\[22\]](#) Perhaps that was possible in Galileo's day, but a groundbreaking experiment involves a brilliant, clever, unexpected trickery of nature that is isomorphic to a Zen short-circuiting in a chicken-and-egg gap, or a clever hack, and so on and so forth. Even a routine classroom experiment uses technology that is the fruit of this kind of resourcefulness. People do something they "shouldn't" be able to do. This is possibly how we might learn intuitions Kant classifies as *a priori*, and how experimental scientists cleverly circumvent the roadblock Kant describes here. It might be said that understanding this basic problem is prerequisite to a good realist philosophy of science.

'Hack', in this context, refers to the programming cleverness described in *Programming Pearls*[\[23\]](#). I analyzed that fundamental mode of problem solving and compared it with its counterpart in "Of Technology, Magic, and Channels"[\[24\]](#). There are other observations and interactions with the text, but I believe these should adequately make the point.

I chose Kant because of his reputation as an impenetrable analytic philosopher. With the aid of a good translation and these principles, I was at times surprised at how easy it was to read. By the end of the week, I

had another surprise when I decided to reread George MacDonald's *Phantastes*[\[25\]](#), a work which I have greatly enjoyed. This time, my experience was different. I felt my mind working differently despite a high degree of mental fatigue. The evocative metaphor fell dead, and I found myself reading the text as I would read Kant, thinking in a manner deeply influenced by reading Kant, and in the end setting it down because my mind had shifted deeply into a mode quite different from what allows me to enjoy *Phantastes*. I was surprised at how deeply using abstract memory to read Kant had affected not only conscious recall of ideas but also ways of thought itself.

I do not consider my recorded observations to be in any sense a rigorous experiment, but I believe the experience suggests it's interesting enough to be worth a good experiment.

Here are twelve proposed principles, or rules of thumb, of abstract memory:

1. Be wholly present. Want to know the material. Make it emotionally relevant and connected to something that concerns you. Don't take notes[\[26\]](#).
2. Encode material in multiple ways. Some different ways to encode are: analogies to different abstractions, list distinctions from similar abstractions, paraphrase, search for isomorphisms, use the concepts, and create visual symbols.[\[27\]](#)
3. At least in the beginning, mix a little bit of reading material with a lot of processing. Don't plough through anything you want to remember. Work on drawing a lot of mist in, not pounding with heavy drops that will create a beaten shield.
4. Don't read out of a desire to finish reading a text. Read to draw the materials through processed thought.
5. Process in a way that is striking, stunning, novel, and counter-intuitive: in a word, memorable.
6. Process material on as deep a level as you can.[\[28\]](#)
7. Search for subtle distinctions between a concept under study and its near neighbors.
8. Converse, interact with, and respond to the abstractions. What would you say if an acquaintance said that in a discussion? What questions would you ask? Write it down.

9. Know how much mental energy you have, and choose battles wisely. Given a limited amount of energy, it is better to fully remember a smaller number of critical abstractions than to have diffuse knowledge of many random ideas.
10. Guard your emotions. Be aware of what emotional states you learn well in, and put being in those states before passing your eyes over such-and-such many pages of reading material.
11. Review material after study, seeking to find a different way of putting it.
12. Metacogitate. Be your own coach.

Committing these principles to memory is left as an exercise to the reader.

What can I say to conclude this monograph? I can think of one or two brief addenda, such as the programmer's virtue of laziness[29], but in a very real sense I can't conclude now. I can sketch out a couple of critiques that may be of interest. Jerry Mander[30] critiques the artificial unusuality of television and especially advertising, in a way that has direct bearing on traditional mnemotechnics. He suggests that giving otherwise uninteresting sensation a strained and artificial unusuality has undesirable impact on how people perceive life as seen outside of TV, and the angle of his critique is the main reason why I was hesitant to learn artificial memory. There may be room for similar critiques about why making ridiculous comparisons to remember ideas creates a bad habit for someone who wishes to think rigorously. There is also the cognitive critique that the search for isomorphisms will introduce unnoted distortion. One thinks of the person who says, "All the religions in the world say the same thing." There is a common and problematic tendency to be astute in perceiving substantial similarities among world religions and all but blind in perceiving even more substantial differences. That is why I suggest comparing with multiple and different familiar concepts, rather than one. I could give other thoughts about critiques, but I'm trying to explain an art of memory, not especially to defend it. My intention here is not to settle all questions, but open the biggest one and suggest a direction of inquiry by which an emerging investigation may find a more powerful way to learn abstractions.[31]

## Notes

1. Yates, Frances A., *The Art of Memory*, hereafter *AM*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966, pp. 1-2. The text is a treasure trove on the development of mnemotechnics, also referred to here as artificial memory or the art of memory. [Back](#)
2. Trudeau, Kevin, *Kevin Trudeau's Mega Memory*, hereafter *KTMM*, New York: William Morrow & Co., 1995 is one of several practical manuals for someone who thinks the classical art of memory interesting and would like to be able to use it. [Back](#)
3. *AM*, pp. 27ff. [Back](#)
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 50ff. [Back](#)
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 129ff. [Back](#)
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 173ff. [Back](#)
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 231ff. [Back](#)
8. Jowett, B., *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. III, hereafter *DP*, New York: National Library Company, pp. 442-443. [Back](#)
9. *AM*, pp. 112ff describes one popularizer whose somewhat debased form advocated memorizing individual letters. This practice is awkward, much as it would be awkward to record the appearance of a room by taking a notepad and writing one letter on each sheet of paper. [Back](#)
10. Feynman, Richard, *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman*, hereafter *SYJMF*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985, pp. 338ff and other places in the text. He began his famous "Cargo Cult Science" address by talking about his occult diversions from scientific endeavors, and it is arguable that Newton's groundbreaking work in physics and optics was a scientific diversion from his main occult endeavors. I find it revealing that, even with Feynman's occult forays left in the book, the index shows curious lacunae for "ESP", "Hallucination", "New Age", "Reflexology", "Sensory deprivation", etc. [Back](#)
11. *100 Ways of Kything*, hereafter *1WK*, by Jonathan Hayward, at [cjshayward.com/kything](http://cjshayward.com/kything) describes a number of activities which can embody presence and focus. [Back](#)
12. Hayes, J.R., and Simon, H.A., "Understanding Written Problem Instructions", 1974, in Gregg, L.W. ed., *Knowledge and Cognition*, hereafter *KC*, Hillsdale: Erlbaum. Quoted in Posner, Michael I. ed., *Foundations of Cognitive Science*, hereafter *FCS*, Cambridge: The

- MIT Press, 1989, pp. 534-535. [Back](#)
13. *FCS*, pp. 559-560. [Back](#)
  14. *SYJMF*, pp. 36-37. A more scholarly, if more pedestrian, mention of the phenomenon is provided in *FCS*, pp. 559-560. [Back](#)
  15. *FCS*, p. 690. The authors do not necessarily subscribe to this view, but acknowledge influence among many in the field. [Back](#)
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 691. [Back](#)
  17. "A Picture of Evil", hereafter *APE*, by Jonathan Hayward, at [cjshayward.com/evil/](http://cjshayward.com/evil/) provides an example of communication which is striking in this manner. [Back](#)
  18. Gamma, Erich; Helm, Richard; Johnson, Ralph; Vlissides, John, *Design Patterns: Elements of Reusable Object-Oriented Software*, hereafter *DP*, Reading: Addison-Wesley, p. 3. The book describes recurring good practices that are known to many expert practitioners, but often only on a tacit level—and tries to explain how this tacit knowledge can be made explicit. The book is commonly called 'GoF' ("Gang of Four") by software developers. Thanks to Ron Miles for locating the page number. [Back](#)
  19. February 9-15 2002. Testing abstract artificial and honing this article were juggled with other responsibilities. [Back](#)
  20. Black, Newton Henry; Davis, Harvey Nathaniel, *New Practical Physics: Fundamental Principles and Applications to Daily Life*, hereafter *NPP*, New York: Macmillan, 1929. Given to me as a whimsical Christmas gift in 2001. At the time of beginning, I was significantly out of practice in both physics and mathematics. [Back](#)
  21. Smith, Norman Kemp tr., *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, hereafter *IKCPR*, London: Macmillan, 1929. I had not previously read Kant. [Back](#)
  22. I knew that science doesn't deal in proof; experiments may corroborate a theory, but not establish it as something to never again doubt. I was thinking at that point along another dimension, to convey a quality of physics experiments today. [Back](#)
  23. Bentley, Jon Louis, *Programming Pearls*, hereafter *PP*, Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1986. [Back](#)
  24. Hayward, Jonathan, "Of Technology, Magic, and Channels", in *Gift of Fire*, June 2001, number 126. [Back](#)
  25. MacDonald, George, *Phantastes*, hereafter *P*, reprinted Grand

- Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999. [Back](#)
26. Despite widespread endorsement of this practice, taking notes taxes limited mental energy that can better be used to understand the material, and acts to the mind as a signal of, "This can safely be forgotten." *KTMM*, very early on, makes a point of telling readers not to take notes (p. 5). The purpose of attending a lecture or reading a book is to make internal comprehension rather than external reference materials. [Back](#)
  27. Tulving, Endel; Craik, Fergus I.M., *The Oxford Handbook of Memory*, hereafter *OHM*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, refers on p. 98 to the *picture superiority effect*, which states that pictures are better remembered because of a dual coding where they are encoded as image and words and therefore have two chances at being stored rather than the one chance when material is presented only as words. [Back](#)
  28. *OHM* mentions on p. 94 the "levels of processing" view, a significant perspective which states that material is retained better the more deeply it is processed. [Back](#)
  29. Wall, Larry; Christiansen, Tom; Schwartz, Randal L., *Programming Perl*, Second Edition, hereafter *PP2*, Sebastopol: O'Reilly, pp. 217ff and other places throughout the book. Known by the affectionate nickname of "the camel book" among software developers. (This book is distinct from *PP*). [Back](#)
  30. Mander, Jerry, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, hereafter *FAET*, New York: Morrow Quill, 1978, pp. 299ff. [Back](#)
  31. I would like to thank Robin Munn for giving me my first serious introduction to the art of memory, Linda Washington and Martin Harris for looking at my manuscript, William Struthers for valuable comments about source material, and Chris Tessone, Angela Zielinski, Kent and Theo Nebergall, and people from Wheaton College and International Christian Mensa for prayer. I would also like to thank those who read this article, apply it, perhaps extend it, and perhaps tell others about them. [Back](#)

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- **All** of my visitors:
  - Those who [link to Jonathan's Corner](#) and let other people know about it.
  - Those who just visit—*this site was made for you!*

# Actually, to Me, It Is a Very Good Day

Let me begin by sharing my favorite *For Better or for Worse* strip. On a night that is dark, wet, and probably quite cold, John Patterson steps into a cab and says, "What a miserable day!" The cabby surprises him by saying, "Actually, to me, it is a very good day."

John is surprised, but the cabby explains. "You see," he says, "I am from Sudan. I have seen my friends shot and killed. I have a wife whom I have not seen in two years, and a son whom I have never seen. But every day I save a little, and I am that much closer to bringing them here." At the end of the trip, John rather pensively pays and tips the cabby.

Then he steps in the door—it is still dark, wet, and probably rather cold—and his wife says, "What a miserable day!"

John simply puts his arms around her and their little girl, and said, "Actually, to me, it is a very good day."

This is a good vignette to be mindful of, and if economic times are rougher now than when these words first appeared, it does not diminish their truth in the *least*. To me, it is a very good day.

To me, it is a very good day.

And let me explain what I mean.

One of my goals in life has been to be a scholar, and I've tried hard to earn credentials to teach in theology. Given the difficulties Ph.D. holders have getting a job, it seemed to me to be rather silly to apply for a job without getting the standard "union card:" a Ph.D.

I became a graduate student in theology while overcoming cancer, and earned a master's in theology under Cambridge's philosophy of religion seminar. And, after some time to recover, I entered a Ph.D. program.

And

And...

I've spent a lot of time looking for a way to explain what happened in the Ph.D. program. Eventually, I began to suspect that I might be having such difficulty finding an appropriate way to explain those events because they are not the kind of thing that *can* be explained appropriately.

So let me say the following.

- I'm a pretty bright guy. Ranked 7th in a nationwide math contest. Did an independent study of calculus in middle school. Studied over a dozen languages. And so on.
- I honestly found more than one thing at the university to be *worse* than suffering chemo. (And chemotherapy included the worst hour of merely physical pain in my life.)
- The university is not budging in their position that, as my GPA in all that happened was 3.386/4.0 and a 3.5 was required, I have washed out of their Ph.D. program.

And I'm not sure, after an experience like that, that I'm really in the best position to apply to another program: references are important, and it would show a profound naïveté to tell a professor, "I know you retaliated for my gestures of friendship, but you'll still be kind and give me a good letter of reference, right?" I am not in the best position to apply to another Ph.D. program. And I wish to very clearly say, *today is a very good day to me.*

The goals I was pursuing are a privilege and not a right. For that matter, the job I have now is not something to be taken for granted. I have a job that is meeting all my basic expenses. Most jobs you have at least one pest to deal with. Not this one; there is not a single person at my job that I would rather not deal with. They're all decent people.

If I had my way and got my Ph.D., there are other things that probably would not have happened, including my books being published. And I am quite glad for that. And even in theology, I may never be involved with theology on the terms I envisioned, but that is not nearly so final as it sounds, and I would like to be clear about that.

A Christian in the West may or may not find it strange to place theology in the category of "academic disciplines." In Orthodoxy the placement is strange indeed, because theology, even in its treatment of texts, is much more a spiritual discipline of prayer than a technical

discipline of analysis. And in that sense, the door to theology is as open to me as it ever was: it is a door that I can enter through repentance, and is as open to me now as much as any time.

To me, it is a very good day.

And perhaps I may well leave behind something value, but perhaps God did not intend it to be scholarship. Perhaps I was just meant to write.

And on that note, I would like to share some snippets, some highlights, from my books.

The books include several shorter works building up to a long piece; [The Sign of the Grail](#) tells the story of a young man whose world begins to deepen when he discovers, in his college dorm room, a book of Arthurian legends:

After eating part of his meal, George opened *Brocéliande*, flipping from place to place until an illustration caught his eye. He read:

Merlin walked about in the clearing on the Isle of Avalon. To his right was the castle, and to his left was the forest. Amidst the birdsong a brook babbled, and a faint fragrance of frankincense flowed.

Sir Galahad walked out of the castle portal, and he bore a basket of bread.

Then Galahad asked Merlin about his secrets and ways, of what he could do and his lore, of his calling forth from the wood what a man anchored in the castle could never call forth. And Galahad enquired, and Merlin answered, and Galahad enquired of Merlin if Merlin knew words that were more words than our words and more mystically real than the British tongue, and then the High Latin tongue, and then the tongue of Old Atlantis. And then Galahad asked after anything beyond Atlantis, and Merlin's inexhaustible fount ran dry.

Then Sir Galahad asked Merlin of his wood, of the stones and herbs, and the trees and birds, and the adder and the dragon, the gryphon and the lion, and the unicorn whom only a virgin may touch. And Merlin spake to him him of the pelican, piercing her bosom that her young may feed, and the wonders, virtues, and interpretation of each creature, until Galahad asked of the dragon's head for which Uther had been called Uther

Pendragon, and every Pendragon after him bore the title of King and Pendragon. Merlin wot the virtue of the dragon's body, but of the dragon's head he wot nothing, and Sir Galahad spake that it was better that Merlin wist not.

Then Sir Galahad did ask Merlin after things of which he knew him nothing, of what was the weight of fire, and of what is the end of natural philosophy without magic art, and what is a man if he enters not in the castle, and "Whom doth the Grail serve?", and of how many layers the Grail hath. And Merlin did avow that of these he wist not none.

Then Merlin asked, "How is it that you are wise to ask after these all?"

Then Galahad spake of a soft voice in Merlin his ear and anon Merlin ran into the wood, bearing bread from the castle.

George was tired, and he wished he could read more. But he absently closed the book, threw away what was left of his hamburgers and fries, and crawled into bed. It seemed but a moment that he was dreaming.

George found himself on the enchanted Isle of Avalon, and it seemed that the Grail Castle was not far off.

George was in the castle, and explored room after room, entranced. Then he opened a heavy wooden door and found himself facing the museum exhibit, and he knew he was seeing the same 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century sword from the Celtic lands, only it looked exactly like a wall hanger sword he had seen online, a replica of a 13<sup>th</sup> century Provençale longsword that was mass produced, bore no artisan's fingerprints, and would split if it struck a bale of hay. He tried to make it look like the real surface, ever so real, that he had seen, but machined steel never changed.

Then George looked at the plaque, and every letter, every word, every sentence was something he could read but the whole thing made no sense. Then the plaque grew larger and larger, until the words and even letters grew undecipherable, and he heard what he knew were a dragon's footprints and smelled the stench of acrid smoke. George went through room and passage until the noises grew louder, and chanced to glance at a pool and see his reflection.

He could never remember what his body looked like, but his head

HE COULD NEVER REMEMBER what his body looked like, but his head was unmistakably the head of a dragon.

And the story of this nightmare is part of the story of how he begins questing for the Holy Grail and ultimately wakes up in life.

A short story builds up in [The Christmas Tales](#):

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

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

Where to go?

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

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

What he was thinking of was the Icon that adorns the Icon stand, and for that matter adorns the whole temple. It had not only the Icons, but the relics of (from left to right) Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint John Chrysostom, and Saint Basil the Great. His mother had told Stephan that they were very old, and Stephan looked at her and said, "Older than email? Now *that* is old!" She closed her eyes, and when she opened them she smiled. "Older than email," she said, "and electric lights, and cars, and a great many of the kinds of things in our house, and our country, and..." her voice trailed off. He said, "Was it as old as King Arthur?" She said, "It is older than even the tale of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table."

This story, incidentally, is set in a real place. I have been there.

One of the medium-sized works in [A Cord of Seven Strands](#) is a narrative as of a dream:

You pull your arms to your side and glide through the water. On your left is a fountain of bubbles, upside down, beneath a waterfall; the bubbles shoot down and then cascade out and to the surface. To your right swims a school of colorful fish, red and blue with thin black stripes. The water is cool, and you can feel the currents gently pushing and pulling on your body. Ahead of you, seaweed above and long, bright green leaves below wave back and forth, flowing and bending. You pull your arms, again, with a powerful stroke which shoots you forward under the seaweed; your back feels cool in the shade. You kick, and you feel the warmth of the sun again, soaking in and through your skin and muscles. Bands of light dance on the sand beneath you, as the light is bent and turned by the waves.

There is a time of rest and stillness; all is at a deep and serene peace. The slow motion of the waves, the dancing lights below and above, the supple bending of the plants, all form part of a stillness. It is soothing, like the soft, smooth notes of a lullaby.

Your eyes slowly close, and you feel even more the warm sunlight, and the gentle caresses of the sea. And, in your rest, you become more aware of a silent presence. You were not unaware of it before, but you are more aware of it now. It is there:

Being.

Love.

Life.

Healing.

Calm.

Rest.

Reality.

Like a tree with water slowly flowing in, through roots hidden deep within the earth, and filling it from the inside out, you abide in the presence. It is a moment spent, not in time, but in eternity.

[Firestorm 2034](#) tells the story of a brilliant medieval traveler transported to some twenty or thirty years in our future. It's a little like a story told more compactly and more like a dream:

It was late in the day, and my feet were hurting.

I had spent the past three hours on the winding path up the foothills, and you will excuse me if I was not paying attention to the beauty around me.

I saw it, and then wondered how I had not seen it—an alabaster palace rising out of the dark rock around it, hidden in a niche as foothill became mountain. After I saw it, I realized—I could not tell if the plants around me were wild or garden, but there was a grassy spot around it. Some of my fatigue eased as I looked into a pond and saw koi and goldfish swimming.

I looked around and saw the Gothic buildings, the trees, the stone path and walkways. I was beginning to relax, when I heard a voice say, "Good evening," and looked, and realized there was a man on the bench in front of me.

He was wearing a grey-green monk's robe, and cleaning a gun. He looked at me for a moment, tucked the gun into a shack, and welcomed me in.

Outside, the sun was setting. At the time, I thought of the last rays of the dying sun—but it was not that, so much as day giving birth to night. We passed inside to a hallway, with wooden chairs and a round wooden table. It seemed brightly enough lit, if by torchlight.

My guide disappeared into a hallway, and returned with two silver chalices, and set one before me. He raised his chalice, and took a sip.

The wine was a dry white wine—refreshing and cold as ice. It must have gone to my head faster than I expected; I gave a long list of complaints, about how inaccessible this place was, and how hard the road. He listened silently, and I burst out, "Can you get the master of this place to come to me? I need to see him personally."

The servant softly replied, "He knows you are coming, and he will see you before you leave. In the mean time, may I show you around his corner of the world?"

I felt anger flaring within me; I am a busy man, and do not like to waste my time with subordinates. If it was only one of his underlings who would be available, I would have sent a subordinate myself. As I thought this, I was surprised to hear myself say, "Please."

We set down the chalices, and started walking through a maze of passageways. He took a small oil lamp, one that seemed to burn

passageways. He took a small oil lamp, one that seemed to burn brightly, and we passed through a few doors before stepping into a massive room.

The room blazed with intense brilliance; I covered my eyes, and wondered how they made a flame to burn so bright. Then I realized that the chandeliers were lit with incandescent light. The shelves had illuminated manuscripts next to books with plastic covers—computer science next to bestiaries. My guide went over by one place, tapped with his finger—and I realized that he was at a computer.

Perhaps reading the look on my face, my guide told me, "The master uses computers as much as you do. Do you need to check your e-mail?"

I asked, "Why are there torches in the room you left me in, and electric light here?"

He said, "Is a person not permitted to use both? The master, as you call him, believes that technology is like alcohol—good within proper limits—and not something you have to use as much as you can. There are electric lights here because their brilliance makes reading easier on the eyes. Other rooms have torches, or nothing at all, because a flame has a different meaning, one that we prefer. Never mind; I can get you a flashlight if you like. Oh, and you can take off your watch now. It won't work here."

"It won't work? Look, it keeps track of time to the second, and it is working as we speak!"

The man studied my watch, though I think he was humoring me, and said, "It will give a number as well here as anywhere else. But that number means very little here, and you would do just as well to put it in your pocket."

I looked at my watch, and kept it on. He asked, "What time is it?"

I looked, and said, "19:58."

"Is that all?"

I told him the seconds, and then the date and year, and added, "But it doesn't feel like the 21st century here." I was beginning to feel a little nervous.

He said, "What century do you think it is here?"

I said, "Like a medieval time that someone's taken a scissors to. You have a garden with perfect gothic architecture, and you in a monk's robe, holding an expensive-looking rifle. And a computer in a

library that doesn't even try to organize books by subject or time."

I looked around on the wall, and noticed a hunting trophy. Or at least that's what I took it for at first. There was a large shield-shaped piece of wood, such as would come with a beautiful stag—but no animal's head. Instead, there were hundreds upon hundreds of bullet holes in the wood—enough that the wood should have shattered. I walked over, and read the glass plate: "This magnificent deer shot 1-4-98 in Wisconsin with an AK-47. God bless the NRA."

I laughed a minute, and said, "What is this doing in here?"

The servant said, "What is anything doing here? Does it surprise you?"

I said, "From what I have heard, the master of this place is very serious about life."

My guide said, "Of course he is. And he cherishes laughter."

I looked around a bit, but could not understand why the other things were there—only be puzzled at how anyone could arrange a computer and other oddments to make a room that felt unmistakably medieval. Or was it? "What time is it here? To you?"

My guide said, "Every time and no time. We do not measure time by numbers here; to the extent that time is 'measured', we 'measure' by what fills it—something qualitative and not quantitative. Your culture measures a place's niche in history by how many physical years have passed before it; we understand that well enough, but we reckon time, not by its place in the march of seconds, but by the content of its character. You may think of this place as medieval if you want; others view it as ancient, and not a small part is postmodern—more than the computer is contemporary."

I looked at my watch. Only five minutes had passed. I felt frustration and puzzlement, and wondered how long this could go on.

"When can we move on from here?"

"When you are ready. You aren't ready yet."

I looked at my watch. Not even ten seconds had passed. The second hand seemed to be moving very slowly.

I felt something moving in the back of my mind, but I tried to push it back. The second hand continued on its lazy journey, and then—I took off my watch and put it in my pocket.

My guide stood up and said, "Walk this way, please."

my guide stood up and said, "Walk this way, please."

He led me to a doorway, opening a door, and warning me not to step over the threshold. I looked, and saw why—there was a drop of about a foot, into a pool of water. The walls were blue, and there was sand at the far end. Two children—a little boy and a little girl—were making sand castles.

He led me through the mazelike passages to rooms I cannot describe. One room had mechanical devices in all stages of assembly and disassembly. Another was bare and clean. The kitchen had pepperoni and peppers hanging, and was filled with an orange glow that was more than torchlight. There was a deserted classroom filled with flickering blue light, and then we walked into a theatre.

The chamber was small, and this theatre had more than the usual slanted floor. The best way I could describe it is to say that it was a wall, at times vertical, with handholds and outcroppings. There were three women and two men on the stage, but not standing—or sitting, for that matter. They were climbing, shifting about as they talked.

I could not understand their language, but there was something about it that fascinated me. I was surprised to find myself listening to it. I was even more surprised to realize that, if I could not understand the words, I could no less grasp the story. It was a story of friendship, and there is something important in that words melted into song, and climbing into dance.

I watched to the end. The actors and actresses did not disappear backstage, but simply climbed down into the audience, and began talking with people. I could not tell if the conversation was part of the act, or if they were just seeing friends. I wondered if it really made any difference—and then realized, with a flash, that I had caught a glimpse into how this place worked.

When I wanted to go, the servant led me to a room filled with pipes. He cranked a wheel, and I heard gears turning, and began to see the jet black keys of an organ. He played a musical fragment; it sounded incomplete.

He said, "Play."

I closed my eyes and said, "I don't know how to play any instrument."

He repeated the fragment and said, "That doesn't matter. Play."

There followed a game of question and answer—he would

improvise a snatch of music, and I would follow. I would say that it was beautiful, but I couldn't really put it that way. It would be better to say that his music was mediocre, and mine didn't quite reach that standard.

We walked out into a cloister. I gasped. There was a sheltered pathway around a grassy court and a pool stirred by fish. It was illumined by moon and star, and the brilliance was dazzling.

We walked around, and I looked. In my mind's eye I could see white marble statues of saints praying—I wasn't sure, but I made up my mind to suggest that to the master. After a time we stopped walking on the grass, and entered another door.

Not too far into the hallway, he turned, set the oil lamp into a small alcove, and began to rise up the wall. Shortly before disappearing into the blackness above, he said, "Climb."

I learn a little, I think. I did not protest; I put my hands and feet on the wall, and felt nothing. I leaned against it, and felt something give way—something yielding to give a handhold. Then I started climbing. I fell a couple of times, but reached the shadows where he disappeared. He took me by the hand and began to lead me along a path.

I could feel a wall on either side, and then nothing, save his hand and my feet. Where was I? I said, "I can't see!"

A woman's voice said, "No one can see here. Eyes aren't needed." I felt an arm around my waist, and a gentle squeeze.

I felt that warmth, and said, "I came to this place because I wanted to see the master of this house, and I wanted to see him personally. Now—I am ready to leave without seeing him. I have seen enough, and I no longer want to trouble him."

I felt my guide's hand on my shoulder, and heard his voice as he said, "You have seen me personally, and you are not troubling me. You are here at my invitation. You will always be welcome here."

When I first entered the house, I would have been stunned. Now, it seemed the last puzzle piece in something I had been gathering since I started hiking.

The conversation was deep, and I cannot tell you what was said. I don't mean that I forgot it—I remember it clearly enough. I don't really mean that it would be a breach of confidence—it might be that

as well. What I mean is that there was something special in that room, and it would not make much sense to you even if I could explain it. If I were to say that we talked in a room without light, where you had to feel around to move about—it would be literally true, but beside the point. When I remember the room, I do not think about what wasn't there, but what was there. I was glad I took off my watch—but I cannot say why. The best thing I can say is that if you can figure out how a person could be aware of a succession of moments, and at the same time have time sense that is not entirely linear—or at very least not *just* linear—you have a glimpse of what I found in that room.

We talked long, and it was late into the next day when I got up from a perfectly ordinary guestroom, packed, and left. I put on my watch, returned to my business, and started working on the backlog of invoices and meetings that accumulated in my absence. I'm still pretty busy, but I have never left that room.

[Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary](#) is a thin volume for a dictionary, but then it works a little unlike the more standard dictionary one uses to look things up:

**Form**, *n.* A piece of paper used by administrations to deter people from using their services. It is the opinion of this lexicographer that the following form could be of the utmost assistance in helping bureaucracies more effectively serve those under their care.

**Form to Request Information in the Form of a Form**

**Section 1: Personal Information**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Sex:** [ ]M [

]F **Date of Birth:** \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

**Social Security Number:** \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

**Driver's License Number:** \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

**VISA/MasterCard Number:** \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ -

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Mailing Address, Business:**

**Street:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_ **ZIP**  
**Code:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Mailing Address, Home:**  
**Street:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_\_ **ZIP**  
**Code:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Telephone, Work:** (\_\_\_\_)\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_, Ext. \_\_\_\_\_  
**Telephone, Home:** (\_\_\_\_)\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_  
**Telephone, Car:** (\_\_\_\_)\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_  
**Beeper:** (\_\_\_\_)\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ **Chicago High School:** [  
]Y [ ]N  
**E-mail Address:**

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(if address is in domain aol.com or webtv.net, please explain on a separate sheet of paper)

**Height:** \_', \_\_\_" **Weight:** \_\_\_\_# **Hair:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Eyes:**  
\_\_\_\_\_ **Blood type:** \_\_\_ **IQ:** \_\_\_

**Political Affiliation:** [ ]Federalist [ ]Republican [ ]Democrat [ ]Libertarian [ ]Monarchist [ ]Socialist [ ]Marxist [ ]Communist [ ]Nazi [ ]Fascist [ ]Anarchist [ ]Other (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

**Citizenship:** [ ]United States, including Canada and other territories [ ]Mexico [ ]California [ ]Other (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

**Race:** [ ]Caucasian/Pigmentally Challenged [ ]African [ ]Asian [ ]Hispanic/Latino [ ]Amerindian [ ]Heinz-57 [ ]Other (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_) [

]An athletic event where people run around an oval again and again and again.

Page 1 \* End of Section 1 of 3

## **Section 2: Form Description**

**Length of Form, in Characters:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Number of Questions or Required Data:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Expected Time to Complete:** \_\_\_ Hours, \_\_\_ Minutes, \_\_\_ Seconds.

**Expected Mental Effort Required to Complete:**  
\_\_\_\_\_ (if form would

insult the intelligence of a senile hamster, please explain on a separate sheet of paper)

**Expected number of questions judged to be annoying, unnecessary, and/or personally offensive: \_\_\_**

**Expected time wasted on questions judged to be annoying, unnecessary, and/or personally offensive: \_\_\_ Hours, \_\_\_ Minutes, \_\_\_ Seconds.**

**Expected blood pressure increase while filling out form: \_\_\_ mmHg systolic, \_\_\_ mmHg diastolic.**

If further contemplation has led you to believe that some of the questions asked are not strictly necessary to provide the service that you offer upon completion of said form, please enclose revised prototype here.

Page 2 \* End of Section 2 of 3

### **Section 3: Essay Questions**

Please explain, in 500 words or less, your philosophy concerning the use of forms.

Please explain, in 200 words or less, why you designed this form as you did.

Please explain, in 300 words or less, why you believe that this form is necessary. If you are in a service oriented sector and desire to require the form of people you serve, please explain why you believe that requiring people to fill out forms constitutes a service to them.

When this form is completed, please return to the address provided. The Committee for Selecting Forms will carefully examine your case and delegate responsibility to an appropriate subcommittee.

Please allow approximately six to eight weeks for the appointed subcommittee to lose your file in a paper shuffle.

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But many of the definitions are shorter: "**Christmas**, *n.* An annual holiday celebrating the coming of the chief Deity of Western civilization: Mammon."

[Yonder](#) is a shorter work, like the others can be mischievous and iconoclastic, and opens with a fictitious news article heralding the discovery of an inclusive language manuscript for a good chunk of the Greek New Testament. The culminating work is a Socratic dialogue, set in a science fiction thoughtscape that paints a terrifying silhouette and asks a terrifying question, "What if we really didn't have the things about a world of men and women and all the things that we chafe at?" Along the way to that work comes a moment of rest:

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

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

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

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

Every time in her life, sitting down at a keyboard with her father was the highlight of her day. Every day but this day. This day, she could only think about how simple and plain the music was, how lacking in complexity. Abraham stopped his song and looked at his daughter "Who have you been listening to Abigail?"

daughter. "Who have you been listening to, Abigail."

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

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

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

Abby heard the wind blowing in the trees.

In the wind, Abigail heard music, and in the wind and the music Abigail heard all the things she had lost in her childhood. It was as if she had looked in an image and asked, "What is that wretched thing?" — and realized she was looking into a mirror. No, it was not quite that; it was as if in an instant her whole world was turned upside down, and her musical complexity she could not bear. She heard all over again the words, "Who have you been listening to?" — only, this time, she did not think them the words of a jealous monster, but words of concern, words of "Who has struck a blow against you?" She saw that she was blind and heard that she was deaf: that the hearing of complexity had not simply been an opening of her ears, but a wounding, a smiting, after which she could not know the concentrated presence a child had known, no matter how complex — or how simple — the music became. The sword cut deeper when she tried to sing songs from her childhood, at first could remember none, then could remember one — and it sounded empty

— and she knew that the song was not empty. It was her. She lay down and wailed.

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

"There is music even in your wail."

"I loathe music."

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

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

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

"*Daddy!*"

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

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

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

As Abby's fingers began to dance, she first felt as if she were being weighed in the balance and found wanting. The self-consciousness she had finally managed to banish in her playing was now there — ugly, repulsive — and then she was through it. She made a horrible mistake, and then another, and then laughed, and Abraham laughed with her. Abby began to play and then sing, serious, inconsequential, silly, and delightful in the presence of her father. It was as if shackles fell from her wrists, her tongue loosed — she thought for a moment that she was like a little girl again, playing at her father's side, and then knew that it was better. What could she compare it to? She couldn't. She was at a simplicity beyond complexity, and her father called forth from her music that she could never have done without her trouble. The music seemed like dance, like laughter; it was under and around and through her, connecting her with her father, a moment out of time.

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

There are some other passages that I would like to quote, but I'll stop with one more, from [The Steel Orb](#), which ends with a paired science fiction short work and a fantasy novella. Both of those works share in this paean's joy:

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

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

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

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

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

Shall I thank Thee for the river of time

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

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

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

Shall I forget how the Holy Grail itself  
is but the shadow,  
the impact,  
the golden surface reflecting the light,  
secondary reflection to the primeval light,  
the wrapping paper that disintegrates next to the Gift it holds:  
that which is  
mystically and really  
the body and the blood of Christ:  
the family of saints  
for me to be united to,  
and the divine Life?

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

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

Shall I indeed muse that there is

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

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

And the royal priesthood is one in which we are called to be  
a royal priesthood,  
a chosen people,  
more than conquerors,  
a Church of God's eclecticism,  
made divine,  
a family of little Christs,  
sons to God and brothers to Christ,  
the ornament of the visible Creation,  
of rocks and trees and stars and seas

of rocks and trees and stars and seas,  
and the spiritual Creation as well:  
seraphim, cherubim, thrones  
dominions, principalities, authorities,  
powers, archangels, angels,  
rank on rank of angels,  
singing before the presence of God,  
and without whom no one can plumb the depths  
of the world that can be seen and touched.

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

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

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

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

And when we worship thus,  
it cannot be only us, for  
apples and alligators,  
boulders and bears,  
creeks and crystals,  
dolphins and dragonflies,  
eggplants and emeralds,  
fog and furballs,  
galaxies and grapes,  
horses and habaneros,  
ice and icicles,  
jacinth and jade,  
kangaroos and knots,  
lightning and light,  
meadows and mist,  
nebulas and neutrons,  
oaks and octupi,  
porcupines and petunias,  
quails and quarks,  
rocks and rivers,  
skies and seas,  
toads and trees,  
ukeleles and umber umbrellas,  
wine and weirs,  
xylophones and X-rays,  
yuccas and yaks,  
zebras and zebrawood,  
are all called to join us before Thy throne  
in the Divine Liturgy:

Praise ye the Lord.  
Praise ye the Lord from the heavens:  
praise him in the heights.  
Praise ye him, all his angels:  
praise ye him, all his hosts.  
Praise ye him, sun and moon:  
praise him, all ye stars of light.  
Praise him, ye heavens of heavens.

and ye waters that be above the heavens.  
Let them praise the name of the Lord:  
for he commanded, and they were created.  
He hath also stablished them for ever and ever:  
he hath made a decree which shall not pass.  
Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps:  
Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours;  
stormy wind fulfilling his word:  
Mountains, and all hills;  
fruitful trees, and all cedars:  
Beasts, and all cattle;  
creeping things, and flying fowl:  
Kings of the earth, and all people;  
princes, and all judges of the earth:  
Both young men, and maidens;  
old men, and children:  
Let them praise the name of the Lord:  
for his name alone is excellent;  
his glory is above the earth and heaven.  
He also exalteth the horn of his people,  
the praise of all his saints;  
even of the children of Israel,  
a people near unto him.  
Praise ye the Lord.

And my blessings are not just that, unlike the cab driver, I have not seen my friends shot and killed. Nor is it just that I have a job in a time when having a job shouldn't be taken for granted—working with kind co-workers, and a good boss, to boot. I've received my first major book review—and, I hope, not the last:

Down through the centuries, the Legend of King Arthur has been used as an icon for so many literary works in the western world. "[The Sign of the Grail](#)" is a collection of memorable literary works by CJS Hayward centering around the Holy Grail and what it means to orthodox religion, as well as those who follow those teachings. Tackling diverse subjects such as iconography and an

earthly paradise, he pulls no punches when dealing with many of the topics laid out through the legends. "[The Sign of the Grail](#)" is a unique, scholarly, and thorough examination of the Grail mythos, granting it a top recommendation for academia and the non-specialist general reader with an interest in these subjects. Also very highly recommended for personal, academic, and community library collections are CJS Hayward's other deftly written and original literary works, essays, and commentaries compilations and anthologies: "[Yonder](#)" (9780615202174, \$40.00); "[Firestorm 2034](#)" (9780615202167, \$40.00), "[A Cord of Seven Strands](#)" (9780615202174, \$40.00), "[The Steel Orb](#)" (9780615193618, \$40.00), "[The Christmas Tales](#)" (9780615193632, \$40.00), and "[Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary](#)" (9780615193625, \$40.00).

John Burroughs

Reviewer

[The Midwest Book Review]

Actually, to me, it is a very good day.

# **The Administrator Who Cried, "Important!"**

Once upon a time, there was a new employee, hired fresh out of college by a big company. The first day on the job, he attended a pep rally, filled out paperwork concerning taxes and insurance, and received a two page document that said at the top, "Sexual Harassment Policy: Important. Read Very Carefully!"

So our employee read the sexual harassment policy with utmost care, and signed at the bottom indicating that he had read it. The policy was a remedial course in common sense, although parts of it showed a decided lack of common sense. It was an insult to both his intelligence and his social maturity.

Our employee was slightly puzzled as to why he was expected to read such a document that carefully, but soon pushed doubts out of his mind. He trotted over to his new cubicle, sat down, and began to read the two inch thick manual on core essentials that every employee needs to know. He was still reading core essentials two hours later when his boss came by and said, "Could you take a break from that? I want to introduce you to your new co-workers, and show you around."

So our employee talked with his boss — a knowledgeable, competent, and understanding woman — and enjoyed meeting his co-workers, trying to learn their names. He didn't have very much other work yet, so he dutifully read everything that the administrators sent him — even the ones that didn't say "Important — please read" at the top. He read about ISO 9001 certification, continual changes and updates to company policy, new technologies that the company was adopting, employee discounts

new technologies that the company was adopting, employee discounts, customer success stories, and other oddments totalling to at least a quarter inch of paper each day, not counting e-mails.

His boss saw that he worked well, and began to assign more difficult tasks appropriate to his talent. He took on this new workload while continuing to read everything the administration told him to read, and worked longer and longer days.

One day, a veteran came and put a hand on his shoulder, saying, "Kid, just between the two of us, you don't have to read every piece of paper that says 'Important' at the top. None of us read all that."

And so our friend began to glance at the first pages of long memos, to see if they said anything helpful for him to know, and found that most of them did not. Some time after that, he realized that his boss or one of his co-workers would explicitly tell him if there was a memo that said something he needed to know. The employee found his workload reduced to slightly less than fifty hours per week. He was productive and happy.

One day, a memo came. It said at the top, "Important: Please Read." A little more than halfway through, on page twenty-seven, there was a description of a new law that had been passed, and how it required several jobs (including his own) to be done in a slightly different manner. Unfortunately, our friend's boss was in bed with a bad stomach flu, and so she wasn't able to tell him he needed to read the memo. So he continued doing his job as usual.

A year later, the company found itself the defendant in a forty million dollar lawsuit, and traced the negligence to the action of one single employee — our friend. He was fired, and made the central villain in the storm of bad publicity.

But he definitely was in the wrong, and deserved what was coming to him. The administration very clearly explained the liability and his responsibility, in a memo very clearly labelled "Important". And he didn't even *read* the memo. It's his fault, right?

No.

*Every communication that is sent to a person constitutes an implicit claim of, "This concerns you and is worth your attention." If experience tells other people that we lie again and again when we say this, then what right do we have to be believed when we really do have something important to say?*

I retold the story of the boy who cried wolf as the story of the

administrator who cried important, because administrators are among the worst offenders, along with lawyers, spammers, and perhaps people who pass along e-mail forwards. Among the stack of paper I was expected to sign when I moved in to my apartment was a statement that I had tested my smoke detector. The apartment staff was surprised that I wanted to test my smoke detector before signing my name to that statement. When an authority figure is surprised when a person reads a statement carefully and doesn't want to sign a claim that all involved know to be false, it's a bad sign.

There is communication that concerns the person it's directed to, but says too much — for example, most of the legal contracts I've seen. The tiny print used to print many of those contracts constitutes an implicit acknowledgment that the signer is not expected to read it: they don't even use the additional sheets of paper necessary to print text at a size that a person who only has 20/20 vision can easily read. There is also communication that is broadcast to many people who have no interest in it. To that communication, I would propose the following rule: *Do not, without exceptionally good reason, broadcast a communication that concerns only a minority of its recipients.* It's OK every now and then to announce that the blue Toyota with license plate ABC 123 has its lights on. It's not OK to have a regular announcement that broadcasts anything that is approved as having interest to some of the recipients.

My church, which I am in general very happy with, has succumbed to vice by adding a section to the worship liturgy called "Announcements", where someone reads a list of events and such just before the end of the service, and completely dispels the moment that has been filling the sanctuary up until the announcements start. They don't do this with other things — the offering is announced by music (usually good music) that contributes to the reverent atmosphere of the service. But when the service is drawing to a close, the worshipful atmosphere is disrupted by announcements which I at least almost never find useful. If the same list were printed on a sheet of paper, I could read it after the service, in less time, with greater comprehension, with zero disruption to the moment that every other part of the service tries so carefully to build — and I could skip over any announcements that begin "For Married Couples:" or "Attention Junior High and High Schoolers!" The only advantage I can see to the present practice, from the church leadership's perspective, is

that many people will not read the announcements at all if they have a choice about it — and maybe, just *maybe*, there's a lesson in that.

As well as pointing out examples of a rampant problem in communication, where an administrator cries "Important!" over many things that are not worth reading, and then wonders why people don't believe him when he cries "Important!" about something which *is* important, I would like to suggest an alternative for communities that have access to the internet. A web server could use a form to let people select areas of concern and interest, and announcements submitted would be categorized, optionally cleared with a moderator, and sent only to those people who are interested in them. Another desirable feature might let end receivers select how much announcement information they can receive in a day — providing a discernible incentive to the senders to minimize trivial communication. In a sense, this is what happens already — intercom litanies of announcements ignored by school students in a classroom, employees carrying memos straight from their mailboxes to the recycle bins — but in this case, administrators receive clear incentive and choice to conserve bandwidth and only send stuff that is genuinely important.

While I'm giving my Utopian dreams, I'd like to comment that at least some of this functionality is already supported by the infrastructure developed by UseNet. Probably there are refinements that can be implemented in a web interface — all announcements for one topic shown from a single web page, since they shouldn't be nearly as long as a normal UseNet post arguing some obscure detail in an ongoing discussion. Perhaps other and better can be done — I am suggesting "Here's something better than the status quo," not "Here's something so perfect that there's no room for improvement."

In one UseNet newsgroup, an exchange occurred that broadcasters of announcements would be well-advised to keep in mind. One person said, "I'm trying to decide whether to give the UseNet Bore of the Year Award to [name] or [name]. The winner will receive, as his prize, a copy of all of their postings, minutely inscribed, and rolled up inside a two foot poster tube."

Someone else posted a reply asking, "Length or diameter?"

*To those of you who broadcast to people whom you are able to address because of your position and not because they have chosen to*

*receive your broadcasts, I have the following to say: In each communication you send, you are deciding the basis by which people will decide if future communications are worth paying attention to, or just unwanted noise. If your noise deafens their ears, you have no right to complain that the few truly important things you have to tell them fall on deaf ears. **Only you can prevent spam!***

**AI as an Arena for  
Magical Thinking  
Among Skeptics**  
*Artificial Intelligence,  
Cognitive Science, and Eastern  
Orthodox Views on  
Personhood*

***AI as an Arena for Magical Thinking Among Skeptics***  
**Artificial Intelligence, Cognitive Science, and Eastern  
Orthodox Views on Personhood**

M.Phil. Dissertation

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15 June 2004

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## **Abstract**

I explore artificial intelligence as failing in a way that is characteristic of a faulty anthropology. Artificial intelligence has had excellent funding, brilliant minds, and exponentially faster computers, which suggests that any failures present may not be due to lack of resources, but arise from an error that is manifest in anthropology and may even be cosmological. Maximus Confessor provides a genuinely different background to criticise artificial intelligence, a background which shares far fewer assumptions with the artificial intelligence movement than figures like John Searle. Throughout this dissertation, I will be looking at topics which seem to offer something interesting, even if cultural factors today often obscure their relevance. I discuss Maximus's use of the patristic distinction between 'reason' and spiritual 'intellect' as providing an interesting alternative to 'cognitive faculties.' My approach is meant to be distinctive both by reference to Greek Fathers and by studying artificial intelligence in light of the occult foundations of modern science, an important datum omitted in the broader scientific movement's self-presentation. The occult serves as a bridge easing the transition between Maximus

Scott serves as a bridge easing the transition between Maximus Confessor's worldview and that of artificial intelligence. The broader goal is to make three suggestions: first, that artificial intelligence provides an experimental test of scientific materialism's picture of the human mind; second, that the outcome of the experiment suggests we might reconsider scientific materialism's I-It relationship to the world; and third, that figures like Maximus Confessor, working within an I-Thou relationship, offer more wisdom to us today than is sometimes assumed. I do not attempt to compare Maximus Confessor's Orthodoxy with other religious traditions, however I do suggest that Orthodoxy has relevant insights into personhood which the artificial intelligence community still lacks.

## Introduction

Some decades ago, one could imagine a science fiction writer asking, 'What would happen if billions of dollars, dedicated laboratories with some of the world's most advanced equipment, indeed an important academic discipline with decades of work from some of the world's most brilliant minds—what if all of these were poured into an attempt to make an artificial mind based on an understanding of personhood that came out of a framework of false assumptions?' We could wince at the waste, or wonder that after all the failures the researchers still had faith in their project. And yet exactly this philosophical experiment has been carried out, in full, and has been expanded. This philosophical experiment is the artificial intelligence movement.

What relevance does AI have to theology? Artificial intelligence assumes a particular anthropology, and failures by artificial intelligence may reflect something of interest to theological anthropology. It appears that the artificial intelligence project has failed in a substantial and characteristic way, and furthermore that it has failed as if its assumptions were false—in a way that makes sense given some form of Christian theological anthropology. I will therefore be using the failure of artificial intelligence as a point of departure for the study of theological anthropology. Beyond a negative critique, I will be exploring a positive alternative. The structure of this dissertation will open with critiques, then trace historical development from an interesting alternative to the present problematic state, and then explore that older alternative. I will thus move in the opposite of the usual direction.

For the purposes of this dissertation, *artificial intelligence* (AI) denotes the endeavour to create computer software that will be humanly intelligent, and *cognitive science* the interdisciplinary field which seeks to understand the mind on computational terms so it can be re-

implemented on a computer. Artificial intelligence is more focused on programming, whilst cognitive science includes other disciplines such as philosophy of mind, cognitive psychology, and linguistics. *Strong AI* is the classical approach which has generated chess players and theorem provers, and tries to create a disembodied mind. Other areas of artificial intelligence include the *connectionist* school, which works with neural nets,[\[1\]](#) and *embodied AI*, which tries to take our mind's embodiment seriously. The picture on the cover[\[2\]](#) is from an embodied AI website and is interesting for reasons which I will discuss below under the heading of '[Artificial Intelligence](#).'

Fraser Watts (2002) and John Puddefoot (1996) offer similar and straightforward pictures of AI. I will depart from them in being less optimistic about the present state of AI, and more willing to find something lurking beneath appearances. I owe my brief remarks about AI and its eschatology, under the heading of '[Artificial Intelligence](#)' below, to a line of Watts' argument.[\[3\]](#)

Other critics[\[4\]](#) argue that artificial intelligence neglects the body as mere packaging for the mind, pointing out ways in which our intelligence is embodied. They share many of the basic assumptions of artificial intelligence but understand our minds as biologically emergent and therefore tied to the body.

There are two basic points I accept in their critiques:

First, they argue that our intelligence is an embodied intelligence, often with specific arguments that are worth attention.

Second, they often capture a quality, or flavour, of thought that beautifully illustrates what sort of thing human thought might be besides digital symbol manipulation on biological hardware.

There are two basic points where I will be departing from their line of argument:

First, they think outside the box, but may not go far enough. They are playing on the opposite team to cognitive science researchers, but they are playing the same game, by the same rules. The disagreement between proponents and critics is not whether mind may be explained in purely materialist terms, but only whether that assumption entails that minds can be re-implemented on computers.

Second, they see the mind's ties to the body, but not to the spirit, which means that they miss out on half of a spectrum of interesting

critiques. I will seek to explore what, in particular, some of the other half of the spectrum might look like. As their critiques explore what it might mean to say that the mind is embodied, the discussion of reason and intellect under the heading '[Intellect and Reason](#)' below may give some sense of what it might mean to say that the mind is spiritual. In particular, the conception of the intellects offers an interesting base characterisation of human thought that competes with cognitive faculties. Rather than saying that the critics offer false critiques, I suggest that they are too narrow and miss important arguments that are worth exploring.

I will explore failures of artificial intelligence in connection with the Greek Fathers. More specifically, I will look at the seventh century Maximus Confessor's *Mystagogia*. I will investigate the occult as a conduit between the (quasi-Patristic) medieval West and the West today. The use of Orthodox sources could be a particularly helpful light, and one that is not explored elsewhere. Artificial intelligence seems to fail along lines predictable to the patristic understanding of a spirit-soul-body unity, essentially connected with God and other creatures. The discussion becomes more interesting when one looks at the implications of the patristic distinction between 'reason' and the spiritual 'intellect.' I suggest that connections with the Orthodox doctrine of divinisation may make an interesting a direction for future enquiry. I will only make a two-way comparison between Orthodox theological anthropology and one particular quasi-theological anthropology. This dissertation is in particular not an attempt to compare Orthodoxy with other religious traditions.

One wag said that the best book on computer programming for the layperson was *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, but that's just because the best book on anything for the layperson was *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. One lesson learned by a beginning scholar is that many things that 'everybody knows' are mistaken or half-truths, as 'everybody knows' the truth about Galileo, the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and other select historical topics which we learn about by rumour. There are some things we will have trouble understanding unless we can question what 'everybody knows.' This dissertation will be challenging certain things that 'everybody knows,' such as that we're making progress towards achieving artificial intelligence, that seventh century theology belongs in a separate mental compartment from AI, or that science is a

different kind of thing from magic. The result is bound to resemble a tour of Wonderland, not because I am pursuing strangeness for its own sake, but because my attempt to understand artificial intelligence has taken me to strange places. Renaissance and early modern magic is a place artificial intelligence has been, and patristic theology represents what we had to leave to get to artificial intelligence.

The artificial intelligence project as we know it has existed for perhaps half a century, but its roots reach much further back. This picture attests to something that has been a human desire for much longer than we've had digital computers. In exploring the roots of artificial intelligence, there may be reason to look at a topic that may seem strange to mention in connection with science: the Renaissance and early modern occult enterprise.

Why bring the occult into a discussion of artificial intelligence? It doesn't make sense if you accept science's own self-portrayal and look at the past through its eyes. Yet this shows bias and insensitivity to another culture's inner logic, almost a cultural imperialism—not between two cultures today but between the present and the past. A part of what I will be trying to do in this thesis is look at things that have genuine relevance to this question, but whose relevance is obscured by cultural factors today. Our sense of a deep divide between science and magic is more cultural prejudice than considered historical judgment. We judge by the concept of scientific progress, and treating prior cultures' endeavours as more or less successful attempts to establish a scientific enterprise properly measured by our terms.

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

Christians were exploring another question altogether. The occult vision has fragmented, with its dominion over the natural world becoming scientific technology, its vision for a better world becoming political ideology, and its spiritual practices becoming a private fantasy.

One way to look at historical data in a way that shows the kind of sensitivity I'm interested in, is explored by Mary Midgley in *Science as Salvation* (1992); she doesn't dwell on the occult as such, but she perceptively argues that science is far more continuous with religion than its self-understanding would suggest. Her approach pays a certain kind of attention to things which science leads us to ignore. She looks at ways science is doing far more than falsifying hypotheses, and in so doing observes some things which are important. I hope to develop a similar argument in a different direction, arguing that science is far more continuous with the occult than its self-understanding would suggest. This thesis is intended neither to be a correction nor a refinement of her position, but development of a parallel line of enquiry.

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

There is in fact historical precedent for such a phenomenon. I suggest that a parallel with Eucharistic doctrine might illuminate the interrelationship between Orthodoxy, Renaissance and early modern

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

Without discussing the principles in Thomas Dixon's 1999 delineation of theology, anti-theology, and atheology that can be un-theological or quasi-theological, regarding when one is justified in claiming that theology is present, I adopt the following rule:

A claim is considered *quasi-theological* if it can conflict with theological claims.

Given this rule, patristic theology, Renaissance and early modern magic (hereafter 'magic' or 'the occult'), and artificial intelligence claims are all considered to be theological or quasi-theological.

I will not properly trace an historical development so much as show the distinctions between archetypal scientific, occult, and Orthodox worldviews as seen at different times, and briefly discuss their relationships with some historical remarks. Not only are there surprisingly persistent tendencies, but Lee repeats Weber's suggestion that there is real value to understand ideal types.<sup>[5]</sup>

I will be attempting to bring together pieces of a puzzle—pieces scattered across disciplines and across centuries, often hidden by today's cultural assumptions about what is and is not connected—to show their interconnections and the picture that emerges from their fit. I will be looking at features including intentionality,<sup>[6]</sup> teleology,<sup>[7]</sup> cognitive faculties,<sup>[8]</sup> the spiritual intellect,<sup>[9]</sup> cosmology, and a strange figure who wields a magic sword with which to slice through society's Gordian knots. Why? In a word, all of this connected. Cosmology is relevant if there is a cosmological error behind artificial intelligence. There are both an organic connection and a distinction between teleology and intentionality, and the shift from teleology to intentionality is an important shift; when one shifts from teleology to intentionality one becomes partly blind to what the artificial intelligence picture is missing. Someone brought up on cognitive faculties may have trouble answering, 'How else could it be?'; the patristic understanding of the spiritual intellect gives a very interesting answer, and offers a completely different way to understand thought. And the figure with the magic sword? I'll let this figure remain mysterious for the moment, but I'll hint that without that metaphorical magic sword we would never have a literal artificial intelligence project. I do not believe I am forging new connections among these things, so much as uncovering something that was already there, overlooked but worth investigating.

This is an attempt to connect some very diverse sources, even if the different sections are meant primarily as philosophy of religion. This brings problems of coherence and disciplinary consistency, but the greater risk is tied to the possibility of greater reward. It will take more work to show connections than in a more externally focused enquiry, but if I can give a believable case for those interconnections, this will *ipso*

*facto* be a more interesting enquiry.

All translations from French, German, Latin, and Greek are my own.

# Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence is not just one scientific project among others. It is a cultural manifestation of a timeless dream. It does not represent the repudiation of the occult impulse, but letting that impulse work out according to its own inner logic. Artificial intelligence is connected with a transhumanist vision for the future<sup>[10]</sup> which tries to create a science-fiction-like future of an engineered society of superior beings.<sup>[11]</sup> This artificial intelligence vision for the future is similar to the occult visions for the future we will see below. Very few members of the artificial intelligence movement embrace the full vision—but I may suggest that its spectre is rarely absent, and that that spectre shows itself by a perennial sense of, 'We're making real breakthroughs today, and full AI is just around the corner.' Both those who embrace the fuller enthusiasm and those who are more modestly excited by current project have a hope that we are making progress towards creating something fundamentally new under the sun, of bequeathing humanity with something that has never before been available, machines that genuinely think. Indeed, this kind of hope is one of magic's most salient features. The exact content and features vary, but the sometimes heady excitement and the hope to bestow something powerful and new mark a significant point contact between the artificial intelligence and the magic that enshrouded science's birth.

There is something timeless and archetypal about the desire to create humans through artifice instead of procreation. Jewish legend tells of a rabbi who used the Kaballah to create a clay golem to defend a city against anti-semites in 1581.<sup>[12]</sup> *Frankenstein* has so marked the popular imagination that genetically modified foods are referred to as 'Frankenfoods,' and there are many (fictional) stories of scientists creating androids who rebel against and possibly destroy their creators.

Robots who have artificial bodies but think and act enough like humans never to cause culture shock are a staple of science fiction. [13] There is a timeless and archetypal desire to create humans by artifice rather than procreation. Indeed, this desire has more than a little occult resonance.

We should draw a distinction between what may be called 'pretentious AI' and 'un-pretentious AI.' The artificial intelligence project has managed technical feats that are sometimes staggering, and from a computer scientist's perspective, the state of computer science is richer and more mature than if there had been no artificial intelligence project. Without making any general claim that artificial intelligence achieves nothing or achieves nothing significant, I will explore a more specific and weaker claim that artificial intelligence does not and cannot duplicate human intelligence.

A paradigm example of un-pretentious AI is the United States Postal Service handwriting recognition system. It succeeds in reading the addresses on 85% of postal items, and the USPS annual report is justifiably proud of this achievement. [14] However, there is nothing mythic claimed for it: the USPS does not claim a major breakthrough in emulating human thought, nor does it give people the impression that artificial mail carriers are just around the corner. The handwriting recognition system is a tool—admittedly, quite an impressive tool—but it is nothing more than a tool, and no one pretends it is anything more than a tool.

For a paradigm example of pretentious AI, I will look at something different. The robot Cog represents equally impressive feats in artificial hand-eye coordination and motor control, but its creators claim something deeper, something archetypal and mythic:

The scholar places his hand on the robots' shoulder as if they had a longstanding friendship. At almost every semiotic level, this picture constitutes an implicit claim that the researcher has a deep friendship with what must be a deep being. The unfortunately blurred caption reads, '©2000 Peter Menzel / Robo sapiens.' On the Cog main website area, every picture with Cog and a person theatrically shows the person treating the robot as quite lifelike—giving the impression that the robot must be essentially human.

But how close is Cog to being human? Watts writes,

The weakness of Cog at present seems to be that it cannot actually do very much. Even its insect-like computer forebears do not seem to have had the intelligence of insects, and Cog is clearly nowhere near having human intelligence.[\[16\]](#)

The somewhat light-hearted frequently-asked-questions list acknowledges that the robot 'has no idea what it did two minutes ago,' answers 'Can Cog pass the Turing test?' by saying, 'No... but neither could an infant,' and interestingly answers 'Is Cog conscious?' by saying, 'We try to avoid using the c-word in our lab. For the record, no. Off the record, we have no idea what that question even means. And still, no.' The response to a very basic question is ambiguous, but it seems to joke that 'consciousness' is obscene language, and gives the impression that this is not an appropriate question to ask: a mature adult, when evaluating our AI, does not childishly frame the question in terms of consciousness. Apparently, we should accept the optimistic impression of Cog, whilst recognising that it's not fair to the robot to ask about features of human personhood that the robot can't exhibit. This smells of begging the question.

Un-pretentious AI makes an impressive technical achievement, but recognises and acknowledges that they've created a tool and not something virtually human. Pretentious AI can make equally impressive technical achievements, and it recognises that what it's created is not equivalent to human, but it does not acknowledge this. The answer to 'Is Cog conscious?' is a refusal to acknowledge something the researchers have to recognise: that Cog has no analogue to human consciousness. Is it a light-hearted way of making a serious claim of strong agnosticism about Cog's consciousness? It doesn't read much like a mature statement that 'We could never know if Cog were conscious.' The researcher in Figure 2 wrote an abstract on how to give robots a theory of other minds[\[17\]](#), which reads more like psychology than computer science.

There's something going on here that also goes on in the occult. In neo-paganism, practitioners find their magic to work, not exactly as an outsider would expect, by making incantations and hoping that something will happen that a skeptic would recognise as supernatural, but by doing what they can and then interpreting reality as if the magic had worked. They create an illusion and subconsciously embrace it. This

mechanism works well enough, in fact, that large segments of today's neo-paganism started as jokes and then became real, something their practitioners took quite seriously.<sup>[18]</sup> There's power in trying to place a magical incantation or a computer program (or, in programmer slang, 'incantation') to fill a transcendent hope: one finds ways that it appears to work, regardless of what an outsider's interpretation may be. This basic technique appears to be at work in magic as early as the Renaissance, and it appears to be exactly what's going on in pretentious AI. The basic factor of stepping into an illusion after you do what you can makes sense of the rhetoric quoted above and why Cog is portrayed not merely as a successful experiment in coordination but as Robo sapiens, the successful creation of a living golem. Of course we don't interpret it as magic because we assume that artificial and intelligence and magic are very different things, but the researchers' self-deception falls into a quite venerable magical tradition.

Computers seem quite logical. Are they really that far from human rationality? Computers are logical without being rational. Programming a computer is like explaining a task to someone who follows directions very well but has no judgment and no ability to recognise broader intentions in a request. It follows a list of instructions without any recognition or a sense of what is being attempted. The ability to understand a conversation, or recognise another person's intent—even with mistakes—or any of a number of things humans take for granted, belongs to rationality. A computer's behaviour is built up from logical rules that do certain precise manipulations of symbols without any sense of meaning whatsoever: it is logical without being rational. The discipline of usability is about how to write well-designed computer programs; these programs usually let the user forget that computers aren't rational. For instance, a user can undo something when the computer logically and literally follows an instruction, and the user rationally realises that that isn't really what was intended. But even the best of this design doesn't let the computer understand what one meant to say. One frustration people have with computers stems from the fact that there is a gist to what humans say, and other people pick up that gist. Computers do not have even the most rudimentary sense of gist, only the ability to logically follow instructions. This means that the experience of bugs and debugging in programming is extremely frustrating to those learning how to program; the computer's response to what seems a correct program goes beyond

the computer's response to what seems a correct program goes beyond nitpicking. This logicity without rationality is deceptive, for it presents something that looks very much like rationality at first glance, but produces unpleasant surprises when you treat it as rational. There's something interesting going on here. When we read rationality into a computer's logicity, we are in part creating the illusion of artificial intelligence. 'Don't anthropomorphise computers,' one tells novice programmers. 'They hate that.' A computer is logical enough that we tend to treat it as rational, and in fact if you want to believe that you've achieved artificial intelligence, you have an excellent basis to use in forming a magician's self-deception.

Artificial intelligence is a mythic attempt to create an artificial person, and it does so in a revealing way. Thought is assumed to be a private manipulation of mental representations, not something that works in terms of spirit. Embodied AI excluded, the body is assumed to be packaging, and the attempt is not just to duplicate the 'mind' in a complete sense, but our more computer-like rationality: this assumes a highly significant division of what is essential, what is packaging, and what comes along for free if you duplicate the essential bits. None of this is simply how humans have always thought, nor is it neutral. Maximus Confessor's assumptions are different enough from AI's that a comparison makes it easier to see some of AI's assumptions, and furthermore what sort of coherent picture could deny them. I will explore how exactly he does so below under the heading '[Orthodox Anthropology in Maximus Confessor's \*Mystagogia\*.](#)' More immediately, I wish to discuss a basic type of assumption shared by artificial intelligence and the occult.

## The Optimality Assumption

One commonality that much of magic and science share is that broad visions often include the assumption that what they don't understand must be simple, and be easy to modify or improve. Midgley discusses Bernal's exceedingly optimistic hope for society to transform itself into a simplistically conceived scientific Utopia (if perhaps lacking most of what we value in human society);[\[19\]](#) I will discuss later, under various headings, how society simply works better in Thomas More's and B.F. Skinner's Utopias if only it is re-engineered according to their simple models.[\[20\]](#) Aren't Utopian visions satires, not prescriptions? I would argue that the satire itself has a strong prescriptive element, even if it's not literal. The connection between Utopia and AI is that the same sort of thinking feeds into what, exactly, is needed to duplicate a human mind. For instance, let us examine a sample of dialogue which Turing imagined going on in a Turing test:

Q: Please write me a sonnet on the subject of the Forth Bridge.

A: Count me out on this one. I never could write poetry.

Q: Add 34957 to 70764.

A: (Pause about 30 seconds and then give as answer) 105621.

Q: Do you play chess?

A: Yes.

Q: I have K at my K1, and no other pieces. You have only K at K6 and R at R1. It is your move. What do you play?

A: (After a pause of 15 seconds) R-R8 mate.[\[21\]](#)

Turing seems to assume that if you duplicate his favoured tasks of arithmetic and chess, the task of understanding natural language comes along, more or less for free. The subsequent history of artificial intelligence has not been kind to this assumption. Setting aside the fact

intelligence has not been kind to this assumption. Setting aside the fact that most people do not strike up a conversation by strangely requesting the other person to solve a chess problem and add five-digit numbers, Turing is showing an occult way of thinking by assuming there's nothing really obscure, or deep, about the human person, and that the range of cognitive tasks needed to do AI is the range of tasks that immediately present themselves to him. This optimism may be damped by subsequent setbacks which the artificial intelligence movement has experienced, but it's still present. It's hard to see an artificial intelligence researcher saying, 'The obvious problem looks hard to solve, but there are probably hidden problems which are much harder,' let alone consider whether human thought might be non-computational.

Given the difficulties they acknowledge, artificial intelligence researchers seem to assume that the problem is as easy as possible to solve. As I will discuss later, this kind of assumption has profound occult resonance. I will call this assumption the optimality assumption: with allowances and caveats, the optimality assumption states that artificial intelligence is an optimally easy problem to solve. This doesn't mean an optimally easy problem to solve given the easiest possible world, but rather, taking into the difficulties and nuances recognised by the practitioner, the problem is then assumed to be optimally easy, and then it could be said that we live in the (believable) possible world where artificial intelligence would be easiest to implement. Anything that doesn't work like a computer is assumedly easy, or a matter of unnecessary packaging. There are variations on the theme of begging the question. One basic strategy of ensuring that computers can reach the bar of human intelligence is to lower the bar until it is already met. Another strategy is to try to duplicate human intelligence on computer-like tasks. Remember the Turing test which Turing imagined, which seemed to recognise only the cognitive tasks of writing a poem, doing arithmetic, and solving a chess problem: Turing apparently assumed that natural language understanding would come along for free by the time computers could do both arithmetic and chess. Now we have computer calculators and chess players that can beat humans, whilst natural language understanding tasks which are simple to humans represent an unscaled Everest to artificial intelligence.

We have a situation very much like the attempt to make a robot that can imitate human locomotion—if the attempt is tested by having a robot

race a human athlete on a racetrack ergonomically designed for robots. Chess is about as computer-like a human skill as one could find.

Turing's script for an imagined Turing test is one manifestation of a tendency to assume that the problem is optimally easy: the optimality assumption. Furthermore, Turing sees only three tasks of composing a sonnet, adding two numbers, and making a move in chess. But in fact this leaves out a task of almost unassailable difficulty for AI: understanding and appropriately acting on natural language requests. This is part of human rationality that cannot simply be assumed to come with a computer's logicity.

Four decades after Turing imagined the above dialogue, Kurt VanLehn describes a study of problem solving that used a standard story problem. [22] The ensuing discussion is telling. Two subjects' interpretations are treated as problems to be resolved, apparently chosen for their departure from how a human 'should' think about these things. One is a nine year old girl, Cathy: '...It is apparent from [her] protocol that Cathy solves this problem by imagining the physical situation and the actions taken in it, as opposed to, say, converting the puzzle to a directed graph then finding a traversal of the graph.' The purpose of the experiment was to understand how humans solve problems, but it was approached with a tunnel vision that gave a classic kind of computer science 'graph theory' problem, wrapped up in words, and treated any other interpretation of those words as an interesting abnormality. It seems that it is not the theory's duty to approach the subject matter, but the subject matter's duty to approach the theory—a signature trait of occult projects. Is this merely VanLehn's tunnel vision? He goes on to describe the state of cognitive science itself:

For instance, one can ask a subject to draw a pretty picture... [such] Problems whose understanding is not readily represented as a problem space are called *ill-defined*. Sketching pretty pictures is an example of an ill-defined problem... There have only been a few studies of ill-defined problem solving. [23]

Foerst summarises a tradition of feminist critique: [24] AI was started by men who chose a particular kind of abstract task as the hallmark of intelligence; women might value disembodied abstraction less and might choose something like social skills. The critique may be pushed one step

further than that: beyond any claim that AI researchers, when looking for a basis for computer intelligence, tacitly crystallised intelligence out of men's activities rather than women's, it seems that their minds were so steeped in mathematics and computers that they crystallised intelligence out of human performance more in computer-like activities than anything essentially human, even in a masculine way. Turing didn't talk about making artificial car mechanics or deer hunters any more than he had plans for artificial hostesses or childminders.

Harman's 1989 account of functionalism, for instance, provides a more polished-looking version of an optimality assumption: 'According to functionalism, it does not matter what mental states and processes are made of any more than it matters what a carburetor or heart or a chess king is made of.' (832). Another suggestion may be made, not as an axiom but as an answer to the question, 'How else could it be?' This other suggestion might be called *the tip of the iceberg conception*.

A 'tip of the iceberg' conception might reply, 'Suppose for the sake of argument that it doesn't matter what an iceberg is made of, so long as it sticks up above the surface and is hard enough to sink a ship. The task is then to make an artificial iceberg. One can hire engineers to construct a hard shell to function as a surrogate iceberg. What has been left out is that these properties of something observable from the surface rest on something that lies much, much deeper than the surface. (A mere scrape with an iceberg sunk the Titanic, not only because the iceberg was hard, but because it had an iceberg's monumental inertia behind that hardness.) One can't make a functional tip of the iceberg that way, because a functional tip of an iceberg requires a functional iceberg, and we have very little idea of how to duplicate those parts of an iceberg that aren't visible from a ship. You are merely assuming that one can try hard enough to duplicate what you can see from a ship, and if you duplicate those observables, everything else will follow.' This is not a fatal objection, but it is intended to suggest what the truth could be besides the repeated assumption that intelligence is as easy as possible to duplicate in a computer. Here again is the optimality assumption, and it is a specific example of a broader optimality assumption which will appear in occult sources discussed under the ['Renaissance and Early Modern Magic'](#) heading below. The 'tip of the iceberg' conception is notoriously absent in occult and artificial intelligence sources alike. In occult sources, the

endeavour is to create a magically sharp sword that will slice all of the Gordian knots of society's problems; in artificial intelligence the Gordian knots are not societal problems but obstacles to creating a thinking machine, and researchers may only be attempting to use razor blades to cut tangled shoelaces, but researchers are still trying to get as close to that magic sword as they believe possible.

## Just Around the Corner Since 1950

The artificial intelligence movement has a number of reasonably stable features, including an abiding sense of 'Today's discoveries are a real breakthrough; artificial minds are just around the corner.' This mood may even be older than digital computers; Dreyfus writes,

In the period between the invention of the telephone relay and its apotheosis in the digital computer, the brain, always understood in terms of the latest technological inventions, was understood as a large telephone switchboard, or more recently, as an electronic computer.[\[25\]](#)

The discoveries and the details of the claim may change, and experience has battered some of strong AI's optimism, but in pioneers and today's embodied AI advocates alike there is a similar mood: 'What we've developed now is effacing the boundary between machine and human.' This mood is quite stable. There is a striking similarity between the statements,

These emotions [discomfort and shock at something so human-like] might arise because in our interactions with Cog, little distinguishes us from the robot, and the differences between a machine and its human counterparts fade.[\[26\]](#)

and:

The reader must accept it as a fact that digital computers can be constructed, and indeed have been constructed, according to the

principles we have described, and that they can in fact mimic the actions of a human computer very closely.[\[27\]](#)

What is interesting here is that the second was made by Turing in 1950, and the first by Foerst in 1998. As regards Turing, no one now believes 1950 computers could perform any but the most menial of mathematicians' tasks, and some of Cog's weaknesses have been discussed above ("Cog... cannot actually very much. Even its insect-like forebears do not seem to have had the intelligence of insects..."). The more artificial intelligence changes, the more it seems to stay the same. The overall impression one receives is that for all the surface progress of the artificial intelligence, the underlying philosophy and spirit remain the same—and part of this underlying spirit is the conviction, 'We're making real breakthroughs now, and full artificial intelligence is just around the corner.' This self-deception is sustained in classically magical fashion. Artificial intelligence's self-presentation exudes novelty, a sense that today's breakthroughs are decisive—whilst its actual rate of change is much slower. The 'It's just around the corner.' rhetoric is a longstanding feature. For all the changes in processor power and greater consistency in a materialist doctrine of mind, there are salient features which seem to repeat in 1950's and today's cognitive science. In both, the strategy to ensure that computers could jump the bar of human intelligence is by lowering the bar until it had already been jumped.

## The Ghost in the Machine

It has been suggested in connection with Polanyi's understanding of tacit knowledge that behaviourists did not teach, 'There is no soul.' Rather, they draw students into a mode of enquiry where the possibility of a soul is never considered.

Modern psychology takes completely for granted that behavior and neural function are perfectly correlated, that one is completely caused by the other. There is no separate soul or life force to stick a finger into the brain now and then and make neural cells do what they would not otherwise. Actually, of course, this is a working assumption only....It is quite conceivable that someday the assumption will have to be rejected. But it is important also to see that we have not reached that day yet: the working assumption is a necessary one and there is no real evidence opposed to it. Our failure to solve a problem so far does not make it insoluble. One cannot logically be a determinist in physics and biology, and a mystic in psychology.[\[28\]](#)

This is a balder and more provocative way of stating what writers like Turing lead the reader to never think of questioning. The assumption is that the soul, if there is one, is by nature external and separate from the body, so that any interaction between the two is a violation of the body's usual way of functioning. Thus what is denied is a 'separate soul or life force to stick a finger into the brain now and then and make neural cells do what they would not do otherwise.' The Orthodox and others' doctrine of unified personhood is very different from an affirmation of a ghost in the machine. To affirm a ghost in the machine is to assume the soul's basic externality to the body: the basic inability of a soul to interact with a body creates the problem of the ghost in the machine. By the time

with a body creates the problem of the ghost in the machine. By the time one attempts to solve the problem of the ghost in the machine, one is already outside of an Orthodox doctrine of personhood in which spirit, soul, and body are united and the whole unit is not an atom.

The objective here is not mainly to criticise AI, but to see what can be learned: AI seems to fail in a way that is characteristic. It does not fail because of insufficient funding or lack of technical progress, but on another plane: it is built on an erroneous quasi-theological anthropology, and its failures may suggest something about being human. The main goal is to answer the question, 'How else could it be?' in a way that is missed by critics working in materialist confines.

What can we say in summary?

First, artificial intelligence work may be divided into un-pretentious and pretentious AI. Un-pretentious AI makes tools that no one presents as anything more than tools. Pretentious AI is presented as more human than is properly warranted.

Second, there are stable features to the artificial intelligence movement, including a claim of, 'We have something essentially human. With today's discoveries, full artificial intelligence is just around the corner.' The exact form of this assertion may change, but the basic claim does not.

Third, artificial intelligence research posits a multifarious 'optimality assumption,' namely that, given the caveats recognised by the researcher, artificial intelligence is an optimally easy assumption to solve. The human mind is assumed to be the sort of thing that is optimally easy to re-create on a computer.

Fourth, artificial intelligence comes from the same kind of thinking as the ghost in the machine problem.

There is more going on in the artificial intelligence project than an attempt to produce scientific results. The persistent rhetoric of 'It's just around the corner.' is not because artificial intelligence scientists have held that sober judgment since the project began, but because there's something else going on. For reasons that I hope will become clearer in the next section, this is beginning to look like an occult project—a secularised occult project, perhaps, but 'secularised occult' is not an empty term in that you take all of the occult away if you take away spellbooks. There is much more to the occult than crystal balls, and a

good deal of this 'much more' is at play even if artificial intelligence doesn't do things the *Skeptical Enquirer* would frown on.

## Occult Foundations of Modern Science

With acknowledgment of the relevance of the Reformation, the wake of Aristotelianism, and the *via moderna* of nominalism,[\[29\]](#) I will be looking at a surprising candidate for discussion on this topic: magic. Magic was a large part of what shaped modernity, a much larger factor than one would expect from modernity's own self-portrayal, and it has been neglected for reasons besides than the disinterested pursuit of truth. It is more attractive to our culture to say that our science exists in the wake of Renaissance learning or brave Reformers than to say that science has roots in it decries as superstition. For reasons that I will discuss below under the next heading, I suggest that what we now classify as the artificial intelligence movement is a further development of some of magic's major features.

There is a major qualitative shift between Newton's development of physics being considered by some to be a diversion from his alchemical and other occult endeavours, and 'spooky' topics today being taboo for scientific research. Yet it is still incomplete to enter a serious philosophical discussion of science without understanding the occult, as as it incomplete to enter a serious discussion of Christianity without understanding Judaism. Lewis points out that the popular understanding of modern science displacing the magic of the middle ages is at least misleading; there was very little magic in the middle ages, and then science and magic flourished at the same time, for the same reason, often in the same people: the reason science became stronger than magic is purely Darwinian: it worked better.[\[30\]](#) One may say that medieval religion is the matrix from which Renaissance magic departed, and early modern magic is the matrix from which science departed.

What is the relationship between the mediaeval West and natristic

Christianity? In this context, the practical difference is not yet a great one. The essential difference is that certain seeds have been sown—such as nominalism and the rediscovered Aristotelianism—which in the mediaeval West would grow into something significant, but had not in much of any practical sense affected the fabric of society. People still believed that the heavens told the glory of God; people lived a life oriented towards contemplation rather than consumption; monasteries and saints were assumed so strongly that they were present even—especially—as they retreated from society. Certain seeds had been sown in the mediaeval West, but they had not grown to any significant stature. For this discussion, I will treat mediaeval and patristic Christianity as more alike than different.

## Renaissance and Early Modern Magic

Magic in this context is much more than a means of casting spells or otherwise manipulating supernatural powers to obtain results. That practice is the token of an entire worldview and enterprise, something that defines life's meaning and what one ought to seek. To illustrate this, I will look at some details of work by a characteristic figure, Leibniz. Then I will look at the distinctive way the Renaissance magus related to the world and the legacy this relationship has today. Alongside this I will look at a shift from understanding this life as a contemplative apprenticeship to Heaven, to understanding this life as something for us to make more pleasurable.

Leibniz, a 17<sup>th</sup> century mathematician and scientist who co-discovered calculus, appears to have been more than conversant with the occult memory tradition,[\[31\]](#) and his understanding of calculus was not, as today, a tool used by engineers to calculate volumes. Rather, it was part of an entire Utopian vision, which could encompass all knowledge and all thoughts, an apparently transcendent tool that would obviate the need for philosophical disagreements:

If we had this [calculus], there would be no more reason for disputes between philosophers than between accountants. It would be enough for them to take their quills and say, 'Let us calculate!'

Leibniz's 1690 *Ars Combinatoria* contains some material that is immediately accessible to a modern mathematician. It also contains material that is less accessible. Much of the second chapter (9-48) discusses combinations of the letters U, P, J, S, A, and N; these letters are tied to concepts ranging from philosophy to theology, jurisprudence and

mathematics: another table links philosophical concepts with numbers (42-3). The apparent goal was to validly manipulate concepts through mechanical manipulations of words, but I was unable to readily tell what (mathematico-logical?) principle was supposed to make this work. (The principle is apparently unfamiliar to me.) This may reflect the influence of Ramon Lull, thirteenth century magician and doctor of the Catholic Church who adapted a baptised Kaballah which involved manipulating combinations of (Latin) letters. Leibniz makes repeated reference to Lull (28, 31, 34, 46), and specifically mentions his occult *ars magna* (28). Like Lull, Leibniz is interested in the occult, and seeks to pioneer some new tool that will obviate the need for this world's troubles. He was an important figure in the creation of science, and his notation is still used for calculus today. Leibniz is not trying to be just another member of society, or to contribute to society's good the way members have always contributed to society's good: he stands above it, and his intended contribution is to reorder the fabric of society according to his endowed vision. Leibniz provides a characteristic glimpse of how early modern magic has left a lasting imprint.

If the person one should be in Orthodoxy is the member of Church and society, the figure in magic is the magus, a singular character who stands outside of the fabric of society and seeks to transform it. What is the difference? The member of the faithful is an integrated part of society, and lives in submission and organic connection to it. The magus, by contrast, stands above society, superior to it, having a relation to society as one whose right and perhaps duty is to tear apart and reconstruct society along better lines. We have a difference between humility and pride, between relating to society as to one's mother and treating society as raw material for one to transform. The magus is cut off from the common herd by two closely related endowments: a magic sword to cut through society's Gordian knots, and a messianic fantasy.[\[32\]](#) In Leibniz's case the magic sword is an artificial language which will make philosophical disagreements simply obsolete. For the artificial intelligence movement, the magic sword is artificial intelligence itself. The exact character of the sword, knot, and fantasy may differ, but their presence does not.

The character of the Renaissance magus may be seen as as hinging on despair with the natural world. This mood seems to be woven into

Hermetic texts that were held in such esteem in the Renaissance and were connected at the opening of pre-eminent Renaissance neo-Platonist Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.<sup>[33]</sup> If there is good to be had, it is not met in the mundane world of the *hoi polloi*. It must be very different from their reality, something hidden that is only accessible to an elite. The sense in which this spells out an interest in the occult means far more than carrying around a rabbit's foot. The specific supernatural contact was valued because the occult was far hidden from appearances and the unwashed masses. (The Christian claim that one can simply pray to God and be heard is thus profoundly uninteresting. Supernatural as it may be, it is ordinary, humble, and accessible in a way that the magus is trying to push past.) This desire for what is hidden or very different from the ordinary means that the ideal future must be very different from the present. Therefore Thomas More, Renaissance author, canonised saint, and strong devotee of Mirandola's writing, himself writes *Utopia*. In this work, the philosophic sailor Raphael establishes his own reason as judge over the appropriateness of executing thieves,<sup>[34]</sup> and describes a Utopia where society simply works better: there seem to be no unpleasant surprises or unintended consequences.<sup>[35]</sup> There is little sense of a complex inner logic to society that needs to be respected, or any kind of authority to submit to. Indeed, Raphael abhors authority and responds to the suggestion that he attach himself to a king's court by saying, 'Happier! Is that to follow a path that my soul abhors?' This Utopian vision, even if it is from a canonised Roman saint, captures something deep of the occult currents that would later feed into the development of political ideology. The content of an occult vision for constructing a better tomorrow may vary, but it is a vision that seeks to tear up the world as we now know it and reconstructs it along different lines.

Magic and science alike relate to what they are interested in via an I-It rather than an I-Thou relationship. Relating to society as to one's mother is an I-Thou relationship; treating society as raw material is an I-It relationship. An I-Thou relationship is receptive to quality. It can gain wisdom and insight. It can connect out of the whole person. The particular kind of I-It relationship that undergirds science has a powerful and narrow tool that deals in what can be mathematically represented. The difference between those two is misunderstood if one stops after

saying, 'I-It can make technology available much better than I-Thou.' That is how things look through I-It eyes. But I-Thou allows a quality of relationship that does not exist with I-It. 'The fundamental word I-Thou can only be spoken with one's whole being. The fundamental word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being.' I-Thou allows a quality-rich relationship that always has another layer of meaning. In the Romance languages there are two different words for knowledge: in French, *connaissance* and *savoir*. They both mean 'knowledge,' but in different ways: *savoir* is knowledge of fact (or know-how); one can *sait que* ('know that') something is true. *Connaissance* is the kind of knowledge of a person, a 'knowledge of' rather than a 'knowledge that' or 'knowledge how.' It can never be a complete knowledge, and one cannot *connait que* ('know-of that') something is true. It is personal in character. An I-It relationship is not just true of magic; as I will discuss below under the heading of '[Science, Psychology, and Behaviourism](#),' psychology seeks a baseline *savoir* of people where it might seek a *connaissance*, and its theories are meant to be abstracted from relationships with specific people. Like magic, the powers that are based on science are epiphenomenal to the relationship science is based on. Relating in an I-Thou rather than I-It fashion is not simply less like magic and science; it is richer, fuller, and more human.

In the patristic and medieval eras, the goal of living had been contemplation and the goal of moral instruction was to conform people to reality. Now there was a shift from conforming people to reality, towards conforming reality to people.<sup>[36]</sup> This set the stage, centuries later, for a major and resource-intensive effort to create an artificial mind, a goal that would not have fit well with a society oriented to contemplation. This is not to say that there is no faith today, nor that there was no technology in the middle ages, nor that there has been no shift between the early modern period and today. Rather, it is to say that a basic trajectory was established in magic that significantly shapes science today.

The difference between the Renaissance magus and the mediaeval member of the Church casts a significant shadow today. The scientist seems to live more in the shadow of the Renaissance magus than of the member of mediaeval society. This is not to say that scientists cannot be humble and moral, nor that they cannot hold wonder at what they study. But it is to say that there are a number of points of contact between the Renaissance magus's way of relating to the world and that of a scientist

renaissance magus's way of relating to the world and that of a scientist and those who live in science's shadow. Governments today consult social scientists before making policy decisions: the relationship seems to be how to best deal with material rather than a relationship as to one's mother. We have more than a hint of secularised magic in which substantial fragments of Renaissance and early modern magic have long outlived some magical practices.

Under the patristic and medieval conception, this life was an apprenticeship to the life in Heaven, the beginning of an eternal glory contemplating God. Magic retained a sense of supernatural reality and a larger world, but its goal was to improve this life, understood as largely self-contained and not as beginning of the next. That was the new chief end of humanity. That shift is a shift towards the secular, magical as its beginning may be. Magic contains the seeds of its own secularisation, in other words of its becoming scientific. The shift from contemplation of the next world to power in this world is why the occult was associated with all sorts of Utopian visions to transform the world, a legacy reflected in our political ideologies. One of the tools developed in that magical milieu was science: a tool that, for Darwinian reasons, was to eclipse all the rest. The real magic that has emerged is science.

## Science, Psychology, and Behaviourism

What is the niche science has carved out for itself? I'd like to look at an academic discipline that is working hard to be a science, psychology. I will more specifically look at behaviourism, as symptomatic within the history of psychology. Is it fair to look at behaviourism, which psychology itself rejected? It seems that behaviourism offers a valuable case study by demonstrating what is more subtly present elsewhere in psychology. Behaviourism makes some basic observations about reward and punishment and people repeating behaviours, and portrays this as a comprehensive psychological theory: behaviourism does not acknowledge beliefs, for instance. Nonetheless, I suggest that behaviourism is a conceivable development in modern psychology which would have been impossible in other settings. Behaviourism may be unusual in the extreme simplicity of its vision and its refusal to recognise internal states, but not in desiring a Newton who will make psychology a full-fledged science and let psychology know its material with the same kind of knowing as physics has for its material.

Newton and his kin provided a completely de-anthropomorphised account of natural phenomena, and behaviourism provided a de-anthropomorphised account of humans. In leading behaviourist B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948), we have a Utopian vision where every part of society seems to work better: artists raised under Skinner's conditioning produce work which is 'extraordinarily good,' the women are more beautiful,[\[37\]](#) and Skinner's alter ego expresses the hope of controlling the weather,[\[38\]](#) and compares himself with God.[\[39\]](#) Skinner resemble seems to resemble a Renaissance magus more than a mediaeval member: society is raw material for him to transform. Skinner

is, in a real sense, a Renaissance magus whose magic has become secularised. Quite a lot of the magus survives the secularisation of Skinner's magic.

Even without these more grandiose aspirations, psychology is symptomatic of something that is difficult to discern by looking at the hard sciences. Psychological experiments try to find ways in which the human person responds in terms comparable to a physics experiment—and by nature do not relate to their subjects as human agents. These experiments study one aspect of human personhood, good literature another, and literature offers a different kind of knowing from a psychological experiment. If we assume that psychology is the best way to understand people—and that the mind is a mechanism-driven thing—then the assumed burden of proof falls on anyone saying, 'But a human mind isn't the sort of thing you can duplicate on a computer.' The cultural place of science constitutes a powerful influence on how people conceive the question of artificial intelligence.

Behaviourism offers a very simple and very sharp magic sword to cut the Gordian knot of unscientific teleology, a knot that will be discussed under the heading of '[Intentionality and Teleology](#)' below. It removes suspicion of the reason being attached to a spiritual intellect by refusing to acknowledge reason. It removes the suspicion of emotions having a spiritual dimension by refusing to acknowledge emotions. He denies enough of the human person that even psychologists who share those goals would want to distance themselves from him. And yet Skinner does more than entertain messianic fantasies: *Walden Two* is a Utopia, and when Skinner's alter ego compares himself with God, God ends up second best.[\[40\]](#) I suggest that this is no a contradiction at all, or more properly it is a blatant contradiction as far as common sense is concerned, but as far as human human phenomena go, we have two sides of the same coin. The magic sword and the messianic fantasy belong to one and the same magus.

There is in fact an intermediate step between the full-fledged magus and the mortal herd. One can be a magician's assistant, clearing away debris and performing menial tasks to support the real magi. [\[41\]](#) The proportion of the Western population who are scientists is enormous compared to science's founding, and the vast majority of the increase is in magician's assistants. If one meets a scientist at a social gathering, the

science is in all probability not a full-fledged magus, but a magician's assistant, set midway between the magus and the commoner. The common scientist is below the magus in knowledge of science but well above most commoners. In place of a personal messianic fantasy is a more communal tendency to assume that the scientific enterprise is our best hope for the betterment of society. (Commoners may share this belief.) There is a significant difference between the magus and most assistants today. Nonetheless, the figure of the magus is alive today—secularised, in most cases, but alive and well. Paul Johnson's Augustinian account of *Intellectuals* includes such eminent twentieth century scientific figures as Bertrand Russell, Noam Chompsky, and Albert Einstein;[\[42\]](#) the figures one encounters in his pages are steeped in the relationship to society as to raw material instead as to one's mother, the magic sword, and the messianic fantasy.

## I-Thou and Humanness

I suggest that the most interesting critiques of artificial intelligence are not obtained by looking through I-It eyes in another direction, but in using other eyes to begin with, looking through I-Thou eyes. Let us consider Turing's 'Arguments from Various Disabilities'.[\[43\]](#) Perhaps the people who furnished Turing with these objections were speaking out of something deeper than they could explain:

Be kind, resourceful, beautiful, friendly, have initiative, have a sense of humour, tell right from wrong, make mistakes, fall in love, enjoy strawberries and cream, make some one fall in love with it, learn from experience, use words properly, be the subject of its own thought, have as much diversity of behaviour as a man, do something really new.

### **Be kind:**

Kindness is listed by Paul as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) in other words, an outflow of a person living in the Spirit. Disregarding the question of whether all kindness is the fruit of the Spirit, in humans kindness is not merely following rules, but the outflow of a concern for the other person. Even counterfeit kindness is a counterfeit from someone who knows the genuine article. It thus uses some faculty of humanity other than the reasoning ability, which classical AI tries to duplicate and which is assumed to be the one thing necessary to duplicate human cognition.

### **Be resourceful:**

The artificial intelligence assumption is that if something is non-deterministic, it is random, because deterministic and pseudo-random are the only options one can use in programming a computer. This leaves

out a third possibility, that by non-computational faculties someone may think, not merely 'outside the box,' in a random direction, but above it. The creative spark comes neither from continuing a systematic approach, nor simply picking something random ('because I can't get my computer to turn on, I'll pour coffee on it and see if that helps'), but something that we don't know how to give a computer.

**Be beautiful:**

Beauty is a spiritual quality that is not perceived by scientific enquiry and, given our time's interpretation of scientific enquiry, is in principle not recognised. Why not? If we push materialist assumptions to the extreme, it is almost a category error to look at a woman and say, 'She is beautiful.' What is really being said—if one is not making a category error—is, 'I have certain emotions when I look at her.' Even if there is not a connection between physical beauty and intelligence, there seems to be some peasant shrewdness involved. It is a genuine, if misapplied, appeal to look at something that has been overlooked.

**Be friendly:**

True as opposed to counterfeit friendliness is a manifestation of love, which has its home in the will, especially if the will is not understood as a quasi-muscular power of domination, but part of the spirit which lets us turn towards another in love.

Remarks could easily be multiplied. What is meant to come through all this is that science is not magic, but science works in magic's wake. Among relevant features may be mentioned relating as a magus would (in many ways distilling an I-It relationship further), and seeking power over the world in this life rather living an apprenticeship to the next.

## **Orthodox Anthropology in Maximus Confessor's *Mystagogia***

I will begin detailed enquiry in the Greek Fathers by considering an author who is foundational to Eastern Orthodoxy, the seventh century Greek Father Maximus Confessor. Out of the existing body of literature, I will focus on one work, his *Mystagogia*,[\[44\]](#) with some reference to the *Capita Gnosticae*. Maximus Confessor is a synthetic thinker, and the *Mystagogia* is an anthropological work; its discussion of Church mystagogy is dense in theological anthropology as the training for a medical doctor is dense in human biology.

Orthodox Christians have a different cosmology from the Protestant

Orthodox Christians have a different cosmology from the Protestant division of nature, sin, and grace. Nature is never un-graced, and the grace that restores from sin is the same grace that provides continued existence and that created nature in the first place. That is to say, grace flows from God's generosity, and is never alien to nature. The one God inhabits the whole creation: granted, in a more special and concentrated way in a person than in a rock, but the same God is really present in both.

Already, without having seriously engaged theological *anthropology*, we have differences with how AI looks at things. Not only are the answers different, but the questions themselves are posed in a different way. 'Cold matter,' such as is assumed by scientific materialism, doesn't exist, not because matter is denied in Berkeleyan fashion but because it is part of a spiritual cosmology and affirmed to be something more. It is mistaken to think of cold matter, just as it is mistaken to think of tepid fire. Even matter has spiritual attributes and is graced. Everything that exists, from God and the spiritual creation to the material creation, from seraphim to stone, is the sort of thing one connects to in an I-Thou relationship. An I-It relationship is out of place, and from this perspective magic and science look almost the same, different signposts in the process of establishing a progressively purer I-It relationship.

## Intellect and Reason

Maximus' anthropology is threefold: the person is divided into soul and body, and the soul itself is divided into a higher part, the intellect, and a lower part, the reason:[\[45\]](#)

[Pseudo-Dionysius] used to teach that the whole person is a synthesis of soul and body joined together, and furthermore the soul itself can be examined by reason. (The person is an image which reflects teaching about the Holy Church.) Thus he said that the soul had an intellectual and living faculty that were essentially united, and described the moving, intellectual, authoritative power—with the living part described according its will-less nature. And again, the whole mind deals with intelligible things, with the intelligible power being called intellect, whilst the sensible power is called reason.

This passage shows a one-word translation difficulty which is symptomatic of a difference between his theology and the quasi-theological assumptions of the artificial intelligence project. The word in question, which I have rendered as 'authoritative power,' is '*exousiastikws*,' with root word '*exousia*.' The root and its associated forms could be misconstrued today as having a double meaning of 'power' and 'authority,' with 'authority' as the basic sense. In both classical and patristic usage, it seems debatable whether '*exousia*' is tied to any concept of power divorced from authority. In particular this passage's '*exousiastikws*' is most immediately translated as power rather than any kind of authority that is separate from power. Yet Maximus Confessor's whole sense of power here is one that arises from a divine authorisation to know the truth. This sense of power is teleologically oriented and has intrinsic meaning. This is not to say that Maximus could only conceive of

power in terms of authority. He repeatedly uses '*dunamis*,' (*proem*.15-6, 26, 28, etc), a word for power without significant connotations of authority. However, he could conceive of power in terms of authority, and that is exactly what he does when describing the intellect's power.

What is the relationship between 'intellect'/'reason' and cognitive faculties? Which, if either, has cognitive faculties a computer can't duplicate? Here we run into another difficulty. It is hard to say that Maximus Confessor traded in cognitive faculties. For Maximus Confessor the core sense of 'cognitive faculties' is inadequate, as it is inadequate to define an eye as something that provides nerve impulses which the brain uses to generate other nerve impulses. What is missing from this picture? This definition does not provide any sense that the eye interacts with the external world, so that under normal circumstances its nerve impulses are sent because photons strike photoreceptors in an organ resembling a camera. Even this description hides most teleology and evaluative judgment. It does not say that an eye is an organ for perceiving the external world through an image reconstructed in the brain, and may be called 'good' if it sees clearly and 'bad' if it doesn't. This may be used as a point of departure to comment on Maximus Confessor and the conception of cognitive faculties.

Maximus Confessor does not, in an amoral or self-contained fashion, see faculties that operate on mental representations. He sees an intellect that is where one meets God, and where one encounters a Truth that is no more private than the world one sees with the eye is private.

Intellect and reason compete with today's cognitive faculties, but Maximus Confessor understands the intellect in particular as something fundamentally moral, spiritual, and connected to spiritual realities. His conception of morality is itself different from today's private choice of ethical code; morality had more public and more encompassing boundaries, and included such things as Jesus' admonition not to take the place of highest honour so as not to receive public humiliation (Luke 14:7-10): it embraced practical advice for social conduct, because the moral and spiritual were not separated from the practical. It is difficult to Maximus Confessor conceiving of practicality as hampered by morality. In Maximus Confessor's day what we separate into cognitive, moral, spiritual, and practical domains were woven into a seamless tapestry.

## Intellect, Principles, and Cosmology

Chapter twenty-three opens by emphasising that contemplation is more than looking at appearances (23.1-10), and discusses the Principles of things. The concept of a *Principle* is important to his cosmology. There is a foundational difference between the assumed cosmologies of artificial intelligence and Maximus Confessor. Maximus Confessor's cosmology is not the artificial intelligence cosmology with a spiritual dimension added, as a living organism is not a machine modified to use foodstuffs as fuel.

Why do I speak of the 'artificial intelligence cosmology'? Surely one can have a long debate about artificial intelligence without adding cosmology to the discussion. This is true, but it is true because cosmology has become invisible, part of the assumed backdrop of discussion. In America, one cultural assumption is that 'culture' and 'customs' are for faroff and exotic people, not for 'us'—'we' are just being human. It doesn't occur to most Americans to think of eating Turkey on Thanksgiving Day or removing one's hat inside a building as customs, because 'custom' is a concept that only applies to exotic people. I suggest that Maximus Confessor has an interesting cosmology, not because he's exotic, but because he's human.

Artificial intelligence proponents and (most) critics do not differ on cosmology, but because that is because it is an important assumption which is not questioned even by most people who deny the possibility of artificial intelligence. Searle may disagree with Fodor about what is implied by a materialist cosmology, but not whether one should accept materialism. I suggest that some artificial intelligence critics miss the most interesting critiques of artificial intelligence because they share that project's cosmology. If AI is based on a cosmological error, then no amount of fine-tuning within the system will rectify the error. We need to

consider cosmology if we are to have any hope of correcting an error that basic. (Bad metaphysics does not create good physics.) I will describe Maximus Confessor's cosmology in this section, not because he has cosmology and AI doesn't, but because his cosmology seems to suggest a correction to the artificial intelligence cosmology.

At the base of Maximus's cosmology is God. God holds the Principles in his heart, and they share something of his reality. Concrete beings (including us) are created through the Principles, and we share something of their reality and of God. The Principles are a more concrete realisation of God, and we are a more concrete realisation of the Principles. Thought (*nohsis*) means beholding God and the Principles (*logoi*) through the eye of the intellect. Thinking of a tree means connecting with something that is more tree-like than the tree itself.

It may be easier to see what the important Principles in Maximus Confessor's cosmology if we see how they are being dismantled today. Without saying that Church Fathers simply grafted in Platonism, I believe it safe to say that Plato resembled some of Church doctrine, and at any rate Plato's one finger pointing up to God offers a closer approximation to Christianity than Aristotle's fingers pointing down. I would suggest further that looking at Plato can suggest how Christianity differs from Aristotelianism's materialistic tendencies, tendencies that are still unfolding today. Edelman describes the assumptions accompanying Darwin's evolution as the 'death blow' to the essentialism, the doctrine that there are fixed kinds of things, as taught by Plato and other idealists. [46] Edelman seems not to appreciate why so many biologists assent to punctuated equilibrium. [47] However, if we assume that there is solid evidence establishing that all life gradually evolved from a common ancestor, then this remark is both apropos and perceptive.

When we look around, we see organisms that fit neatly into different classes: human, housefly, oak. Beginning philosophy students may find it quaint to hear of Plato's Ideas, and the Ideal horse that is copied in all physical horses, but we tend to assume Platonism at least in that horses are similar 'as if' there were an Ideal horse: we don't believe in the Ideal horse any more, but we still treat its shadow as if it were the Ideal horse's shadowy copy.

Darwin's theory of evolution suggests that all organisms are connected via slow, continuous change to a common ancestor and therefore to each

other. If this is true, there are dire implications for Platonism. It is as if we had pictures of wet clay pottery, and posited a sharp divide between discrete classes of plates, cups, and bowls. Then someone showed a movie of a potter deforming one and the same clay from one shape to another, so that the divisions are now shown to be arbitrary. There are no discrete classes of vessels, just one lump of clay being shaped into different things. Here we are pushing a picture to the other end of a spectrum, further away from Platonism. It is a push from tacitly assuming there is a shadow, to expunging the remnant of belief in the horse and its shadow.

But this doesn't mean we're perfect Platonists, or can effortlessly appreciate the Platonic mindset. There are things we have to understand before we can travel in the other direction. If anything, there is more work involved. We act as if the Ideas' shadows are real things, but we don't genuinely believe in the shadows *qua* shadows, let alone the Ideas. We've simply inherited the habit of treating shadows as a convenient fiction. But Maximus Confessor believed the Principles (Ideas) represented something fuller and deeper than concrete things.

This is foundational to why Maximus Confessor would not have understood thought as manipulating mental representations in the inescapable privacy of one's mind. Contemplation is not a matter of closing one's eyes and fantasising, but of opening one's eyes and beholding something deeper and more real than reality itself. The sensible reason can perceive the external physical world through the senses, but this takes a very different light from Kant's view.

Maximus Confessor offers a genuinely interesting suggestion that we know things not only because of our power-to-know, but because of their power-to-be-known, an approach that I will explore later under the heading '[Knowledge of the Immanent](#).' The world is not purely transcendent, but immanent. For Kant the mind is a box that is hermetically sealed on top but has a few frustratingly small holes on the bottom: the senses. Maximus Confessor doesn't view the senses very differently, but the top of the box is open.

This means that the intellect is most basically where one meets God. Its powerful ability to know truth is connected to this, and it connects with the Principles of things, as the senses connect with mere things. Is it fair to the senses to compare the intellect's connection with Principles with the senses' experience of physical things? The real question is not that. but whether it is fair to the intellect. and the answer is 'no.' The

Principles are deeper, richer, and fuller than the mere visible things, as a horse is richer than its shadow. The knowledge we have through the intellect's connection with the Principles is of a deeper and richer sort than what is merely inferred from the senses.

## **The Intelligible and the Sensible**

Maximus Confessor lists, and connects, several linked pairs, which I have incorporated into a schema below. The first column of this schema relates to the second column along lines just illustrated: the first member of each pair is transcendent and eminent to the second, but also immanent to it.

### **Head Body**

Heaven earth (3.1-6)  
holy of holies sanctuary (2.8-9)  
intelligible sensible (7.5-10)  
contemplative active (5.8-9)  
intellect reason (5.9-10)  
spiritual wisdom practical wisdom (5.13-15)  
knowledge virtue (5.58)  
unforgettable knowledge faith (5.58-60)  
truth goodness (5.58-9)  
archetype image (5.79-80)  
New Testament Old Testament (6.4-6)  
spiritual meaning of a text literal meaning of a text (6.14-5)  
bishop's seating on throne bishop's entrance into Church (8.5-6, 20-21)  
Christ's return in glory Christ's first coming, glory veiled (8.6-7, 18)  
Maximus Confessor's cosmology sees neither a disparate collection of unconnected things, nor an undistinguished monism that denies differences. Instead, he sees a unity that sees natures (1.16-17) in which God not only limits differences, as a circle limits its radii (1.62-67), but

transcends all differences. Things may be distinguished, but they are not divided. This is key to understanding both doctrine and method. He identifies the world with a person, and connects the Church with the image of God. Doctrine and method are alike synthetic, which suggests that passages about his cosmology and ecclesiology illuminate anthropology.

One recurring theme shows in his treatment of heaven and earth, the soul and the body, the intelligible (spiritual) and the sensible (material). The intelligible both transcends the sensible, and is immanent to it, present in it. The intelligible is what can be apprehended by the part of us that meets God; the sensible is what presents itself to the world of senses. (The senses are not our only connection with the world.) This is a different way of thinking about matter and spirit from the Cartesian model, which gives rise to the ghost in the machine problem. Maximus Confessor's understanding of spirit and matter does not make much room for this dilemma. Matter and spirit interpenetrate. This is true not just in us but in the cosmos, which is itself 'human': he considers '...the three people: the cosmos (let us say), the Holy Scriptures, and this is true with us' (7.40-1). The attempt to connect spirit and matter might have struck him like an attempt to forge a link between fire and heat, two things already linked.

## Knowledge of the Immanent

The word which I here render 'thought' is '*nohsis*', cognate to 'intellect' ('*nous*') which has been discussed as that which is inseparably the home of thought and of meeting God. We already have a hint of a conceptual cast in which thought will be understood in terms of connection and contemplation.

In contrast to understanding thought as a process within a mind, Maximus describes thought in terms of a relationship: a thought can exist because there is a power to think of in the one thinking, and a power to be thought of in what is thought of.[\[48\]](#) We could no more know an absolutely transcendent creature than we could know an absolutely transcendent Creator. Even imperfect thought exists because we are dealing with something that 'holds power to be apprehended by the intellect' (I.82). We say something is purple because its manifest purpleness meets our ability to perceive purple. What about the claim that purple is a mental experience arising from a certain wavelength of light striking our retinas? One answer that might be given is that those are the mechanisms by which purple is delivered, not the nature of what purple is.[\[49\]](#) The distinction is important.

We may ask, what about capacity for fantasy and errors? The first response I would suggest is cultural. The birth of modernity was a major shift, and its abstraction introduced new things into the Western mind, including much of what supports our concept of fantasy (in literature, etc.). The category of fantasy is a basic category to our mindset but not to the patristic or medieval mind. Therefore, instead of speculating how Maximus Confessor would have replied to these objections, we can point out that they aren't the sort of thing that he would ever think of, or perhaps even understand.

But in fact a more positive reply can be taken. It can be said of good

and evil that good is the only real substance. Evil is not its own substance, but a blemish in good substance. This parallels error. Error is not something fundamentally new, but a blurred or distorted form of truth. Fantasy does not represent another fundamentally independent, if hypothetical, reality; it is a funhouse mirror refracting this world. We do not have a representation that exists in one's mind alone, but a dual relationship that arises both from apprehending intellect and an immanent thing. The possibility of errors and speculation make for a longer explanation but need not make us discard this basic picture.

## Intentionality and Teleology

One of the basic differences in cosmology between Maximus Confessor and our own day relates to *intentionality*. As it is described in cognitive science's philosophy of mind, 'intentionality' refers to an 'aboutness' of human mental states, such as beliefs and emotions. The word 'tree' is about an object outside the mind, and even the word 'pegasus' evokes something that one could imagine existing outside of the mind, even if it does not. Intentionality does not exist in computer programs: a computer chess program manipulates symbols in an entirely self-enclosed system, so 'queen' cannot refer to any external person or carry the web of associations we assume. Intentionality presents a philosophical problem for artificial intelligence. Human mental states and symbol manipulation are about something that reach out to the external world, whilst computer symbol manipulation is purely internal. A computer may manipulate symbols that are meaningful to humans using it, but the computer has no more sense of what a webpage means than a physical book has a sense that its pages contain good or bad writing. Intentionality is a special feature of living minds, and does not exist outside of them. Something significant will be achieved if ever a computer program first embodies intentionality outside of a living mind.

Maximus Confessor would likely have had difficulty understanding this perspective as he would have had difficulty understanding the problem of the ghost in the machine: this perspective makes intentionality a special exception as the ghost in the machine made our minds' interaction with our bodies a special exception, and to him both 'exceptions' are in fact the crowning jewel of something which permeates the cosmos.

The theory of evolution is symptomatic of a difference between the post-Enlightenment West and the patristic era. This theory is on analytic

grounds not a true answer to the question, 'Why is there life as we know it?' because it does not address the question, 'Why is there life as we know it?' At best it is a true answer to the question, 'How is there life as we know it?' which people often fail to distinguish from the very different question, 'Why is there life as we know it?' The Enlightenment contributed to an effort to expunge all trace of teleology from causality, all trace of 'Why?' from 'How?' Of Aristotle's four causes, only the efficient cause[50] is familiar; a beginning philosophy student is liable to misconstrue Aristotle's final cause[51] as being an efficient cause whose effect curiously precedes the cause. The heavy teleological scent to final causation is liable to be missed at first by a student in the wake of reducing 'why' to 'how'; in Maximus Confessor, causation is not simply mechanical, but tells what purpose something serves, what it embodies, what meaning and relationships define it, and why it exists.

Strictly speaking, one should speak of 'scientific mechanisms' rather than 'scientific explanations.' Why? 'Scientific proof' is an oxymoron: science does not deal in positive proof any more than mathematics deals in experiment, so talk of 'scientific proof' ordinarily signals a speaker who has more faith in science than understanding of what science really does. 'Scientific explanation' is a less blatant contradiction in terms, but it reflects a misunderstanding, perhaps one that is more widespread, as it often present among people who would never speak of 'scientific proof.' Talk of 'scientific explanation' is not simply careless speech; there needs to be a widespread category error before there is any reason to write a book like Mary Midgley's *Science as Salvation* (1992). Science is an enterprise which provides mechanisms and has been given the cultural place of providing explanations. This discrepancy has the effect that people searching for explanations turn to scientific mechanisms, and may not be receptive when a genuine explanation is provided, because 'explanation' to them means 'something like what science gives.' This may not be the only factor, but it casts a long shadow. The burden of proof is born by anyone who would present a non-scientific explanation as being as real as a scientific explanation. An even heavier burden of proof falls on the person who would claim that a non-scientific explanation—not just as social construction, but a real claim about the external world—offers something that science does not.

The distinction between mechanism and explanation is also relevant

because the ways in which artificial intelligence has failed may reflect mechanisms made to do the work of explanations. In other words, the question of 'What is the nature of a human?' is answered by, 'We are able to discern these mental mechanisms in a human.' If this is true, the failure to duplicate a human mind in computers may be connected to researchers answering the wrong question in the first place. These are different, as the question, 'What literary devices can you find in *The Merchant of Venice*[\[52\]](#)?' is different from 'Why is *The Merchant of Venice* powerful drama?' The devices aren't irrelevant, but neither are they the whole picture.

Of the once great and beautiful land of teleology, a land once brimming in explanations, all has been conquered, all has been levelled, all has been razed and transformed by the power of I-It. All except two stubborn, embattled holdouts. The first holdout is intentionality: if it is a category error to project things in the human mind onto the outer world, nonetheless we recognise that intentionality exists in the mind—but about-ness of intentionality is far less than the about-ness once believed to fill the cosmos. The second and last holdout is evolution: if there is to be no mythic story of origins that gives shape and meaning to human existence, if there cannot be an answer to 'Why is there life as we know it?' because there is no reason at all for life, because housefly, horse, and human are alike the by-product of mindless forces that did not have us in mind, nonetheless there is still an emaciated spectre, an evolutionary mechanism that does just enough work to keep away a teleological approach to origins questions. The land of teleology has been razed, but there is a similarity between these two remnants, placeholders which are granted special permission to do what even the I-It approach recognises it cannot completely remove of teleology. That is the official picture, at least. Midgley is liable to pester us with counterexamples of a teleology that is far more persistent than the official picture gives credit for: she looks at evolution doing the work of a myth instead of a placeholder that keeps myths away, for instance.[\[53\]](#) Let's ignore her for the moment and stick with the official version. Then looking at both intentionality and evolution can be instructive in seeing what has happened to teleology, and appreciating what teleology was and could be. Now Midgley offers us reasons why it may not be productive to pretend we can excise teleology: the examples of teleology she discusses do not seem to be improved by

being driven underground and presented as non-teleological.

Maximus's picture, as well as being teleological, is moral and spiritual. As well as having intentions, we are living manifestations of a teleological, moral and spiritual Intention in God's heart. Maximus Confessor held a cosmology, and therefore an anthropology, that did not see the world in terms of disconnected and meaningless things. He exhibited a number of traits that the Enlightenment stripped out: in particular, a pervasive teleology in both cosmology and anthropology. He believed in a threefold anthropology of intellect/spirit, reason/soul, and body, all intimately tied together. What cognitive science accounts for through cognitive faculties, manipulating mental representations, were accounted for quite differently by an intellect that sees God and the Principles of beings, and a reason that works with the truths apprehended by intellect. The differences between the respective cosmologies and anthropologies are not the differences between two alternate answers to the same question, but answers to two different questions, differently conceived. They are alike in that they can collide because they are wrestling with the same thing: where they disagree, at least one of them must be wrong. They are different in that they are looking at the same aspect of personhood from two different cultures, and Maximus Confessor seems to have enough distance to provide a genuinely interesting critique.

## Conclusion

Maximus Confessor was a synthetic thinker, and I suggest that his writings, which are synthetic both in method and in doctrine, are valuable not only because he was brilliant but because synthetic enquiry can be itself valuable. I have pursued a synthetic enquiry, not out of an attempt to be like Maximus Confessor, but because I think an approach that is sensitive to connections could be productive here. I'm not the only critic who has the resources to interpret AI as floundering in a way that may be symptomatic of a cosmological error. It's not hard to see that many religious cosmologies offer inhospitable climates to machines that think: Foerst's reinterpretation of the image of God[\[54\]](#) seems part of an effort to avoid seeing exactly this point. The interesting task is understanding and conveying an interconnected web. So I have connected science with magic, for instance, because although the official version is that they're completely unrelated, there is a strong historic link between them, and cultural factors today obscure the difference, and for that matter obscure several other things that interest us.

This dissertation falls under the heading of boundary issues between religion and science, and some readers may perceive me to approach boundary issues in a slightly different fashion. That perception is correct. One of the main ways that boundary issues are framed seems to be for Christian theologians to show the compatibility of their timeless doctrines with that minority of scientific theories which have already been accepted by the scientific community and which have not yet been rejected by that same community. With the question of origins, there has been a lot of work done to show that Christianity is far more compatible with evolutionary theory than a literal reading of Genesis 1 would suggest. It seems to have only been recently that gadflies within the intelligent design movement have suggested both that the scientific case for

evolution is weaker than it has been made out to be, and there seems to be good reason to believe that Christianity and evolution are incompatible at a deep enough level that the literal details of Genesis 1 are almost superfluous. Nobody conceives the boundary issues to mean that theologians should demonstrate the compatibility of Christianity with that silent majority of scientific theories which have either been both accepted and discredited (like spontaneous generation) or not yet accepted (like the cognitive-theoretic model of the universe). The minority is different, but not as different as people often assume.

One of the questions which is debated is whether it is best to understand subject-matter from within or without. I am an M.Phil. student in theology with a master's and an adjunct professorship in the sciences. I have worked to understand the sciences from within, and from that base look and understand science from without as well as within. Someone who only sees science from without may lack appreciation of certain things that come with experience of science, whilst someone who only sees science from within may not be able to question enough of science's self-portrayal. This composite view may not be available to all, nor is it needed, but I believe it has helped me in another basic rôle from showing religion's compatibility with current science: namely, serving as a critical observer and raising important questions that science is itself unlikely to raise, sometimes turning a scientific assumption on its head. Theology may have other things to offer in its discussion with science than simply offering assent: instead of solely being the recipient of claims from science, it should be an agent which adds to the conversation.

Are there reasons why the position I propose is to be preferred? Science's interpretation of the matter is deeply entrenched, enough so that it seems strange to connect science with the occult. One response is that this perspective should at least be listened to, because it is challenging a now entrenched cultural force, and it may be a cue to how we could avoid some of our own blind spots. Even if it is wrong, it could be wrong in an interesting way. A more positive response would be to say that this is by my own admission far from a complete picture, but it makes sense of part of the historical record that is meaningless if one says that modern science just happened to be born whilst a magical movement waxed strong, and some of science's founders just happened to be magicians. A more robust picture would see the early modern era as an interlocking whole that encompassed a continuing Reformation

interlocking whole that encompassed a continuing reformation, Descartes, magic, nascent science, and the wake of the Renaissance polymath. They all interconnect, even if none is fully determined. Lack of time and space preclude me from more than mentioning what that broader picture might be. There is also another reason to question the validity of science's basic picture:

**Artificial intelligence doesn't work, at least not for a working copy of human intelligence.**

Billions of dollars have been expended in the pursuit of artificial intelligence, so it is difficult to say the artificial intelligence project has failed through lack of funding. The project has attracted many of the world's most brilliant minds, so it is difficult to say that the project has failed through lack of talent. Technology has improved a thousandfold or a millionfold since a giant like Turing thought computer technology was powerful enough for artificial intelligence, so it is difficult to say that today's computers are too underpowered for artificial intelligence. Computer science has matured considerably, so it's hard to say that artificial intelligence hasn't had a chance to mature. In 1950, one could have posited a number of reasons for the lack of success then, but subsequent experience has made many of these possibilities difficult to maintain. This leaves open the possibility that artificial intelligence has failed because the whole enterprise is based on a false assumption, perhaps an error so deep as to be cosmological.

The power of science-based technology is a side effect of learning something significant about the natural world, and both scientific knowledge and technology are impressive cultural achievements. Yet science is not a complete picture—and I do not mean simply that we can have our own private fantasies—and science does not capture the spiritual qualities of matter, let alone a human being. The question of whether science understands mechanical properties of physical things has been put to the test, and the outcome is a resounding yes. The question of whether science understands enough about humans to duplicate human thought is also being put to the test, and when the rubber meets the road, the answer to that question looks a lot like, 'No.' It's not definitive (it couldn't be), but the picture so far is that science is trying something that can't work. It can't work because of spiritual principles, as a perpetual motion machine can't work because of physical principles. It's not a matter of insufficient resources available so far, or

still needing to find the right approach. It doesn't seem to be the sort of thing which could work.

We miss something about the artificial intelligence project if we frame it as something that began after computer scientists saw that computers can manipulate symbols. People have been trying to make intelligent computers for half a century, but artificial intelligence is a phenomenon that has been centuries in the making. The fact that people saw the brain as a telephone switchboard, when that was the new technology, is more a symptom than a beginning. There's more than artificial intelligence's surface resemblance to alchemists' artificial person ('homunculus'). A repeated feature of the occult enterprise is that you do not have people giving to society in the ways that people have always given to society; you have exceptional figures trying to delve into unexplored recesses and forge some new creation, some new power—some new technology or method—to achieve something mythic that has simply not been achieved before. The magus is endowed with a magic sword to powerfully slice through his day's Gordian knots, and with a messianic fantasy. This is true of Leibniz's *Ars Combinatoria* and it is true of more than a little of artificial intelligence. To the reader who suggests, 'But magic doesn't really work!' I would point out that artificial intelligence also doesn't really work—although its researchers find it to work, like Renaissance magi and modern neo-pagans. The vast gap between magic and science that exists in our imagination is a cultural prejudice rather than a historical conclusion. Some puzzles which emerge from a non-historical picture of science—in particular, why a discipline with modest claims about falsifying hypotheses is held in such awe—seem to make a lot more sense if science is investigated as a historical phenomenon partly stemming from magic.

If there is one unexpected theme running through this enquiry, it is what has emerged about relationships. The question of whether one relates to society (or the natural world) as to one's mother or as to raw material, in I-Thou or I-It fashion, first crept in as a minor clarification. The more I have thought about it, the more significant it seems. The Renaissance magus distinguished himself from his medieval predecessors by converting I-Thou relationships into I-It. How is modern science different? To start with, it is much more consistent in pursuing I-It relationships. The fact that science gives mechanisms instead of explanations is connected: an explanation is an I-Thou thing whilst a

explanations is connected, an explanation is an I-Thou thing, whilst a bare mechanism is I-It: if you are going to relate to the world in I-It fashion, there is every reason to replace explanations with mechanisms. An I-Thou relationship understands in a holistic, teleological fashion: if you are going to push an I-It relationship far enough, the obvious approach is to try to expunge teleology as the Enlightenment tried. A great many things about magus and scientist alike hinge on the rejection of Orthodoxy's I-Thou relationship.

In Arthurian legend, the figure of Merlin is a figure who holds magical powers, not by spells and incantations, but by something deeper and fundamental. Merlin does not need spells and incantations because he relates to the natural world in a way that almost goes beyond I-Thou; he relates to nature as if it were human. I suggest that science provides a figure of an anti-Merlin who holds anti-magical powers, not by spells and incantations, but by something deeper and fundamental. Science does not need spells and incantations because it relates to the natural world and humans in a way that almost goes beyond I-It; it relates to even the human as if it were inanimate. In both cases, the power hinges on a relationship, and the power is epiphenomenal to that relationship.

If this is a problem, what all is to be done? Let me say what is not to be done. What is not to be done is to engineer a programme to enlist people in an I-Thou ideology. Why not? 'I-Thou ideology' is a contradiction in terms. The standard response of starting a political programme treats society as raw material to be transformed according to one's vision—and I am not just disputing the specific content of some visions, but saying that's the wrong way to start. Many of the obvious ways of 'making a difference' that present themselves to the modern mind work through an I-It relationship, calculating how to obtain a response from people, and are therefore tainted from the start. Does that mean that nothing is to be done? No; there are many things, from a walk of faith as transforming communion with God, to learning to relate to God, people, and the entire cosmos in I-Thou fashion, to using forms of persuasion that appeal to a whole person acting in freedom. But that is another thesis to explore.

## Epilogue, 2010

I look back at this piece six years later, and see both real strengths and things I wince at. This was one of my first major works after being chrismated Orthodox, and while I am enthusiastic for Orthodoxy there are misunderstandings. My focus on cosmology is just one step away from Western, and in particular scientific, roots, and such pressure to get cosmology right is not found in any good Orthodox theologian I know. That was one of several areas where I had a pretty Western way of trying to be Orthodox, and I do not blame people who raise eyebrows at my heavy use of existentialist distinction between I-Thou and I-It relationship. And the amount of time and energy spent discussing magic almost deterred me from posting it from my website; for that reason alone, I spent time debating whether the piece was fit for human consumption. And it is possibly theology in the academic sense, but not so much the Orthodox sense: lots of ideas, cleverly put together, with little invitation to worship.

But for all this, I am still posting it. The basic points it raises, and much of the terrain, are interesting. There may be fewer true believers among scientists who still chase an artificial intelligence pot o' gold, but it remain an element of the popular imagination and belief even as people's interests turn more and more to finding a magic sword that will slice through society's Gordian knots—which is to say that there may be something relevant in this thesis besides the artificial intelligence critique.

I am posting it because I believe it is interesting and adds something to the conversation. I am also posting it in the hope that it might serve as a sort of gateway drug to some of my more recent works, and provide a contrast: this is how I approached theology just after being received into Holy Orthodoxy, and other works show what I would present as theology

having had more time to steep in Orthodoxy, such as [The Arena](#).  
I pray that God will bless you.

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## Footnotes

[1] These neural nets are modelled after biological neural nets but are organised differently and seem to take the concept of a neuron on something of a tangent from its organisation and function in a natural brain, be it insect or human.

[2] *Cog*, <http://www.ai.mit.edu/projects/humanoid-robotics-group/cog/images/cog-rod-slinky.gif>, as seen on 11 June 2004 (enlarged).

[3] 2002, 50-1.

[4] Searle 1998, Edelman 1992, etc., including some of Dreyfus 1992. Edelman lists Jerome Brunner, Alan Gauld, Claes von Hofsten, George Lakoff, Ronald Langaker, Ruth Garrett Millikan, Hilary Putnam, John Searle, and Benny Shannon as convergent members of a realist camp (1992, 220).

[5] Lee 1987, 6.

[6] 'Intentionality' is a philosophy of mind term for the 'about-ness' of mental states.

[7] By 'teleology' I understand in a somewhat inclusive sense that branch of theology and philosophy that deals with goals, ends, and ultimate meanings.

[8] 'Cognitive faculty' is a philosophy of mind conception of a feature of the human mind that operates on mental representations to perform a specific function.

[9] The spiritual 'intellect' is a patristic concept that embraces thought, conceived on different terms from 'cognitive science,' and is inseparably the place where a person meets God. Augustine locates the image of God in the intellect (*In Euangelium Ioannis Tractatus*, III.4), and compares the intellect to Christ as illuminating both itself and everything else (*In Euangelium Ioannis Tractatus*, XLVII, 3).

[10] Watts 2002, 57-8. See the World Transhumanist Association website at <http://www.transhumanist.org> for further information on transhumanism.

[11] C.S. Lewis critiques this project in *The Abolition of Man* (1943) and *That Hideous Strength* (1965). He does not address the question of whether this is a possible goal, but argues that it is not a desirable goal: the glorious future it heralds is in fact a horror compared to the present it so disparages.

[12] *Encyclopedia Mythica*, 'Rabbi Loeb,' [http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/rabbi\\_loeb.html](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/r/rabbi_loeb.html), as seen on 26 Mar 04.

[13] Foerst 1998, 109 also brings up this archetypal tendency in her conclusion.

[14] United States Postal Service 2003 annual report, <http://www.usps.com/history/anrpto3/html/realkind.htm>, as seen on 6 May 2004.

[15] *Cog*, as seen on <http://www.ai.mit.edu/projects/humanoid-robotics-group/cog/images/scaz-cog.gif>, on 6 May 2004 (enlarged).

[16] 2002, 57.

[17] *Cog*, 'Theory of Mind for a Humanoid Robots,' <http://www.ai.mit.edu/projects/humanoid-robotics/group/cog/Abstracts2000/scaz.pdf>, as seen on 6 May 2004.

[18] Adler 1986, 319-321.

[19] 1992, 161-4.

[20] Utopias are often a satire more than a prescription literally conceived, but they are also far more prescriptive than one would gather from a simple statement that they are satire.

[21] Turing 1950.

[22] VanLehn 1989, in Posner 1989, 532.

[23] *Ibid.* in Posner 1989, 534.

[24] 1998, 101.

[25] 1992, 159.

[26] Foerst 1998, 103.

[27] Turing 1950.

[28] Hebb 1949, as quoted in the Linux 'fortune' program.

[29] Nominalism said that general categories are something in the mind drawn from real things, and not something things themselves arise

from. This has profoundly shaped the course of Western culture.

[30] Lewis 1943, 46.

[31] Yates 1966, 380-382.

[32] Without submitting to the Church in the usual way, the magus is equal to its highest members (Webster 1982, 57).

[33] George Mason University's *Modern & Classical Languages*, 'Pico della Mirandola: Oratio de hominis dignitate,' <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/fld/CLASSICS/mirandola.oratio.html> as seen on 18 May 2004. See Poim 27-9, CH7 1-2 in Bentley 1987 for texts reflecting an understanding of the world as evil and associated contempt for the *hoi polloi*.

[34] *Thomas More: Utopia, Digitale Rekonstruktion*, <http://www.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/cgi-bin/button.cgi?pfad=/diglib/more/utopia/jpeg/&seite=00000017.jpg&jump=1>, <http://www.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/cgi-bin/button.cgi?pfad=/diglib/more/utopia/jpeg/&seite=00000018.jpg&jump=1>, etc. (pp. 35-6), as seen on 2 June 2004.

[35] *Thomas More: Utopia, Digitale Rekonstruktion*, <http://www.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/cgi-bin/button.cgi?pfad=/diglib/more/utopia/jpeg/&seite=00000039.jpg&jump=1>, <http://www.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/cgi-bin/button.cgi?pfad=/diglib/more/utopia/jpeg/&seite=00000040.jpg&jump=1>, etc., (pp. 79-86), as seen on 2 June 2004. This runs through most of the book.

[36] Lewis 1943, 46.

[37] *Ibid.*, 33-35.

[38] *Ibid.*, 23-24.

[39] *Ibid.*, 295-299.

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] See Midgley, 1992, 80.

[42] 1990, 195, 197-224, 337-41.

[43] 1950.

[44] References will be to the online Greek version at *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, [http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/inst/wsearch?wtitle=2892+049&uid=&GreekFont=Unicode&mode=c\\_search](http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/inst/wsearch?wtitle=2892+049&uid=&GreekFont=Unicode&mode=c_search), according to chapter and line. Unless otherwise specified, references in this section will be to the *Mystagogia*.

[45] 5.1-10. 'Intellect' in particular is used as a scholarly rendering of

the Greek '*nous*,' and is not equivalent to the layman's use of 'intellect,' particularly not as cognate to 'intelligence.' The 'reason' ('*logos*') is closer to today's use of the term, but not as close as you might think. This basic conceptualisation is common to other patristic and medieval authors, such as Augustine.

[46] 1992, 239.

[47] 'Punctuated equilibrium' is a variant on Darwin's theory of (gradual) evolution. It tries to retain an essentially Darwinian mechanism whilst acknowledging a fossil record and other evidence which indicate long periods of stability interrupted by the abrupt appearance and disappearance of life forms. It is called 'punk eek' by the irreverent.

[48] I.82. Material from the *Capita Gnosticae*, not available in *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, will be referenced by century and chapter number, i.e. I.82 abbreviates Century I, Chapter 82.

[49] See Lewis 2001, 522.

[50] What we usually mean by 'cause' today: something which mechanically brings about its effect, as time and favourable conditions cause an acorn to grow into an oak.

[51] The 'final cause' is the goal something is progressing towards: thus a mature oak is the final cause of the acorn that would one day grow into it.

[52] As seen on the Project Gutenberg archive at <http://www.gutenberg.net/etext97/1ws1810.txt> on 15 June 2004.

[53] 1992, 147-165.

[54] 1998, 104-7.

# **Akathist to St. Philaret the Merciful**

## **Kontakion 1**

To thee, O camel who passed through the eye of the needle, we offer thanks and praise: for thou gavest of thy wealth to the poor, as an offering to Christ. Christ God received thy gift as a loan, repaying thee exorbitantly, in this transient life and in Heaven. Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures! (*Repeated thrice.*)

## Oikos 1

Thou hadst earthly wealth yet knewest true treasure: thou madest use of thy possessions but trustedst them never, for in thee was the Kingdom of God and thy treasurehouse was Heaven. Wherefore thou hearest these praises which we offer to thee:

Rejoice, illustrious and wealthy noble who knew true wealth!  
Rejoice, O thou who were ever mindful of the poor!  
Rejoice, who knew thy deeds to the poor are deeds done to Christ!  
Rejoice, O thou who knew true wealth from false!  
Rejoice, O thou who knew that we can take nothing from the world!  
Rejoice, O thou who knew that the righteous would never be forsaken!  
Rejoice, O thou who gave ever more than was asked!  
Rejoice, O thou who withheld not thy last ounce of wheat!  
Rejoice, O thou who gave all six bushels to one who asked for a little!  
Rejoice, O thou whose friend gave thee forty bushels thereafter!  
Rejoice, O thou who trusted in the Lord with all his heart!  
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

## **Kontakion 2**

Thou knewest treasure enough to feed thy household for a hundred years without work: And thou wert true to thy name, Philaret or "Lover of Virtue", even when thine own wife saw not the horses on the mountain and chariots of fire which surround the true lover of virtue. But with eyes raised to fiery Heaven, we cry out with thee: Alleluia!

## Oikos 2

Thou invitedst thine own to join thy love of virtue, and thine own received not thine invitation. But thine invitation remaineth open, and we who receive thine invitation and hearken to the open door cry out to thee in praise:

Rejoice, O diadem of married life in the world!

Rejoice, O thou who knewest virtue as treasure!

Rejoice, O thou who fed a household out of the treasurehouse of thy virtue!

Rejoice, O thou who knew not the greed of Midas's curse!

Rejoice, O thou whose gifts would yet multiply and enrich the recipient!

Rejoice, O thou who was generous when he was rich!

Rejoice, O thou who was raided by marauders yet became no less generous!

Rejoice, O thou who trusted God when he had much and when he had little!

Rejoice, O thou who knewest that riches profit not in the day of wrath!

Rejoice, O thou whose virtue profited in easy times and hard times alike!

Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

## **Kontakion 3**

Many a generous beggar will give his last penny, whilst few a rich man will give to thee from his hedge of protection. Yet we behold a wonder in thee, who was rich, illustrious, and of noble lineage, and esteemed these not. Thy hedge of protection was the Lord God, and virtue and treasure in Heaven, and thou wert generous unto thine uttermost farthing. To thee, a rich man more generous than a beggar, we cry: Alleluia!

## Oikos 3

Thou transcendedst the virtues of pagan philosophy: fortitude, justice, prudence, and temperance, the virtues of a well lived earthly life. But thou knewest the Christian, deiform virtues: faith, hope, and love, the virtues of a Heavenly life already present in an egg in life on earth.

Wherefore we cry out to thee:

Rejoice, O thou whose fortitude sought no protection from earthly treasures!

Rejoice, O thou whose justice transcended human reckoning!

Rejoice, O thou whose prudence was the Wisdom who is Christ!

Rejoice, O thou whose temperance sought from earthly things nothing in excess of what they could give!

Rejoice, O thou whose faith trusted that Christ would faithfully provide!

Rejoice, O thou whose hope in God was never disappointed!

Rejoice, O thou whose love refrained from sharing neither virtue nor earthly possessions!

Rejoice, O thou whose joy flowed in easy times and hard!

Rejoice, O thou whose peace flowed from the silence of Heaven!

Rejoice, O thou whose generosity was perfect!

Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

## **Kontakion 4**

We will forever underestimate thy generosity if we merely count what thou gavest against what much or little property thou possessesdt, for thine open hand was a shadow and an icon of the vast wealth thou heldest in the generous treasure in Heaven, and this vast treasure thou laid hold to as Philaret, lover of virtue, which is to say lover of treasures in Heaven, eclipseth thy generosity with mere earthly property as the sun eclipseth the moon—nay, as the sun eclipseth a candle! Wherefore, with thee who hoarded true treasure, we cry: Alleluia!

## Oikos 4

Beseech the Lord God that we also might seek true treasure in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrodes and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherefore we cry out in wonder to thee:

Rejoice, O thou who drunk from the wellspring of Truth!  
Rejoice, O thou who were fed by the Tree of Life!  
Rejoice, O thou who knew silver from dross!  
Rejoice, O thou who never grasped at dross because thou clungst to the Treasure for whom every treasure is named!  
Rejoice, O thou who esteemed men of humble birth because thou questedst after the royal priesthood!  
Rejoice, O thou who grasped treasure next to which every earthly endowment is but dust and ashes!  
Rejoice, O thou who counted the poor and needy as more precious than gold!  
Rejoice, O thou who cast away shadows to behold the Sun of Righteousness!  
Rejoice, O thou who never forsook the Lord!  
Rejoice, O thou whom the Lord never abandoned!  
Rejoice, O thou who found that not one of His good promises has failed!  
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

## **Kontakion 5**

Ever seeking Christ, thou becamest thyself like Christ, the source and the summit of all virtue. Wishing to imitate thee as thou imitatedst Christ, we cry unto thee: Alleluia!

## Oikos 5

Every virtue is an icon of Christ, an icon not before us, but in us.  
Seeking after the virtues as we seek Christ, we cry out to thee:

Rejoice, O thou divine lover of virtue!

Rejoice, O thou who knew the Source of virtue!

Rejoice, O thou whose virtue was an imprint of Christ!

Rejoice, O thou who perfected the divine image with voluntary likeness!

Rejoice, O thou who teaches us virtue in the Christian walk!

Rejoice, O thou ever willing to share not only possessions but virtue!

Rejoice, O thou in whom Christ sat enthroned on virtue!

Rejoice, O thou who in virtue loved and served God!

Rejoice, O volume wherein the Word was inscribed in the ink of the virtues!

Rejoice, O thou who ever banishest passions!

Rejoice, O polished mirror refulgent with the uncreated Light!

Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

## **Kontakion 6**

Eating from the Tree of Life, thou becamest thyself a tree of life, to the nourishment of many. Hungering for lifegiving food, we cry with thee:  
Alleluia!

## Oikos 6

Sown in good soil, thou baredst fruit thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.  
Wherefore we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, O thou who were food to the hungry!  
Rejoice, O thou who were wealth to the destitute!  
Rejoice, O thou who were a robe of boldness to the naked!  
Rejoice, O thou who gave abundantly out of thine abundance!  
Rejoice, O thou who gave abundantly out of lack and want!  
Rejoice, O thou who were God's abundance to thy neighbour!  
Rejoice, O thou who never merely gave money or property!  
Rejoice, O thou who always gave with a blessing!  
Rejoice, O thou who loved Christ in thy neighbour!  
Rejoice, O thou tree whose shade sheltered many!  
Rejoice, O thou river who irrigated vast lands!  
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

## **Kontakion 7**

Blessed art thou, O holy Father Philaret the Merciful! Merciful wert thou, and thou receivedst mercy, wherefore we cry with thee: Alleluia!

## Oikos 7

Feeding the hungry is greater work than raising the dead! Wherefore we ask of thee no miracle, O merciful Father Philaret, for thou shewedst the continual miracle of mercy, and we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, O thou who gave the very last thou hadst!  
Rejoice, O thou who received recompense from Christ thereafter!  
Rejoice, O thou who withheld nothing from him who asked of thee!  
Rejoice, O thou who wherewith withheld nothing from Christ!  
Rejoice, O thou who clung not to gold!  
Rejoice, O thou who clung to the Light next to which gold is as dust!  
Rejoice, O wise one who made blessings as abundant as dust!  
Rejoice, O thou who were ever full of mercy!  
Rejoice, O thou whose mercy was as a lamp!  
Rejoice, O thou who firmly beheld the invisible!  
Rejoice, O thou whose faith worked mercy through love!  
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

## **Kontakion 8**

Rejoice, thou who wilt stand before Christ's dread judgment throne numbered among those who hear: Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came to me. And thou wilt cry with the blessed saints: Alleluia!

## Oikos 8

Knowing that no man can love God whom he cannot see except that he love his neighbor whom he has seen, thou wert ever merciful, wherefore we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, O thou who fed Christ when He was an hungred!  
Rejoice, O thou who gave Christ to drink when He was athirst!  
Rejoice, O thou who showed Christ hospitality when He came a stranger!  
Rejoice, O thou who clothed Christ when He was naked!  
Rejoice, O thou who visited Christ when He was sick!  
Rejoice, O thou who came to Christ when He was in prison!  
Rejoice, O thou who met the least of these and saw Christ!  
Rejoice, O thou who called every man thy brother!  
Rejoice, O thou who saw no man as outside of God's love!  
Rejoice, O thou perfect in mercy as thy Heavenly Father is perfect in mercy!  
Rejoice, O lamp ever scintillating with the Light of Heaven!  
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

## **Kontakion 9**

All the angels were amazed at the excellence of thy virtue, for thy name "Philaret" is not only "Lover of Virtue" but "Lover of Excellence", for in thee excellence, virtue, and power are one and the same. Wherefore thou joinest the angels in crying: Alleluia!

## Oikos 9

Even the most eloquent of orators cannot explain how thy virtue excelleth, for they cannot explain how in every circumstance thou soughtest out and lovedst virtue. But we marvel and cry out faithfully:

Rejoice, O rich man who cared for the poor!

Rejoice, O illustrious man who cared for men of no account!

Rejoice, O excellent in virtue in times of advantage!

Rejoice, O excellent in virtue in times of suffering as well!

Rejoice, O man who held great treasure and yet ever fixed his eyes upon true Treasure!

Rejoice, O thou who in every circumstance found an arena for excellent virtue!

Rejoice, O thou who were ever an excellent worshipper of God!

Rejoice, O thou who in the world escaped the Devil's snares!

Rejoice, O thou who unmasked hollow Mammon!

Rejoice, O thou who found harbor on the sea of life!

Rejoice, O thou who by loving virtue loved Christ!

Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

## **Kontakion 10**

Thy life wast a living manuscript of the Sermon on the Mount, for even Solomon in his splendor had not raiment like unto thy faith. Beholding thy splendor we cry with thee: Alleluia!

## Oikos 10

Thou storedst up possessions wherewith not to worry: not fickle and corruptible treasure on earth, but constant and incorruptible treasure in Heaven. Wherefore we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, O thou who however rich wert poor in spirit!  
Rejoice, O thou who mourned thy neighbor's unhappiness!  
Rejoice, O thou meek before thy neighbor's suffering!  
Rejoice, O thou who hungered and thirsted for justice and all virtue!  
Rejoice, O thou mirror of mercy!  
Rejoice, O thou who remained pure in heart!  
Rejoice, O thou who made deepest peace!  
Rejoice, O living mirror of the Beatitudes!  
Rejoice, O thou soaring as the birds of the air!  
Rejoice, O thou who wert devoted to one Master, and despised all others!  
Rejoice, O living exposition of the Sermon on the Mount!  
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

## **Kontakion 11**

Thou wert as the widow who bereaved herself even of her last two farthings: not only gave she more than all the others, but she who gave up her creaturely life received the uncreated, immortal, and eternal life. Like her, thou wert a vessel empty enough to fill, wherefore we cry with thee: Alleluia!

## Oikos 11

Thou wert a second Job, steadfast whilst Satan tore off layer after layer of thy belongings to show that there was nothing inside. Wherefore, we cry to thee who ever persevered:

Rejoice, O thou worshiper of God in plenty and in need!  
Rejoice, O thou icon of perseverance and faith!  
Rejoice, O thou generous with thy coin and generous with thy virtue!  
Rejoice, O thou phoenix ever arisen from thy very ashes!  
Rejoice, O thou saint immobile in thy dispassion!  
Rejoice, O thou who in want showed the truth of thy generosity in easy times!  
Rejoice, O thou who ever blessed the name of the Lord!  
Rejoice, O thou who with many possessions loved them not!  
Rejoice, O thou who with few possessions loved them no more!  
Rejoice, O thou who remained stalwart whilst Satan tore away what was thine, to show there was nothing inside!  
Rejoice, O thou who were vindicated when God peeled off the nothing and showed there was everything inside!  
Rejoice, O thou who vindicated God as did Job!  
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

## **Kontakion 12**

Thou hadst no food in the house, when imperial emissaries came looking for a bride for the Emperor: thou rich in Heaven, in trust thou beganst preparations to honourably meet the imperial emissaries. And thy neighbours came and brought food, a fitting feast, and the imperial emissaries found thy granddaughter finest in virtue and modesty, choosing her for her excellence to become Empress. Wherefore we cry with thee: Alleluia!

## Oikos 12

When all this had come to pass, in thy virtue, in thine excellence, thou knewest what is real treasure. In thy virtue and humility, thou refusedst all imperial rank and office, saying that it sufficed thee to be known as grandfather to the Empress. Wherefore, amazed, we cry to thee:

Rejoice, O thou who knew true Treasure!

Rejoice, O thou who were lover of virtue and excellence!

Rejoice, O thou who were rich and cared for the poor!

Rejoice, O thou who lost almost all and still opened thy hand!

Rejoice, O thou who became grandfather to the Empress whilst remaining ever humble!

Rejoice, O thou who were illustrious and noble yet cherished those of low estate!

Rejoice, O thou who were razed nigh unto the earth, and ever remained excellent as a lover of virtue!

Rejoice, O thou who were raised nigh unto Heaven, and ever remained humble as a lover of virtue!

Rejoice, O thou who sought first the Kingdom of Heaven!

Rejoice, O thou who were given all other things as well!

Rejoice, O thou who even then fixed his virtuous gaze on Christ!

Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

## **Kontakion 13**

O holy Father Philaret whose excellence was virtue and whose virtue was excellence, whose power was virtue and whose virtue was power, who was ever merciful and generous out of thine overflowing virtue, ever protected by the Kingdom of God, pray for us as we cry unto thee:  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! (*Repeated thrice.*)

## Oikos 1

Thou hadst earthly wealth yet knewest true treasure: thou madest use of thy possessions but trustedst them never, for in thee was the Kingdom of God and thy treasurehouse was Heaven. Wherefore thou hearest these praises which we offer to thee:

Rejoice, illustrious and wealthy noble who knew true wealth!  
Rejoice, O thou who were ever mindful of the poor!  
Rejoice, who knew thy deeds to the poor are deeds done to Christ!  
Rejoice, O thou who knew true wealth from false!  
Rejoice, O thou who knew that we can take nothing from the world!  
Rejoice, O thou who knew that the righteous would never be forsaken!  
Rejoice, O thou who gave ever more than was asked!  
Rejoice, O thou who withheld not thy last ounce of wheat!  
Rejoice, O thou who gave all six bushels to one who asked for a little!  
Rejoice, O thou whose friend gave thee forty bushels thereafter!  
Rejoice, O thou who trusted in the Lord with all his heart!  
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## **Kontakion 1**

To thee, O camel who passed through the eye of the needle, we offer thanks and praise: for thou gavest of thy wealth to the poor, as an offering to Christ. Christ God received thy gift as a loan, repaying thee exorbitantly, in this transient life and in Heaven. Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

# **Alchemy: Fool's Gold in Today's World**

## Introduction: Alchemy and Questionable Moral Character

I would like to open with a disturbing passage from Mary Midgley's [Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning](#). I might briefly mention that Midgley is no feminist; she is a conservative whose chief influences are Plato and Aristotle.

We come here to one more of the strange compensatory myths, dreams, or dramas that are my theme. The literature of early modern science is a mine of highly-coloured passages that describe Nature, by no means as a neutral object, but as a seductive but troublesome female, to be unrelentingly pursued, sought out, fought against, chased into her inmost sanctuaries, prevented from escaping, persistently courted, wooed, harried, vexed, tormented, unveiled, unrobed, and 'put to the question' (i.e. interrogated under torture), forced to confess 'all that lay in her most intimate recesses', her 'beautiful bosom' must be laid bare, she must be held down and finally 'penetrated', 'pierced', and 'vanquished' (words which constantly recur).

Now this odd talk does not come from a few exceptionally uninhibited writers. It has not been invented by modern feminists. It is the common, constant idiom of the age. Since historians began to notice it, they have been able to collect it up easily in handfuls for every discussion.

Or as I heard approvingly quoted many times by teachers at the liberal enough [Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy](#), "*We place Nature on*

*the rack* [i.e. a particularly nasty instrument of torture] *and compel her to bear witness.*=

Let's talk about Sir Isaac Newton for a moment. He was the founder of physics as we know it, and the co-founder of calculus. Also, he was a world-class academic bully. All his scientific endeavors were side projects next to his involvement in alchemy, and he has been called, "Not the first of the scientists, but the last of the magicians.= He also, late in life, acquired a position of authority, bypassed certain checks and balances, and saw it to it that dozens of men died a slow and painful death.

(Some of us might detect a note of envy in that any and all effort he made to produce gold were failures even for him. At the same time, the men he destroyed were "coiners= or forgers who made at times remarkably convincing imitations of officially minted **gold** coins.)

*Did I mention that messianic fantasies were standard issue for scientists then?*

In fact there weren't just messianic fantasies for scientists and alchemists. The original hope people saw in calculus was not, as today, a branch of mathematics that holds place X in the creation of new mathematicians and place Y in practical applications. It was rather hoped to be a tool where, as I quote, "there should be no more need for disputes among philosophers than among accountants,= because all differences of opinion could be resolved through straightforward use of calculus. The Utopian vision was a precursor to Herman Hesse's [Glass Bead Game](#), only Hesse seemed very skeptical about how well something like this occult pipe dream would really play out for society.

**My friends, the foundations of science smell bad, and alchemy with them.**

## Alchemy in the Limelight

Some time over ten years back, and much to my later chagrin, [I wanted to illustrate a point and deliberately chose alchemy, as a jarring image, to illustrate it.](#)

Later, I was one of the voices saying that alchemy was coming out of the closet. Here I would point out that semiotics defines a "sign= to be "anything that can be used to lie,= including not only words but posture, clothing, furniture, activities, etc. When I was working at the American Medical Association headquarters, there was a quilt hanging by the cafeteria, looking in every way quaint, domestic, and conservative... and explained **dozens** of alchemical symbols. (*Did the AMA forget it was founded to shut down homeopathy as an occult medicine?*)

Some years after that, I was saying simply that alchemy was *out*, no if's, and's, or but's. And now I have stopped making such statements because they are superfluous. I have been told by Christians that alchemy was the bedrock nascent science was founded on.

## Alchemy as a Strategy to Grow Whilst Dodging Spiritual Work

Why grind an axe against alchemy? The critique can be stated in six English words: "***Sorry, kid. You need elbow grease.***"=

I do not in any sense wish to say that all religions say the same thing; that is ultimately a degrading way to say that no world religion says anything significant. However, there appears to be a widespread sense that we need elbow grease. The Hindu concept of the Royal Science of God-Realization does not work without elbow grease; it is scarcely more nor less than a structure and plan for elbow grease. The Buddha may have simplified Hinduism to an astonishing degree, but his eightfold noble path calls for, among other things, various dimensions of elbow grease. Even the apparent exception of staunch Evangelicals who believe with Luther that we are sanctified by grace alone and through faith alone (and, though it is not relevant here, that the Bible alone has authority), also have an expectation that if you have healthy and living faith, you will produce elbow grease, and for that matter you will produce quite a lot of elbow grease. Evangelicals may categorically deny that elbow grease can save, but they set the bar pretty high as far as world religious traditions go for how much elbow grease a genuine member should be producing.

Alchemy offers a dangerously treacherous and seductive **shortcut**. Its marketing proposition is to offer a shortcut to spiritual transformation, a technique in lieu of inner work, but a that does not legitimately work. It certainly didn't work in Newton's case; if we return to the [Sermon on the Mount's](#) "by your fruits you shall know them,"= Sir Isaac Newton's moral character is the character of a false prophet on a capital scale.

There was one unenlightened book commenting about how ironic it

was that an alchemist was to be spiritually transformed somewhere beyond greed before being able to transmute metals to gold. And so, it said, one of the requisites to produce gold ironically being to have let go of desiring gold. I do not find irony, and I find a point of contact with Orthodox iconography. The idea of ridding oneself of greed before being ready to create gold recalls a (possibly G.K. Chesterton) comment I have failed to track down, that a particular desire was like a spiritualist's desire to see a nymph's breasts and not that of a run-of-the-mill lecher, and I fail to see irony in the expectation to transcend greed. I am not here concerned with whether that makes sense to desire, but in Newton's case *it did not work!*

**I do not condemn alchemy because it so completely failed to let Newton transmute lead to gold.**

**I *do* condemn alchemy because it so completely failed to let Newton transmute his own *heart* to gold.** (That is, incidentally, something that many, many non-chemists have done.)

There was an Oprah Winfrey-endorsed book *The Alchemist* which on the back had a quote from ?Bill Clinton? saying something like, "When I read it I felt like I was awake and the whole world was asleep.= Friends, you *do not* want to feel like that. [One of the usual signs you are coming to a spiritual breakthrough is that you are \*repenting\*.](#)

## Alchemy Is Deeper Than Hinduism? *Huh?*

In *The Alchemist*, a religious studies scholar studied all the world's religions, which he summarily dismissed in favor of alchemy. Sorry, *no*. There may be religions in the world that are shallower than alchemy; but alchemy is a consolation prize, particularly as compared to Orthodox Christianity and Hinduism. G.K. Chesterton didn't even *mention* alchemy when he said, "If you are considering world religions, you will save yourself a great deal of time by only considering Christianity and Hinduism, because Islam is just a Christian heresy, and Buddhism is just a Hindu heresy.=

I have heard Christian critiques of Hinduism, some of them sharp. One person at a theology faculty who was a Hindu before becoming an Orthodox Christian suggested that if I really want to understand Hinduism, I should focus less on a reconciliation between monotheism and polytheism and the striving for purity one encounters in modern commentary on the Bhagavad-Gita, and instead read [Kali's Child](#). I have in fact not read the title yet, but Kali is a demon-goddess who wears skulls on her necklace, and the special blessing she bestows is madness. The point the scholar was making is that you don't understand Hinduism until you understand the place of tantrism, which is trying to get ahead by something forbidden, *much like alchemy today*.

But for all this, Hinduism is still deeper than a whale can dive, and I am drawing a complete blank as to a reason to summarily dismiss even Hinduism in favor of alchemy. Possibly there are Hindus who also practice alchemy; Hinduism is cosmopolitan as far as religions go. And as far as Christianity, it only really occurs in *The Alchemist* as trappings to validate occult activity.

## **Even the Marketing Story Fails to Have Constructive Character Development**

But I find it noteworthy and interesting how character development occurs in a book meant to let people covet alchemy. For the protagonist, there is no really positive change in character development; the character development in the book is only debauchery. Apart from occult sin, the hero grows more and more caught up in himself in pride; what are presented as the blunders he makes along the way are when he loves and acts out of consideration for others and forgets devotion to the polestar of his monumental pride. In the end, which may modify classical alchemy, the student is as much an alchemist as the master, and ends just as much infested with pride. He cannot transmute lead to gold or live forever because those are not part of his path in alchemy; but he acquires massive gold even if he cannot create it, and his lack of moral character matches his master.

## Gnosticism, Alchemy's Undying Cousin

Philip Lee, in [Against the Protestant Gnostics](#), is a Protestant pastor who concludes, "We have met the enemy and he is us.= He suggests that historical study of Gnosticism is irrelevant because Gnosticism, as he reads it, is an ahistorical process that may keep recurring historically, but is not really historical. (I would loosely compare this point to why one does not study the history of the process of decomposition in untreated corpses.) He also says that Gnosticism is not fruitfully studied as a philosophy or system of ideas, because the process goes through ongoing changes of belief and over time later beliefs can and do contradict earlier beliefs. But while he knocks out two obvious scholar's tools with which to approach Gnosticism, he leaves something solid. He suggests that all Gnosticism hinges on a mood: **despair**. This means more specifically a despair that can only hope as framed by escape and escapism.

Christians who read the Bible may be deaf to how shocking it was to open the Bible with a chapter repeating, "And God saw what he had made, **and it was good**,= and after man was created, "**very good**.= To my knowledge, no other Ancient Near Eastern Creation story tells the like. Marduk tore the evil dragon Tiamat's body in two and made half into the sky and half into the earth. If that is so, our bodies are despicable. The same is true for an account of the world being produced, as best I recall, as a projection from vile sexual behavior.

Against these, Christianity tells us the world is the good Creation of a transcendent good God, and there is a very real sense that to be in communion with the Orthodox Church is to be in communion with not only God and choirs of angels and fellow Orthodox, but whales and rocks and stars and trees. Sin and its effects may be real enough: but however much we need repentance from sin. the goodness God bakes into

Creation runs deeper.

Gnosticism, including alchemy, seems enticing to a certain mindset, but it is a route for unhappy people to reach an even more unhappy position.

I might note that while there are differences in the phenomenon of Gnosticism, the evil character of the world we live in, and the consequent framing of salvation that amounts to some exotic escapism, is remarkably consistent across times and schools. As Yoda said, "Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter.=

It might be found that [repentance](#) for an alchemist may only to a certain measure be about spiritual practices I don't even want to know: it may be waking up to being placed in a world that is in and of itself good and finding that the need for escape is more apparent than real and becomes even less important as the healing balm of repentance soaks in.

Escapism wants something that's not part of the world, and anything you can acquire as real gives only an ephemeral satisfaction. Repentance from this passion in most cases won't help you acquire wants that you don't have. It may instead help you "acquire= and appreciate those that you actually *do*.

Let me close with a poem. It was written a few years ago, but if anything it is *more*, not *less*, relevant today.

## How Shall I Tell an Alchemist?

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

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

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

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

Deified.

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

**All I Ever Really  
Needed to Learn  
about Programming,  
I Learned From  
Java**

# All I really needed to learn about programming, I learned from Java

Write once, debug everywhere; Prefer compile time errors to run time errors; Gotos and pointers are like bad words – they can get you into a lot of trouble; Novice-friendliness and expert-friendliness are at a trade-off; An intentionally simple syntax is compatible with a complex collection of objects; Programming in a high level language is faster than programming in a lower level language; It takes longer to learn the high level ways of calling algorithms than the low level building blocks needed to implement them; Every once in a while, you will be surprised at what you have to implement yourself – a ready-made method to return a stacktrace as a string, or have a method find its caller's class; Use the most restrictive keywords you can – it's kindness in disguise; If you want to circumvent security, you can't cast to (char \*) and reconstruct private members; If you want to circumvent security, you very well may be able to serialize to a stream and reconstruct private members; Resurrect objects and die; There are some things that words cannot explain – for everything else, there are over 100 megs of documentation; Your program will see much more use if people can run it from their browsers; You can program your server to use any encryption algorithm allowed, but you can't stop your clients from storing their private keys on unsecured Windows boxes; Carefully designed languages can

reduce bugs, but debugging will always be a part of programming; No matter how carefully designed the language is, people will still write code that should be indented six feet downwards and covered with dirt; A good new language makes it unnecessary to use older ones, just as a good cordless screwdriver makes it unnecessary to use a hammer or a wrench; You can lead a programmer to objects, but you can't make him think; You can paint on a glass pane in your computer or at your house – but just because you are allowed to do it doesn't mean it's (usually) a good idea; Writing a DWIM compiler is AI-complete; No matter how fast computers get, there will always be a way to make them move like molasses;

# Amazing Providence

My church in Cambridge asked students to share as Holy Trinity Cambridge said farewell to us. I ended up sharing this more than once.

Even before I left Wheaton, I had a disturbing amount of trouble. An employer broke its word, jeopardising my ability to pay. I was working on student loans for *six months*. They fell into place one business day before I left. And when I left I was gravely ill.

I arrived at Cambridge without a place to stay, and when after weeks I found one, I was barely able to work because I was so wiped out that my hardest efforts weren't enough for me to consistently work more than two hours a day. I went through treatments that could have killed me.

My studies suffered. I did terribly at almost everything during the schoolyear. Usually the people supervising me didn't even give me a grade—just advice on what to do next.

To say all this and *stop* would be very deceptive. In the end, I was bewildered, not so much by the sufferings I had been allowed to experience, but the joy. How has God blessed me?

Community, for starters. I've been held in a blanket of prayer by Christians here, in England, in other countries, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, all praying for me. I'm honored. There were times when I knew I should not have the strength to walk at all, but I was walking lightly, joyfully, on strength given by God. The Dean family helped me look for a place to stay, and I don't think I can even *remember* all the practical help they gave—but more than this, they welcomed me into their hearts at the time I felt most isolated and lonely. Holy Trinity is a warm place; a woman named Mary invited me over for a lavish meal that I don't think she can often afford to eat as a ninety year old widow. I believe my roommate Yussif was the reason why God closed so many doors in places

to stay, and opened just one. He gave me this marvelous African shirt, and when I wear it I feel like I'm putting on regalia I have not earned. I've had visits: my father came out to visit me, and later my aunt, uncle, and two cousins spent a day in Cambridge. We went on a small boat in the river Cam, and one of the people in the tour company lent my cousin Katie his hat. The tour guide looked at her and said, "It's a good thing you have that hat to protect you from the fierce English sun." I fear that especially here I must leave out much more than I can say; the Shepherd's Council will be annoyed if I talk for three hours.

God's transcendence has become more and more real to me. I've relearned that the God who lives inside our hearts is majestic and glorious, beyond the farthest stars. When I've attended Orthodox vespers, I've met God's transcendence.

Providence has been powerful. At the end of the year, my friend Dirk said he could move my possessions that evening to Colchester for storage. I e-mailed Michelle in Colchester and scrambled to get ready. After I arrived, Michelle said I had the luck of the Irish: one day earlier or later, she would not have been home. Among other things. This sort of thing had happened again and again and again, and when she later e-mailed me about my luck, I answered, "Not luck. Providence."

I've had all sorts of pleasures, small and great. I've improvised on my college's chapel organ. I've been able to take pictures of Cambridge and incorporate them into [a game where you're running through a labyrinth, chasing a furball, looking at lovely Cambridge pictures, and answering icebreaker questions](#). (Don't worry. It's actually much stranger than it sounds.)

The academic environment is a real blessing. This may sound strange, but academic theology often destroys students' faith. My faith has become both stronger and deeper. The tutorial system has been excellent, and things fell into place at the end of the year. I was able to work on my thesis when I was too tired to lift my head, and the day I turned it in, I told my Bible study I was realizing how God was not constrained by my limitations. Cambridge grades are based exclusively on the final, and I received e-mail from my tutor Thursday. I passed *everything*.

I've been learning about the link between God's transcendent glory, on one hand, and his loving providence on the other. What is it? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Which of you, by worrying, can add a

single hour to his life?" Sickness is a good opportunity to realize that even a single hour is a gift from God. "Therefore I tell you, do not worry, asking, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For the pagans run after these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek *first* the kingdom of God, and his perfect righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

It's not just that God doesn't need my help figuring out what's best for me. What I've learned is that what God, in his transcendence, in his mystery, in his glory, in his deeply hidden wisdom, ordains for me is much fuller, deeper, richer, more beautiful, more interesting, and more adventuresome than what I would choose for myself if (God forbid) I were in control...

The blessings continue after I've returned. My parents were given a sweetheart of a dog, named Jazz. Not ten minutes after I met her, Jazz climbed up on my lap and wanted to cuddle. Jazz is a seventy-five pound Laborador retriever and is a bit of a bull in a China shop. I trust that through her, God will give me furry companionship, aerobic exercise, and thicker arms. Please pray that I may rightly appreciate her.

Thank you *so much* for praying. It is said that Satan laughs at our plans, scoffs at our power, and trembles at our prayers. Please *persist in all of your prayers*, and if the Lord leads you, please let part of that include me.

# Amos and Andy: Meet Barack Obama!

**Amos:** Boy, those Republicans sure are dumb. So dumb, they try to stop change wherever they can!

**Andy:** You figured *that* out? When?

**Amos:** Well, Sarah Palin's an idiot, and ever since Dan Quayle... I guess I've always known. But there's more.

**Andy:** Any favorites?

**Amos:** Well, there's one point where Dan Quayle said he was going to brush up on his Latin before going to Latin America. I have a friend who's a Republican, and he said that maybe someone who had a law degree and would make 47 state visits to other countries might have said that with "a twinkle in his eye," expecting listeners to get the *joke*. Can you imagine rationalizing about the *stupid* Dan Quayle being *that* intelligent?

**Andy:** Do you have anything like that for Sarah Palin?

**Amos:** Not exactly...

But the photos really are outstandingly bad. You should see the expressions! And get this: my friend who is a Republican said that stills including video of speech will include stills that look silly, that Obama would have stills that were just as stupid-looking, and saying that Palin or Obama would have such stills was nothing more interesting than saying that either of them has a pulse. *Can you imagine?* What cheek!

**Andy:** Wow.

**Amos:** And Republicans have a serious prejudice about what it means to have a black president. And get this, if you want to wonder what they were smoking: my Republican friend sighed and said, "It is proof that the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's dream is truly dead. Those who support him judge by the color of his skin, and saying 'his critics' are *almost interchangeable* with 'those who judge him by the content of his character.'"

**Andy:** You mean they don't understand how backwards it is to rationalize that kind of *prejudice*?

And Republicans do worse than poison the well as far as race relations go. Much worse! Do they even *watch* "The Daily Show?"

**Amos:** Well, I asked my friend who is a Republican, and he sighed, said he had watched "The Daily Show" a few times, and said that he had also watched Rush Limbaugh a few times, and then he said, "Every conservative I know considered Rush Limbaugh to be an embarrassment—and I am waiting to meet a liberal who considers 'The Daily Show' to be anything other than a strong dose of clear thinking on what's happening in the news."

**Andy:** But the Rush Limbaugh show was full of such logical fallacies!

**Amos:** And don't get me started on an inconvenient truth! Having deniers is a luxury we cannot afford. Now of course climate deniers are in the same bag as Holocaust deniers. And the most insidious thing is that all the climatologists are in the pay of big oil, or sure *act* like it! It's not to a one, but most of the people who have a Ph.D. in climatology are trying to give a bit of prissy nuance and saying all sorts of things about the limits of their computer programs to model climate change. It's disgusting! And my Republican friend, when I had tried to explain all about global warming to him, only sighed and said, "I'm worried about global *cooling*, and not manmade—and not something we're able to do much about." What cheek! Doesn't he know that now is the time to act on global warming?

**Andy:** And I suppose your Republican friend has tried to deny that Obama has delivered change?

**Amos:** Puzzling enough, but no. He said, "Barack Obama has lived true to his word. *Change* he heralded, *change* he promised, *change* he delivered, and *change* he keeps on delivering."

**Andy** [*looks at watch*]: Uh, fancy that, a Republican being right about... Uh, I'd love to continue, but I have to go.

**Amos:** Why do you say that? Do you have to be somewhere in the next ten or fifteen minutes?

**Andy:** No, but I do in about three hours. Gotta go!

# The Angelic Letters

*My dearly beloved son Eukairos;*

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

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

With Eternal Light and Love,

**Your Fellow-Servant and Angel**

---

*My dear son Eukairos;*

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

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

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

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

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

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

medicate his experience as well. And for that he needs prayer.

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

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

Watch after Mark, and hold him in prayer.

Your Dearly Loving Elder,  
Your Fellow-Servant,

**But a Wind and a Flame of Fire**

---

*My dear, dear Eukairos;*

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

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

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

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

The Physician is at work!

With Eternal Light and Love,

**Your Fellow-Servant and Angel**

---

*Dear blessed Eukairos;*

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

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

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

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

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

In Light and Life and Love,

**Your Brother Angel**

---

*My dear fellow-ministering angel;*

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

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

Now Mark does not understand this, and while you may draw him to begin to sense this, that is not the point. In [The Way of the Pilgrim](#), a man speaks who was given the sacred Gospels in an old, hard-to-understand book, and was told by the priest, "Never mind if you do not understand what you are reading. The devils will understand it." Perhaps, to Mark, icons are still somewhat odd pictures with strange postures and proportions. You may, if you want, help him see that there *is* perspective in the icons, but instead of the usual perspective of people in their own world, it is reverse perspective whose vanishing point lies behind him because Mark is in the picture. But instead of focusing on correcting his understanding, and certainly correcting his understanding all at once, draw him to venerate and look at these openings of Heaven. Never mind if he does not fully grasp the icons he venerates. *The devils will understand.*

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

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

---

*Dear cherished, luminous son;*

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

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

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

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

With Deep Affection,

**Your Brother Angel**

---

*My dearly beloved, cherished fellow angel Eukairos;*

Your charge Mark has been robbed.

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

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

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

If you were a human employee, this would be the time for you to be punching in *lots* of overtime. Never mind that he thinks unconsciously that you and God have both deserted him; your strengthening hand has been invisible to him. I do not condemn you for any of this, but this time has been appointed for him to have opportunities for growth and for you to be working with him, and the fact that he does not seek growth in this trial is only reason for you to work all the harder. That he is seeking to get things back the way they were, and suffering anger and fear, is only reason for you to exercise more diligent care. God is working with him now as much as ever, and I would advise you for now to work to the point of him seeking his spiritual good in this situation, however short he falls of right use of adversity for now.

Your name, "Eukairos," comes from "eu", meaning "good", and "kairos", an almost inexhaustible word which means, among other things, "appointed time" and "decisive moment." You and Mark are alike called to dance the great dance, and though Mark may not see it now, you are God's agent and son supporting him in a great and ordered dance where everything is arranged in God's providence. Right now Mark sees none of this, but as his guardian angel you are charged to work with him in the dance, a dance where God incorporates his being robbed and will incorporate his spiritual struggles and, yes, provide when Mark fails to

incorporate his spiritual struggles and, yes, provide when Mark fails to see that the righteous will never be forsaken.

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

Your Fellow-Servant in Prayer,

**But an Angel Who Cannot Struggle Mark's Struggle on his Behalf**

---

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

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

Mark began to console himself with the deep pit of porn, that poison that is so easily found in his time and place. And he began to pray, on his priest's advice, "Holy Father John, pray to God for me," and "Holy Mother Mary, pray to God for me," Saint John the Much-Suffering and Saint Mary of Egypt being saints to remember when fighting that poison. And you helped him for a moment to see how he was turned in on himself and away from others, and he prayed for help caring about others.

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

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

With an Eternal Love,

**Your Respectful Brother Angel**

---

*My dear, scintillating son Eukairos;*

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

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

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

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

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

*through* the "No."

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

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

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

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

Your Fellow-Servant in the Service of Man,

**A Brother Angel**

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*My dear son Eukairos;*

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

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

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

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

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

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

linking with one's worldview. These thoughts remain a battleground in spiritual warfare even if one's worldview condemns greed, pride, anger, gluttony, lust, worry, and doubt.

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

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

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

With Deepest Affection,

**Another Member of the Angel Choirs**

---

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

I wish to write to you concerning devils.

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

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

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

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

And do help him to see that he is in the hands of God, that the words

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

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

---

*My dear, watchful son Eukairos;*

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

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

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

And hold him in your prayers.

As One Who Possesses Nothing,

**One Who Receives All He Needs From God**

---

*My prayerful, prayerful Eukairos;*

Prayer is what Mark needs now more than ever.

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

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

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

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

Ever draw Mark into deeper prayer.

With You Before God's Heart that Hears Prayers,

**A Praying Angel**

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

Your charge has passed through his apprenticeship successfully.

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

And so death claimed him to its defeat. **O Death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?** Death claimed claimed saintly Mark to its defeat.

Mark is no longer your charge.

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

Go in peace.

Your Fellow-Minister,

**מיכאל • MIXAHA • MICHAEL • Who Is Like God?**

# Animals

Can you pull out Leviathan with a hook,  
or press his tongue down with a cord?  
Can you put a rope in his nose,  
or pierce his jaw with a hook?  
Will he make many supplications to you?  
Will he speak soft words to you?  
Will he make a covenant with you?  
Will he be your servant forever?  
Will you play with him as with a bird?  
Or will you put him on a rope for your maidens?  
Will traders bargain for him?  
Shall he be divided among the merchants?  
Can you fill his skin with harpoons,  
or his head with fishing spears?  
Lay hands on him;  
Think of the battle; you will not do it again!  
Behold, the hope of a man is disappointed;  
he is laid low even at the sight of him.  
No one is so fierce as to dare to stir him up.  
Who then is he who can stand before him?  
Who can confront him and be safe?  
Under the whole Heavens, who?  
I will not keep silence concerning his limbs,  
or his mighty strength, or his powerful frame.  
Who can strip off his outer garment?  
Who can penetrate his double coat of mail?  
Who can open the doors of his face?  
Round about his teeth is terror

ROUND ABOUT HIS TEETH IS TERROR.

His back is made of rows of shields,  
shut up as tightly as with a seal.

One is so near to another  
that no air can pass between them.

They are joined to one another;  
they clasp each other and cannot be separated.

His sneezings flash forth light;  
and his eyes are like the eyelids of the dawn.

Out of his mouth go flaming torches;  
sparks of fire leap forth.

Out of his nostrils comes forth smoke,  
as from a boiling pot and burning rushes.

In his neck abides strength,  
and terror dances before him.

The folds of his flesh cleave together,  
firmly cast upon him and immovable.

His heart is as hard as a stone,  
as hard as the lower millstone.

When he raises himself up, the gods are afraid;  
at the crashing they are beside themselves.

Though the sword reaches him, it does not avail;  
nor spear, nor dart, nor javelin.

He counts iron as straw,  
and bronze as rotted wood.

The arrow cannot make him flee;  
for him slingstones are turned to rubble.

Clubs are counted as stubble;  
he laughs at the rattle of javelins.

His underparts are like sharp potsherds;  
he spreads himself like a threshing sledge on the mire.

He makes the deep boil like a pot;  
he makes the sea like a pot of ointment.

Behind him he leaves a shining wake;  
one would think the deep to be hoary.

Upon earth there is not his equal,  
a creature without fear.

He beholds everything that is high;

he is king over all of the sons of pride. (Job 41)

Behold Behemoth, which I made with you;  
he eats grass as an ox.

Look now; his strength is in his loins,  
and his power is in the muscles of his belly.

He swings his tail like a cedar;  
the sinews of his thighs are knit together.

His bones are like rods of bronze;  
his limbs are like bars of iron.

He is the chief of the works of God;  
his maker can approach him with the sword.

Surely the mountains bring forth food to him,  
where all of the beasts of the field play.

He lies under the lotus trees;  
the willows of the brook surround him.

Behold, he drinks up a river and is not frightened;  
he is confident though the Jordan rushes into his mouth.

Can a man take him with hooks,  
or pierce his nose with a snare? (Job 40:15-24)

These words, lightly altered from the Revised Standard Version, culminate a divine answer to Job out of the whirlwind: where was Job when God laid the foundation of earth? The divine voice turns to the foundations of the earth and the bounds of the sea, light and darkness, rain and hail, the stars, and the lion, mountain goat, wild ox and ass, ostrich, horse, and the hawk. The text is powerful even if translators demurely use "tail" for what the Behemoth swings like a cedar.

On a more pedestrian level, I was reticent when some friends had told me that they were going to be catsitting in their apartment and invited me over. (They know I love cats and other animals.) What I thought to explain later was that I proportionately outweigh a housecat by about as much as a mammoth outweighs me (perhaps "rhinoceros" would have been more appropriately modest than "mammoth"), and I try to let animals choose the pace at which they decide I'm not a threat. (And the cat has no way of knowing I don't eat cats.) As far as the environment to meet goes, I didn't bring up "You never get a second chance to make a first impression," but humans are more forgiving than animals. Although I didn't mention that I did mention the difference between someone

I don't mention that, I did mention the difference between someone approaching you in a mailroom and someone following you in a less safe place. All of which was to explain why I love animals but would be cautious about approaching a cat in those circumstances and would play any visit by ear. (I later explained how even if the cat is not sociable and spends most of its visit hiding, they can still experience significant success by returning the cat to his owner unharmed with any unpleasantness quickly forgotten in the arms of his owner.)

As I write, I spent a lovely afternoon with those friends, and tried to serve as a tour guide. What I realized as I was speaking to them was that I was mixing the scientific with what was not scientific, not exactly by saying things some scientists would disapprove like why eyeless cave fish suggest a reason natural selection might work *against* the formation of complex internal and external organs, but by something else altogether.

What is this something else? It is the point of this essay to try and uncover that.

I wrote in [Meat](#) why I eat lots of beef but am wary of suffering caused by cruel farming, and for that reason don't eat veal and go light on pork: I believe it is legitimate to kill animals for food but not moral to raise them under lifelong cruelty to make meat cheap. (Jesus was very poor by American standards and rarely had the luxury of eating meat.) While I hope you will bookmark [Meat](#) and consider trying to eat lower on the animal cruelty scale, my reason for bringing this up is different. The reason I wrote [Meat](#) has to do with something older in my life than my presently being delighted to find beef sausage and beef bacon, and trying not to eat much more meat than I need. And I am really trying hard not to repeat what I wrote before.

Thomas Aquinas is reported to have said that the one who does not murder because "Do not murder" is so deep in his bones that he needs no law to tell him not to murder, is greater than the theologian who can derive that law from first principles. What I want to talk about is simultaneously "deep in the bones" knowledge and something I would like to discover, and it is paradoxically something I want to discover because it is deep in my bones. And it is connected in my minds less to meat than when one of my friends, having come with a large dog who was extremely skittish around men, had a mix of both women and men over to help her move into her apartment, and asked me and not any of the women to take care of a dog she acknowledged was afraid of men. (I don't

know why she did this; I don't think she thought about my being a man.) At the beginning of half an hour, the dog was manifestly not happy at being at the other end of a leash with me; at the end of the half hour the dog had his head in my lap and was wagging his tail to meet the other men as well as women.

Part of this was knowledge in the pure Enlightenment sense about stretching an animal's comfort zone without pushing it into panic—a large part, in fact. But another part is that while I don't believe that animals are people, I try to understand animals and relate to them the same way I understand and relate to people. Maybe I can't discuss philosophy with a rabbit, and maybe a little bit of knowledge science-wise helps about minimizing intimidation to a creature whose main emotion is fear.

But that's not all.

After I ended the phone conversation where I explained why I was wary of terrifying what might be an already afraid cat, I realized something. I had just completed a paper for a feminist theology class which criticized historical scholarship that looked at giants of the past as behaving strangely and inexplicably, and I tried to explain why their behavior was neither strange nor inexplicable. I suggested that historical sources need to be understood as human and said that if you don't understand why someone would write what you're reading, that's probably a sign there's something you don't understand. Most of the length of my paper went into trying to help the reader see where the sources were coming from and see why their words were human, and neither strange nor inexplicable. What I realized after the phone conversation was that I had given the exact same kind of argument for why I was hesitant to introduce myself to the cat: I later called and suggested that the cat spend his first fifteen minutes in the new apartment with his owner petting him. I never said that the cat was human, and unlike some cat owners I would never say that the cat was equal to a human, but even if I will never meet that cat, *my approach to dealing with the cat meet him is not cut off from my approach to dealing with people*. And in that regard I'm not anywhere near a perfect Merlin (incidentally, a merlin is a kind of hawk, the last majestic creature we encounter before the proud Behemoth and Leviathan, and it does not seem strange to me that a lot of Druids have hawk in their name, nor do I

think the name grandiose), but Merlin appears in characters' speculation in C.S. Lewis's [That Hideous Strength](#) as someone who achieves certain effects, not by external spells, but by who he is and how he relates to nature. That has an existentialist ring I'd like to exorcise, but if I can get by with saying that I feel no need to meditate in front of a tree and repeat a mantra of "I see the tree. The tree sees me," nor do I spend much of any time trying to "Get in touch with nature..." then after those clarifications I think I can explain why something of Lewis's portrayal of Merlin resonates. (And I don't think it's the most terribly helpful approach to talk about later "accretions" and try to understand Arthurian legend through archaeological reconstruction of 6th century Britain; that's almost as bad as asking astronomy to be more authentic by only using the kind of telescopes Galileo could use.) It is not the scientific knowledge I can recite that enables me to relate to animals well, but by what is in my bones: a matter of who I am even before woolgathering about "Who am I?"

This has little to do with owning pets; I do not know that I would have a pet whether or not my apartment would allow them, and have not gone trotting out for a cat fix even though one is available next door. It's not a matter of having moral compunctions about meat, although it fed into my acquiring such compunctions a few years ago. It's not about houseplants either; my apartment allows houseplants but I have not gone to the trouble of buying one. Nor is it a matter of learning biology; physics, math, and computer science were pivotally important to me, but not only was learning biology never a priority for my leisure time, but I am rather distressed that when people want to understand nature they inevitably grab for a popular book on biology. When people try to understand other people, do they ask for CT scan of the other person's brain? Or do they recognize that there is something besides biological and medical theories that can lend insight into people and other creatures?

The fact that we do not try to relate to people primarily through medicine suggests a way we might relate to other animals besides science: trying to relate to nature by understanding science is asking an I-It tree to bear I-Thou fruit. (If you are unfamiliar with Martin Buber's [I and Thou](#), it would also be comparable to asking a stone to lay an egg.)

I'm not going to be graphic, but I would like to talk about dissection. Different people respond differently to different circumstances, and I know that my experience with gradeschool dissection is not universal. I

know that my experience with gradeschool dissection is not universal. I also know that dissection is not a big deal for some people, as I know that the hunters I know are among the kindest people I've met. Still I wish to make some remarks.

The first thing is that there is an emotional reaction you people need to suppress. Perhaps some adults almost reminisce about that part of their education as greatly dreaded but almost disappointing in its lack of psychological trauma. And I may be somewhat sensitive. But there's something going on in that experience, stronger for some people and weaker in others. It's one learning experience among others and what is learned is significant.

But is it really one learning experience among others?

Again without being graphic, dissection could have been used as a bigger example in C.S. Lewis's [The Abolition of Man](#), a book I strongly recommend. It finds a red flag in the dissection room, if mentioned only briefly—a red flag that something of our humanity is being lost.

To be slightly more graphic, one subtle cue was that in my biology classroom, there were plenty of gloves to begin with, then as the dissections progressed, only one glove per person, then no gloves at all—at a school for the financially gifted. And, to note something less subtle, the animals were arranged in a very specific order. You could call the progression, if you wanted to, the simplest and least technical to properly dissect, up to a last analysis which called for distinctly more technical skill. Someone more suspicious might point out how surprisingly the list of animals coincides with what a psychologist would choose in order to desensitize appropriately sensitive children. I really don't think I'm being too emotional by calling this order a progression from what you'd want to step on to what some people would want to cuddle. I don't remember the Latin names I memorized to make sense of what I was looking at. What it did to my manhood, or if you prefer humanity, is lasting, or at least remembered. Perhaps my sensibilities might have needed to be coarsened, but it is with no great pride that I remember forcing myself in bravado to dissect without gloves even when everybody else was wearing them. Perhaps I crossed that line so early because there were other lines that had already been crossed in me. And perhaps I am not simply being delicate, but voicing a process that happened for other people too.

If the question is, "What do we need in dealing with animals?", one answer might be, "What dissection makes children kill." I'm not talking

about the animals, mind you; with the exception of one earthworm, I never killed a specimen. Perhaps the memories would be more noxious if I had, but all my specimens were pre-killed and I was not asked to do that. But even with pre-killed specimens I was, in melodramatic terms, ordered to kill something of my humanity. I do not mean specifically that I experienced unpleasant emotions; I've had a rougher time with many things I can remember with no regrets. What I mean is that any emotions were a red flag that something of an appropriate way of relating to animals was being cut up with every unwanted touch of the scalpel. It's not just animals that are dismantled in the experience.

When I wrote my second novel, I wrote to convey medieval culture (perhaps [Firestorm 2034](#) would have been better if I focused more on, say, telling a story), and one thing I realized was that I would have an easier time conveying medieval culture if I showed its contact, in a sense its dismantling, with a science fiction setting, although I could have used the present day: I tried not to stray too far from the present day U.S. There is something that is exposed in contact with something very different. It applies in a story about a medieval wreaking havoc in a science fiction near future. It also applies in the dissection room. Harmony with nature, or animals, may not be seen in meditating in a forest. Or at least not as clearly as when we are fighting harmony with animals as we go along with an educator's requests to [graphic description deleted].

Let me return to the account from which I took words about a Leviathan and a Behemoth whose tail swings like a cedar. This seemingly mythological account—if you do not know how Hebrew poetry operates, or that a related languages calls the hippopotamus *pehemoth* instead of using the Greek for "river horse" as we do—is better understood if you know what leads up to it. A stricken Job, slandered before God as only serving God as a mercenary, cries out to him in anguish and is met by comforters who tell him he is being punished justly. The drama is more complex than that, but God save me from such comforters in my hour of need. The only thing he did not rebuke the comforters for was sitting with Job in silence for a week because they saw his anguish was so great.

Job said, "But I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to argue my case with God." (Job 13:3) And, after heated long-winded dialogue, we read (Job 38-39, RSV):

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:  
"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?  
Gird up your loins like a man,  
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.  
Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?  
Tell me, if you have understanding.  
Who determined its measurements—surely you know!  
Or who stretched the line upon it?  
On what were its bases sunk,  
or who laid its cornerstone,  
when the morning stars sang together,  
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?  
Or who shut in the sea with doors,  
when it burst forth from the womb;  
when I made clouds its garment,  
and thick darkness its swaddling band,  
and prescribed bounds for it,  
and set bars and doors,  
and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,  
and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?  
Have you commanded the morning since your days began,  
and caused the dawn to know its place,  
that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,  
and the wicked be shaken out of it?  
It is changed like clay under the seal,  
and it is dyed like a garment.  
From the wicked their light is withheld,  
and their uplifted arm is broken.  
Have you entered into the springs of the sea,  
or walked in the recesses of the deep?  
Have the gates of death been revealed to you,  
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?  
Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?  
Declare, if you know all this.  
Where is the way to the dwelling of light,  
and where is the place of darkness,  
that you may take it to its territory  
and that you may discern the paths to its home?"

and that you may discern the paths to its home:

You know, for you were born then,  
and the number of your days is great!

Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,  
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,  
which I have reserved for the time of trouble,  
for the day of battle and war?

What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,  
or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain,  
and a way for the thunderbolt,  
to bring rain on a land where no man is,  
on the desert in which there is no man;  
to satisfy the waste and desolate land,  
and to make the ground put forth grass?

Has the rain a father,  
or who has begotten the drops of dew?  
From whose womb did the ice come forth,  
and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?  
The waters become hard like stone,  
and the face of the deep is frozen.

Can you bind the chains of the Plei'ades,  
or loose the cords of Orion?

Can you lead forth the Maz'zaroth in their season,  
or can you guide the Bear with its children?

Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?

Can you establish their rule on the earth?

Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,  
that a flood of waters may cover you?

Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go  
and say to you, `Here we are'?

Who has put wisdom in the clouds,  
or given understanding to the mists?

Who can number the clouds by wisdom?

Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,  
when the dust runs into a mass  
and the clods cleave fast together?

Can you hunt the prey for the lion,

or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,  
when they crouch in their dens,  
or lie in wait in their covert?  
Who provides for the raven its prey,  
when its young ones cry to God,  
and wander about for lack of food?  
Do you know when the mountain goats bring forth?  
Do you observe the calving of the hinds?  
Can you number the months that they fulfil,  
and do you know the time when they bring forth,  
when they crouch, bring forth their offspring,  
and are delivered of their young?  
Their young ones become strong, they grow up in the open;  
they go forth, and do not return to them.  
Who has let the wild ass go free?  
Who has loosed the bonds of the swift ass,  
to whom I have given the steppe for his home,  
and the salt land for his dwelling place?  
He scorns the tumult of the city;  
he hears not the shouts of the driver.  
He ranges the mountains as his pasture,  
and he searches after every green thing.  
Is the wild ox willing to serve you?  
Will he spend the night at your crib?  
Can you bind him in the furrow with ropes,  
or will he harrow the valleys after you?  
Will you depend on him because his strength is great,  
and will you leave to him your labor?  
Do you have faith in him that he will return,  
and bring your grain to your threshing floor?  
The wings of the ostrich wave proudly;  
but are they the pinions and plumage of love?  
For she leaves her eggs to the earth,  
and lets them be warmed on the ground,  
forgetting that a foot may crush them,  
and that the wild beast may trample them.  
She deals cruelly with her young, as if they were not hers;  
though her labor be in vain, yet she has no fear.

though her labor be in vain, yet she has no fear,  
because God has made her forget wisdom,  
and given her no share in understanding.  
When she rouses herself to flee,  
she laughs at the horse and his rider.  
Do you give the horse his might?  
Do you clothe his neck with strength?  
Do you make him leap like the locust?  
His majestic snorting is terrible.  
He paws in the valley, and exults in his strength;  
he goes out to meet the weapons.  
He laughs at fear, and is not dismayed;  
he does not turn back from the sword.  
Upon him rattle the quiver,  
the flashing spear and the javelin.  
With fierceness and rage he swallows the ground;  
he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet.  
When the trumpet sounds, he says `Aha!'  
He smells the battle from afar,  
the thunder of the captains, and the shouting.  
Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars,  
and spreads his wings toward the south?  
Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up  
and makes his nest on high?  
On the rock he dwells and makes his home  
in the fastness of the rocky crag.  
Thence he spies out the prey; his eyes behold it afar off.  
[closing gruesome image deleted]

Then Job says some very humble and humbled words. Then the Lord gives his *coup de grace*, a demand to show strength like God that culminates with words about the Leviathan and Behemoth. Job answers "... Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know... *I had heard of thee by hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee.*" (Job 42:3,5, RSV)

Did God blast Job like a soup cracker?

Absolutely, but if that is all you have to say about the text, you've missed the text.

There's something about Job's "comforters" defending a sanitized religion too brittle to come to terms with un-sanitized experience and un-sanitized humanity; Job cares enough about God to show his anger, and though he is never given the chance to plead his case before God, he meets God: he is not given what he *asks for*, but what he *needs*.

There's a lot of good theology about God giving us what we *need*, but without exploring that in detail, I would point out that the Almighty shows himself Almighty through his Creation, quite often through animals. There may be reference to rank on rank of angels named as all the sons of God shouting for joy (Job 38:7), but man is curiously absent from the list of majestic works; the closest reference to human splendor is "When [Leviathan] raises himself up the gods are afraid; at the crashing they are beside themselves" (Job 41:25). The RSV thoughtfully replaces "gods" with "mighty" in the text, relegating "gods" to a footnote—perhaps out of concern for readers who might be disturbed by the Old and New Testament practice of occasionally referring to humans as gods, here in order to emphasize that even the mightiest or warriors are terrified by the Leviathan.

This is some of the Old Testament poetry at its finest, written by the Shakespeare of the Old Testament, and as Hebrew poetry it lays heavy emphasis on one the most terrifying creature the author knew of, the crocodile, a terrifying enough beast that Crocodile Dundee demonstrates his manhood to the audience by killing a crocodile—and the film successfully competes head-to-head against fantasy movies that leave nothing to the imagination for a viewer who wants to see a fire-breathing dragon.

Let me move on to a subtle point made in Macintyre's [Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues](#). While the main emphasis of the work is that dependence is neither alien to being human nor something that makes us somehow less than human, he alludes to the classical definition of man as "rational mortal animal" and makes a subtle point.

Up until a few centuries ago the term "animal" could be used in a sense that either included or excluded humans. While both senses coexisted, there was not a sense that calling a person an animal was degrading any more than it was degrading to mention that we have bodies. Now calling someone an animal is either a way of declaring that they are beneath the bounds of humanity, or a dubious compliment to a

they are beneath the bounds of humanity, or a dubious compliment to a man for boorish qualities, or else an evolutionary biologist's way of insisting that we are simply one animal species among others, in neo-Darwinist fashion enjoying no special privilege. But Aristotle meant none of these when he recognized we are animals.

To be human is to be both spirit and beast, and not only is there not shame in that we have bodies that need food and drink like other animals, but there is also not shame in a great many other things: We perceive the world and think through our bodies, which is to say as animals. We communicate to other people through our bodies, which is to say as animals. Were we not animals the Eucharist would be impossible for Christians to receive. We are also spirit, and our spirit is a much graver matter than our status as animals, including in Holy Communion; our spirit is to be our center of gravity, and our resurrection body is to be transformed to be spiritual. But the ultimate Christian hope of bodily resurrection at the Lord's return is a hope that as spiritual animals we will be transfigured and stand before God as the crowning jewel of bodily creation. The meaning of our animal nature will be changed and profoundly transformed, but *never* destroyed. Nor should we hope to be released from being animals. To approach Christianity in the hope that it will save us from our animal natures—being animals—is the same kind of mistake as a child who understandably hopes that growing up means being in complete control of one's surroundings. Adulthood and Christianity both bring many benefits, but that is not the kind of benefit Christianity provides (or adulthood).

If that is the case, then perhaps there is nothing terribly provocative about my trying to understand other animals the way I understand other people. Granted, the understanding cannot run as deep because no other animal besides man is as deep as man and some would have it that man is the ornament of both visible *and spiritual* creation, Christ having become man and honored animal man in an honor shared by no angel. The old theology as man as microcosm, shared perhaps with non-Christian sources, sees us as the encapsulation of the entire created order. Does this mean that there are miniature stars in our kidneys? It is somewhat beside the point to underscore that every carbon nucleus in your body is a relic of a star. A more apropos response would be that to be human is to be both spirit and matter, to share life with the plants and the motion of animals, and that it is impossible to be this microcosm without being an

animal. God has honored the angels with a spiritual and non-bodily creation, but that is not the only honor to be had.

In my homily [Two Decisive Moments](#), I said,

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

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

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

Adam fell and dragged down the whole realm of nature. God had and has every authority to repudiate Adam, to destroy him, but in fact God did something different. He called Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, and in the fullness of time he didn't just call a prophet; he sent his Son to become a prophet and more.

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

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

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

*Behold the man and behold the firstborn of many brothers! You may know the great chapter on faith, chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, and it is with good reason one of the most-loved chapters in the Bible, but it is not the only thing in Hebrews. The book of Hebrews looks at things people were caught up in, from the glory of angels to sacrifices and the Mosaic Law, and underscores how much more the Son excels above them. A little before the passage we read above, we see, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you'?" (Hebrews 1:5) And yet in John's prologue we read, "To those who received him and believed in his name, he gave the authority to become the children of God." (John 1:9) We also read today, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I have made your enemies a footstool under your feet?'" (Hebrews 1:13) And yet Paul encourages us: "The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet," (Romans 16:20) and elsewhere asks bickering Christians, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (I Corinthians 6:3) *Behold the man! Behold the firstborn of many brothers, the Son of God who became a man so that men might become the Sons of God. Behold the One who became what we are that we might by grace become what he is. Behold the supreme exemplar of what it means to be Christian.**

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

Pontius Pilate spoke words that were deeper than he could have **possibly** imagined. And Christ continued walking the fateful journey before him, continued walking to the place of the Skull,

Golgotha, and finally struggled to breathe, his arms stretched out as far as love would go, and barely gasped out, "It is finished."

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

To the Orthodox, at least in better moments, Christ is not just our perfect image of what it means to be God. He is also the definition of what it means to be Christian and what it ultimately means to be man.

Can we understand this and deny that Christ is an animal?

# Apprentice gods

1. This life is an apprenticeship. You do not understand its purpose until you understand that we are created to be apprentice gods.
2. It is said, a man knows the meaning of life when he plants a tree knowing he will never live to sit in its shade. Truer is to say that a man knows the meaning of life when he plants a tree not seeing how he will ever *this side of Heaven* sit in its shade.
3. You do not understand life in the womb until you understand what is after the womb. For some actions in the womb bear fruit in the womb, but suckling and kicking are made to strengthen muscles for nursing and walking, and nursing a preparation for the solid food of men.
4. [You shall surely die](#): such Adam and Eve were warned, such Adam and Eve were cursed, and such the saints are blessed. For death itself is made an entryway for life. But we can only repent in this life: after this life our eternal choice of Life or Death is sealed.
5. Do not despise moral, that is to say eternal, victories. Have you labored to do something great, only to find it all undone? Take courage. God is working with you to wreak triumph. From his eternal providence he is working, if you will be his co-worker, in synergy, to make with you something greater than you could possibly imagine, a treasure in Heaven which you never could imagine to be able to covet.
6. The purpose of life may be called as an apprenticeship to become divine. The divine became man that man might become divine. The Scriptures oft speak of the sons of God, and of men's participation in the nature divine. This divinisation begins on earth and reaches its full stature, when the Church triumphant and whole becomes the

Church of saints who have become what in God they were trying to become. And we are summoned to that door.

7. Were sportsmanship to be found only in a foreign culture, we would find it exotic. Play your best, seek to win a well-played game, but have dispassion enough to be graceful in winning and losing alike. But one of its hidden gems is that most often a team that has to win will be defeated by a team that only tries to give it their best.
8. But sportsmanship is not just for sports. Hard times are encroaching and are already here: but we are summoned, not to win, but to play our best. Hence St. Paul, at the end of a life of as much earthly triumph as any saints, spoke as a true sportsman: he said not, "I have triumphed," but that he had been faithful: [I have fought a good fight, I have finished my \[race\]course, I have kept the faith.](#) This from a saint who enjoyed greater earthly accomplishments than his very Lord.
9. It is said that there are three ranks among the disciples: slaves who obey God out of fear, hirelings who obey God out of the desire for reward, and sons who obey God out of love. It has also been said that we owe more to Hell than to Heaven, for more people come to the truth from fear of Hell than the desire for the rewards in Heaven. But if you want a way out of Hell, seek to desire the incomparably greater reward in Heaven; if you seek reward in Heaven, come to obey God out of love, for love of God transcends even rewards in Heaven.
10. It is said, Doth thou love life? Then do not waste time, for time is the stuff life's made of. It might be said, Seekest thou to love? Then do not shun asceticism and discipleship, for they are the stuff love is made of. Or they are a refining fire that purges all that is not silver and gold. Our deifying apprenticeship takes place through asceticism and being disciples.
11. Two thoughts are to be banished: *I am a saint*, and *I shall be damned*. Instead think these two thoughts: *I am a great sinner*, and *God is merciful*. [Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.](#) You have not met Christ's dread judgment throne yet: seek each day to pursue more righteousness.
12. The sum of our status as apprentice gods is this: Love men as made in the image of God, and work in time as the womb of eternity. Fulfill

your apprenticeship with discipleship as best you are able. And follow God's lead in the great Dance, cooperating in synergy with his will. And know that [lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.](#)

**Apps and Mobile  
Websites for the  
Orthodox Christian  
Smartphone and  
Tablet: Best iPhone,  
iPad, Droid,  
Samsung, Android,  
Kindle, and  
Blackberry Mobile  
Websites and Apps**

**Apps that are directly useful  
for ascesis**

**There are not many apps formally labeled as Orthodox  
Christian, but there are some apps and mobile websites that can be**

used in the pursuit of the spiritual discipline of asceticism. Among these apps are:

[Ancient Faith Radio](#) ([iPhone and iPad](#), [Droid, Samsung, and Android](#), [Blackberry](#))

The value of this app goes more or less without saying, but there is one caveat.

I visited a monastery whose rules included not playing recorded music, and I saw outside the nave an old man, with headphones on, listening to Byzantine chant, moving to its beat and off in his own world.

It struck me, if anything, as an act beneath the dignity of an old man. [Being off in your own world is not good for anyone](#), but there are some things tolerated in youth that are just sad in a mature adult. And as best I can surmise the rule was not a rule against certain types of prohibited music (though acid rock would be a worse violation), but using technology to be off in your own world in the first place. And it is because of this that I rarely listen to recorded liturgical music: it is easily available, but there is something about it that is simply wrong. (And this is not just a matter of how digital music sounds to someone with perfect pitch.)

I know of nothing better in terms of Orthodox Internet radio than Ancient Faith Radio, and really have very little if anything to say how Ancient Faith Radio could better do the job of a radio station (or, as the case may be, two stations providing access to lectures, sacred liturgical chant, and access to past broadcasts). But I have some reservations about why Orthodox need to be doing the job of a radio station—as, for that matter, I have a cautious view of my own website. The ironically titled [The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#) lays out the attitude where a radio station with crisply rendered sacred song available on one's iPhone or Android should be used that much. [cjshayward.com/psalms/?mode=mobile](http://cjshayward.com/psalms/?mode=mobile) (bookmark for iPhone, iPad, Droid, Samsung, Android, Kindle, and Blackberry; tablet users may prefer [cjshayward.com/psalms/](http://cjshayward.com/psalms/))

The Psalter is the greatest prayerbook of the Orthodox Church. This page selects a Psalm at random, until you click a link and it provides another Psalm at random. They seem to be helpful, chiefly because the Psalter is helpful

because the printer is helpful.

[CJSHayward.mobi](http://CJSHayward.mobi) (bookmark for iPhone, iPad, Droid, Samsung, Android, Kindle, and Blackberry; tablet users may prefer [cjshayward.com](http://cjshayward.com))

I hate to hawk my own wares, but I've put quite a lot into the two sites linked above, and perhaps reading them may be of some use.

[cjshayward.com/clock/phone.cgi](http://cjshayward.com/clock/phone.cgi) (bookmark for iPhone, iPad, Droid, Samsung, Android, Kindle, and Blackberry, both phone and tablets)

This is a jumping point to your local liturgical day's readings from Scripture, saints' lives, and troparia/kontakia. It is intended to follow your local liturgical day, from sunset to sunset, which is why it asks what city you are nearest to. It offers a choice of Old Calendar or New Calendar, although the Old Calendar has room to improve in terms of dates relative to Pascha. It is a jumping off point to the real OCA trove of readings, saint's lives, and troparia; much more than the lion's share of the value is in the OCA feasts and saints to which this provides a jumping off point.

Evernote ([iPhone and iPad](#), [Droid, Samsung, and Android](#), [Blackberry](#), and desktop computers)

Evernote (iPhone and iPad users may consider [Instapaper](#)) offers the possibility of a library of texts to pray. Of course it can be many other things besides a library of prayers, but you can store morning and evening prayers, preparation for Communion, [and a wealth of Akathists](#). There is much more that they can be used for, but I've found it well worth my time to type up liturgical prayers and have the text available for prayer later.

Your smartphone's built-in note-taking application, or [Momento for iPhone or iPad](#) (with many [diary applications for Droid, Samsung, and Android](#), and perhaps other offerings for other devices.

Some monks in the ancient world kept a notebook, and something to write with, by their belts. They would stop at intervals to write down their thoughts: not brilliant ideas to think about, but take moral stock of where they were and how they were doing.

Such a practice was not mandatory in the ancient world and to my knowledge no one requires it now. However, since I started doing it, I have besides some very stupid struggles come to a higher level of awareness, of nipsis, of how much goes on in my head and heart that is simply silly.

If you do this, it would be better to have an application that stores your information locally in your smartphone instead of uploading it to the cloud where others may more easily find it. That is why I don't recommend Evernote for this purpose; it is a very attractive app in many ways, but not as strong on privacy as your smartphone's built-in note taker or a diary app.

[The Kindle app for iPhone, iPod Touch, Droid, Samsung, Android, and Blackberry](#) (not to mention PC's)

I wouldn't want to denigrate paperback books, but you can buy some of the greatest classics on Kindle: the [Orthodox Study Bible](#) (an edition I discussed in [my Orthodox Bookshelf](#)), the [Philokalia](#), and [My Orthodox Prayer Book](#). Plenty of lesser works are available too: see my own Kindle offerings at [cjshayward.com](#).

The icon library at [IconLibrary.mobi](#).

While preparing to write this, there was one thing I looked for but couldn't find: an icon library, or at least an icon library that features Christ, the Theotokos, and the saints and angels instead of just featuring angels. So I created [IconLibrary.mobi](#). It's better than nothing.

## **Apps that are generally useful**

G.K. Chesterton said, "There is more simplicity in the man who eats caviar on impulse than the man who eats granola on principle." And there is more Orthodoxy in just using an iPhone as a tool for being human than going to the app store and looking for apps endorsed as religious.

Do a Google search for [best iPhone apps](#), for instance, and you will find a wealth of app recommendations. And many of these can work as a support for an Orthodox life of asceticism: Orthodoxy did not invent the pot, the belt, or the hammer, and yet all of these can have a place. Not, perhaps, the same place as a book of prayers, but a legitimate place. Secular tools and activities are holy when they are used by a life out of asceticism. And there are some excellent apps; among them I would name **PocketMoney**, a personal finance tool; **mSecure**, a password manager; **Things**, a to-do list; **GPS MotionX Drive**, a navigation tool; **Flashlight**, which lets you use the LED as a flashlight; and the main **Google** app, a search app optimized for the web by the company that defined search. All of these have their place.

But there are many apps on those lists that are unhelpful. Games and entertainment apps are meant to kill time, which is to say that they are meant to provide a convenient alternative to the spiritual discipline that told monks, "Your cell [room] will teach you everything you need to know." And I suggest asking, in considering an app, "Does this support asceticism?" A to-do list helps with nuts and bolts of a disciplined life. An app to show a stream of new and different restaurants feeds gluttony. It is fine for Orthodox Christians to use apps that are not branded as Orthodox or ascetical, but the question "Does this support ascetical living?" (which is in no way a smartphone-centric question, but a basic question of Orthodox life, to be settled with one's priest or spiritual father perhaps), applies here.

## **A closing note: When do you call 9-1-1 (or 9-9-9)?**

There is a good case to be made that the most important number for you to be able to call on any phone is 9-1-1. However, this does not mean that your first stop in dealing with boredom is to call 9-1-1 to just chat with someone. It may be the most important number for you to be able to call—and the only number that may save your life—but using 9-1-1 rightly means using it rarely.

I would not speak with quite equal force about smartphones, but I would say that if you really want to know how to use your smartphone in a way that supports Orthodox spiritual discipline, the biggest answer is not to use one more app or one more mobile website. It is to use your phone less, to visit people face to face instead of talking and texting, and to use apps a little more like you use 9-1-1: to get a specific task accomplished.

And this is without looking at the problem of an intravenous drip of noise. The iPhone and Android's marketing proposition is to deliver noise as an anaesthetic to boredom. And Orthodox use of the iPhone is not to deliver noise: all of us, with or without iPhones or Android devices, are to cultivate the asceticism of silence, and not make ourselves dependent on noise. And it is all too easy with these smartphones; they are designed so that it is too easy.

The Fathers did not say "You cannot kill time without injuring eternity," but on this point they could have. Killing time is the opposite of the asceticism of being present, of being attentive of the here and now that God has given us, and not the here and now that we wish to be in or the here and now we hope to get to. Contentment and gratitude are for here now, not what we imagine as better conditions. We are well advised to live astemiously, and that is where the best use of iPhone and Android

...the technology, and that is where the best use of these devices  
smartphones and tablets comes from.

**Smartphones have many legitimate uses, but don't look to them for, in modern terms, a mood management tool.**

# Archdruid of Canterbury Visits Orthodox Patriarch

The Archdruid of Canterbury appeared as head of a delegation to His All Holiness THOMAS, Patriarch of Xanadu.

The Archdruid bore solemn greetings and ecumenical best wishes. He presented gifts, including an oak and holly icon, portraying St. Francis of Assisi as the pioneer of "I-Thou" existentialism. The icon was "not made by hands" ("all done by paw," in the memorable words of Paddington Bear).

The Druidic leader spoke of the Orthodox Church with the most solemn reverence. "The Orthodox Church is not only Oriental and exotic, but has the most hauntingly beautiful liturgy achieves what we are trying to engineer in our liturgical reform, and the Orthodox Church would make the perfect partner for the most dynamic and progressive forces that keep the C of E a living spiritual power in this world. St. Alban and St. Sergius *are* Anglican saints, but they are first and foremost Orthodox saints, and are only Anglican saints because they are Orthodox saints. I have personally blended the most excellent traditions of Druidic Bard and occupant of the See of Canterbury. We would be most deeply honoured if the existing profound (if invisible) bond uniting Orthodox, Anglican, and Druid were made explicit."

After the Druid spoke for an hour, he paused in thought a moment, turned to His All Holiness THOMAS and said, "But I fear I have done too much talking, while you have said nothing. Isn't there anything you'd like to say? Don't you have questions we could speak to?"

The Patriarch coughed, sat in silence for a moment, and began to

The Patriarch coughed, sat in silence for a moment, and began to squirm. "Have you considered pursuing ecumenical relations with the African majority in your own communion? I've dealt with some of them and they're really quite solid people, with good heads on their shoulders." The Archdruid made no reply.

# The Arena

1. We stand in an arena, the great coliseum. For it is the apostles who were sent forth last, as if men condemned to die, made a spectacle unto the world, to angels and men.
2. St. Job was made like unto a champion waging war against Satan, on God's behalf. He lost everything and remained God-fearing, standing as the saint who vindicated God.
3. [But all the saints vindicate God.](#)
4. We are told as we read the trials in [the Book of Job](#) that Satan stands slandering God's saints day and night and said God had no saint worthy of temptation. And the Lord God Almighty allowed Satan to tempt St. Job.
5. We are told this, but in the end of the Scripture, even when St. Job's losses are repaid double, St. Job never hears. He never knows that he stands in the cosmic coliseum, as a champion on God's behalf. Never on earth does St. Job know the reason for the catastrophes that befell him.
6. St. Job, buffeted and bewildered, could see no rhyme or reason in what befell him. Yet even the plagues of Satan were woven into the plans of the Lord God who never once stopped working all things to good for this saint, and to the saint who remained faithful, the plagues of Satan are woven into the diadem of royal priesthood crowning God's saints.
7. Everything that comes to us is either a blessing from God or a temptation which God has allowed for our strengthening. The plagues by which Satan visited St. Job are the very means themselves by which God glorified his faithful saint.
8. Do not look for God in some other set of circumstances. Look for him

in the very circumstances you are in. If you look at some of your circumstances and say, "God could not have allowed that!", you are not rightly accepting the Lord's work in the circumstances he has chosen to work his glory.

9. You are in the arena; God has given you weapons and armor by which to fight. A poor warrior indeed blames the weapons God has armed him with.
10. Fight therefore, before angels and men. The circumstances of your life are not inadequate, whether through God lacking authority, or wisdom, or love. The very sword blows of Satan glancing off shield and armor are ordained in God's good providence to burnish tarnishment and banish rust.
11. The Almighty laughs Satan to scorn. St. Job, faithful when he was stricken, unmasked the feeble audacity of the demons.
12. God gives ordinary providence for easy times, and extraordinary providence for hard times.
13. If times turn hard for men, and much harder for God's servants, know that this is ordained by God. Do not suppose God's providence came when you were young but not now.
14. What in your life do you wish were gone so you could be where you should be? When you look for God to train you in those very circumstances, that is the beginning of victory. That is already a victory won.
15. Look in every circumstance for the Lord to train you. The dressing of wounds after struggle is part of training, and so is live combat.
16. The feeble audacity of the demons gives every appearance of power, but the appearance deceives.
17. Nothing but your sins can wound you so that you are down. And even our sins are taken into the work of the Almighty if we repent.
18. When some trial comes to you, and you thank God, that is itself a victory.
19. Look for God's work here and now. If you will not let God work with you here and now, God will not fulfill all of your daydreams and then begin working with you; he will ask you to let him train you in the here and now.
20. Do you find yourself in a painfully rough situation? Then what can you do to lighten others' burdens? Instead of asking, "Why me?", ask,

"Why not me?"

21. An abbot asked a suffering monk if he wanted the abbot to pray that his suffering be taken away. The disciple said, "No," and his master said, "You will outstrip me."
22. It is not a contradiction to say that both God has designs for us, and we are under the pressure of trials. Diamonds are only made through pressure.
23. No disciple is greater than his master. Should we expect to be above sufferings when the Son of God was made perfect through suffering?
24. Anger is a spiritual disease. We choose the path of illness all the more easily when we do not recognize that God seeks to train us in the situation we are in, not the situation we wish we were in.
25. It is easier not to be angry when we recognize that God knows what he is doing in the situations he allows us to be in. The situation may be temptation and trial, but was God impotent, unwise, or unloving in how he handled St. Job?
26. We do not live in the best of all possible worlds by any means. We live instead in a world governed by the best of all possible Gods. And that is the greater blessing.
27. Some very holy men no longer struggle spiritually because spiritual struggle has worked out completely. But for the rest of us, struggle is a normal state. It is a problem for you or I to pass Lent without struggle. If we struggle and stumble and fall, that is good news. All the better if we cannot see how the thrusts and blows of the enemy's sword burnish away a little rust, one imperceptible speck at a time.
28. Do you ask, "Did it have to hurt *that* much?" When I have asked that question, I have not found a better answer than, "I do not understand," and furthermore, "Do I understand better than God?"
29. We seek happiness on terms that make success and happiness utterly impossible. God destroys our plans so that we might have the true happiness that is blessedness.
30. Have a good struggle.
31. There is no road to blessedness but the royal road of affliction that befits God's sons. Consider it pure joy when you fall into different trials and temptations. If you have trouble seeing why, read [the Book of James](#).
32. Treasures on earth fail. Treasures in Heaven are more practical.

33. Rejoice and dance for joy when men slander you and revile you and curse you for what good you do. This is a sign you are on the royal road; this is how the world heralds prophets and sons of God. This earthly dishonor is the seal of Heavenly honor.
34. If you have hard memories, they too are a part of the arena. Forgive and learn to thank God for painful memories.
35. Remember that you will die, and live in preparation for that moment. There is much more life in mindfully dying each day than in heedlessly banishing from your mind the reality. Live as men condemned to die, made a spectacle before men and angels.
36. Live your life out of prayer.
37. It takes a lifetime of faith to trust that God always answers prayers: he answers either "Yes, here is what you asked," or "No, here is something better." And to do so honestly can come from the struggle of praying your heart out and wondering why God seemed to give no answer and make no improvements to your and others' pain.
38. In the Bible, David slew Goliath. In our lives, David *sometimes* prevails against Goliath, but often not. Which is from God? Both.
39. Struggling for the greater good is a process of at once trying to master, and to get oneself out of the way. Struggle hard enough to cooperate with God when he rips apart your ways of struggling to reach the good.
40. Hurting? What can you do to help others?

**Athanasius: *On  
Creative Fidelity***

## Translator's Introduction

In an era of political correctness, it is always refreshing to discover a new manuscript from Athanasius, a saint a bit like gentle Jesus, meek and mild, who told the community's most respected members that they crossed land and sea to gain one single convert only to make this convert twice as much a child of Hell as they were themselves ([Matt 23:15](#)). In an era of political correctness, Athanasius can be a breath of fresh air.

In this hitherto undiscovered and unknown work, Athanasius addresses a certain (somewhat strange and difficult to understand) era's idiosyncrasy in its adulation of what is termed "creative fidelity." His own era seems to be saying something to ours.

## **Athanasius: *On Creative Fidelity***

What is this madness I hear about "*creative fidelity*"? For it is actually reported to me that whenever one of you talks about being faithful to tradition, his first act is to parrot mad words about how "Being Orthodox has never been a matter of mindless parrot-like repetition of the past, but always a matter of creative fidelity."? *What madness is this?*

Is creative fidelity the fundamental truth about how to be an Orthodox Christian? Then why do we only hear about this at a time when people love innovation, when the madness of too many innovators to mention poisons the air as effectively as the heretic, the Antichrist, Arius? How is it that the Fathers, who are also alledged to participate in this diabolical "*creative fidelity*", did not understand what they were doing, but instead insisted in one and the same faith shared by the Church since its beginning? Is this because you understand the Fathers better than the Fathers themselves?

Is the report of blasphemy also true, that to conform to people's itching ears ([II Tim 4:3](#)) you shy back from the divine oracle, "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." ([I Cor 11:3](#))? There is something the Apostle so much wants you to understand, and perhaps if you understood it better you would not go so far astray as to seek the living among the dead ([Luke 24:5](#)) in your quest for creative fidelity.

How is it that you seek the living among the dead ([Luke 24:5](#))? Christ is the head of the Church ([Eph 5:23](#)), of every man ([I Cor 11:3](#)), of every authority ([Col 2:10](#)), of all things ([Eph 1:22](#)), and God is the head of Christ ([I Cor 11:3](#)). Christ is the one head, and because of him there are many heads. The sanctuary is the head of the nave: the place where

sacred priests minister meets its glory and manifest interpretation (for as the divine Disciple tells us, the Son has interpreted the Father ([John 1:18](#)) to the world) in the nave where the brethren worship. The archetype is the head of the image, the saint the head of his icon, and indeed Heaven is the head of earth. And it is the head whose glory is manifest in the body.

If both incorruptible and unchangeable Heaven is the head of corruptible and changeable earth and yet earth manifests Heaven, what does this say about this strange thing you laud called "creative fidelity"? Does it not say something most disturbing? Does the one and the same faith, alive from the days of the apostles, belong to the corruptible or the incorruptible? Is it not unchangeable?

What then of those adaptations you make—even if some are good and some are even necessary? Do they not belong to the realm of the changeable and the realm of the corruptible?

*Which then is to be head?* Is the corruptible and changeable to be the head of the incorruptible that suffers no change? Or rather is not the heavenly incorruptible faith to be made manifest and interpreted in the world of change? Such creative fidelity as there may be cannot be the head, and when it usurps the place of the head, you make Heaven conform to earth. Such a people as yours is very good at making Heaven conform to earth!

Listen to me. When you prepare for the sacred Pascha, how many fasts are there? One of you fasts most strictly; another is too weak to fast; another has an observance somewhere between these poles, so that there are several ways of observing the fast.

Are there therefore many fasts? Are there many Lords ([I Cor 8:5](#)) honored when you fast? Or is it not one and the same fast which one observes according to the strictest letter, another with more accommodation, and each to the glory of God? Now which is the head, the variation in fasting, or the fast itself? Are the differences in observance the spiritual truth about the fast, or the one fast to the glory of the One Lord? Or do you think that because the fast may be relaxed in its observance, the most important truth is how many ways it may legitimately be observed?

So then, as the Church's fast is the head of the brethren's fast, be it strict or not strict, and it is one fast in the whole Church, so also there is one faith from the days of the Apostles. This I say not because I cannot

one faith from the days of the Apostles. This I say not because I cannot notice the differences between the Fathers, but because these differences are not the head. The one faith is the head of various observances and the one faith perfectly delivered is the head even of creative fidelity, which has always appeared when people pursue the one faith and which has no need of our exhortations. Have the Fathers shown creative fidelity when they sought to preserve the one faith? If you say so, what does that say about your exhortation to creative fidelity? Is it needed? Do you also exhort people to wrong others so that the flower of forgiveness may show forth? Or is there not enough opportunity for the flower of forgiveness without seeking it out? Show creative fidelity when you must, but must you seek it out? Must you make it the head? Must you make the Fathers wrong when they lay a foundation, not of each day's idiosyncracies in being faithful, but in the one faith that like Heaven cannot suffer change and like Heaven is what should be made manifest in earth?

Why do you seek the living among the dead ([Luke 24:5](#))? Our confession has a great High Priest ([Heb 3:1](#)) who has passed through the Heavens ([Heb 4:14](#)) to that Temple and Tradition, that Sanctuary, of which every changeable earthen tradition is merely a shadow and a copy ([Heb 8:5](#)) and which the saints of the ages are ever more fully drawn to participate! Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses and the Great Witness himself, let us also lay aside every weight, and change, and sin which so easily entangles, and run with perseverance the race that is set before us ([Heb 12:1](#)), changing that we may leave change behind!

Remember that you are not walking, as you say, the Orthodox System of Concepts, but the Orthodox Way. Remember that feeding the hungry ([Matthew 25:35](#)); is greater than raising the dead. Never let the lamp of your prayers go out ([I Thess 5:17](#)). Like the Father, be a father to the fatherless ([Ps 68:5](#); [Isa 1:17](#)). All the brethren salute you ([Rom 16:16](#); [II Cor 13:13](#)). Greet one another with a holy kiss ([Rom 16:16](#); [I Cor 16:20](#); [II Cor 13:2](#); [I Thess 5:26](#); [I Pet 5:11](#)).

# Author's Corner

Today I am writing not specifically because of Patriot Day, but because of another moment. Yesterday, after having written [Within the Steel Orb](#), I wrote a brief letter and went to send a copy to Madeleine l'Engle, but then I learned the news: she had passed away earlier that day.

I believe it is fitting that during her last days I should be finishing and sharing [Within the Steel Orb](#) a work that owes much to her. I owed as much a debt to her as to any living author, and she is the only one of my favorite authors whose lifespan overlapped my own. The news of her death stung.

May her memory be eternal.

But that is not the whole story. I am starting up an excellent job soon, and I look forward to getting to know the people better. The job has God's fingerprints all over it. As I am moving forward, it is in the [kairos moments](#) that Madeleine l'Engle wrote of... and other good things as well.

There is a fresh page ahead of me in my life, and I look forward to reading it. Onward ho!

## Sunday 6 February 2005, Anno Domini

I like a moment in [For Better or For Worse](#) which goes roughly as follows:

[In heavy sleet, the father of the family hails a cab.]

**Father:** What a miserable day!

**Cab driver:** Actually, to me it is a very good day.

**Father:** What do you mean?

**Cab driver:** I am from Sudan. I have seen my friends shot and killed. I have a wife whom I have not seen in two years, and a son whom I have never seen. But each day brings a little money and leaves me that much closer to bringing my wife and child to America.

[The father looks thoughtful as he pays the cab driver.]

[In the next frame, he steps into his house.]

**Mother:** What a miserable day!

**Father** [*placing an arm around his wife and their little girl*]:  
Actually, to me it is a very good day.

Learning to be Orthodox has been humbling, and there have been some difficult things. However, I have many positives to look on. A few of them are:

- I completed my master's in theology at [Cambridge](#).
- I've been invited to train for a teaching job; if all goes well, I'll be able to get some good experience teaching.
- I've been accepted for a doctoral theology program at the [Graduate Theological Union](#) this fall, and may have other options as well.
- I've had the opportunity to face some of my faults and get a better

understanding of what it means to be Orthodox.

- I've had the opportunity to make a number of small improvements to my website so it's more polished as a website.

I have many reasons for joy.

## **29 November 2003, Anno Domini**

Against daunting obstacles, God has placed me back at Cambridge, in England, to study for an M.Phil. in theology. I am doing research on the holy kiss; the New Testament tells Christians several times, "Greet one another with a holy kiss," something that is very interesting theologically. It connects with love, respect, all of us being made in the image of God, the Holy Spirit, the Church as a family, and other things that are quite deep. I'm hoping to present a paper on it at a conference in February, for the Society of St. Sergius and St. Alban.

I am also hoping to be received into the Orthodox Church on either Christmas (25 December) or Epiphany (6 January). There are a lot of things about it that feel very much like home. The awe and sense of God's transcendence, incense and music, a living preservation of ancient ways of thought, practicing the holy kiss, and a fulness of Biblical interpretation and doctrine that my Evangelical upbringing helps me appreciate: all of these things draw me, but the primary reason is that it is true Church. One thing that bothered me as a Protestant is that the fragmented Church I was in seemed not to show the fullness of what the New Testament said that Church was. Orthodoxy has what was missing.

## 6 October 2003, Anno Domini

Since I last wrote, there have been continuing extraordinary difficulties and extraordinary providence. Last year, due to health trouble, Cambridge told me that regardless of performance I'd be allowed back. Now it doesn't look like they'll keep their word, even though I passed everything. I am also preparing for a job interview tomorrow, which would use data mining to try to understand what Christians believe and why certain problems exist in the Church.

This summer, I've rested and designed a search engine, [The Data Mine](#). It's still at an early phase, but I designed it to let me search a theology classics collection, and it looks helpful in letting me do that. I'm feeling rather depressed that Cambridge looks like it's not going to happen.

It has been written that God works with us in a very particular way when we reach the point where things begin to unravel. Even though I have quite a lot to be thankful for—much more than my diploma from Cambridge—I'm reaching that point now.

## **12 October 2002, Anno Domini**

I had been delaying writing because I was waiting for just one more thing to sort out before making my next post, then another, then another. I intended to write, "I am in Cambridge, studying theology, and everything is sorted out." Now I don't know when, or if, I can say that, but God is with me.

Before leaving for the University of Cambridge in England, I had been having medical problems, and one delay after another before my student loan was in place. After about eight months' work on getting funding, my student loan was in place one business day before I left. God resolved another major paperwork issue, but I'm still waiting to see how the health problems sort out. After I arrived on the second of October, my college did not have a place for me to sleep, and there was one day where I didn't know where I would spend the night. I still don't know where I'll sleep after tomorrow night.

To say that much is true so far as it goes, but misleading. I have seen both extraordinary difficulty and extraordinary providence. I am feeling stressed now, but there have been times when I felt exhilarated. Friends, one of whom I had not met before coming to Cambridge, had shown extraordinary hospitality. I was delighted to have a bicycle to run errands. I have had, throughout this time, a sense that I didn't know how God intended to provide, but that he would. I've been thinking about Jesus's words in the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?" (Matt. 6:25-26, NIV) I have been in a delightful place, and God has been more real to me than he has been in a long time.

I'm hoping to use the year wisely: my schedule is relatively light, and I

hope to publish articles and make contacts. If you'd like to pray for me,  
pray when you put your shoes on that God would bless this year of study.

## **March 16, 2002 Anno Domini**

Since I last wrote, I have begun teaching at DeVry. I have also been accepted by the faculty of divinity at Cambridge, to begin studying in the fall. I am quite happy about both. DeVry has given more than one nice surprise, and Cambridge—enough said. Other good things have also been happening. I've made relatively few website creations lately; I've been working hard and now applying creative energy to teaching. I'm working on getting financing squared away, and I am working to clear away one snag. The train ride to the DeVry campus where I teach (in Chicago) has a very nice view, and I want to cherish this time. It is for me, a time for prayer and much thanksgiving.

If you pray, please pray when you brush your teeth that I would:

- Be led to the right college within Cambridge.
- Be led to the right advisor.
- Connect with the right funding.

## January 6, 2002 Anno Domini

For a long time, I've sought to cultivate silence and the discipline of a savoring pace. This winter finds me busier. I've learned something about consistent prayer; I am preparing a talk for my church's youth group and hope to later post it. I ask God each night to bless all of you who visit Jonathan's Corner; that and other prayers create a quiet amidst haste.

What looms large now?

- I am preparing to return to school for a doctorate in theology, and be able to teach as a professor. I'd love to go to Oxford.
- I submitted part of [Firestorm 2034](#) to an editor interested in science fiction that grapples with both science and religion.
- I'm trying to understand what I hope will become my third novel. The world is fascinating and is more challenging for me to write about than the others. It's like a hoard of gold, hidden in a labyrinth: you can only share it after a lot of searching. I'm trying to keep this from falling to the wayside.

There are other things going on: commitments to keep, and day-to-day errands both ordinary and spectacular. I'd ask fellow Christians to pray for my success in these endeavors, school in particular. (Pray for me when you brush your teeth!)

**An Author's Musing  
Memoirs About his  
Work**  
*Reflections, Retractions, and  
Retracings*

**Taking a second look at some  
of what I wrote**

***Dear Reader,***

Years back, when I was a math grad student, I wrote a short essay entitled, [Why study mathematics?](#) The basic thought was connected with the general education math class I was taking, and it is not really an article for why to specialize in mathematics through intensive study, but why a more basic knowledge of math can be a valuable part of liberal arts education. Much like how I taught my class, I did not speak favorably of memorizing formulas—pejoratively called "mindless symbol manipulation" by mathematicians—but spoke of the beauty of the abstractions, the joy of puzzles and problem solving, and even spoke of mathematics as a form of weight lifting for the mind: if you can do math, I said, you can do almost anything. I was sincere in these words, and I believe my obscure little piece captures something that a lot of math students and faculty sensed even if they did not explain their assumption.

Since then, there are some things I would say differently. Not exactly that I was incorrect in what I said, but I worked hard to climb a ladder that was leaning against the wrong building.

One famous author in software development, who wrote a big book about "software engineering", had said, "What gets measured gets improved," and began to express second thoughts about his gung-ho enthusiasm for measurement. He didn't exactly *take back* his words of, "What gets measured gets improved," but he said that the most important things to understand are rarely things that are easy or obvious to measure: the mantra "What gets measured gets improved," is a mantra to ruthlessly optimize things that often are less important than you might think. His second thoughts went further: the words "software" and "engineering" have been joined at the hip, but however hard software developers have tried to claim to be engineers, what they do is very different from engineering: it's an apples and oranges comparison.

I would pretty well stand by the statement that if you can deal with the abstraction in math, you can deal with the abstraction in anything: whether chemistry, analytic philosophy, engineering, or sales, there isn't much out there that will call for more abstract thinking than you learn in math. But to pick sales, for instance, not many people fail in sales because they can't handle the deep abstraction. Sales calls for social graces, the ability to handle rejection, and real persistence, and while you may really and truly learn persistence in math, I sincerely doubt that mathematical training is a sort of industrial strength preparation for social graces and dealing with rejection. And even in engineering, social graces matter more than you might think; it's been said that being good at math gets you in the door, but social influence and effectiveness are what make a *real* superstar. I would still stand by a statement that if you can handle the abstraction in math, you can probably handle the abstraction in anything else. But I'm somewhat more wary of implying that if you have a mathematical mind, you just have an advantage for everything life may throw at you. **That's simply not true.**

There are some things I have written that I would like to take back, at least in part, but even where my works are flawed I don't believe mass deletions are the best response. I would rather write what might be called "Retractions and retracings" and leave them available with the original works. [Why study Mathematics?](#), whatever its flaws, gives a real glimpse

into the beauty that draws mathematicians to mathematics. I may be concerned with flaws here, but they are not the whole truth. However, there are some things I would like to comment on, some flaws to point out. In many cases, I don't believe that what I said is mainly wrong, but I believe it is possible to raise one's eyes higher.

## HOW to HUG

Mathematics may be seen as a skill, but it can also be how a person is oriented: jokes may offer a caricature, but a caricature of something that's *there*. One joke tells of a mathematician who finds something at a bookstore, is delighted to walk home with a thick volume entitled *HOW to HUG*, and then, at home, is dismayed to learn he purchased volume 11 of an encyclopædia. And I mention this as a then-mathematician who wrote [A Treatise on Touch](#), which may be seen as interesting, may be seen as deep, and may have something in common with the mathematician purchasing a book so he could know how to hug.

Part of what I have been working on is how, very slowly, to become more human. This struggle is reflected in [Yonder](#), which is at its most literal a struggle of philosophers to reach what is human. There is an outer story of disembodied minds set in a dark science fiction world, who are the philosophers, and there is a story within a story, an inner story, of the tragic beauty of human life. When I showed it to a science fiction guru, he suggested that I cut the philosophical dialogues down by quite a bit. The suggestion had a lot of sense, and quite possibly a traditional publisher would want to greatly abbreviate the sections that he suggested I curtail. But I did not follow his advice, and I don't think this was just author stubbornness. When literature builds up to a success, usually the path to success is filled with struggles and littered with failures. This is true of good heroic literature, and for that matter a lot of terrible heroic literature as well. (Just watch a bad adventure movie sometime.) [Yonder](#) is a story that is replete with struggles and failures, only the failures of the disembodied minds have nothing to do with physical journeys or combat. They begin stuck in philosophy, mere philosophy, and their clumsy efforts to break out provide the failures, and therefore to greatly abridge the philosophical discussion would be to strip away the struggle and

failure by which they reach success: a vision of the grandeur of being human. Like much good and bad literature, the broad sweep was inspired by [The Divine Comedy](#), opening with a vision of Hell and building up to a view of our painful life as a taste of Heaven, and you don't tell [The Divine Comedy](#) faithfully if you replace the [Inferno](#) with a brief summary stating that there are some gruesome images and a few politically incorrect ideas about sin. The dark science fiction world and its mere philosophy provides the vision of Hell that prepares the reader to see the humanness of Heaven and the Heaven of humanness. The inner story can be told by itself; it is for that matter told independently in [A Wonderful Life](#). But there is something in [Yonder](#), as it paints the stark, dark, disturbing silhouette of the radiant, luminous splendor and beauty of human life.

While I was a math undergrad, I read and was deeply influenced by the *Tao Te Ching*; something of its influence may be seen in [The Way of the Way](#). That work has its flaws, and I may have drunk too deeply of Taoism, but there was a seed planted that I would later recognize in fuller forms in the Orthodox Way. I had in full my goals of studying and thinking, but I realized by the way that there was some value to be had in stillness. Later I would come to be taught that stillness is not an ornament to put on top of a tree; it is the soil from which the tree of life grows.

After I completed my studies in math, and having trouble connecting with the business world, I took stock, and decided that the most important knowledge of all was theology. I had earlier planned to follow the established route of being a mathematician until I was no longer any good for mathematics and then turning out second rate theology. My plans shifted and I wanted to put my goal up front and, I told my pastor, "I want to think about theology in community." (If you are wincing at this, good.) So, in this spirit, I applied to several schools and began the study of academic theology. If you are an astute reader, I will forgive you if you ask, "But isn't this still a mathematician looking for a book on how to hug?" The goal I had, to teach at a university or even better train Orthodox priests at a seminary, was a laudable enough goal, and perhaps God will bless me with that in the future. Perhaps he wants the same thing, but perhaps God first wants to free me from the chain of being too much like a mathematician wanting to learn how to hug by reading a book.

During my time studying theology at Cambridge, I was received into

During my time studying theology at Cambridge, I was received into the Orthodox Church. I am grateful to God for both a spiritual father whose lenience offered a corrective to my legalistic tendencies, and for a godfather who was fond of reading Orthodox loose cannons and who helped me see a great many things that were invisible to me at the time. For instance, I asked him for help on some aspect of getting my worldview worked out correctly, and I was caught off guard when he explained, "You aren't being invited to work out the Orthodox worldview. You're being invited to worship in the right glory of Orthodoxy, and you are being invited to walk the Orthodox way." In that sense Orthodoxy is not really a system of ideas to work out correctly that, say, a martial art: there may be good books connected to martial arts, but you learn a martial art by practicing it, and you learn Orthodoxy by practicing it. And in that response, my godfather helped me take one step further away from being a mathematician trying to find a book that will teach him how to hug. (He also gave me repeated corrections when I persisted in the project of trying to improve Orthodox practices by historical reconstruction. And eventually he got through to me on that point.)

Becoming Orthodox for me has been a matter of becoming really and truly human, or at least beginning to. There is a saying that has rumbled down through the ages in different forms: in the second century, St. Irenaeus wrote, *"For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God."* I have not read this in much earlier sources, but I have read many later phrasings: *"God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man that man and the sons of man might become gods and the sons of God."* *"The divine became human that the human might become divine."* *"The Son of God became a man that men might become the sons of God."* And one real variation on this has been quoted, *"Christ did not just become man so that I might become divine. **He also became man that I might become a man.**"*

If Christ became man that I might become human, this is manifest in a million ways in the Orthodox Church. Let me give one way. When I was preparing to be received into the Orthodox Church, I asked my godfather some question about how to best straighten out my worldview. He told me that the Western project of worldview construction was not part of the Orthodox Way: I had been invited to walk the Orthodox Way but not

work out the Orthodox worldview. If there is in fact an Orthodox worldview, it does not come from worldvish endeavors: it arises out of the practices and life of the Orthodox Church, much in line with, "*Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his perfect righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*" Not just corrections, but being caught off-guard by effectively being told, "Here are some of many rules; there is no need for you to know all of them. They are important, and you need to strive for strict excellence, but you are not treating them in the right spirit if you hold them rigidly and legalistically. (Work out with your priest how you will best bend them.)" The Orthodox Church's nature as essentially an oral tradition has helped cure me of silly things like meticulously studying ancient texts to put my mind to an antiquarian reconstruction and answer the question, "How should we live?" (The Orthodox Church is ancient, but it is not really infected with antiquarian reconstruction efforts.) The rhythm of the liturgy and its appointed seasons, the spiritual housecleaning involved with preparing for confession, the profoundly important community of the faithful: all of these are part of how it works out in the Orthodox Church that God became man not only so that I might become divine, but also so that I might become more truly man.

Part of this becoming human on my part also has to do with silence, or as Orthodox call it, hesychasm. Part of the disorder of life as we know it is that our minds are scattered about: worrying about this, remembering that pain, and in general not gathered into the heart. Mathematical training is a training in drawing the mind out of the heart and into abstract thinking. The word "abstract" itself comes from the Latin *abstrahere*, meaning to pull back (from concrete things), and if you train yourself in the habit of abstraction you pull yourself back from silence and from what is good about the *Tao Te Ching*.

In [Silence: Organic Food for the Soul](#), I all but closed with the words, "Be in your mind a garden locked and a fountain sealed," which speaks about having a mind that is gathered together and is in the fullest sense mind: which is not when abstract thinking is its bread and butter. Perhaps some of the saints' wisdom is abstract, but it does not come from building an edifice of abstractions.

The terms *intellect* and *mind* mean something very different in Orthodox classics than they do in today's English. The difference is as great as the difference between using *web* to mean a physical object

woven out of spider's silk and *web* to mean interconnected documents and media available over the internet. Today you might say, "The intellect is what an IQ test measures." An Orthodox saint who had been asked might have said, "The intellect is where you meet God." The mind is an altar, and its proper thought flows out of its being an altar: in [Within the Steel Orb](#), a visitor from our world steps into a trap:

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

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

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

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

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

"Is it?"

"What else could the mind be?"

"What else could the mind be? What about an altar at which to worship? A workshop? A bridge between Heaven and earth, a meeting place where eternity meets time? A treasury in which to gather riches? A spark of divine fire? A line in a strong grid? A river, ever flowing, ever full? A tree reaching to Heaven while its roots grasp the earth? A mountain made immovable for the greatest storm? A home in which to live and a ship by which to sail? A constellation of stars? A temple that sanctifies the earth? A force to draw things in? A captain directing a starship or a voyager who can travel without? A diamond forged over aeons from of old? A perpetual motion machine that is simply impossible but functions anyway? A faithful manuscript by which an ancient book passes on? A showcase of holy icons? A mirror, clear or clouded? A wind which can never be pinned down? A haunting moment? A home with which to welcome others, and a mouth with which to kiss? A strand of a web? An acrobat balancing for his whole life long on a slender crystalline prism between two chasms? A protecting veil and a concealing mist? An eye to glimpse the uncreated Light as the world

concealing mist. An eye to glimpse the uncreated Light as the world moves on its way? A rift yawning into the depths of the earth? A kairometer, both primeval and young? A—"

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

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

That litany of metaphors summarizes much of my second master's thesis. Which is not really the point; but my point here is that on an Orthodox understanding, intellect is *not* something you measure by an IQ test and a mind is *not* the spitting image of a computer. The mind, rightly understood, finds its home in prayer and simple silence. The intellect is where one meets God, and its knowing flows out of its contact with God and with spiritual reality. And, in the metaphors of the [Song of Songs](#), the mind as it is meant to be is "a garden locked, a fountain sealed", not spilled out promiscuously into worry, or grudges, or plans for the future that never satisfy. And this gathering together of the mind, this prayer of the mind in the heart, is one that was not proposed to me by my mathematical training.

Now I should mention that I have a lot to be grateful for as far as math goes. There are a lot of people who gave of themselves in my training; there are a lot of people who gave of themselves in the various math

contests I was involved in. And, not to put too fine a point on it, I have a computer job now which is a blessing from God and in which I build on a strong mathematical foundation. It would be silly for me to say, "I am not grateful for this" as God has provided me many blessings through math. But I need to place things like "I have a lot of math awards" alongside what a monk said to a maid and to me: she was fortunate in the job she had, as manual labor that allowed her mind to pray as she was working in inner stillness, while I as a computer person was less fortunate because my job basically required me to be doing things with my mind that don't invite mental stillness. My job may be a profound blessing and something not to take for granted. But he was pointing out that the best jobs for spiritual growth may not be the ones higher on the pecking order.

## A streak of escapism

There is a streak of escapism in much of my work. If you read [Within the Steel Orb](#), I believe you will find insight expressed with wonder, and I would not take back any of that. But the wisdom, which is wisdom from here and now, is expressed as the alien wisdom of an alien world that panders to a certain escapism. Wisdom and wonder can be expressed without escapism; [Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth](#) and [Doxology](#) both express wisdom and wonder in a way that does not need to escape from a disdained here and now. But there is a thread of escapism in much of my work, even as I have sought to reject it.

During or shortly after I was in high school, I wrote a note in an online forum arguing that *Terminator 2* had shot itself in the foot. The movie had a scene with two little boys angrily playing with toy guns and the voiceover complained about how tragic this was, and at the end the message was made even more explicit: "If a machine, a terminator, can learn the value of human life, maybe we can too." But the movie was an action-adventure movie, meaning a movie whose attraction was built on glorified violence with guns blazing. In terms of a movie that would speak out against violence, contrast it with a movie idea I had, for a movie that would rush along at an action-adventure clip for the first few minutes and then slow down like a European art film; from [Lesser Icons: Reflections on Faith, Icons, and Art](#):

What I did do was to outline a film idea for a film that would start out indistinguishably from an action-adventure movie. It would have one of the hero's friends held captive by some cardboard-cutout villains. There is a big operation to sneak in and deftly rescue him, and when that fails, all Hell breaks loose and there is a terrific action-adventure style firefight. There is a dramatic buildup to the

hero getting in the helicopter, and as they are leaving, one of the villain's henchmen comes running with a shotgun. Before he can aim, the hero blasts away his knee with a hollow-nosed .45.

The camera surprisingly does not follow the helicopter in its rush to glory, but instead focuses on the henchman for five or ten excruciating minutes as he curses and writhes in agony. Then the film slows down to explore what that one single gunshot means to the henchman for the remaining forty years of his life, as he nursed a spiritual wound of lust for vengeance that was infinitely more tragic than his devastating physical wound.

By contrast, it may be clearer what might be called shooting yourself in the foot in the *Terminator 2* syndrome, and as far as escapism goes, I have a couple of pieces that shoot themselves in the foot with something like a *Terminator 2* syndrome. In [The Voyage](#), the miserable young Jason is an escapist and, when he meets an old man, asks the old man's help in an escape he doesn't believe is possible. The old man deftly opens Jason's eyes to the beauty of this world, the beauty of the here and now, that are simply invisible to him. I stand by everything I wrote in that regard. But the closing line, when thanks to the old man Jason triumphs over escapism, is, "And Jason entered another world." Which is to say that the story shot itself in the foot, like *Terminator 2*.

There may be a paradoxical link between escapism and self-absorption. Self-absorption is like being locked in your room and sensing that it is constricting, and so you wish that you could be teleported up to a spaceship and explore the final frontier, or maybe wish for a portal to open up that would take you to the Middle Ages or some fantasy world. And maybe you can get a bit of solace by decorating your room like someplace else and imagining that your room is that other place, and maybe you can pretend and do mind games, but they don't really satisfy. What you miss is what you really need: to unlock the door, walk out, visit a friend, go shopping, and do some volunteering. It may not be what you could arrange if you were controlling everything, but that's almost exactly the *point*. It may not what you want, but it is what you need, and it satisfies in a way that a quest to become a knight, at least in your imagination, cannot. And my own concerns to escape self-absorption and escapism play out in my writing: [The Spectacles](#) is more successful than

[The Voyage](#) in telling of an escape from the Hell of self-absorption and escapism; I've been told it's my best short story. But it still has the imprint of self-absorption even as it tells of someone finding way out of self-absorbed escapism. And something of that imprint affects my writing: there are some good things about my fiction, but I have been told that my characters are too similar and are only superficially different. I do not think I will ever receive the kind of compliment given to Charles Dickens, that he envisions a complete universe of different characters. People may say that my satire like [Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary](#) shows a brilliant wit and is bitingly funny, but you can be pretty full of yourself and still write good satire. By contrast, it takes humble empathy to make a universe of characters worthy of Dickens.

## **A door slammed shut:**

### *God's severe mercy*

I earned a master's in theology, and entered into a doctoral program. I thought for a long while about how to say something appropriate about that program, and I think the best I can do is this:

I've been through chemotherapy, and that was an experience: overall, it was not as bad as I feared, and I enjoyed life when I was going through chemotherapy. I still cherish [The Spectacles](#), the first piece written after a long dry spell because I was drained by illness. I'm not sure it is a nice thing to have powerful cytotoxins injected into your body, and the rough spots included the worst hour of (purely physical) pain in my life, but on the whole, a lot of progress has been made in making chemotherapy not as bad as it used to be, and I had good people to care for me.

And then there are experiences that, to put it politely, put chemotherapy into perspective. My entering this doctoral program and trying to please the people there was one of those experiences into perspective: during that time, I contacted a dean and wrote, "I found chemotherapy easier than dealing with [*a professor I believed was harassing me*]," and received no response beyond a secretary's brush-off. After this ordeal, my grades were just below the cutoff to continue, and that school is not in any way going to give me nice letters of reference to let me finish up somewhere else. I suppose I could answer spam emails and get a diploma mill Ph.D., but I don't see how I am in a position to get the Ph.D. that I wanted badly enough to endure these ordeals.

And if I ask where God was in all this, the answer is probably, "*I was with you, teaching you all the time.*" When I was in middle school, I ranked 7th in the nation in the 1989 MathCounts competition, and I found it obvious then that this was because God wanted me to be a mathematician. For that matter, I didn't go through the usual undergraduate panic about "What will I major in?" Now I find it obvious that God had something else in mind, something greater: discipleship, or sonship, which may pass through being a mathematician, or may not. Not

straying too far from this, I wanted a Ph.D., and I thought that this would be the best way to honor him with my abilities. Again I was thinking too narrowly; I was still too much of the mathematician looking for a book to teach him how to hug; again the answer seemed to be, "*That's not the issue. Aim higher and be my servant.*" As it turns out, I have four years' graduate work in theology; that has some use in my writings, and even if it didn't, the issue is not whether I am a good enough achiever, but whether I am faithful.

During this time I read quite a lot of medieval versions of the legends of King Arthur. There were a couple of things that drew me to them, both of them rather sad. The first was pride, both pride at thinking I was going to be an Arthurian author, and pride at sometimes reading medieval legends in the original.

But the second reason I kept reading them was that compared to what I was covering in theology class, reading the legends almost seemed like I was actually studying *theology*. (At least by comparison.) Whether a course in theological foundations that assumed, "We need to work from the common ground that is shared by all the world's religious traditions, and that universal common ground is Western analytic philosophy," or reading that theologians are scientists and they are every bit as much scientists as people in the so-called "hard sciences" like physics, or a course in "philosophy and contemporary theology" that was largely about queer matters and such topics as ambiguous genitalia, the whole experience was like "Monty Python teaches Christian theology." And it would be a funny, if tasteless joke, but it was really something much more tragic than a Monty Python riff on theology. And in all this the Arthurian legends, which are really quite pale if they are held next to the grandeur of Christian theology, none the less seemed to give respite for me to study.

In the light of all this, there are three basic things that I wrote. The first is the Arthurian book I wanted to write out of all the medieval books I was reading:

- [The Sign of the Grail](#)

The second thing is a group of pieces that were written largely as rebuttals to things I ran into there. (The university was a "Catholic" university, so they were generous to us Orthodox and treated us like

liberal Catholics.) I've had enough contact with Catholics outside that university; those pieces are not written just in response to being at a "Catholic" university.

- [Dissent: Lessons From Being an Orthodox Theology Student at a Catholic University](#)
- [An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism](#)
- [Religion and Science Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution](#)

I believe there is some merit in these pieces, but not that much: if they say something that needs to be said, they are limited to winning an argument. Theology can win an argument and some of the best theology is meant to win an argument, but the purpose of real theological writing is to draw people into the presence of God. These pieces may say something valuable, but they do not really do the job of theology: *beckon the reader to worship before the throne of God.*

But that leaves the third group of pieces written in the wake of that un-theological theology program, and that is precisely pieces which are written to draw the reader to bask in the glory of God. The ones I would pick as best are:

- [Doxology](#)
- [God the Spiritual Father](#)
- [Lesser Icons: Reflections on Faith, Icons, and Art](#)
- [Silence: Organic Food for the Soul](#)
- [Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Asceticism](#)

## So where does this leave me now?

I think I've made real progress but I still have a lot in common with that mathematician who bought a book so he could learn how to hug. Be that as it may, I have a lot to be thankful for.

I had my heart set on completing my program, but in 2005 I started a Ph.D. program that was estimated to take eight years to complete. And since then, the economy tanked. And in this, a gracious and merciful God didn't give me what I *wanted*, but what I *needed*. Actually, more than that. In the aftermath of the program, I took some anthropology and linguistics coursework which on the one hand confirmed that I was already good at learning languages (the woman who scored the MLAT for me said, "I've scored this test for thirty years and I've never seen a score this high,") and on the other hand, paradoxically provided good remedial understanding of things I just didn't *get* about my own culture. And there's something I'd like to point out about that. God provided academic coursework to teach me some things that most people just pick up as they grow, and perhaps studying academic theology was what God provided to help me get on to something that is at once more basic, greater, and more human: entering the Orthodox Church, and entering real, human theology.

But back to after the anthropology courses. Then the economy took a turn for the worse, and I found a good job. Then the economy got worse than that, and my job ended, and I had my fast job hunt yet and found an even better than that. There's no way I'm entitled to this; it is God's gracious providence at work. These are blessings covered in the divine fingerprints.

I still have failings to face: rather spectacular failings which I'd rather not detail. And it God's grace that I am still learning of my clumsiness

and my sin, and realize I really need to face ways I don't measure up. But that is really not the issue.

Does God work with flawed people?

Who else does he have to work with?

He has glorious, majestic, awesome, terrifying holy angels. But there is another glory when God works in and through flawed people.

Even the sort of mathematician who would read a book on how to hug ([or maybe write one](#)). The worst of our flaws is like an ember thrown into the ocean of God's transforming power.

And the same God wills to work in you, whatever your flaws may be.

*Much love,*

Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward

# *Belabored Inclusive Language and Naturally Inclusive Language*

## **A long-lost letter to the editor**

There was a letter to the editor I wrote long ago and have tried and failed to find. It did not seem to come up in a search on the magazine that printed it; but I do not fault the magazine or its website because I also could not find it in my Gmail archives. My Gmail account is over a decade old, but the core conversation was a couple of years before I opened my Gmail account.

What I essentially said was as follows:

**The common terminology of "inclusive language" and "exclusive language" is loaded language and harsh, exclusive language... It would be better to speak of "belabored inclusive language" and "naturally inclusive language."**

## Confidence and timidity

When I was on one consulting gig at a prestigious client, political correctness in language was present but not enforced. What I mean by that is this: *I heard both the old style and the new style of language*. I never heard someone get even a little upset at someone using "he" in an inclusive way, but there was a good chunk of my colleagues who used *naturally inclusive language* (N.B. including some immigrants), and a good chunk of my colleagues who used *belabored inclusive language*).

When people spoke in *naturally inclusive language*, without exception it was bold, confident, assured. And they did not seem to be thinking about being confident; they seemed to be quite undistracted in making whatever point they wanted to make.

When men at very least spoke (I don't clearly remember a woman speaking in anything but *naturally inclusive language*, although that was probably included), there was a timidity and a bad kind of self-consciousness. Even a divided attention. A man saying "they" for a single person of unspecified sex always had a question on his face of "Is this unsexist enough?" Even men who were current with the *belabored inclusive language* of political correctness as it existed then had a perennial distracted question on their faces of, "Have I done enough?" with significant doubt as to any definite and positive answer.

This kind of divided mind is not especially good for business communication, or non-business communication for that matter.

## **Feminists don't even use inclusive language**

Feminism is a bazaar not a cathedral, and one can find a mainstream feminist classic saying that "all the central terms [in feminism] are up for grabs" (and, presumably, one could also find numerous disagreements to those words). Even the term "feminism" may appear dated when this work is new; as of classes a decade ago feminism was working on a far-reaching rebranding as "gender studies", and I tolerate both that this work's treatment of feminism will likely appear dated in five or ten years, and for that matter might have appeared dated to feminist readers ten years ago. However, as no form of feminism that has emerged that I am aware of has yet been stable, I am not particularly interested in endlessly updating a minor work to keep up with fashions.

**My point is this. I have read feminists at length. I have spoken with people and met its live form. I have taken a graduate course in feminist theology. And I have yet to read a feminist author use inclusive language. Ever.**

How?

*What do I mean by that?*

**The essential feminist bailiwick, the area of primary feminist concern, is members of the human species and the human race, *Homo sapiens*, who are female, for the entirety of life, from whenever life is considered to begin, to whenever life is considered to end.**

**And the universal feminist-used term for a member of this bailiwick is not "human female" or "female human." It is "woman."**

*Do you see something odd?*

Without imposing nearly so great a reform program to create a politically correct English, we have a mainstream English term that begins and ends neatly where the bailiwick begins and ends, and a pronoun that works perfectly: "she." This amounts to a much smaller shift in language than migrating from "man-hours" to "work-hours", "waiter" or "waitress" to "server" and "waitstaff", and selling "five-seat licenses," a term which engenders considerable confusion about what part of the body most makes us human. By contrast, even cattle have historically been given enough dignity to be counted by the head. "Head" may be taken to have an undesired second meaning now, but couldn't we at least be counted by the *spine*?

But every single feminist author I've read is content to refer to the entire bailiwick as "women."

**"Woman," age-wise, is not inclusive language. It refers to adults alone, according to the shallow view of communication, and if "man" excludes "woman", "woman" excludes "female children."**

It happens that feminist authors, at least for a present discussion, will talk about human females who are seniors and cope with issues about aging, or girls in math classes (classes which seem to always being given an 'F'). And if a feminist author is writing about minors *alone*, she may refer to the human females in question as "girls." **But I have yet to read a feminist source of any decade use any other term at all for any member of the whole bailiwick. The sense is that when you write "woman," female minors are spoken for.** There is no felt need to specify "women and girls" (or, to perhaps pursue a familiar logic, "girls and women") when the group of females in question is mixed and includes minors. Nor, as far as principles and general approach, is there any concept that a good solution for adult women might be misguided if applied to minors. There might be storms of protest at some strain of literature that says, "A man should watch his step carefully all the days of his life," and the required, and almost hysterical, allegation placed that the author in question had not conceived of any advice that considers women, and this hysterical enough allegation may be accompanied by ostensible clarification that the text should only be quoted as "A man [*Sic*] should watch his [*Sic*] step carefully all the days of his [*Sic*] life." But there is no uproar, there is not a whisper of dissent,

when discussions of "women" are taken to obviously fully include girls unless excluded by context such as discussion of distinctively senior needs.

*If you look at feminist use of the term "woman", with blindingly obvious concern for all human females, you have a remarkably good working model for how a good, naturally inclusive language might function.*

# The Best Things in Life Are Free

1. The best things in life are free.
2. The best things in life are free. But what does this mean?
3. The best things in life are free. But we do not understand the truth of these words if we think they are filled out by hugs and friendship, or even love: [If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.](#)
4. A better lens comes from the condemnation of the Pharisees: [Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean.](#)
5. It appears in Orthodoxy that the outside of the chalice is all feasts and beautiful liturgies, even during Lent: but on the inside is all repentance, deprivation and hardship, and being blindsided by rebukes. All of this falls under "The best things in life are free," the one as much as the other.
6. Well enough it may be said that sin is the forerunner of sorrow: [The wages of sin is death](#), and that death's sorrow begins here and now. Sin ultimately kills pleasure: [It takes humility to enjoy even pride. It takes sobriety to enjoy even drunkenness. It takes chastity to enjoy even lust.](#)
7. But this is not all. The outside of the cup is beautiful and its beauty is true and real. But the real treasure is inside. Repentance is a spiritual awakening; it terrifies because it seems that when we repent we will lose a shining part of ourselves forever, but when we repent we

suddenly realize, "*I was holding on to a piece of Hell!*" and are free to flee the stench. What feast compares to the grandeur of real repentance?

8. The Great High Priest said, *I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.* The best things in life are free, and this pruning is a very big free gift.
9. It is when we are cleansed inside the cup that the outside is clean. Let Christ cleanse us inside the cup, and then inside and outside will both bear proper fruit.
10. The things in life that are free are persecutions, and we have on the highest authority: *Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.*
11. St. Paul goes so far to say, *But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.*
12. We may approach the outside of the chalice first, but it is a loss to stop there. We need the joyful sorrow of compunction and all that is within the chalice, and then what is on the outside of the chalice will be clean, and what is more, will reach its proper stature.
13. Every day take a little less, and pare down a little more. The Fathers do warn, "Do not engage in warfare beyond your strength," and the praxis is to crawl before we try to walk. But *The Way of the Ascetic* pares down, little by little, in humor, in luxury, in eating for a purpose other than nourishment, and aims to have none of it left.
14. *By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.* And by faith we wean ourselves even from a life centered on innocent pleasures, knowing that they do not hold a candle to the spiritual pleasure that is inside the chalice.

15. The cutting of of one's own will is free. And it is the experience of monasticism that this is one of the best things in life: a monk's will is cut off, not for the primary benefit of his brother monks, but for his own benefit. And the voluntary and involuntary cutting off of one's will extends far outside the monastery. It is one of the best things in life, whether we accept it as a blessing or resent it because we do not wish to grow up in the spiritual life.
16. Do you wish that this chalice be taken from you? Christ prayed the same, but he also prayed, "**Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.**" For some prayers are impossible.
17. There are two answers to prayer: "Yes," and "No, please ask for something better." St. James writes, **You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.** Passions are sinful habits that warp us, and when we ask for something to satisfy our passions, God only ever says "No" because he wants better for us.
18. Those things that are obviously good are nothing compared to the terrible goods: *the gilded artwork outside the chalice is beautiful enough, but it is nothing next to what is inside the chalice.*
19. **The Maximum Christ wishes the maximum for our lives, and that comes through repentance and the royal road of affliction.**
20. **Rejoice and dance for joy when men slander you and revile you and curse you for Christ's sake. This is a sign you are on the royal road; this is now the world heralds prophets and sons of God. This earthly dishonor is the seal of Heavenly honor.**
21. **No one can harm the man who does not injure himself. Nor can any circumstance.** So therefore let us not be governed by circumstances, or think the less of our God when he allows us rougher circumstances.
22. **We do not live in the best of all possible worlds, but there is another shoe to drop. We live in a world governed by the best of all possible Gods, and that is a greater good.**
23. Perhaps we are entering a time of struggle. (*Entering?*) Perhaps we are seeing the end of exceptionally prosperous and easy days we have no right reason to expect. The same truths apply. The same God who reigns in easy times, reigns in hard times.
24. **"Give us this day our daily bread:"** it is normal not to know where your next meal is from.

25. The arm of the Lord is more visible, not less, in hard times. God's providence is stronger when you know you need it.
26. The chalice offered us indeed looks easy on the outside but is full of pain within. But the sufferings are part of the treasure. And the best things in life reach deeper than the golden ornaments that belong on the outside, but extend to the joyful sadnesses within. Those who shed at least some entertainment and seek repentance and compunction for their sins find repentance an awakening and compunction to be joyful and cleansing. And that is not all. Everything inside the cup runs deep. And everything inside the cup is free.
27. The divine sovereignty is never purchased at the expense of human freedom. Human freedom is limited, but this is not where divine sovereignty comes from. The divine sovereignty has the last word after every creaturely choice has been made, and the divine sovereignty shapes joy after every draught of the inexhaustible cup.
28. The joy of the best things in life is not purchased at the expense of the chalice of suffering. Suffering is limited, but this is not something the divine sovereignty is purchased from. The divine sovereignty has the last word after every creaturely suffering has been entered, and the divine sovereignty leaves people in a better place than had they not met their sufferings.
29. The divine life is now. The divine energies are now. Not later, once some difficulties are resolved, but now.
30. In ancient times the holiday of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection were celebrated together; even now there is not a separation between them, and we speak of a three-day Pascha. There is no real separation between bearing a cross and being crowned with a crown, even if it takes time to gain the eyes of faith to see such things.
31. Orthodox are iconodules, but God is both iconodule and iconoclast: he takes things in our life and makes them icons of himself, and he also keeps on destroying and removing things to make us more free to breathe. Heaven and Hell are both inside us, and God seeks to inhabit Heaven inside of us and uproot Hell.
32. God the Father is the maker of all things visible and invisible. God is spirit, and even among created things the first excellence belongs to the invisible. Who can buy or sell invisible things? This is one reason

- the best things in life are free.
33. In the Incarnation, Heaven kissed earth and the visible now has a share in the excellence of the invisible. But still **if a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned**: the sale of relics is forbidden.
  34. Do you believe the best things in life are free? Excellent, but **the demons believe—and shudder**. Do you *live* as if the best things in life are free?
  35. **It is more blessed to give than receive**. What do you have to give?
  36. If you covet something and you gain it, it will bring misery once the pleasure melts away, and the greater the covetousness, the greater the misery. Covetousness is the inverse of what is inside the cup.
  37. We want to have things our way. But the Lord has other plans. And what we will find if we yield is that he has other plans for us that are not what we would have chosen, but are far better. This is at once an easy and a hard thing to do.
  38. In the Bible a chalice is both a cup of suffering to drink and a cup which fills with excellent joy. The suffering is as bad as we fear—no, worse— but if we drink of it we will be drinking of the very best things in life. The divine life in the chalice immeasurably eclipses the gilt ornament outside of it. Rememberance of death, compunction, and repentance dig deeper than the music of liturgy.
  39. The best things in life are not just an ornament for when our material needs are well taken care of. It is true ten times more that they are lifeblood in hard times and harder times. And the chalice is inexhaustible.
  40. The best things in life are free.

# **Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength**

In chapel, a speaker spoke of a person who was asked "Do you know how to play golf?" and answered "Yes, I learned yesterday." He then went on to speak of one of the simplest of Jesus's lessons, and how to truly learn that lesson is the work of a lifetime. If I were to be asked if I understand what I am talking about, the best and most honest answer I could give would be "No, but I am beginning to." For all of my life, I have been shown and have seen that there is something horrible that occurs when a human life without Christ is extinguished, and believed that, if destruction is something God wishes humans to avoid, then he would not place them in situations where it is unavoidable. It is not God's nature to say "this is to be avoided" and then be unfaithful and not provide a way out: sin is to be avoided and minimized. God always provides a way out. When I sin, it is not because God allowed me to come to a situation where there is no way to act without sin, or even because there was a way out that was beyond my strength, but because I choose to disregard what God in his love and wisdom has provided, and bring pain and destruction to myself and to God. And so I have spent time questioning and studying, and in the past couple of years have stumbled across something that astounds me. At first I saw one means that can work when diplomacy fails, and does not say to any other human being "You are expendable. I will permit you to die." And then, looking deeper, I have seen that it is not only another way to avoid violence, but that it is the imitation of Christ

only another way to avoid violence, but that it is the imitation of Christ, and a new understanding of what it means to imitate Christ, to suffer for him, to conquer in his name. From time to time, God has given me affirmations of what I am doing - showing me other Christians who before me have seen what I have discovered, bringing a new light to the darkness that is in causing suffering to another. I have no delusions of being a master of that of which I speak - while I learn, while I progress, I do not see how I will ever be other than a novice before I am in Heaven and no longer see darkly and through a glass - but, at the same time, God has shown me something that is awesome in the true meaning of the word, and it is something that I cannot keep to myself.

The most dangerous assumption is the one that is not realized as such. An assumption that is realized can be strengthened and improved in detail if it is true, and rejected if it is false. The one that is unstated offers the danger of not showing its full glory if it is true, and not offering itself for rejection if it is false. There is an often unrealized assumption that there are ultimately some situations where violence is the only way out (IE where God can't or won't use any other means), and furthermore that the choice is between violence and inaction (no other alternatives). Stating that it is an assumption neither proves nor disproves it, but does bring it to light - to consider and judge as an assumption.

The idea that the use of physical force is an evil is a presupposition that is carried throughout this work. All agree violence is preferably to be avoided, not a desirable state, and its means, deception and destruction, bear the mark of darkness rather than the mark of light.

I know fully that the sixth commandment, translated as "Thou shalt not kill." in King James, used language that would better be translated "You shall not murder.", a command that left open the possibility of killing in many cases. This does not mean that that moral avenue is still open. The ninth commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" was written in language that specifically spoke of lying in court. This does not mean that a court of law is the only place that a Christian is not permitted to lie. There are many things that were made complete when Christ came, one of which was shifting from inwardly attempting to maintain purity to outwardly evangelizing. In the Old Testament, the prophet had a role calling back the lost sheep of Israel, but to the Gentiles there was no real sense of the Great Commission. Christ's coming changed that, so that one of the primary responsibilities

given to Christians is to win souls. It is with knowledge of this that Paul spoke of becoming a servant to all, ending with "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (I Cor 9:22)

Each person in this world is either ready to die or not ready to die. A person who is ready to die will not be serving someone who needs to be stopped. I know that there are many soldiers who would rather not fight, who would rather die than kill, and who bear no hatred towards their enemies. At the same, if you would kill, I have this question for you: Can you consider it to be the best possible form of evangelism to look an enemy soldier in the eyes, say "Jesus loves you. He died so that you may be forgiven of your sins and go to Heaven. I love you." and then, pulling a trigger, send that soldier to Hell?

The early Christian church (before Constantine's vision) had a strong aversion to the shedding of blood, as reflected by people such as Athenagorus, who said in 180 AD "We [Christians] cannot endure even to see a man put to death, though justly." When the Emperor attempted to create a Christian state, a part of the compromise that was introduced was the concept of just war theory: killing is undesirable and an evil under all circumstances, but there are some circumstances when it is not the greatest evil, and inaction and the damage it will cause is a greater evil. This thought is at the center of misunderstanding of pacifism: that a pacifist sits back and does nothing, that pacifism is passivism. I will attempt here to outline the difference between pacifism and passivism. If I succeed, it is only by God's grace.

If Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had prescribed to the idea that it would be possible to know in advance what is the greater evil and what is the lesser evil, and to choose between, then certainly the lesser of the two evils would have been to bow down once and continue with their many other ministries. The story, however, glorifies their refusal to commit even the smallest evil, and reflects God's disregard for what is and isn't humanly possible. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.", says the Lord. Zech. 4:6

The new law is to love your enemy as yourself, and to forgive the one who injures you seven times seventy, as per Matthew 18:22.

Oftentimes people ask me "Well, God commanded not only defensive wars and even conquest but genocide in the Old Testament; what about those?" Please be assured that, were I to be born before Christ came, I would believe that violence is sometimes allowed. If I were to be born

would believe that violence is sometimes allowed. If I were to be born before Christ came, I would probably be an active member of the military, because that is what God commanded of many people and something that my gifts would be suited for. Jesus, however, said "You have heard that it was said: 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you... Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect." (Matt. 5:43,44,48) Before this command, it would have been not only acceptable but a moral duty to strike at some enemies, just as it was not only acceptable but a moral duty to repay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe (Ex. 21:23-25). With Christ, however, things were completely changed: "You have heard that it was said: 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt. 5:38-39) Any action taken in a war must be reconcilable with complete and absolute love for the enemies attacked: loving ("Love does no harm to its neighbor", Rom 13:10), doing good towards, praying for, blessing.

If you wish to become a warrior, then you will study and try to learn tactics and strategy. An attack that is lacking in planning will fall to a defense that is strategic, even if the attackers have better soldiers and better weapons.

If you wish to use the means of peace (whether or not you believe that they are always sufficient), then just as a warrior must study, you must study the concepts and principles of the means of peacemaking. You must study the tactics and strategy of making peace before even considering to declare it an insufficient tool for a situation where violence is necessary.

Once the men of a village came, running, and told Gandhi that they had run away while the police were raping and pillaging. When they told him that this was because of his instruction to be nonviolent, he hung his head in shame. He would not have been angry with them if they had defended their families by the power of a sword. He would have approved had they stood in harm's way, calling all injury to themselves without seeking to strike or to harm, to the point of death. But to run away like that and passively leave those who could not run was an act of great and terrible cowardice, the darkest possible answer to the problem. Gandhi - because the Hindu religion sees grey and dark\_er\_ and light\_er\_ courses

of action (every action falling onto a spectrum) believed that violence was necessary in many situations, in any event infinitely superior to cowardice. I do not believe that God presents a situation that does not have some way out that is free of sin and evil, and so I believe that violence is completely unnecessary to the Christian. The point of this example still stands, however - that cowardice is diametrically opposed to peacemaking.

Random violence for its own sake is not farther from a just war than sitting back and doing nothing is from pacifism. Cowardice is the direct opposite of peacemaking, and a coward CANNOT learn to be a peacemaker without first learning bravery.

Long before one person ever strikes another in a corporeal manner, peace has been breached. The first principle of peace is something that lies much stronger and much deeper than the absence of physical conflict. The Hebrew word "shalom" has come to have the meaning that peace should have - if you have not encountered the word shalom, take "harmony" or "accord" to be a rough English equivalent. When there is truly peace between two people, they love each other to the point of being ready to forfeit wealth, honor, and life. Such peace leaves no room for prejudice and misunderstanding, which scatter as cockroaches scatter at the appearance of light. To establish peace, you do not merely ensure a lack of physical violence (particularly not through intimidation at your own superior capability for violence - "peace through strength" destroys what it wishes to establish), but rather work to remove all traces of hatred and injustice. Peace is not an absence, but the presence of love.

"The greatest of these is love." I Cor 13:13 Establish love and there will be peace.

Just as a warrior must be ready to sacrifice the life of another by killing, so also, to live by peace you must be ready to sacrifice yourself by dying. This is the heart of the difference between passivism and pacifism. A passivist sits back and does nothing. A pacifist goes out on the battlefield, ready to die. To go out into a battle to kill, with the knowledge that you may die, requires great courage. To go out into a battle, not to kill, but to die, requires greater courage still.

It is obvious that there is a certain power which, in order to harness, it is necessary to take up arms and be ready to kill if need be. What is not so obvious is that there is another power for which it is necessary to put down arms and be ready to die if need be.

down arms and be ready to die if need be.

It is easy to return love to one who loves. It is not easy to give love to one who hates. And yet to do this impossible task is possible by the grace of God: "I can do everything in Christ who gives me strength." Phil. 4:13

Christ did not conquer us by threats of fire and brimstone. His message was not centered around "If you do not follow me, you will go to Hell." (although that is true) He did not torture us until we said "Ok, Ok, I believe." (although he has the power, the authority, and the right to do so) He rather said "Look how much I love you. Look at what I did for you. Look at what I want to do for you." He loved us who were his mortal enemies, and conquered us from the inside out: not by force, not by threat, but by love that knew no bounds. When we evangelize - conquering those who are God's mortal enemies - we do not threaten with Hell or use torture. We show our love, and by the power of the Holy Spirit conquer from the inside out, making an ally of an enemy and bringing blessing where God wills. This nature, this love, this manner of conquering is the heart of peacemaking.

In the midst of a world where darkness has its dominion, the powers of light are not overcome. This is not because the power of Satan is weak, but because the power of God is stronger. If you master an enemy by violence, your victory is temporary. If you master an enemy by love, your victory is eternal.

In the study of war and peace, look not only at troubled individuals and nations in the time of war, but also when there is peace - and know, as much as what went wrong when there were battles, what went right when there was love. Formal elaboration of some principles of peacemaking are rare, but its practice is more common than you might think. When you use your body to shield another person from injury, when you place yourself in the path of harm - take the example of the king of Denmark shielding Jews from Hitler - that is peacemaking.

Brother Andrew, while speaking at a chapel here, recounted an excellent example of peacemaking. He was talking with the leader of a terrorist liberation front who was holding hostages. He reasoned with the leader for a while, talking about how he could not rest if a single brother or sister of his in Christ was in captivity, but did not succeed. Diplomacy failed, as it sometimes will. He did not break into a fistfight, or try to grab one of the guns in the room. What he did do was to ask, "Will you take me in his place? Will you let him go free, and chain me to the central

radiator?" The leader was astonished, not believing at first that he actually realized (let alone meant) what he said, and then that Andrew's house was in order, and that he really was ready to be a hostage. That is acting in Christ's love.

Love is not weakened or limited by hostility of the ones loved. It would be hollow and worthless if it were only an effective means of dealing with people who love you and take you seriously. Christ came down and died, died not for perfect people who were worthy of salvation (such people would need no such thing), but for people who were walking in the darkness and hated the light. His manifest power is revealed in the ones who have been conquered and transformed by its strength, and so Billy Graham, Jeffrey Dahmer, and myself who were all repulsive in his sight and fully worthy of Hell have come to be forgiven and made anew. We were God's enemies, conquered not by a show of force on God's part (which would have been easy - God could kill me as easily as I lift a finger), but by costly love. He came down in human form and, when he had shown his love in all other ways, showed his love by dying. And, as God conquered us who were his enemies by the power of his love, and made us to be his reconciled sons and daughters, so we must conquer those who are our enemies by the power of his love manifest in us, and make them to be our reconciled brothers and sisters.

Jesus said "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt. 5:39) This is not a command to act as if you have no rights and passively let yourself be regarded as subhuman, but rather an insistence on the fact that you do have rights. In the society of that time, a slap on the cheek was not intended as a physical injury but rather as an insult, putting an inferior back in his or her place. The strength of that insult depended greatly upon which hand dealt it: as the left hand was seen as unclean, a slap with the left hand was the insult far greater than one dealt with the right hand. This was reflected in the legal penalties for an inappropriate slap: the penalty for slapping a peer with your left hand was a fine one hundred times the penalty for slapping a peer with your right hand; the penalty for slapping a better with your right hand was a fine while the penalty for slapping a better with your left hand was death. The people Jesus was speaking to most directly were, by and large, slaves and the downtrodden. A slap on the right cheek was dealt with the left hand. To turn the other cheek would leave the master with two options. The first would be to slap the slave again, but this time with the right

The first would be to slap the slave again, but this time with the right hand (therefore declaring the slave a peer). The second would be not to slap the slave again (therefore effectively rescinding the first slap). Now, such impudence and sauciness would often tend to bring punishment, but it none the less says "Hey, I'm a human. I have rights. You can't treat me like this." It is not an action without suffering for oneself, nor does it inflict suffering on the "enemy": but it does say and do something in a powerful way.

If you are to be a peacemaker, you must act against any evil - no matter how small it may appear (by human measure - there is no small evil by God's measure) - whenever you see it. Even if it is not a breach of peace in the military sense, it is a breach of shalom, and should be stopped as soon as possible, so that it does not grow and multiply. If this is done, it will be rare if ever that violent intervention is even a question.

The power of violence is in what it can compel of the body. The power of peacemaking is what it can compel of the soul. If someone commands you to do what is morally repugnant to you, and you use the force of arms to stop that person, then you will probably slay some, and you will certainly make enmity. If instead you use the force of peacemaking - by noncompliance, being disobedient and taking whatever the consequences must be, and by choosing your own suffering over the convenience of obedience - you will not see results as quickly, but your actions will command respect rather than enmity.

If you are to gain the power to successfully intervene with violence, then you must devote resources to equipment and time to training. Time and money thus spent are not spent on humanitarian ends. This is not to say that military technology and research does not have civilian spinoffs, or to say that the precision and discipline within military bodies is not something that can be very useful. Both of these benefits do exist, and are worth taking note (and advantage) of. At the same time, it is necessary to think: Is this really the most powerful and best way to spend this money? Love and active peacemaking are not limited to the well financed. Its power does not come from the investment of scarce monetary resources, but rather through the Holy Spirit, which is anything but a scarce resource. Money is freed to other ends.

Everyone in this discussion agrees that it is better to voluntarily suffer than to inflict suffering on others.

Diplomacy is a powerful thing. It becomes even more powerful if you

study the positions of all parties involved, study both their stated desires and what is unstated: their culture, their experience, the motivation behind stating the desires and intentions that they state. Oftentimes goals that appear diametrically opposed will, when examined at the root, reveal a mutually beneficial way of resolution. The power of diplomacy is not, however, absolute, and it depends to an extent on the goodwill of both parties. It is then that either one side must turn back, or that the desires be accomplished at the price of suffering. The usual method of waging wars uses physical force to conquer. The method of peacemaking - to stand in the way of the evil being done against you, and not dodge or resist the blows aimed at you - uses spiritual force which opens a hardened heart.

Love is not the exclusive domain or power of one group. Any individual can bring surprise by an act of love. The power of love, when applied to all ways so that there are no charges of incompleteness or hypocrisy, is overwhelming.

Love wishes nothing that it would not accord to another. Greed, the placement of self at the center of the universe, is diametrically opposed to love.

Christ's resistance and even revulsion at our evil did not cause him to force that evil from us. He rather showed us the better way, and left us to choose between the paths of light and those of darkness. So it is with love that makes peace: it is not forced upon those who believe violence to be the greatest interventive power.

Proclaim Christ at all times, and use words if need be.

Morally, there is not a difference between directly and indirectly causing an action. The one who commissions an assassination is no less guilty than the one who murders in person. Be sure that the actions you support are as pure as the actions you would take in person.

Just as Jesus said not to murder either in body (by breaking the sixth commandment) or in mind (by harboring hatred), peacemaking and love must penetrate both the actions of the body and the actions of the mind completely.

If you oppose someone with peacemaking, you will call to yourself the love and respect of others. Your power is not dependent on the extent of your military might (which is dependent on the extent to which you sacrifice humanitarian ends), but only on the extent to which you love and to which the Holy Spirit has power. In other words, if it fails, it is

and to which the Holy Spirit has power. In other words, if it fails, it is because God sees more good in that momentary failure than its success.

Peacemaking is more the opposite of inaction than it is of violence. Violence consists of seeing an evil and trying to act to rectify it; the means are imperfect. Cowardice and inaction make no hint of an effort to rectify the situation, and in my view are more reproachable than well meant violence. I have no respect for cowards - including those who dodge military conscription because they are afraid to die or be maimed in battle - but do hold respect for soldiers who have the courage and the desire to rectify which is the heart of peacemaking.

The power of love to conquer a hostile person without harm is a mystery; I would be a great liar if I said that I have always treated others in love. I will say that, when I have acted in a manner that says "You are expendable", there is a seed of evil and poison, however small, that starts to grow. When I have acted in a manner that does not see the least (by the world's measure) as expendable, God's love acting in me has shown power that is beyond my comprehension.

At the heart of violent intervention is a presupposition that you know the hearts of your enemies and that you can predict what can happen, so that the slaughter you cause will be lesser than the slaughter you prevent, and that if you instead intervene with your own blood without physically incapacitating your enemy, God will not work through and bless your actions as much as if you had compromised. When this assumption comes to mind, I believe that God has answered it when he said "Satan is a liar and the father of all lies." John 8:44, and that that he can and will do "immeasurably more than we all ask or imagine." (Ephesians 3:20) I am personally offended by the idea that it is necessary to take evil in order to prevent evil, because it carries the implication that God is either a hypocrite (by telling us never to do evil, and having the power to keep us from a choice between acts of evil, but choosing not to) or incompetent (telling us never to do evil, but lacking the power to make this possible). At the heart of peacemaking is faith, faith that without committing any undesirable evil it is possible to conquer the darkness. I have taken too many leaps of faith and landed on solid ground too many times to think that God is unable or even unwilling to grant power to those that will not compromise.

It is said that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Whether or not you agree with that - I find a great blessing in both - it is evident that one

of the marks of love is that it benefits the one who loves and the one who is loved. Violence does not "do no harm to its neighbor" (I Cor 13:10), but very regretfully does what it hopes to be a minimum of harm to its neighbor. The power of love and peacemaking is such that it brings blessings upon the one who uses it to oppose evil, and the person whose evil is opposed.

Civil disobedience must be loving and sincere in all regards. To hatefully scream while restraining your fists is not enough: you must act in complete love and not harm in the least the person who you are resisting.

When you take an action, always look at why you act.

Love that is ready to die leaves no room to be cowardly.

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:21

I hope that, if God offers me the honor of becoming a martyr, I would have the courage to accept the honor. As Paul said in Phillipians 1:21, "To live is Christ; to die is gain."

All Scriptural quotations (except for quotations from the ten commandments) NIV.

**Book Review: A New  
Face on an Old  
Ecumenism (*The  
Orthodox Dilemma  
Second Edition :*  
*Personal Reflections  
on Global Pan-  
Orthodox Christian  
Conciliar Unity*)**

I write with some sadness as provided a courtesy review copy, and as having my consent to include a quote. (Normally, when another author asks my permission to include a quote, I don't judge on basis of concluding agreement or disagreement; I am thankful for the publicity, and in particular thankful for the other author's good manners, especially in a case like this where the quote in question falls well within limits of fair use.)

I wanted to read the book through, since beside the author's generosity, I'd want to be very sure before questioning a book that gets consistent five star reviews, but at least in the first quarter or so of the text I have yet to find any intimation that there is any legitimate anathema, or legitimate barrier to intercommunion, between the

anathema, or legitimate barrier to intercommunion, between the Orthodox Churches as presented for the sake of the text: Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Old Believer, various autonomous churches, and so on. And no distinction is made between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Autonomous church, besides a basic position that only confusion and perhaps past sins or historical accident that stops the Russian Orthodox Church from recognizing the Russian Orthodox Autonomous church as equal jurisdictions that should be in full communion without any of the Orthodox Church's proper reconciliation of heretics and schismatics.

The author mentions a number of unfortunate experiences; I've had some unfortunate experiences, too. I, to, have been educated at a Roman Catholic university, or at least an academic environment that continued to draw inspiration from its Jesuit heritage. And there at least seems to be one difference between East and West; I had one Professor in formal communion with Rome say that she believed in Tradition, but she explicitly placed Arius alongside St. Athanasius as equal and proper representatives of Tradition. While the Roman communion has its own fractured communities of traditionalists, the live threat in Rome is their Left Coast which involves churches of Jesus, Buddha, and Socrates, and at times can be difficult to distinguish from New Age; it is my experience that when Romans wax eloquent about "the spirit of Vatican II" it is provocative to say "The spirit of Vatican II is in the letter" (Avery Cardinal Dulles, class session), and the best thing to do is run for the hills.

With Orthodoxy it is different. Orthodoxy does have a left, and [it has confused Orthodox Christians into believing that contraception is fine as long as you follow a few ground rules](#). However, the real concern in Orthodoxy is the Orthodox Right Coast, which has [Fr. Seraphim \(Rose\)'s quite astonishing following](#) (check out the one-star reviews!), which are unlike anything else I've received as an author. (When someone speaks of "Blessed Seraphim Rose" I've had real trouble telling whether the other person is a member of the canonical Orthodox Church.) To clarify regarding Mr. Alexander's treatment of the matter, I do not lump all the communities he mentions as being under the Right Coast, but only some of them. I have no reason to believe, and this book gives me no reason to believe, that non-Ephesians and non-Chalcedonians are particularly given to legalism, nor Right Coast passions that despise oikonomia and

mercy, nor regard themselves as much too Orthodox to be in communion with the canonical Church. The Orthodox Church's table is piled high, and there has always been room at the table: for True and Autonomous "Orthodox", for Old Believers (some of whom are already in), for Oriental Orthodox, for Western Christians and for people not Christian even in pretension: there is room for all those who will be reconciled, individually or in groups, as schismatics or as heretics, if only they will be received as full members of the Orthodox Church only, and on the Church's terms.

With all that stated, let me begin with what I thought would be my point of departure.

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There is a Utopia on earth, I have been there or at least within walking distance of this Utopia, and come to think of it, seeing Utopia wasn't a memorable experience at all.

If you wish to pull up Google Maps, and search for "Utopia, IL", you will find Utopia pinpointed in a Chicago suburb (Oakbrook Terrace), and Google helpfully shows an uninspired picture of the Jiffy Lube at Utopia. I haven't had the time to research the matter, but there are on present-day U.S. soil the graveyards of a number of attempts of a Nordic country (if memory corrects me, Sweden), to colonize North America and resurrect timeless, ancient Nordic values. There were some things that were remarkably consistent across attempts. There was the reconstruction effort, and there was the daunting endeavor of actually going to New World soil and making a live colony. However, the actual timeless values the whole enterprise hinged on were highly inconsistent. Varying somewhat by the decade, the overall impression of scholarship that may not have reached beyond a Wikipedia article is that these timeless, pristine values were something like an ink blot test in a proverbial Freudian counseling session (note that I have no idea if inkblot tests are practiced any more). The point of asking a patient what was seen in quintessentially ambiguous "pictures" was understood as informing the psychologist of nothing about the "pictures" and everything about the patient. I had not heard of these Utopian movements, nor known that the house I grew up in was such a short drive from Utopia (if in fact this Utopia was of Nordic origin), when I wrote ["Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony With Nature: Anatomy of a Passion"](#) in ["The Best of Jonathan's Corner"](#), but it would have fit naturally enough. The key downwind effect of the inkblot attempt that, in an attempt to reconstruct past glory, the effect is to sever ties to the recent past and the further-back past as well.

A second case in point, studied in ["Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony With Nature: Anatomy of a Passion"](#) in ["The Best of Jonathan's Corner"](#), has to do with the plain meaning of Scripture in the Protestant Reformation. Now Protestants never invented the idea that Scripture is foundational to the point of being bedrock. Whether in Luther's Sola Scripture, or Roman discussions of Scripture and Tradition, or Vladyka KALLISTOS writing that Scripture is not separate from Tradition but the

greatest thing in Tradition (I don't know exactly where non-Ephesians or non-Chalcedonians stand but I would be astonished to find either tradition holding Scripture to be anything less than cardinaly important), you can't escape a sense that the Bible is important, except for the lukewarm and the Left Coasts. However, if it is not decisively interpret by a Tradition (whether non-Left-Coast Rome, Eastern Orthodoxy, Oriental Orthodoxy, or for that matter Orthodoxy's Right Coast), seeing for yourself the plain sense of Scripture is the bedrock to there being myriads of Protestant denominations. Even in the Reformation's better moments, people who were devoted to Christianity as guided by the plain sense of Scripture found time and time again that they could not stay under the same doctrinal house. As a Protestant then (now chrismated Orthodox and received under the rubric of receiving a reconciled heretic, a route I endorse for others as well), my Political Science professor at Calvin, who was Protestant enough, said that "Every man his own Pope" doesn't work. The Bible may invaluable and it may have layers more to it than the Reformation would have liked, and if I may delicately say so, the Orthodox Church keeps a great more of even the 66 book Protestant canon than the "plain sense" Reformation exegetes will acknowledge in Scripture. But the plain sense of Scripture, denuded of protecting Tradition, is halfway to being an inkblot.

The proof of this, if anything, is in Reformation ecclesiology and the Invisible Church, a doctrine I found myself totally unable to derive from the Bible when I was Protestant (and remain unable as Orthodox to do the same). The Invisible Church is essentially a doctrine that once the Reformation logic's practical effects work out and there are innumerable schisms ("denomination" being a neutral-sounding euphemism for something the Reformers themselves knew was entirely abhorrent), God placed some sort of invisible duct tape across true Christians regardless of fracture, and that duct-taped, invisible retcon was in fact what had been hitherto understood by the visible Church, an understanding shared by Romans, Eastern Orthodox, and Oriental Orthodox, and for that matter by the first Reformers until the claim of "My little fragment is the true Church" claimed by dozens of voices could no longer really be taken seriously.

That set the scene for ecumenism as we now know it. I know relatively little of the history of ecumenism, and I have read one scholarly work suggesting that Protestant missionaries in other lands than their own

suggesting that Protestant missionaries in other lands than their own interacted with each other and realized they were separated without clearly understanding why, but in any case that was the reality that defined a great deal of the contours of the category we now know of ecumenism. Originally, ecumenism did not address Romans, let alone Eastern or Oriental Orthodox; the metaphor of a virtual supercomputer composed of numerous coordinated individual personal computers is obviously of more recent vintage than ecumenism itself, but it is faithful to the nature of ecumenism. It is an alternative to saying, "Being in schism like this is sin," and bespeaks an ecclesiology that does not condemn the Reformation collection of schisms, or tries to transcend them while keeping them in place. (Note that this explanation leaves out a good deal.) It also might be pointed out, less delicately, that this doctrine is a Tradition which has priority over Scripture and simply trumps its plain sense on at least one point. Perhaps it is not the most interesting such Tradition: but it is one.

I grew up Protestant, and ecumenism was to me like mother's milk. It was, for that matter, ecumenism that helped lead me to the Orthodox Church (and yes, the Lord does work in mysterious ways). It was bedrock to me that if you cared about Christian unity, ecumenism was the clay you should be shaping. And I encountered the claim, strange to me as it seemed, that Rome was not one more denomination and her claim was in fact something more to being one more division lumped into the duct tape.

But what was stranger was what I encountered as Roman ecumenism years later, having repented of my ecumenism as my priest and sponsor slowly worked with stubborn me over time. At first I assumed that Roman ecumenism was simply Rome saying, "You're right; I agree" to Protestant ecumenism. But that was not in fact the case. Roman ecumenism really and truly is an ecumenism and an incorporation deriving from Protestant ecclesiology. But it is adapted, if disturbingly superficially. I haven't heard the term "Invisible Church" in Roman usage, but the basic idea is there are several more-or-less equivalent communions ("particular Churches", a phrase which seems to change meaning with each Pope, but basically conveying true Church status while being wounded by failure to participate in Roman communions), so that the "Invisible Church" (or whatever they call or refrain from calling it) is not out of Baptists, Mennonites, or Lutherans, but is out of "historic

Churches”, meaning not only Rome but Eastern Orthodox, non-Chalcedonians, non-Ephesians, and any other continuing ancient community I’ve missed. These have more or less de facto the status of individual Protestant denominations under the original Protestant ecclesiology, and I remember the flame I got when a Roman priest made an ecumenical overture that he claimed to be “sensitive to Orthodox concerns” (with zero recognition that ecumenism is a sensitive concern to some Orthodox; he used pretty strong language and implied that he was closer to the heart of Orthodoxy than I was). [“An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism”](#) in [“The Best of Jonathan’s Corner”](#) had been my reply. Roman ecumenism may have Protestantism somewhere in its sights, but the basic framing is that historic Churches are insiders who should restore communion without reconciliation, on the terms Protestant ecumenism would have it, while inclusion of Protestants may be desirable but they are outsiders to the family of historic Churches.

(I might comment briefly that I do not think it is right to regard Oriental Orthodox communions as being like Protestant denominations. There are a small number of primary non-Eastern Orthodox communions, and in fact some of them like Novatians are treated with some sympathy in canon law. After the original break over a millennium ago, I am not aware of further fractures within the communities then established or having most adherents belong to a splinter. However, I do not accord this status to the Orthodox Right Coast or various groups that want to call themselves Orthodox without submitting to canonical communion.)

Having looked at the original ecumenism as invented by Protestants, and its alien transplantation into Rome, I would now like to look at this book’s transplantation of ecumenism into Oriental Orthodoxy and proposed to Eastern Orthodox to make our own as well. The book’s basic proposition is essentially that all the communities claiming to be Orthodox should restore intercommunion without, as understood by Rome’s historic Churches, a full and proper reconciliation. (And on the “There’s room at the table” theme, I might remind you that the Evangelical Orthodox Church was received into the Orthodox Church as reconciled to become canonical. And I’d love to see other groups join them as well.) The only ecclesiastical body with “Orthodox” in its name that I am aware of that Mr. Alexander does not seek to include in

Orthodox intercommunion is the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which was formed after one Presbyterian denomination (Politically Correct, USA?) knowingly ordained a candidate who did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God, and my uncle and other pastors split off so they could still be named Presbyterian while considering the deity of Christ to remain absolutely beyond question.. (I answered an Orthodox Presbyterian DMin graduate from an Orthodox seminary in [“An Orthodox Looks at a Calvinist Looking at Orthodoxy”](#), in [“The Best of Jonathan’s Corner”](#).) The Orthodox Presbyterian claim is to be able to say the Creed without crossing one’s fingers (or at least not translating anything except for the line about the Church), not any sort of claim to be of Eastern provenance. But Mr. Alexander does want to include others who call themselves Orthodox and put Orthodox in their name but do not seek to submit to Orthodox communion, including the (Anglican-based) African Orthodox Church as much as the Russian Orthodox Church or the Russian Orthodox Autonomous church.

The Eastern Orthodox Church can and in every sense should show welcome and hospitality to visitors of any confession and no confession at all, and baptize / chrismate and include in full communion those who (like my respected second advisor at Cambridge) are Copts and want to become members of the Eastern Orthodox Church. However, there is a wide consensus among many Orthodox I respect, not only that good fences make good neighbors, but that ecumenism, of which Mr. Alexander offers a new permutation, is the ecclesiological heresy of our age.

I’m not sure if Mr. Alexander dealt with the Orthodox Right Coast; even his hardships suggest innocence as to how the Right Coast can and often does treat outsiders to it. But I remember years back, when I was trying to get some basic bearings, asked a sharp friend why people who separate themselves from the Orthodox Church in schism develop legalistic passion. He gently suggested I had the order reversed: first comes the passion, then comes the separation. In terms of how passion goes, there are limited options for how the Right Coast can act in anger against the canonical Church and still preserve the self-illusion of being purer. None of the Left Coast axes appear adequate; you can attack the Orthodox Church for not having women priests, but that doesn’t cut it. The same goes for advocating for sexual libertinism. You can wield either Left Coast axe but it won’t give you the illusion of being super-Orthodox

Left Coast axe but it won't give you the illusion of being super-Orthodox.

Pretty much your only live option with the hand Orthodoxy has dealt you is to be super-Orthodox by indicting the Orthodox Church is indicting the Church for overly lax observation of canons. Now ancient canons are all there for a reason, but proper application of canons employs both *akgravia* (the principle of strict excellence) and *oikonomia* (the principle of love). Any good bishop, or possibly priest, will govern out of understanding canon law as a whole and trying to strike the right balance between the two principles. As a consequence, any good priest or bishop will show a great deal of laxity in at least some part of the overall picture of applying ancient canons. All the canons are there for a reason, and there are consequences when a canon is too loosely interpreted. And the one option to appear super-Orthodox, at least to yourself, is to blast the Church for overly lax observation of canon X in situation Y. That defines the contour for your sins.

My suspicion, strange as it may sound, is that the Russian Orthodox Autonomous church would bristle much more at instant and artificial intercommunion with the Russian Orthodox Church than the Russian Orthodox Church would.

One parish friend made a comment that he would like to have an anathema service, a particular service in which propositions the Orthodox Church has anathematized are in fact answered with one word: "Anathema!" I do not mean to state that no anathema or broken communion could ever arise from misunderstanding or, more pointedly, sin. For me to make that claim across all Church history would be quite a claim and it would be in excess of my authority as nothing more than a layman. However, the opposite error of assuming that every anathema or breach in communion should simply be stepped over is equally and stunning of an assertion. In the part I read before I really gave up, I did not see a single analysis reaching a responsible conclusion that even one single anathema or breach in communion may safely be brushed aside. The argument, such as it went, was not to go over any of the fences in detail, but make brief assertions out of a presupposition that anathemas and closed communion (at least between what Rome calls "historic Churches") are insubstantial, not really speaking to us today, and resulting from confusion or sin rather than anything binding.

The author has put his heart in this, a point which is evident on almost every page. His sincerity is not up for grabs, nor his goodwill, and I wince

at the pain he will have reading this. None the less, I say that ecumenism is the Left Coast ecclesiological heresy of our age, I have seen two and now three basic permutations, and its chief audience among canonical Orthodox should be those concerned with Orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

With Much Regret,

[C.J.S. Hayward](#)

# Can You Smoke Without Inhaling?

## Martial Arts and the Orthodox Christian

I have met this kind of slippery words in Orthodoxy, and I did not like it then either. I remember one subdeacon proudly explaining that he had dealt with Evangelicals, gently defusing doubt about venerating the Mother of God by saying, "*You wouldn't be disrespectful to your mother, would you?*"

The late medieval veneration of the Mother of God was called 'idolatry' by the

Reformers not only because the Reformers unwittingly took up the late Western medieval obsessive fixation on idolatry, but also because the Mother of God occupies a position that most of Protestant Christianity doesn't have a conceptual cubbyhole for except for as a rival to God. If Protestants speak of Mariolatry, the assessment might be flawed, but the real flaw is often unconscious and unwitting. There is room in Orthodoxy for a Mother of God who does not take away from the incomparable Oneness of God, but there is not such a place among the more traditional Protestants: the only cubbyhole she may be put in is as a rival to God.

I do not like it when objections are

made to vanish in a puff of sophistry, even when the party performing the disappearing act is on my side.

## A provoking article about yoga in Georgia

There was an article which discussed the Orthodox Church and yoga in Georgia. It made no mention of martial arts, but it left me thinking about how its substance would meet martial arts.

Probably the most striking part of the discussion of the Orthodox Church in Georgia giving a cautious, skeptical eye to yoga, and one of yoga's advocates said, "With time, as practitioners realized that "[b]y chanting one 'Om,' they're not going to change their religion," the objections vanished." This answer reminds me of how Charles Babbage was asked by members of the Parliament if his analytical engine could arrive at the correct answer even if it were given incorrect data to work with. He said, "I cannot rightly apprehend what confusion of ideas would lead to such a question." And I cannot rightly apprehend what confusion of ideas would lead an Orthodox to accept that reply.

The term 'yoga' is from the Sanskrit and means a spiritual path, and in that sense with unadorned simplicity an Orthodox Christian may claim to be a devotee of the Christian yoga, much as for that matter an Orthodox Christian speaking with a follower of the Budo (Warrior's Way) may with unadorned simplicity claim to be following Christian Do. Something close to this insight is at the heart of [Christ the Eternal Tao](#). The question of whether chanting one 'Om,' or rather, 'Aum,' as the "Sacred Syllable" is more properly called, will change your religion is neither here nor there. Saying the Jesus Prayer once *not* make one Orthodox, but this exact point is neither here nor there. Meditation in yoga does not stop with one 'Om' any more than Orthodox hesychasm stops with saying the Jesus Prayer once. On this point I would bring in that the Jesus Prayer is so important in Orthodoxy that in nineteenth century Russia there was genuine,

heartfelt resistance to teaching the Jesus Prayer to laity on the concern that access to something so great without the protecting buttress of monastic living would lead them into pride to the point of spiritual illusion. At the risk of claiming insider status in Hinduism or treating Hinduism as a copy of Orthodoxy, I might suggest that the place of the "Sacred Syllable" in Hinduism is something like the place of the Jesus Prayer in Orthodoxy, alike foundational to the depths of their spiritual treasures, alike the metronome of silence to its practitioners. The concern that the yoga that is drawn from Hinduism constitutes a spiritual path inconsistent with Orthodoxy is anything but kneejerk conservatism, especially if chanting 'Aum' once is the Hindu equivalent of taking the Eucharist once (a point on which I am very unsure). But it represents some fundamental confusion of ideas to speak of "the neutral syllable 'Om,'" as one workbook endorsed a popularization of yoga in the interest of treating depression and bipolar disorder.

Thus far I have focused on the analogies and similarities of hesychasm to the meditation that is found in Hinduism and Buddhism and is part of internal martial arts. It may be described as "divorced from" its religious roots (the founding grandmaster of Kuk Sool Won), but it is a common practice in internal martial arts (I never reached a high enough rank in Aiki Ninjutsu to be expected to join them in meditation), and it may not so easily be separated from its roots as it is presented. Part of the article I read on Georgia and yoga talked about meditation as affecting mind and body and in certain contexts produces a state of extreme suggestibility, quite far from the pattern in the saint's lives where the Lord, the Theotokos, or a saint tells someone something, and ends up doing so at least two or three times because the devout Orthodox is simply more afraid of being deceived than of failing to jump at a command they consider themselves unworthy of. The state of extreme suggestibility produced by meditation opens the door to demonic "insights", and one of the questions raised was, "Do you want to train in a discipline where the leaders are likely under demonic influence, in postures intended to be part of a spiritual path where you, too, will be invited to the place of suggestibility where you will be open to demonic influence?" The entire discipline points to the demonic; why think we can handle it safely? St. Paul writes, "[You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of](#)

demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" It might be begging the question to assume immediately that yoga is one of the cups referred to in this passage, but it is also precariously close to begging the question to assume that the passage is simply irrelevant to whether it is wise for Orthodox Christians to practice.

## Have I been able to smoke without inhaling?

Before talking about martial arts, which I will get to after laying some preliminaries, I would like to talk about an area where I did my best to "smoke without inhaling." I had come to believe that how Dungeons and Dragons and fantasy literature portray magic is not acceptable: perhaps it would be appropriate to portray a character's occult engagement as a serious sin that opens a door to the demons who hate us, but as it was argued to me, it's merely a depiction of a world with alternate physical laws, and when I took that up seriously and asked, "Do you know to what tolerances the constants of the physical world are tuned? If I were to have aim that good, I could hit something much smaller than a proton at the furthest reaches of the universe. Having alternate physical laws that would support ordinary life as we know it and in addition pack in magic is a very tall order. Would you also read fantasy of a world where adultery was harmless due to alternate laws?"

This last polemic may be beside the point here, but what is more to the point is that a friend, not to say very experienced author, responded to a mailing list post suggesting that marketing-wise the first three books an author publishes establish the author's "brand", and suggested that my brand might be non-magical fantasy. And while I would not wish for that brand now, this was a carefully considered suggestion from someone who had read my work at length, and it makes sense. The list of works that could be called nonmagical fantasy, some written after he made the suggestion, include the short stories [The Spectacles](#), [Within the Steel Orb](#), and the novellas, [The Steel Orb](#), [Firestorm 2034](#), and [The Sign of the Grail](#). And there is a reason I have not displayed any of the novellas on [my Amazon author page](#); [The Sign of the Grail](#) in particular was a work

where I realized that my greatest successes (and in a work where I made some bad decisions that jeopardized the work) let me realize that what I was attempting was impossible. I would describe it as, "I succeeded, and in succeeding realized that what I was attempting was impossible."

Some time later, a priest or monk was speaking me and warned about the perennial temptation to escape the here and now. This temptation is hard to pin down; it can take place physically, or mentally by imagination, or by street drugs, or... When this was pointed out, after initially resisting it, I realized that a great many things I did lacked the joy of gratefully accepting the here and now: they provide escape, and one good friend praised [Within the Steel Orb](#) precisely as a way to escape that he couldn't put down.

I would have said then that I smoked, but didn't inhale. I would now say that I inhaled more than I thought, and taking a "smoke, but do not inhale" attitude to sin is a losing proposition. Besides the works listed I made a role-playing game, [The Minstrel's Song](#), which is free of magic but still delivers the escape of fantasy. If you will, it offers a more dilute, less forceful delivery of poison than Dungeons and Dragons, Shadowrun, or many more of the plethora of role playing games out today, and perhaps God may use it to wean people off of that kind of recreation. I may have had a clear conscience when I wrote it, but remember Christ's words, [I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit](#), and this is one of the things God has pruned from me.

Proverbs asks, [Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?](#) This is God speaking, and the whole topic of fantasy, especially non-magical, represents an area where I tried to "smoke, but do not inhale," and it is evident to me that I did inhale a good deal more than was good for me, and a great deal more than I realized. I had, and probably do still have, feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

## **Martial arts without inhaling?**

When I touched base with my spiritual father years back about martial arts, he permitted it up to a point; I know that spiritual prescriptions are not to be copied from one patient to another, but he allowed me to study martial arts that were really just techniques, but not martial arts that were more of a philosophy. I had previously had about a year's combined study between Kuk Sool Won and Karate; I thought that I would study another martial art without inhaling, and simply try to dodge certain aspects in studying Aiki Ninjutsu. (I tried to follow the spirit and intent of my spiritual father's words, but perhaps I should have tried to ask him once I became aware of the neuro-linguistic programming and success plans.) What I really wanted was the stealth training, but God closed the door to the weekend training that would cover stealth.

After having gotten a certain point in, I emailed the instructor saying that I was coming to appreciate that Aiki Ninjutsu represents a complete spiritual tradition and does not mesh well with Christianity. I mentioned as an example the student's Creed, which begins, not with the magnificence of "I believe in one God...", but "I believe in myself. I am confident. I can accomplish my goals." I said that believing in oneself represented a fundamental spiritual failing in Christianity. Had he asked questions or tried to understand me in dialogue beyond my first words, I would have referred to him to Chesterton in [Orthodoxy, Chapter 2](#):

THOROUGHLY worldly people never understand even the world; they rely altogether on a few cynical maxims which are not true. Once I remember walking with a prosperous publisher, who made a remark which I had often heard before; it is, indeed, almost a motto of the modern world. Yet I had heard it once too often, and I saw

suddenly that there was nothing in it. The publisher said of somebody, "That man will get on; he believes in himself." And I remember that as I lifted my head to listen, my eye caught an omnibus on which was written [the asylum] "Hanwell." I said to him, "Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know where flames the fixed star of certainty and success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Super-men. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums." He said mildly that there were a good many men after all who believed in themselves and who were not in lunatic asylums. "Yes, there are," I retorted, "and you of all men ought to know them. That drunken poet from whom you would not take a dreary tragedy, he believed in himself. That elderly minister with an epic from whom you were hiding in a back room, he believed in himself. If you consulted your business experience instead of your ugly individualistic philosophy, you would know that believing in himself is one of the commonest signs of a rotter. Actors who can't act believe in themselves; and debtors who won't pay. It would be much truer to say that a man will certainly fail, because he believes in himself. Complete self-confidence is not merely a sin; complete self-confidence is a weakness. Believing utterly in one's self is a hysterical and superstitious belief like believing in Joanna Southcote: the man who has it has 'Hanwell' written on his face as plain as it is written on that omnibus." And to all this my friend the publisher made this very deep and effective reply, "Well, if a man is not to believe in himself, in what is he to believe?" After a long pause I replied, "I will go home and write a book in answer to that question." This is the book that I have written in answer to it.

I said that if he were to want to know more, I would have referred him to this passage. (The Fathers do not rebut the phrase "believing in yourself", because it was coined and popularized after your time. When it was called "pride" or similar names, it was ripped to shreds.) Perhaps some of the more recent writing from Mount Athos may address "believing in yourself," but I am limited in my grasp of what is current on Mount Athos.)

He responded with an authoritative statement that his art was appropriate for people of all religions or no religion, including Christian, and gave a recipe for success that began with believing in oneself. It was an Activist recipe, not a Saint's, as I lay out two ultimate orientations in [Farewell to Gandhi: The Saint and the Activist](#), not a saint's; I did not expect him to take the role of the saint, but he seemed to only see the Activist approach as a live option. Now the Saint and the Activist do not represent mutually exhaustive options; I would expect Japan's history to hold at least one other model besides them; and the martial art was presented as drawing on centuries or millenia of Japanese history, but it seemed to incorporate neuro-linguistic programming.

And on this point I will notice a difference between the martial art I was taught and prior martial arts: Kuk Sool Won and Karate both spoke, relatively frequently, of emphasizing "harmony between opponents." In Aiki Ninjutsu, the code of ethics includes dealing with others in a "harmonious" way, but I never heard advocacy of humble harmony between opponents: by contrast, one of the more advanced lessons covered with beginners is "become the center:" you dictate what is going on. The art may have been combined with Aikido, which is perhaps the most harmonious-with-opponents of martial arts, but as it was combined and presented, I never heard on the mat someone speaking of harmony with one's opponents, and I heard and saw practice at becoming the center. The teacher seemed to be trying to "win through becoming the center" rather than "win through harmony with one's opponent."

For my next point, I need to say a couple of words about the ki that is central to internal martial arts. "Ki", translated "spirit" and "energy" in the Aikido poster hanging in the dojo, is a foundational concept in so-called "internal" martial arts and appears to me to be a large part of the inspiration for the Force as dramatized in Star Wars. The two are not interchangeable (for instance, I have never heard a martial artist discuss a light side and a dark side to ki or try to levitate something), but I'm not sure of any other concept readily accessible to the Western mind that translates "ki" (the Greek "pneuma" has been suggested by a Tae Kwon Do leader, but it is an approximation while "ki", "chi", and "qi" in Asian languages do translate each other or rather refer the user to the same concept). Interacting with ki is at the heart of internal martial arts.

Perhaps the most basic interaction with ki

Perhaps I should

that I have seen in martial arts was to "ki out", as it was called in Kuk Sool Won and maybe Karate, or "kiaï" in Aiki Ninjutsu, sometimes translated "spirit yell." Aiki Ninjutsu, unlike the other two arts as I was exposed to them, also has a system of four vowels, wrapped with consonants into English words in most English-speaking areas, which are used in different contexts; I am not sure about this but I believe they are connected to the elements of earth, air, fire, and water as they play out. And I emailed the instructor asking if it would make sense to train given that I was not comfortable with this spiritual practice. He gave me another "become the center" answer that spoke of my confusion of terminology, and I wrongly assumed that because it was called a "spirit yell", it was a spiritual practice. But in my earlier practices totalling to about a year, I kied out and was never comfortable with it; *it felt wrong*. This time through, I watched a video where his beautiful wife, also a black belt and instructor, kiaied while cutting with the sword. What I saw in this was spiritual ugliness, as watching something unclean.

Besides telling me I was confused about terminology of the "spirit yell" and called it a spiritual practice out of confusion, he said that I was spending too much time trying to see how my religion would "fit into things," gave a sharp quote about narrow-mindedness, and said it would make sense to "discontinue training."

The other two times I was involved in martial arts, I did not try to avoid inhaling, and these were some of the driest times

make this point hesitantly, because when a Protestant tells an Orthodox who represents the living Tradition, "I understand your Tradition better than you because of my book learning," it normally signals a profound confusion that can get better only if the Protestant gets rid of the book and actually openly meets the Holy Tradition as it appears before him. That is one of the reasons I was very slow to disclose [Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article](#), because my book learning contradicted the plain and unanimous teaching by priest and laity that Orthodoxy allows contraception if you'll follow a few basic rules. I am still concerned that I published it too

spiritually that I knew. This time, I signed a contract saying, in essence, "It is your choice what things you will participate in on an entirely voluntary basis; if you choose not to do certain things, it is our choice whether or not to withhold [advances in] rank." Now I had expected to make progress slowly; martial arts' first training is training me on my weakest point and while I believe I might advance quickly at higher levels where I would be in a better position to use my strengths, I expected slow progress. If I wanted to be trained differently, I could at my option pay for private lessons, but I was trying to just get through the basics without asking for exceptions to how the training usually works. I had not expected that the Sensei would like my asking about practicing without the spirit yell as a spiritual practice, but I was not expecting him to say that that was reason to discontinue practice.

Now if you will ask if I was angry with him, I would say "no", and I don't want to hear about him being hypocritical in his words about my narrow-mindedness. It seemed, if anything, like God acting through him to say "You have had enough" and take away a bottle of wine.

There were other times I quietly opted out and got away with it: on entering or leaving a class session, we were supposed to clap twice to get rid of bad energy and then clap once to acquire good energy. But I had been told repeatedly that I needed to yell a vowel on striking a target, and my opting out was noticed and given corrections during the last session.

quickly.

With that stated, books like *Essence of Ninjutsu* by the grandmaster attribute a profound and occult spiritual significance to kiaiing. I do not remember if it was in this book, but I remember reading the grandmaster forbidding people to take pictures of him during lectures, and when people tried to take pictures, he kiai-ed—and the pictures did not turn out. The one exception was a photographer who kiai-ed as he took pictures, and this was treated by the grandmaster as a "sometimes, you gotta break the rules" exception. Two of his pictures were included in that book; one featured a blur which was claimed to be a grandmaster from prior centuries advising him as a familiar spirit. It was also presented that a

sufficient kiai can without any physical blocking stop an attacker. Et cetera.

The point may be raised that there is something very natural about tensing your muscles and maybe grunting in physical exertion. I would respond with the following analogy: There are natural hormonal levels in people's bodies, which drop off with age. Then there is traditional medical use of steroids, including my use of steroids after radiotherapy knocked out my thyroid function. Then there is the greyish area of general "hormone replacement therapy" as handled by anti-aging, which takes as axiomatic that a 62 year old man should have identical hormones coursing through his blood as a 26 year old man; this is an obstacle to

genuine maturity in the aged. Then there is traditional use of steroids which doses up to ten thousand times the doses used in traditional medicine, which falls into the category of "Somewhere back there, way back there, we crossed a line." It is natural, up to a point, to tense one's muscles and grunt or yell when doing physical exertion, *and with a clean conscience I always breathed out when I was striking*. But the further along the spectrum you go, the more you have crossed a line, and if you are working to a kiai that will do things a skeptic would not believe, you've crossed a line.

## Before I began practice

I had practiced two other martial arts, Kuk Sool Won and Karate as mentioned, and did not attempt to "smoke without inhaling." Both of those I did with an unclean conscience, and there was an incredible growing dryness in my spiritual life. This time I tried to avoid inhaling, and in large measure the question on my conscious was, "You deal in two forms of power that do not basically edify. Do you wish to deal in one more?" I have, for now at least, a regular paycheck coming in, and the Gospel is remarkably cool to the usefulness of money, especially when it is not used for alms for the poor. I work with computers, and I am rather skeptical about whether they are as good for the whole person as they might seem. (See the collection: [The Luddite's Guide to Techonology, \\$24.99 paperback, \\$2.99 Kindle](#) for more details.) The moral of these things is not that the forms of power are utterly unlawful, but that they are less valuable than they seem, they require us to take command of them if we are to use them rightly, and most of the time they could use debunking. And in fact I did try to debunk them in the discussion of the [Sermon on the Mount](#) in [Farewell to Gandhi: The Saint and the Activist](#). I spoke of being "naked as Adam", and at the risk of belaboring a metaphor underscored that what is forbidden here is not literal clothing but metaphorical armor. Now martial practice can be consistent with being "without metaphorical armor;" one martial artist made a parody ad for martial arts touting such things as, "Get beat up by people twice your age and half your size!" The further people get into martial arts, the more aware they are of their vulnerability, and it's pure snake oil when someone advertises some super elite program that will make you the world's greatest martial artist in two months. So I would be cautious of saying that no one in any martial art can be living the [Sermon on the Mount](#), but I believe the teacher did me a kindness by virtually expelling

me from the art, and I am in no rush to find another. Instead of trying more efforts to acquire dubiously helpful forms of power, I could turn my attention to areas where I could better use what computers I have. The [Philokalia](#) tells of people who were mired in clay and calling out to others not to become mired, found their salvation. Perhaps that describes [The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#), because while I may have some of the detachment that is argued, I am a great deal more enmeshed with technology than with some other things. I would not say that I am strong enough to successfully "smoke without inhaling" when dealing with technology.

## Conclusion

When I first visited the dojo, I saw a "red" belt student wearing a black T-shirt with tattered letters, saying on one side,

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.

â€“ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

I wasn't able to look up what the other side said, but I remember it was a quote from the same book. And I said mentally, "I know what kind of people I'm dealing with." Maybe I should have been afraid, confronted him, or something else; I have never seen such socially acceptable hate speech. But part of my reaction was, "Ok; I've been warned; this will be like my time studying theology at [Fordham](#)."

The instructor spoke of my terminological confusion in referencing the term "spirit yell", and in fairness that was not the primary term and was not elaborated at length. The primary term, however, was "kiai", and the philologist in me believes that the root of "kiai" (Aiki Ninjutsu) was ki. Certainly the term "ki out" (Kuk Sool Won) refers to ki. In the groundwork book that is given to newcomers, my instructor is identified as a third dan in Toshindo and also having rank in Aiki Ninjutsu. "Toshindo" is an alternate way of reading the characters to "ninpo", which is ninjutsu considered in its spiritual aspect. In my opinion, he shouldn't have been surprised when I said that Aiki Ninjutsu looked like a complete spiritual system to me. But however much he may have

contradicted my identification of kiai as spiritually significant, either it was a *sine qua non* of my continued participation, or my not asking this kind of question about how it fit with my faith was such, or both. And though this was passing, the book identified which of the four elements one was most closely connected to, by astrological sign. In retrospect, I marched past too many red flags; the onus for my remaining under such conditions is primarily on me.

As a child I read of ninja who had stealth, and their stealth technique was called ninjutsu. Something of that captivated my (among many) people's imagination; etymologically, 'ninjutsu' meant the technique of becoming invisible, an invisibility I assumed was metaphorical for physically skilled stealth, sixteenth century ninja suits, and the like. On my conscience's prompting, I did not do what I very much wanted to do in going to the training weekend in a wooded area where stealth is best taught. Instead I went through a crunch at work where it would have been political suicide to be unavailable at work, although I did not expect this when I did not sign up for the training. And my imagination was enough captivated that I decided not to heed some strong red flags. The guilt for this is my own, not any of theirs.

My endeavor would have been perhaps using people had I consciously embarked on it as a philosophical experiment. Martial arts are often considered to be deeply occult (I doubt the clapping of hands was the only action with an occult intent), and while I would have to limit what I say to exclude Western arts such as fencing or boxing, and arguably some Eastern arts as well such as Brazilian Jiu-jitsu, which one Christian practitioner told me had none of the philosophical element. Certain things still appeal to me more; I would much rather pin an opponent by skill than pummel another person to the point of not being able to get up for ten seconds. To me the combat training was a secondary goal to training in stealth. But even then the lesson I would draw from this is less about martial arts, than trying to smoke without inhaling. While I ignored red flags and the sharp warnings of my conscience, I kept my conscience clean once I was in training, and peer pressure took a back seat to trying to keep my conscience clean. And perhaps I was succeeding enough at smoking without inhaling that the teacher ended my training. But the overall lesson I draw from this is that it is foolish to think, "I can smoke without inhaling." Perhaps at Fordham the position was one where I had to try to smoke without inhaling, and did so at the Lord's bidding. Never

to try to smoke without inhaling—and did so at the LORD'S bidding. Never mind situations like that; they do happen. But it was a severe breach of wisdom for me to take on a situation where I would have to smoke without inhaling. Practicing the techniques put violence before my imagination and stained the purity of my soul. That was consistent. I do not wish to dictate to soldiers who bear the cross of St. George what they must do—but I was not a soldier following orders either.

Whether with regards to fantasy or martial arts or entirely unrelated circles of temptation, it is an error to try to smoke without inhaling. [Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?](#)

# The Case For Uncreative Web Design

When the Master governs, people are hardly aware that he exists.  
Next best is a leader who is loved.  
Next, one who is feared.  
The worst is one who is despised.

Lao Tze, *Tao Te Ching*, tr. Stephen Mitchell

In looking at various award review sites, I have seen people equating creative web design with good web design. This is not simply in acknowledgement that creativity is one of the gifts of the human mind and an indispensable part of the great triumphs of human culture. It goes further to take the perspective that "good web design" means design that impresses the viewer with its creativity. This perspective, which is almost never questioned among awards reviewers, is one which is eminently worthy of question.

Good acting does not leave people impressed with how good the acting is. The very best acting leads people to be so involved with the drama and tension that they forget they are watching actors at all. Not all acting reaches that standard — which is a very high standard — but acting has the quality that, at its best, it is *transparent*: people see through the acting to the important thing, the story.

What are the basic responses to my [A Dream of Light](#)? In order from best to worst:

- Best: The reader is moved by the images and stimulated by the ideas, and leaves the reading a wiser person. Perhaps this involves being impressed by the thoughts, but the reader who is impressed is impressed as a side effect of the literature's power. The reader leaves the reading thinking about the writing's subject-matter.
- Second best: The reader's primary response is to think about how smart I am, or how eccentric, or something of that sort. The writing has not completely succeeded. The reader leaves the reading thinking about me.
- Worst: The reader reads it and walks away thinking about the page's design, even how clean and uncluttered it is. The reader leaves the reading thinking about the web design.

If a reader walks away from that piece of literature thinking about my web design, the design is a failure. The design is as bad as a photograph where the scene is blocked by the photographer's thumb.

It is sometimes easy for webmasters to forget that readers spend most of their time viewing other pages — not figuring out mine. I intentionally employ a standard web design in nearly all of my pages: navigation bar to the left, and a body to the right with dark text on a light background, different colors for *visited* and *unvisited* links (with *visited* links looking washed-out compared to *unvisited* links), no frames, judicious use of *emphasized text*, a header at the top, and navigation links at the bottom. I do not use any technology just because it's there—[one page](#) uses Java, and has content that would be almost meaningless if the applet were not there. The design on my home page is not creative, because it is intended *not* to be creative. I copied best practices from other sites and from friends' suggestions, in order to make a design that gets out of the way so readers can see the content.

To adapt a classic proverb: *Don't bother to impress people with creative design when you can impress people with creative content.* My web design is not evidence of any great creativity, but many readers have found the content in [what I've written](#) to show considerable creativity. I employ a very standardized web design for the same reason that I use standard spellings and grammar when I write: I want people to be able to see through them to whatever it is I'm writing about. Yf spelynge caulze uttinshun too ihtselv, itt yss mahch herdyr too thynque about whutt iz

beeynge sayde. If, on the other hand, people employ standard spellings, readers can ignore the spelling and focus on the point the writer is trying to make. The spelling is *transparent*. Spelling is not where you want to demonstrate your creativity. And neither, usually, is web design.

Now, does that mean there is no place for creativity in design? No! In [I learned it all from Jesus](#), I had each sentence a different color from the one before, and none of it black — which I regard as a legitimate artistic liberty. [The Quintessential Web Page](#) is aiming at a quite different effect (humorous rather than artistic), and it does other things that are not ordinarily appropriate. In this page, I use the content to draw attention to the design — also not normally appropriate. These things are not a special privilege for me; I just mention my pages because they're the ones I know best. There's some really beautiful Flash art on the web. One human-computer interaction expert has created a usability resource that is [one of the ugliest pages I have ever seen](#), and does almost every major no-no on the list. This is as it should be — he is making a point by demonstrating features of bad web design. In that regard, making a page that is singularly annoying makes the point far more forcefully than an exemplar of good web practices that says "Be careful that you don't have text that's indistinguishable from your background." It is perfectly acceptable to stray from general rules *if* you have strong and specific reason to violate them. [I learned it all from Jesus](#), in my opinion, is a unique and valuable addition to my web page — but if I made every page look like that, my PageRank would drop through the floor.

Picasso said, "Good artists copy. Great artists steal." Great artists never believe they have to invent everything from scratch to make good art — instead, they draw on the best that has been done before, and use their own creativity to *build on top of what others have already accomplished*. In web design, this means making a site that is usable to viewers who have learned how to use other sites.

A careful reader will notice one element of design on this site that is not standard, but should be. Designers for major sites, who often have excellent vision, will put navigation links on the page, but make them as small as they can be and not be completely illegible. This is a truly bad idea, and I don't understand why it is so common. (Maybe web designers forget that some of us only have 20/20 vision?) The navigation links are some of the most important links on most web pages, and I wish to say, "Yes! I consider these links

important for you to be able to read and use, and I will proudly let you read them at whatever your preferred text size is, *not* the smallest size I can read!"

I will consider this to be a successful design feature if you weren't aware of it until I pointed it out.

# In Celebration of Tribbles

Years back, one friend, Cynthia, explained why she will never own a furry pet. An editor, her work often allows her to be in her apartment building during business hours, and when she walks through the halls, she hears so many whimperings, whinings, barks, and the like, every one of them saying, "*Will you come in and be with me?*"

That conversation made an impression on me. I am an animal lover. I grew up with a dog about the house, kept kind and gentle card of a lab even when her barking cut into my sleep, and when I am visiting my brother Joe's house, I love to see his cats. And I would love to have a furry cubicle pet. But the options there are somewhat limited, and not only because bosses sometimes have to say "No" to eccentric behavior. Though there have been workplaces where employees were welcome to bring well-behaved dogs, (see, for a rare example, [Dreaming in Code](#)), bringing a pet to work beyond a fish *appropriately* would include either transporting the pet with you or leaving your pet unattended for sixty or so hours straight each weekend, keeping the animal in an enclosed space without freedom to wander or explore, and so on. Now hamsters are solitary creatures and for what I know now, it might be possible to keep a hamster cage in a cubicle, leaving only problems like pet dander irritating other employees' allergies. But on the whole, the question of how to keep an office pet without cruelty is a difficult question.

And, up to a point at least, for a single person to keep a pet at home is dodgy. **Families and people who work out of their homes are a separate case**, and two or more cats may be able to keep each other company, but if you have a fulltime job or serve as a consultant, the

question of how to keep a pet without cruelty may be a bit of a challenge.

Some common and respected practices are in fact cruel. My brother has taken in rescue cats which were already declawed, but he and my sister-in-law have never declawed a cat they owned. The common statement is that even front declawing a kitten is like cutting a baby's fingers off at the knuckles. My brother added that declawed cats are not, in fact, safer for owners to deal with: for a cat with front claws, the first line of defense is a swipe with claws which is only an abrasion, while for a declawed cat the first line of defense is a *bite*, which is a puncture wound. Not only is that a more serious wound, but the puncture wound exposes you to whatever bacteria live in the cat's mouth, and mouths tend to have lots of infectious bacteria. Strange as it may sound, if you have a cat, you *want* the cat to be able to swipe its claws at you if it's cornered, angry, or afraid. *It's better than a declawed cat's bite.*

I have swing-mounted horses, and I would happily do so now if the opportunity offered to me. To swing-mount a horse, you crouch down, get a good grip of the horse's mane with both hands, and leap up, pulling yourself up by the mane, and ideally land squarely on the horse's back, *and this is not cruel*. Different species have different thresholds of pain, and a lot of animals are tougher than us; the average horse's threshold of pain is seven times higher than the average human. This means, for instance, that you can grab a good bit of a horse's mane in your hand and pull as hard as you can, and not only will it not injure the horse, it won't cause pain or even really annoyance for the horse. Now horses can be skittish around people and may not be used to you, but if a horse is comfortable with your presence, yanking on its mane doesn't mean anything.

And different thresholds of pain apply to dogs, too. The dog I had growing up would leap and dance for joy when she saw a family member starting to reach for her leash, because she knew that meant she would go for a walk outside. Years later, a dog a few months old would leap and dance for joy when he saw me reaching for a specific pair of workgloves, because he knew that meant he could bite me significantly harder when we were playing. He had a very high threshold of pain, unusual for even a dog, and he expected me to have the same high threshold of pain, and so things felt more natural and pleasant for him when I wore gloves and allowed him to bite me harder. And there's no way those Thin gloves

would have protected me if he were really trying to hurt me; if he had been trying to do *damage*, he could have easily sliced through my gloves and cut me to the bone. *He was pulling his punches with me, even when I was wearing gloves and I allowed him to bite me much harder.* (It really was just horseplay.) Seeing as he didn't draw blood on me, chances are pretty good it was just friendly horseplay to him. (Although dogs do not eat a meat-only diet, both cats and dogs are predators with *powerful* jaws, and both are well strong enough to cut to the bone.) And really, from my perspective those interactions with the puppy were pleasant play, and from his perspective they were nice, friendly horseplay. I have felt no inclination to bite any of my pets, but if I had started nipping at him with equal force, his enjoyment would probably have been so much the better. Nothing says love like a playful nip and ten or twenty slobbery kisses.

That is part of why I am puzzled when I occasionally hear of a man who was training dogs, and as something the dogs would relate to, bit the dogs for discipline, and he was rightly arrested for cruelty to animals. Part of my response was, "Um... *why?* Was he biting the dogs too hard? Did he draw blood? Did he misunderstand some detail of how an adult dog would use biting to discipline a younger dog? Did the police enforcing the anti-cruelty laws for animals have any idea of what normal social interaction between dogs looks like?" I thought of wearing gloves with that one puppy because I found his playful nips more painful than I wanted, but I can say in general of cats and dogs, that if it nips or bites you and it doesn't draw blood, it almost certainly wasn't trying to hurt you. Even if, perhaps, we need to draw lines and *train* dogs that they need to restrain their natural playfulness when horsing around with people, which most dogs purchased as pets can do well enough.

From a dog's perspective, your hands are your paws, and if you are touching a dog with your paws, that means you want to play. Slapping a dog with your hand to discipline it (as opposed to, for example, pulling a chain attached to its collar, or hitting it over the snout with a rolled-up newspaper) comes across to a dog as an extremely confusing mixed message.

But more broadly than cats and claws, the question of how a single

working person can responsibly own a furry pet without cruelty is difficult (I do not say necessarily *impossible*: but at least difficult). And I've explored a few things, starting when I was in grad school in 2007.

For reasons I don't completely understand, people have made electronic *pets* that you wouldn't want to pet; there is a whole line of artificial cats, dogs, etc. that are usually not furry and do not look like something you'd want to pet. Just search for something like [robot pet](#) and look at the pictures.

But by accident, that's not the whole picture. I managed to get a Furby 2.0, and it seemed to be very well-done for its target audience of children, but have unnerving "uncanny valley"-like effects on me as an adult. I got my money's worth out of the purchase; I gave it to a friend's two-year-old where it became an almost instant hit and may have become his favorite toy. (Before letting it go, I quite deliberately gave it a fresh set of batteries, and showed both his parents where the "Off" switch was.)

Cue *Star Trek*. I am not the world's biggest *Star Trek* fan personally speaking; there was one conversation when cell phones had recently become a common thing to have, and a friend was gushing about *Star Trek*, and said, "And cell phones! What would our society be like today if there were no *Star Trek*?" (My response: "*We would have had much better science fiction?*") But *Star Trek* has many devoted fans, enough that when conditions would support it, it was economically viable to sell live, robotic, spayed-and-neutered Tribbles.

There is [a large variety of Tribble merchandise](#); I have had medium and small Tribbles, and the small ones have been much less interactive. But for a cubicle pet and for people like me who would like to own something furry but aren't in a position to take on a live pet responsibly and without cruelty in solitary confinement or whatnot, a Tribble may be the nicest thing out there.

# Christian Koans

A master observed that a novice was involved in many kinds of service and all kinds of good works. The master asked the novice, "Why do you do so many good works?"

"Because I am trying to make myself acceptable to God," the novice said.

The master set a tile before the novice, and began to polish it.

"What are you doing?", the novice asked.

"I am polishing this tile, to make it into a mirror."

"You can't make a tile into a mirror by polishing it!", the novice protested.

"And neither can you make yourself acceptable to God by good works," the master answered.

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A scholar wrote an article saying, "The Bible shows evidence of post editing and was heavily influenced by the political climate of the day. Its interpretation depends highly on one's perspective."

A believer read the article, and said, "This article shows evidence of post editing and was heavily influenced by the political climate of the day. Its interpretation depends highly on one's perspective."

---

A man came to a believer and said, "You say that you know God exists. Prove it to me."

The believer said, "Do you have any matches?"

"Yes."

The believer took a napkin, and soaked it in water. "You say that you have matches. Set this napkin on fire."

---

Someone said to a believer, "If God performed a miracle in front of me, I would believe."

The believer held up a blade of grass.

---

A novice closed his eyes, folded his hands, and began to say, "Our Father, who art in Heaven..."

A master said, "What are you doing?"

"I am assuming the right posture and saying the right words to pray."

"You can't pray by assuming a posture and saying a specific set of words."

"Then how do you pray?"

The master closed his eyes, folded his hands, and began, "Our Father, who art in Heaven..."

---

A master saw a novice gulping from a bottle of wine. "What are you doing?", the master said.

"I had a really rough day. I need a drink."

The master threw the wine against a wall. "Never drink wine because you need to."

"Do you drink wine?", the novice asked.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I do not need to."

---

A Catholic and a Protestant were having a debate about faith and works, versus faith which works. Someone looked on, and said, "Everything is subject to debate. There is no core of universal Christian faith."

A believer punched him between the eyes.

"What did you do that for?", he asked.

"My fist looked different to your two eyes. Therefore, I did not hit you."

---

A novice said to a master, "I want to be a great man. What is the first thing I should do?"

The master answered, "Forget about being a great man."

---

A novice asked a master, "How am I to resist temptation? My strongest efforts of willpower are not enough."

The master asked the novice, "How am I to put out that fire? All the gasoline I own is not enough."

---

A novice said to a master, "Which do you value more: the truth, or the ancient Christian way?"

The master grabbed the novice's nose.

"Your response makes no sense," said the novice.

"And neither does your question," answered the master.

---

A novice said to a master, "I want to be totally devoted to God. Tell me how I should talk, how I should dress, how I should act."

The master said to the novice, "I want to be spontaneous. Tell me how I should plan my day."

---

A novice said to a master, "I am humble."  
The master said, "No, you are not humble."  
Another novice said, "I am not humble."  
The master said, "That's right; you are not humble."

---

A novice handed a master a check, saying, "Here is some money, so that you will be happy."

The master put the check into the fire: "I wish the fire to be happy as well."

---

A computer professional said to a master, "I'm tired of wasting my time doing little things for God. I want to do something big and important."

The master said, "Tell me how to use a computer."

The professional said, "Well, first you turn it on, then y-"

The master interrupted him. "Don't waste my time talking about turning it on. I only want to know the important stuff."

---

A novice said to a master, "Where should I go to meet with God?"  
The master said, "The radiator vent you are standing on."

---

A novice said to a master, "Tell me how to find deep, hidden secrets. I want to know beyond what is given to ordinary people to know."

The master said, "There are piles of diamonds out in the open. Why do you go lurking in caves, chasing after fool's gold?"

---

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

The master said, "Inside your heart."

---

A man went to a cathedral where he had heard many miracles had occurred, visions of Heaven. "I have come all the way from America, to find God," he told one of the believers.

"Aah. God has gone all the way to America, to find you."

---

A novice once said to a master who was maimed, "Do you ever ask, 'Why me?'"

The master said, "Yes, frequently. I ask God every day why he has given me so many blessings."

---

A master was working at a soup kitchen, serving food, talking with the guests, listening to their stories.

"What are you doing?", a novice asked.

"I am praying and telling God how much I love him."

Later, after everyone had left, the master folded his hands, and said, "God, you are so awesome. Thank you for making me your child. I love you. Thank you for..."

The novice asked, "What are you doing?"

The master said, "I am loving God's precious children."

---

Someone said to a master, "What about the people who have never heard of Christ? Are they all automatically damned to Hell? Tell me; I have heard that you have studied this question."

The master said, "What you need to be saved is for you to believe in Christ, and you have heard of him."

---

A feminist theologian said to a master, "I think it is important that we keep an open mind and avoid confining God to traditional categories of gender."

The master said, "Of course. Why let God reveal himself as masculine when you can confine him to your canons of political correctness?"

---

A novice said to a master, "My master, teach me!"

The master said, "How can I teach you? I am a novice, and you are a master."

---

A novice and a master were walking together. The master said, "Oh, how it distresses God to see all the heresies and schisms in the Church."

The novice said, "How do you know what God feels? You're not God."

The master said, "How do you know whether or not I know what God feels? You're not me."

---

A novice said to a master, "I wish that Christ were still around, that we could love him."

The master picked up a little girl, and gave her a kiss.

---

One person said, "The Christian message is narrow-minded of different belief systems."

Another said, "No, it is Christian missionaries and evangelists who are narrow-minded and intolerant of any different belief system."

A master said, "Neither of you are right. It is you who are narrow-minded and intolerant of any really different belief system."

---

A novice said to a master, "I want to serve God. What denomination should I join?"

The master said, "I want to be healthy. What part of my body should I cut off?"

---

Someone said to a master, "God is love, so he can't condemn homosexual practice."

The master said, "Doctors want people to be healthy, so they can't call cancer 'sickness'."

---

A novice said to a master, "Take me to your highest priest."

The master introduced him to each believer present, saying, "This is the highest priest. You will not find a more sacred priest."

---

A novice asked a master, "Do you believe that some days are especially holy, or that all days are equally holy?"

The master said, "Yes."

---

A novice asked a master, "How should I empty my mind of lust?"  
The master said, "Fill it with Christ."

---

A physicist said to a master, "I believe my own private religion, which I design to suit me, provide me with meaning, and make me happy. What better suited religion can you possibly claim to have?"

The master began to write on a sheet of paper, "Gravity shall pull things together except on Tuesdays and Thursdays, when gravity shall have no effects whatsoever. Objects at rest tend to begin to move; objects in motion tend to ..."

"What on earth are you writing?", the novice said,

"I believe my own private physics, which I design to suit me, provide me with meaning, and make me happy. What better suited physics can you possibly claim to have?"

---

A wealthy novice came to a master, and said, "Teach me!"

The master said, "Scrub out all the wastebaskets."

The novice scrubbed out the wastebaskets and returned. The master did not give a word of thanks, so much as a smile. "Now weed the garden."

The novice weeded the garden and returned. The master did not give a word of thanks, so much as a smile. "Now give us your car."

The novice gave him his car, and then said in frustration, "Why haven't you shown so much as a hint of gratitude? I have done menial service and given you my own car. Isn't that a lot?"

The master said, "Yes, it is a lot, but we need neither your service nor your car. You came to us proud and accustomed to luxury. We gave you an opportunity to taste humble service. We gave you an opportunity to let go of a cherished possession. It is you who should be grateful."

---

Someone said to a master, "Come to our forum. We talk and debate, and express our values and opinions. There is complete freedom, and anybody can believe anything he likes."

The master said, "Do you masturbate?"

A shocked voice said, "What?"

The master calmly clarified, "Do you do with your genitals what you boast of doing with your mind?"

---

Someone said to a master, "I want to believe in God. Persuade me, so that I can believe."

The master said, "I want you to be filled, but I can never eat enough to satisfy your hunger."

---

A philosopher said to a master, "Our judgements can err. I try to doubt things and disbelieve what cannot be proven, so that I will not hold false beliefs."

The master closed his eyes.

"What are you doing?", the philosopher asked.

"When I walk, I sometimes bump into things," the master explained.  
"I am closing my eyes so that the room will be empty."

---

A novice came to a master, talking about the many evil things that stained Church history. After he had finished, the master said, "May I pour you a Coke?"

"Sure."

The master returned with a glass full of icewater, and a two liter bottle of soda. He opened the bottle, poured until the glass was full to the brim - and then kept on pouring. The liquid flowed over the edges of the glass, pouring all over the gable, and spilled onto the floor.

"Stop!", the novice protested. "What are you doing?"

"This glass cannot have any more soda poured into it until it is first emptied. And neither can you grasp the truth until you let go of thinking of the Church as you do now."

---

A CEO sent a business card to a master, listing his name and title. The master sent a novice, saying, "Send him away. I have no time to waste with such a person!"

The visitor then scratched out his title and degrees, sending the card back with only his name.

"Aah, send him in!", the master said. "I have been longing to meet that fellow."

---

A visiting liberal theologian was talking with a master and said, "We have found a way of interpreting the whole Bible that is in accordance with our progressive and liberated beliefs."

At that moment, the power went out, and the room was plunged into darkness.

"Just a minute," the master said, and returned with a candle and some matches. He lit the candle, and they talked for a while longer.

After a time, the theologian wanted to get off to bed, and the master said, "Here, take this candle; it will light your way so that you will not stumble."

As the visitor received the candle, the master blew it out.

---

A visiting novice said to a master, "I have been taught to carefully live by rules and not do anything that might cause me trouble, in order that I not do wrong."

The master took a heavy stone, and dropped it on a small crystalline statuette, crushing it to dust. "I have protected that statue with a great stone, so that nothing can harm it."

---

A novice asked a master, "Have you made much progress over what the Church used to believe in ancient times?"

The master said, "None of us considers himself wise enough to do better than what God has declared to be true. Do you?"

---

A novice asked a master, "Are you Catholic or Protestant?"

The master said, "Yes. No. Both."

The novice said, "Please. It will help me better understand where you are coming from."

The master said, "Is the elephant in your closet eating peanut butter? Answer me now, yes or no."

"If I say either 'yes' or 'no'," the novice protested, "I will deceive you and set back your understanding greatly."

"And if I say either 'Catholic' or 'Protestant'," the master answered, "I also will deceive you and set your understanding back greatly. I am a Christian. If you think anything more, you will know less."

---

A novice told a master, "I am going to seminary."

"Why?", the master asked.

"To become well-versed in Scripture and Christian doctrine."

The master began to walk out of the room.

"Where are you going?", the novice asked.

"I am going to the garage," the master answered.

"Why?", the novice asked.

"To become a car."

---

Someone challenged a master, saying, "The Bible and Christian tradition say, first, that God the Creator is all powerful, second, that God the Creator is all good, third, that God the Creator is all wise, and fourth, that there is evil in God's creation now.

"These contradict each other, so one of them must be false. Which one do you deny?"

The master said, "I deny the one that says that your mind has the power, the wisdom, and the authority to put God in a box and say, 'These contradict each other, so one of them must be false. You're wrong, God.'"

---

"And in conclusion," the speaker said, "truly understanding the overall teaching of Scripture requires that one disregard problematic passages such as the 'Do not resist evil.' in the Sermon on the Mount that was brought up earlier."

"I agree completely," the master said, "To get a good view of the forest, it is essential to chop down all the trees that keep obstructing your view."

---

Someone told a master, "I memorize the Scriptures so that I will be able to answer anyone who comes to me, with the very words of God."

The master said, "Let me tell you about that painting on the wall," and described in perfect detail every hue, every brush stroke.

"Very well," the visitor said, "but what is the painting a picture of?"

"Very well," the master said, "but what is the Bible about?"

---

A novice asked a master, "Can't God let even one of the damned enter into Heaven?"

The master said, "By the time the damned will enter Hell, they will be so steeped in evil that even Heaven would be Hell to them."

---

A novice said to a master, "How can I reach up to God?"  
The master said, "Let God reach down to you."

---

A Star Trek fan told a master, "Christianity is like the Borg, sucking in every nation and race it can, making them like itself. I, for one, refuse to be assimilated."

The master hung his head. "It is so sad."

"What is so sad? That Christianity wants to assimilate me? That I refuse to be assimilated?"

"That the Borg has already assimilated you, and you believe it to be perfection."

# **The Christmas Tales**

## Prologue

Another gale of laughter shook the table. "But it always seems like this," Father Bill said. "The time for fasting has passed, and now we are ready to feast. People melt away from the parish hall to enjoy Christmas together, and there is finally one table. Outside, the snow is falling... falling... wow. That's some heavy snowfall."

Adam looked around. "Hmm... That car in the street is having trouble... Ok, it's moving again. I wouldn't want to be driving home in this snow."

Mary smiled. "Why don't we go around the circle, and each tell a story, or share something, or... something? I think we're going to be here for a while."

And so the stories began.

[Innocent's Tale: \*\*The Apostle\*\*](#)

[Adam's Tale: \*\*The Pilgrimage\*\*](#)

[Mary's Tale: \*\*Mary's Treasures\*\*](#)

[Paul's Tale: \*\*Another Kind of Mind\*\*](#)

[John's Tale: \*\*The Holy Grail\*\*](#)

[Basil's Tale: \*\*The Desert Fathers\*\*](#)

[Macrina's Tale: \*\*The Communion Prayer\*\*](#)

[Barbara's Tale: \*\*The Fairy Prince\*\*](#)

[Epilogue](#)

## **Innocent's Tale: The Apostle**

Innocent said, "I was visiting with my nephew Jason, and he asked me, 'Why are you called Innocent now, or Uncle Innocent, or whatever?' I told him that I was named after one of the patron saints of America, called Apostle to America.

"He said, 'Patron saint of America? I bet he wasn't even an American! And I bet you're going to tell me his boring life!'

"I smiled, and said, 'Sit down, kid. I'm going to bore you to tears.'" And this is how he tried to bore Jason to tears.

---

Where should I start? He was born just before 1800 into the family of a poor sexton. Stop laughing, Jason, that means a church's janitor. The saint was reading the Bible in church at the age of six—the age he was orphaned at. He went to seminary, and aside from being the top pupil in everything from theology and rhetoric to languages, he was popular with the other seminarians because he invented a pocket sundial, and everybody wanted one. This wasn't our time, you couldn't buy a digital watch, and... I think that was cool. He loved to build things with his hands—later on, he built a church with his own hands, and he built a clock in the town hall of—I forget where, but it's in Alaska, and it's still working today. He would also teach people woodworking. So he was a tinkerer and an inventor. Among other things. Among many other things. At school, he learned, and learned, and learned—Slavonic, Latin, Greek, for instance, if you wanted to look at languages. At least that's what he learned at school. That doesn't count the dozen or two languages he learned when he got out into the world and started to travel—his version of courtesy seemed to include learning people's languages when he traveled to their countries.

He was a bit of a Renaissance man. But he did more than languages. His biggest gifts were his humility, patience, and love for all people, but if we forget those, he had a spine of solid steel. He became a deacon and then a priest, and his wife broke down in tears when the bishop asked for someone to go to the terrifying and icy land of Alaska and he was the one volunteer for it. This man, who was not afraid of Siberia, was not afraid of Alaska either, and later on, when he became a bishop, he thought it was a bishop's duty to visit all the parishes he was responsible for, and so would travel to all the parishes, by reindeer, by kayak, by dogsled. This wasn't just cool that he could travel different ways. He would carry his little boat... and kayak up rivers of icewater... when he was 60. Yes, 60. This super hero was real.

He traveled a lot, and met peoples, and understood their languages and cultures. Back when Western missionaries were teaching Africans that they had to become European to be Christian, he came to people, learned their languages, and tried to model Christ's incarnation by taking the flesh of their culture. There were some things he changed—he stopped child sacrifice—but, well, let me think. He did teach woodworking, and he gave the Aleuts a written language. But he never

woodworking, and he gave the Aleuts a written language. But he never tried to make the people into copies of himself. And he was a very effective evangelist. He learned the dialects and languages of Aleutians, Koloshes, Kurils, Inuit, Kenai, Churgaches, Kamchadals, Oliutores, Negidates, Samogirs, Golds, Gulyaks, Koryaks, Tungus, Chukcha, Yakutians, and Kitians. And he wrote grammars for some of their languages, and his ethnographic, geographic, and linguistic works got him elected an honorary member of the Russian Geographical Society and Moscow Royal University.

What does this have to do with America? Jason, our country is bigger than just white people. Now we think of "bigger than white people" as recognizing how fortunate we are to have blacks, Asians, and Hispanics. But a lot of people in Alaska aren't white. The first nations didn't get exterminated. Saint Innocent is a large part of why the original Americans are to this day known to be over a third Orthodox. And Saint Innocent was elected Bishop of China—sorry, I forgot about that—and he also wanted a diocese for America, and wanted everything to be in English. He created written service books and translated part of the Bible for the Aleuts, and he had a sort of vision for an American Orthodox Church. If you don't believe me that he has something to do with America, and you don't count his extensive work in Alaska and beyond, you can at least take the U.S. Government's word for it when they made him an honorary U.S. Citizen. What's so special about that? Well, let me list all the other people in our nation's history who've been granted that honor. There's Winston Churchill, and the Marquis de LaFayette, and... as far as I know, that's it. Jason, you know about the Congressional Medal of Honor? Being made an honorary citizen is much rarer than that!

After all these things, he was made Patriarch of Moscow—one of the top five bishops of the world, with huge responsibility. And after all he had done, and with the new responsibility that had been given to him... He was basically the Orthodox President of the United States, and he still kept an open door. Anyone, just anyone, could come and talk with him. And whoever it was, whatever the need was, he always did something so that the person walked out... taken care of. Now it's not just amazing that there was one person who could do all of these things. It's amazing that there was one person who could do *any* of these things.

Is your Mom here already? I haven't talked about the humanitarian work he did, how when he came to power he worked hard to see that the

poor and needy were cared for. I haven't talked about what it was like for Russians to be at the Alaskan frontier—they called it, not West, but the utter East. And it attracted some pretty weird customers. I haven't talked about the other saints he was working with—Saint Herman, for instance, who defended people against Russian frontiersmen who would kill them, and baked biscuits for children, and wore chains and dug a cave for himself with his hands, and... um... thanks for listening.

Just remember, this is one of the saints who brought Orthodoxy to America.

## **Adam's Tale: The Pilgrimage**

John said, "Adam, I haven't heard you tell me about your summer vacation. You know, when you went to pick up the icons that our parish commissioned from St. Herman's Monastery in Alaska. How was it?"

This is Adam's story.

---

I probably already told you what happened this summer. It turned out to be somewhat exciting. I was going to drive from our parish, take my old car to my sister in L.A., and fly to the holy land of Alaska and buy icons from St. Herman's Monastery.

I debated whether I needed to ask Father for a traveler's blessing. When I went up and asked him how to best profit from a journey that looked too quiet, he said, "You do not know until tomorrow what tomorrow will bring."

A day into the journey, I was passing through Chicago, intending to take a direct route through the south side of Chicago. I felt the voice of the Spirit saying, *North side.*

My stomach got tighter as I drove through the South Side, and got tighter until I was sitting at a red light, alone. The voice said quite urgently, *Burn rubber.*

I waited for a green light. Just a second before, six youths with guns surrounded the car. "Out of the car! *Now!*"

I almost wet my pants. The voice moved gently in my heart and said, *Open the window and talk about Monty Python.*

"What?" I thought.

*Open the window and talk about Monty Python.*

I opened the window and started half-babbling. "Do you watch Monty Python? It's a TV show, has some nudity, you should like it, and has a sketch about the man with a tape recorder up his nose. There's a self-defense series where this man is teaching people how to defend themselves against various types of fruit—what do you do if someone attacks you with a passion fruit or a banana, for instance?"

*Talk about the orange on the dashboard.*

"For instance, what would you do if I attacked you with this orange?"

"Out!" the youth bellowed.

*Tell him you have GPS alarms and security cameras.*

I grumbled in my heart: that's not true, and it'll just make him madder.

*Tell him you have GPS alarms and security cameras. And that he's on candid camera.*

"Did you know this car has a GPS alarm and security cameras hidden all over the place? Smile! You're on candid camera."

He grabbed my coat and put his gun to my head. "You can't lie worth beep! Shut your blankety-blank hole and get out *now!*"

I blinked, and listened to the still, small voice. "Did you know that my cousin works for the FBI? You can leave fingerprints on leather, like my jacket, if your glove slips the teensiest, weensiest bit—in fact, you've done so already. If you shoot me, you'll have your fingerprints on a murder victim's clothing, and in addition to having the Chicago Police Department after you, you'll have a powerful FBI agent who hates your guts. Smile! You're on candid camera."

He looked down and saw that his glove had slipped when he grabbed my coat. He could see I was telling the truth.

Five seconds later, there wasn't another soul in the place.

I pulled through the rest of Chicago uneventfully, drove into a super market parking lot, and sat down shaking for an hour.

From that point on it was a struggle. I was jumpy, like when you've drunk too much coffee. I jumped at every intersection, and prayed, "Lord, keep this car safe." And it seemed odd. There seemed to be more people cutting me off, and driving as if they wanted an accident with me. Maybe that was my jumpy nerves, but this time I didn't even notice the scenery changing. Finally, I came in sight of my sister's suburbs, and prepared to get off. I relaxed, and told myself, "You've done it. You've arrived safely."

A car cut me off and slammed on the brakes. I swerved to the right, barely missing it, but scraping off paint when I ran into the shoulder's guardrail.

I turned my head to see what on earth that person was doing. And slammed into an abandoned Honda Accord in front of me.

I was doing about 77 miles per hour when this started, and I totaled both cars. Thank God for airbags; I was completely unscathed. My cell phone still worked; I called the state troopers, and then told my sister what had happened. It seemed forever before the troopers came and filled out a report; I eventually called for a cab.

I arrived at my sister Abigail's house, obviously looking like a wreck; we talked a bit, and she went up to bed. I could hear her snoring, and I wanted to read a bit before going down. I opened her Bible, when I realized something unpleasant. The basement door was open—I couldn't see down the steps.

Her cat was at the top of the stairs, his back arched, every hair raised, hissing. I very slowly closed the Bible and

missing. I very slowly closed the Bible and—

*Open the Bible.*

I got up.

*Sit down.*

I stood all the way up.

*Sit down.*

I sat down, and a kind of spiritual seeing came as I followed.

*Open the Bible to the concordance and look up 'Emmanuel'.*

I was trying hard not to get up and dial 9-1-1. That was nearly the only thought in my head, but I saw the references to Emmanuel. I immediately began flipping to the passage in Matthew, where Christmas tale has the prophecy of the virgin bearing a son, and... *Not Matthew, but Isaiah.* It was about all I could do not to get up immediately and dial 9-1-1. But I looked, and read... That's the passage where the king of Israel is trembling before the kings of two neighboring powers, and God tells him that if he does not stand firm in his faith, he will not stand at all, and then

—

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son... and before he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land of those two kings you dread will be desolate ruins.

I thanked the Lord for that reading, and got up, and sat down when my stomach got tighter, and finally made the decision to wait as long as the Spirit said, or not call 9-1-1 at all.

*Call 9-1-1.*

I raced over to the phone as quickly as I thought I could move quietly.

The operator exuded an air of calm and competency, and began telling me what the police were doing. "There are several police officers nearby. [pause] They're coming onto your property. They see you've left the back door open, so they're coming through your back door—"

She didn't pause, but I saw four police officers moving very quickly and very quietly. All of them were wearing bulletproof vests. Three of them were big, burly men, with their guns drawn. One of them was a sweet-looking petite policewoman with both hands on a massive shotgun. These police were not messing around.

"They're going through the house. They're going down the basement —"

"Police! *Freeze!*" a voice barked.

Then I heard laughter.

How dare the police laugh in a situation like this? Did they not fear intruders?

One of the police officers came up, trying hard to maintain his composure.

He wasn't succeeding.

My sister Abigail came down with a classic bedhead. "What's going on?"

I heard a voice say, "Come on. Up the stairs you go." The last police officer was dragging a large golden retriever, which had its snout in a leftover ravioli can and a food wrapper stuck to one of its paws, and looked none too dignified.

The first officer managed to compose himself. "I'm sorry. Your back door was left open, and someone's dog was downstairs rummaging through your trash. This gentleman was concerned that it might have been an intruder."

Abigail glared at the dog. "Jazzy! Bad dog!"

The dog dropped the can, put its tail between its legs, and backed up, whimpering.

The officer looked at her. "You know the dog?"

"Yes, Officer," she said. "We can check her tags to be sure, but I think she belongs to a friend who is absolutely sick worrying about where the dog is. Is the number on the tags 723-5467? I'll call her in a minute, and don't worry, I can handle this lovable rascal. Can I get you anything to drink? I've got soy milk, apricot nectar, Coca-Cola, Perrier, Sobe, Red Bull, and probably some other energy drinks in the fridge."

The officer now seemed to be having less difficulty composing himself. He looked at the dog's tag, and said, "Thank you; that won't be necessary." He turned to me. "You did all the right things calling. If there's something like this, you have every reason to dial 9-1-1. Thank you for calling us. Is there anything else we can do for you?"

"No; thank you, officers. It was very reassuring to have you come." As the officers prepared to leave, Abigail looked at me and said, "Don't worry about the car; it was still on insurance. I prepared a sleeping bag for you on the couch, and there's Indian take-out in the fridge. Can you get to bed?"

I said, "It'll probably take me a while. This has been an eventful day, and my heart is still thumping. Besides, I just saw you with your bedhead

and my heart is still thumping. Besides, I just saw you with your beanie, and I'll need extra time to recover from that."

She threw a cushion at me.

When I finally did get to sleep, the words I had read kept running through my mind.

*Get up*, the voice said. "I'm waiting for my watch alarm," I grumbled, or something like that, only much muddier. I wanted to sleep in. Then I looked at my watch.

When I saw the time, I was very suddenly awake. I threw my suitcase together, and shouted Abigail awake. In less than ten minutes we were on the road.

I waited for the fear to begin. And waited and waited. We hit every green light except two—only two red lights on the way to the airport, and on the way to the airport everything went smoothly. This was the fastest time I'd gotten through airport security in my life—at least since 9-11, and I got on to the airplane, and slept all the way. A stewardess had to shake me awake after we landed.

What can I say about Alaska? There's so much that you miss about it if you think of it as another U.S. state. It belongs to its own country, almost its own world.

When I arrived, it was the time of the midnight sun, a time of unending light. It was rugged, and nobody seemed... This is a tough land, with tough people. And it's a holy land, the land where saints struggled and first brought Orthodoxy to this continent. The first holy land was one where people struggled in searing heat. This holy land was one where people met unending light, unending darkness, warm summers and bitter winters, Heaven and Hell. Its chapels are like Russia still survived, like Russia wasn't desecrated in 1917. There are poor and simple wooden chapels...

The best way I can describe it is to say that a veil has been lifted. We live in the shadow of the West, and we see with Western eyes. It's so easy to believe that there is no spirit, that dead matter is all there is.

Pentecostals today have exhortations to believe that Jesus still heals today; the people who asked for healing in the New Testament did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God; they just had the windows of their souls open enough to ask him for healing and believe it could happen. The West has closed our souls to believe that there is nothing a skeptic could deny, there is no chink for wind to blow. And that's not how it is

where I went. The veil was lifted; there were chinks for the wind, the Spirit to blow. When I walked into the wooden chapels and churches, they looked poor and crude and nothing like our perfectly machined churches with perfectly smooth, airtight walls, and the saints were there. I wasn't looking at the icons; I was looking *through* them, to see Heaven. And I had a feeling that the saints were looking through the icons to see me.

The monks at the monastery received me as if I were a saint; it was one of the most humbling welcomes I've received. I hope someday that I'll treat others as well as they treated me.

Before I left, I prayed before St. Herman's remains, and I could almost reach out and touch him, he was so present. There were hardships on Alaska, hard beds and few luxuries and no Internet connection, but I don't remember that. It was—

And then... I don't know what to say. I didn't want to leave. I prayed. *You are needed back home. You cannot stop time.* I left, with reverence.

It was back when I was sitting in my mass-produced office, when I realized that my heart had not left Alaska. It wasn't just that I wished I was back there. There was something deeper. When I prayed before the icons I had brought back for our parish, I could feel the saints watching me and praying for me. Then other icons seemed to be more... alive as windows of Heaven. I left to Alaska and found that veil over the reality of spirit had been pulled aside. I left Alaska and believed that only in Alaska could that veil be pulled aside—that outside of Alaska, everything worked as a skeptic would predict. And I found to my surprise that I have never left Alaska. Temptations no longer seem to just happen. Neither do icons just seem boards with paint. It's like I don't see in black and white while straining to see color any more; I see color, or at least a little bit more in color. And it can be terrifying at times; visible demonic activity is more terrifying than things that is masked as just an unfortunate coincidence, whether it is a temptation or things going wrong, but...

I think that God sent me to Alaska so I could do a better job of serving him here.

## Mary's Tale: Mary's Treasures

John finally spoke. "What's that you're humming, Mary? A penny for your thoughts."

Mary continued humming for a moment, and then sung, in a far-off, dreamy, sing-song voice,

Raindrops on roses,  
And whiskers on kittens,  
Bright copper kettles,  
And warm woolen mittens,  
Brown paper packages,  
Tied up with strings...

"I was just thinking about what I have to be thankful for, about a few of my favorite things."

Her husband Adam held out his hand. "What are they?"  
She slipped her hand into his. "Well..."

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I am thankful for my husband Adam, the love of my life. He is a servant to God, the best husband in the world to me, and the best father in the world to our daughter Barbara.

I am thankful for my mother. She is practical and wise. She is also beautiful. If you think I am pretty, you have seen nothing of the loveliness etched into her face, the treasure map of wrinkles around her kind, loving eyes. She taught me... I don't know how to tell you all the things she taught me. And I am fortunate to have my mother and her mother alive.

My grandmother... When I close my eyes, I can still smell her perfume. I can walk through her garden and see the ivy climbing on the trees, the wild flowers roosting. She thinks her garden has lost what she used to give it. I only see... I don't know how to describe it.

I am thankful for my father. He was a gruff man with a heart of gold. I still remember how every Christmas, as long as he was alive, he gave me a present carved out of wood.

I am thankful for my daughter Barbara, the other love of my life. I remember how, it was only this year, she asked for some money to go shopping at school, where they have a little market where you can spend \$2.00 for a bottle of perfume that smells... to put it delicately, it hints at a gas station. I gruffly said that there were better ways to spend money, and that if she really needed something, she had her allowance. That day I was cleaning her room, and saw her piggy bank empty. She came back after lunch and said, "I have a present for you." I looked, and saw a bottle of perfume. That bottle is on the shelf for my best perfumes, because it's too precious for me to wear when she doesn't ask me to.

I am thankful for the flowers I can grow in my garden. Right now it looks nothing like my grandmother's garden. I still hope I'll learn to make a garden beautiful without neat little rows, but for now I work hard to see the flowers in neat little rows.

I am thankful for God, and for *metanoia*, repentance. There was something I was struggling with yesterday, a cutting word I spoke, and I was terrified of letting it go, then when I did... it was... Repenting is the most terrifying experience before and the most healing after. Before you're terrified of what will happen if you let go of something you can't do without, then you hold on to it and struggle and finally let go, and when you let go you realize you were holding onto a piece of Hell. I am thankful

for a God who wants me to let go of Hell.

I'm thankful for wine. That one doesn't need explaining.

I'm thankful for babies. It's so nice to hold my friends' babies in my arms.

I'm thankful for—if you go to the [Orthodox Church in America](http://oca.org) website at [oca.org](http://oca.org) and click on [Feasts and Saints of the Church](#) followed by [Lives of the Saints](#), there are the lives of many saints. There's a whole world to explore, and it's fascinating to see all the women to look up to. I'm not saying I could measure up to any of them, but... it's something to read, even if I couldn't be like any of them.

I'm thankful for Beethoven's moonlight sonata. Every time I hear it, it's like a soft blue fog comes rolling in, and I'm in a stone hut in the woods lit by candlelight, and I can see the softness all around me. I can feel the fur of the slippers around my feet as I dance in the woods, and I can feel the arms of the one I love wrapped around me.

I'm thankful for all of my husband's little kindnesses.

I'm thankful I didn't run out of any office supplies this week.

I'm thankful our car hasn't broken down this month. We've gotten more mileage out of it than we should have. but we can't afford a new one.

I'm thankful that all of the people in my family, near and far, are in really good health.

I'm thankful that Adam screws the cap onto the toothpaste and always leaves the toilet seat down.

I'm thankful that April Fool's Day only comes once a year. Believe me, in this family, once a year is plenty!

I'm glad that the Orthodox Church is alive and growing.

I'm thankful for all the dirty laundry I have to do. We have dirty laundry because we have enough clothes, and we have dirty dishes because we have food.

I'm glad that Barbara has helped me make bread and cookies ever since she was big enough to stand and drool into the mixing bowl.

I'm profoundly grateful my husband doesn't make me read the books he likes.

I'm glad Adam always remembers to bring a half-gallon of milk home when I ask him, even if he's had a busy day.

I'm glad that when Adam comes home, he asks me to tell him everything that happened in my day, so that I can help him concentrate

everything that happened in my day, so that I can help him concentrate on what he's thinking about.

I'm thankful that Adam doesn't criticize me when I know I'm wrong, and never humiliates me.

I'm glad that Adam doesn't stick his thumb in my eye like he did when we were dating, and sometimes he doesn't even step on my foot when we dance together... and *sometimes* he doesn't even—*Ow!* Ok, ok! I won't tell that one!

Let's see. This is getting to be all about Adam. I really appreciate having confession, where you let go of sin and it is obliterated. I appreciate how the worship at church flows like a creek, now quick, now slow, now turning around in eddies. I appreciate that our parish is more than a social hub, but it's a place I can connect with people. And I appreciate... let me take a breath...

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Mary dimpled. "And..." She squeezed Adam's hand. "There's one more thing. Thank you for praying and keeping us in your prayers for well over a year. We're expecting another child." She blushed and looked down.

And Mary pondered all these treasures in her heart.

## **Paul's Tale: Another Kind of Mind**

Paul leaned forward and began to tell...

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When I was younger, I had the nickname of "The Razor." It seemed like my mind would cut into anything I applied it to. When my friends saw the movie *Dungeons & Dragons*, they were appalled when they asked me for my usual incendiary review and I said, "As far as historical fiction goes, it's better than average." It wasn't just the line where a dwarf told an elf he needed to get a woman who weighed two hundred and fifty pounds and had a beard he could hang on to—that single line gave an encounter with another culture that is awfully rare in a classic like *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*. I had liked the beginning impassioned "How dare you fail to see that everybody's equal?" Miss America-style "I get my opinions from *Newsweek*" speech about the evils of having a few elite magi rule. That was mercifully hitting you on the head with something that's insidious in most historical fiction—namely, that the characters are turn-of-the-millennium secular people in armor, conceived without any empathy for the cultures they're supposed to represent. It had the courtesy not to convince you that that's how medievals thought. Plus the movie delivered magic, and impressive sights, and people who enjoyed the benefits of modern medicine and diet, a completely inappropriate abundance of wealth, and everything else we expect in historical fiction. The movie is clumsily done, and its connection to the medieval way of life is tenuous, but it has a pulse. It delivers an encounter that most viewers weren't expecting. Namely, it provides an encounter how D&D is played—despite what some critics say, it's not a botched version of "Hollywood does fantasy", but a good rendering, even a nostalgic rendering, of a rather uninspired D&D session. And at least for that reason, it has a pulse where most historical fiction doesn't. As far as a seed for discussion goes, I said I'd rather start with *Dungeons & Dragons* than with most of the historical fiction I know of.

I was known for using the term 'assassin's guild' to refer to any organization that derived profit from causing people's deaths. This meant not only a cigarette manufacturer like Phillip Morris, or Planned Parenthood, but included more respected organizations like Coca-Cola, which murdered South American unionizers, or department stores, where human blood was the price paid to offer items so cheap. I'm sure you've seen the email forward about what happened when a young man asked Nike to sell him a pair of shoes with the word "sweatshop" on the side. There are disturbingly many things like that that happen, and I was

side. There are disturbingly many things like that that happen, and I was acute at picking them out.

So D&D and the assassin's guild represent two of the things I could observe, and I observed a great deal of them. Wherever I placed the cynic's razor, it would slice. I was adept at cutting. No one could really stand against me.

I still remember a conversation with one friend, Abigail. She said to me, "I don't doubt that everything that you see is there." Abigail paused, and said, "But is it good for you to look at all that?" I remembered then that I gave her a thousand reasons why her question was missing the point, and the only response she made: "Have you ever tried looking for good?"

I had no response to that, and I realized that the back edge of the razor was dull when I tried to look for good. I looked and I saw evil, but it was years of work before I could perceive the good I never looked for. Earlier I thought that politeness was in very large measure a socially acceptable place to deceive; now I saw that ordinary politeness, such as I used to scorn, had more layers consideration and kindness that I would have ever guessed.

Some years later, I met with an Orthodox priest, and we began to talk. It was Fr. Michael; you know him, and how he welcomes you. After some time, I said, "You don't know how much better it is now that I am using my intellect to perceive good." He looked at me and said, "What would you say if I told you that you don't even know what your intellect is?"

I looked at him. "Um... I have no place to put that suggestion. What do you mean?"

He closed his eyes in thought. "You're a bookish fellow. Have you read Descartes, or the Enlightenment's enthronement of reason, or even the popularizations of science that good scientists wince at?"

I said, "A little."

He said, "I think you mean yes."

I tried not to smile.

He continued, "Read Plato for something that's a little saner. Then read John Chrysostom and Maximus Confessor. Try on the difference between what they say about the mind."

I said, "I'm sure I'll find interesting nuances on the concept of mind."

Before leaving, he said, "So long as you've found only nuances on a concept of mind, you have missed the point."

That remark had my curiosity, if nothing else, and so I began to read. I began trying to understand what the different nuances were on the concept of mind, and... It was a bit like trying to mine out the subtle nuances between the word 'Turkey' when it means a country and 'turkey' when it meant a bird.

When someone like John Chrysostom or Maximus Confessor talks about the "intellect," you're setting yourself up not to understand if you read it as "what IQ is supposed to measure." Intellect *does* mean mind, but in order to understand what that means, you have to let go of several things you don't even know you assume about the mind.

If you look at the vortex surrounding Kant, you think that there's a real outer world, and then we each have the private fantasies of our own minds. And the exact relation between the fixed outer world and the inner fantasy varies; modernism focuses on the real outer world and postmodernism on the private inner fantasy, but they both assume that when you say "inner" you must mean "private."

But what Maximus Confessor, for instance, believed, was that the inner world was an inner world of spiritual realities—one could almost say, "not your inner world, not my inner world, but *the* inner world." Certainly it would seem strange to say that my inner world is my most private possession, in a sense even stranger than saying, "My outer world is my most private possession." And if you can sever the link between "inner" and "private," you have the first chink between what the intellect could be besides another nuance on reason.

Out of several ways that one could define the intellect, one that cuts fairly close to the heart of it is, "Where one meets God." The intellect is first and foremost the spiritual point of contact, where one meets God, and that flows into meeting spiritual realities. Thought is a matter of meeting these shared realities, not doing something in your mind's private space. The intellect is mind, but most of us will have an easier time understanding it if we start from the spirit than if we start at our understanding of mind.

The understanding of knowledge is very different if you have a concept of the intellect versus having a concept of the reason. The intellect's knowing is tied to the body and tied to experience. It has limitations the reason doesn't have: with reason you can pick anything up that you have the cleverness for, without needing to have any particular

character or experience. If you're sharp, you can pick up a book and have the reason's knowledge. But the intellect knows by sharing in something, knows by drinking. Someone suggested, "The difference between reason and intellect, as far as knowledge goes, is the difference between knowing about your wife and knowing your wife." The reason knows *about* the things it knows; the intellect knows *of* things, by tasting, by meeting, by experiencing, by sharing, by loving.

And here I am comparing the intellect and the reason on reason's grounds, which is the way to compare them as two distinct concepts but not to meet them with the deepest part of your being. We know Christ when we drink his body and blood. Something of the intellect's knowing is why words for "know" are the main words for sexual union in the Bible: "Now Adam knew Eve his wife", and things like that. While the reason puts things together, by reasoning from one thing to another, the intellect *sees*, and knows as the angels know, or as God knows.

And when I asked him, "When can I learn more of this?" Fr. Michael said, "Not from any book, at least not for now. Come, join our services, and they will show you what books cannot." I was startled by the suggestion, but Orthodox worship, and the Orthodox Way, gave me something that Maximus Confessor's confusing pages could not. The concept of the intellect does not appear as a bare and obscure theory in Orthodoxy any more than the concept of eating; people who have never heard of the 'intellect', under any of its names, are drawn to know the good by it. It's like a hiker who sees beauty on a hike, strives to keep going, and might have no idea she's getting exercise.

The lesson I'm now learning could be narrowly stated as "Theology is not philosophy whose subject-matter is God." I pretended to listen politely when I heard that, but philosophy is reason-knowing and theology is intellect-knowing. It's unfortunate that we use the same word, "know," for both. Christ said, "Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, and all these things shall be added to you." Originally he was talking about food and drink, but I've come to taste that "all these things" means far more. I sought a knowledge of the good, and so I was trying to think it out. Since I've begun to walk the Orthodox Way, as how God wants me to seek the Kingdom of Heaven, I've tasted good in ways I would never have imagined. When I first spoke with Fr. Michael, I was hoping he would give me more ideas I could grasp with my reason. Instead he gave me an invitation to step into a whole world of wonder I didn't know was open to

invitation to step into a whole world of wonder I didn't know was open to me, and to enter not with my reason alone but with my whole life.

When we worship, we use incense. I am still only beginning to appreciate that, but there is prayer and incense ascending before God's throne, and when we worship, it is a beginning of Heaven. When the priest swings the censer before each person, he recognizes the image of Christ in him. When we kiss icons, whether made of wood or flesh, our display of love and reverence reaches God. Our prayer is a participation in the life of the community, in the life of Heaven itself. We are given bread and wine, which are the body and blood of Christ, and we drink nothing less than the divine life from the fountain of immortality. Christ became what we are that we might become what he is. The Son of God became a Man and the Son of Man that men might become gods and the sons of God. And we live in a world that comprehends the visible and invisible, a world where spirit, soul, and matter interpenetrate, where we are created as men and women, where eternity breathes through time, and where every evil will be defeated and every good will be glorified.

And there is much more to say than that, but I can't put it in words.

## John's Tale: The Holy Grail

Mary looked at John and said, "Have you read *The da Vinci Code*?" She paused, and said, "What did you think of it?"

John drew a deep breath.

Mary winced.

John said, "The Christians I know who have read *The da Vinci Code* have complained about what it presents as history. And most of the history is... well, only a couple of notches higher than those historians who claim the Holocaust didn't happen. I personally find picking apart *The da Vinci Code*'s historical inaccuracies to be distasteful, like picking apart a child's toy. Furthermore, I think those responses are beside the point."

Mary said, "So you think the history is sound?"

John said, "I think that a lot of people who think they're convinced by the history in *The da Vinci Code* have been hoodwinked into thinking it's the history that persuaded them. *The da Vinci Code*'s author, Dan Brown, is a master storyteller and showman. *The da Vinci Code* isn't a compelling book because someone stuck history lectures in a bestseller. *The da Vinci Code* is a compelling book because it sells wonder. Dan Brown is the kind of salesman who could sell shoes to a snake, and he writes a story where Jesus is an ordinary (if very good) man, is somehow more amazing of a claim that Jesus is the person where everything that was divine met everything that was human.

"*The da Vinci Code* boils down to a single word, and that word is 'wonder.' Dan Brown, as the kind of person who can sell shoes to a snake, leaves the reader with the distinct impression that the ideas he is pushing are more exotic, alluring, and exciting than the Christianity which somehow can't help coming across as a blob of dullness."

Mary said, "But don't you find it an exciting book? Something which

can add a bit of spice to our lives?"

John said, "It is an excellent story—it gripped me more than any other recent bestseller I've read. It is captivating and well-written. It has a lot of excellent puzzles. And its claim is to add spice to our lives. That's certainly what one would expect. But let's look at what it dismisses as ho-hum. Let's look at the Christianity that's supposed to be boring and need a jolt of life from Brown."

Mary said, "I certainly found what Brown said about Mary Magdalene to be an eye-opener. Certainly better than..."

John said, "If I found the relics of Mary Magdalene, I would fall before them in veneration. Mary Magdalene was equal to the twelve apostles—and this isn't just my private opinion. The Orthodox Church has officially declared her to be equal to the twelve apostles. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all list her first among women who followed Christ to the cross, and John lists her as the one who first saw the secret of the resurrection. She has her own feast day, July 22, and it's a big enough feast that we celebrate the Eucharist that day. Tradition credits her with miracles and bold missionary journeys. The story is told of her appearing before the Roman Emperor proclaiming the resurrection, and the Emperor said, 'That's impossible. For a man to rise from the dead is as impossible as for an egg to turn red!' Mary Magdalene picked up an egg, and everyone could see it turn red. That's why we still give each other eggs dyed red when we celebrate the Lord's resurrection. There are some ancient Christian writings that call Mary Magdalene the Apostle to the Apostles, because it was she herself who told the Apostles the mystery of the resurrection."

Mary said, "Wow." She closed her eyes to take it in, and then said, "Then why did the Catholic Church mount such a smear campaign against her?"

John said, "I said I didn't want to scrutinize *The da Vinci Code's* revision of history, but I will say that Brown distorts things, quite intentionally as far as I know. And he counts on you, the reader, to make a basic error. Brown is working hard to attack Catholicism—or at least any form of Catholicism that says something interesting to the modern world. *Therefore* (we are supposed to assume) Catholicism is duty-bound to resist whatever Brown is arguing for. Catholicism isn't an attempt to keep its own faith alive. It's just a reaction against Brown.

"Putting it that way makes Brown sound awfully egotistical. I don't think Brown has reasoned it that consistently, or that he thought we

DAN BROWN HAS REASONED IT THAT CONSISTENTLY, OR THAT HE THOUGHT WE might reason it that consistently, but Brown does come awfully close in thinking that if he's pushing something, Rome opposes it. He extols Mary Magdalene, so Rome must be about tearing her down. He glorifies a mysterious place for the feminine, so Rome must be even more misogynistic than the stereotype would have it. I hate to speak for our neighbors at the Catholic parish down the street, but—"

Mary interrupted. "But don't you find something romantic, at least, to think that Mary held the royal seed in her womb?"

John said, "The symbol of the chalice... the womb as a cup... I do find it romantic to say that Mary held the royal seed in her womb. And it's truer than you think. I believe that Mary was the urn that held the bread from Heaven, that she was the volume in which the Word of Life was inscribed, that her womb is more spacious than the Heavens. Only it's a different Mary than you think. I'm not sure how much you know about angels, but there are different ranks, and the highest ranks were created to gaze on the glory of God. The highest two ranks are the cherubim and seraphim, and the cherubim hold all manner of wisdom and insight, while the seraphim burn with the all-consuming fire of holiness. There is no angel holier than these. It is of this different Mary that we sing,

More honorable than the cherubim,  
And more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim,  
In virginity you bore God the Word;  
True Mother of God, we magnify you.

"Her womb, we are told, is more spacious than the Heavens because it contained uncontainable God. It is the chalice which held something which is larger than the universe, and that is why it is more spacious than the Heavens.

"I reread *The da Vinci Code*, and I don't remember if there was even a passing reference to the other Mary. This seems a little strange. If you're interested in a womb that held something precious, if you're interested in a woman who can be highly exalted, she would seem an obvious choice. I don't think *The da Vinci Code* even raises her as an alternative to refute.

"Not even Dan Brown, however, can get away with saying that the Catholic Church ran a smear campaign against Our Lady. He may be able to sell shoes to snakes, but thanks in part to the Reformation's concern that the Catholic Church was in fact worshipping Mary as God, that's

that the Catholic Church was in fact worshipping Mary as God, that's almost as tough a sell as stating that the Catholic Church doesn't believe in God. We Orthodox give Mary a place higher than any angel, and it's understandable for Protestants to say that must mean we give her God's place—Protestants don't have any place that high for a creature. The Catholic Church, like the Orthodox Church, has a cornucopia of saints, a glorious and resplendent plethora, a dazzling rainbow, and it's possible not to know about the glory of Mary Magdalene. So Brown can sell the idea that the Catholic Church slandered one of her most glorious saints, and... um... quietly hope he's distracted the reader from the one woman whom no one can accuse the Catholic Church of slandering."

Mary looked at him. "There still seemed to be... There is a wonder that would be taken away by saying that Mary Magdalene was not the chalice that held the blood."

John said, "What if I told you that that was a smokescreen, meant to distract you from the fact that wonder was being taken away?"

"Look at it. *The da Vinci Code* has a bit of a buildup before it comes to the 'revelation' that the Grail is Mary Magdalene."

Mary said, "I was curious."

John said, "As was I. I was wishing he would get out and say it instead of just building up and building up. There is a book I was reading—I won't give the author, because I don't want to advertise something that's spiritually toxic—"

Mary smiled. "You seem to be doing that already."

John groaned. "Shut up. I don't think any of you haven't had ads for *The da Vinci Code* rammed down your throat, nor do I think any of you are going to run and buy it to learn about pure and pristine Gnos— er... Christianity. So just shut up."

Mary stuck out her tongue.

John poked her, and said, "Thank you for squeaking with me."

"Anyway, this book pointed out that the Holy Grail is not a solid thing. It is a shadow. It's like the Cross: the Cross is significant, not just because it was an instrument of vile torture, but because it was taken up by the Storm who turned Hell itself upside-down. Literature has plenty of magic potions and cauldrons of plenty, but all of these pale in comparison with the Holy Grail. That is because the Holy Grail exists in the shadow of an even deeper mystery, a mystery that reversed an ancient curse. Untold ages ago, a serpent lied and said, 'Take, eat. You will not die.' Then the

woman's offspring who would crush the serpent's head said, 'Take, eat. You will live.' And he was telling the truth, and he offered a life richer and deeper than anyone could imagine.

"And so there is a mystery, not only that those in an ancient time could eat the bread and body that is the bread from Heaven and drink the wine and blood that is the divine life, but that this mystery is repeated every time we celebrate it. We are blinded to the miracle of life because it is common; we are blinded to this sign because it is not a secret. And it is a great enough miracle that the chalice that held Christ's blood is not one item among others; it is the Holy Grail.

"In the ancient world, the idea that God could take on a body was a tough pill to swallow. It still is; that God should take on our flesh boggles the mind. And there were a lot of people who tried to soften the blow. And one of the things they had to neutralize, in their barren spirituality, was the belief that Christ could give his flesh and blood. The legend of the Holy Grail is a testimony to the victory over that belief, the victory of God becoming human that we might become like him and that he might transform all of our humanity. It says that the cup of Christ, the cup which held Christ's blood, is a treasure because Christ's blood is a treasure, and the image is powerful enough that... We talk about 'Holy Grail's, as in 'A theory that will do this is the Holy Grail of physics.' That's how powerful it is.

"I would say that there were people in the ancient world who didn't get it. In a real sense, Dan Brown picks up where they left off. And part of what he needs to do is make Mary Magdalene, or some substitute, the Holy Grail, because we can't actually have a cup that is the Holy Grail, because we can't actually have a Table where Christ's body and blood are given to all his brothers and sisters.

"And that is the meaning of Mary Magdalene as the Holy Grail. She is a beautiful diversion so we won't see what is being taken away. She is a decoy, meant to keep our eyes from seeing that any place for the Eucharist is vanishing. And I'm sure Mary Magdalene is rolling over in her reliquary about this.

"But in fact the Eucharist is not vanishing. It's here, and every time I receive it, I reverently kiss a chalice that is an image of the Holy Grail. What Dan Brown builds up to, as an exciting revelation, is that Jesus left behind his royal bloodline. This bloodline is alive today, and we see something special when Sophie wraps her arms around the brother she

something special when Sophie wraps her arms around the brother she thought was dead. And that is truer than Dan Brown would ever have you guess.

"Jesus did leave behind his blood; we receive it every time we receive the Eucharist. And it courses through our veins. You've heard the saying, 'You are what you eat.' You do not become steak by eating steak, but you do become what Jesus is by eating his flesh. Augustine said, 'See what you believe. Become what you behold.' That's part of the mystery. In part through the Eucharist, we carry Christ's blood. It courses through our veins. And it's not dilute beyond measure, as Dan Brown's picture would have it. We are brothers and sisters to Christ and therefore to one another. There is an embrace of shared blood at the end of *The da Vinci Code*, and there is an embrace, between brothers and sisters who share something much deeper than physical blood, every time we share the holy kiss, or holy hug or whatever. Is the truth as wild as what Dan Brown says? It's actually much wilder."

Mary said, "I can't help feeling that *The da Vinci Code* captures something that... their talk of knights and castles, a Priory that has guarded a secret for generations, a pagan era before the testosterone poisoning we now call Christianity..."

John smiled. "Yes. It had that effect on me too. These things speak of something more. When I was younger, one of my friends pointed out to me that when I said 'medieval', I was referring to something more than the Middle Ages. It was a more-than-literal symbol, something that resonated with the light behind the Middle Ages. And the same is happening with the golden age Brown evokes. All of us have a sense that there is an original good which was lost, or at least damaged, and the yearning Brown speaks to is a real yearning for a legitimate good. But as to the specific golden age... Wicca makes some very specific claims about being the Old Religion that Wiccans resume after the interruption of monotheism. Or at least it made them, and scholars devastated those claims. There are a few Wiccans who continue to insist that they represent the Old Religion instead of a modern Spiritualist's concoction. But most acknowledge that the account isn't literally true: they hold the idea of an 'Old Religion' as an inspiring tale, and use the pejorative term 'Wiccan Fundamentalists' for people who literally believe that Wicca is the Old Religion.

"And so we can yearn for a Golden Age when people believed the spirit

of our own age... um... how can I explain this. People who yearn for an old age when men and women were in balance have done little research into the past. People who think the New Testament was reactionary have no idea of a historical setting that makes the New Testament look like it was written by flaming liberals. Someone who truly appreciated the misogyny in ancient paganism would understand that rape could not only be seen as permissible; quite often it was simply seen as a man's prerogative. Trying to resurrect ancient paganism because Christian views on women bother you is like saying that your stomach is ill-treated by your parents' mashed potatoes so you're going to switch to eating sticks and gravel.

"But I'm getting into something I didn't want to get into...

"There is something from beyond this world, something transcendent, that is shining through Brown's writing. The Priory is haunting. The sacred feminine is haunting. There is something shining through. There is also something shining through in Orthodoxy. And that something is something that has shone through from the earliest times.

"In *The da Vinci Code*, knighthood is a relic of what it used to be. Or at least the knight they visit is a relic, more of a tip of the hat to ages past than a breathing tradition. The Knights Templar at least represent something alive and kicking. They're a society that continues alive today and is at once medieval and modern. They bear the glory of the past, but they bear it today. In that sense they're a glimmer of what the Church is—a society alike ancient and modern, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

"What I meant to be saying is that knighthood is more a tip of the hat than something alive. I've read the Grail legends in their medieval forms, and I've met knights and ladies in those pages. It takes some time to appreciate the medieval tradition—there is every reason for a modern reader to say that the texts are long and tedious, and I can't quickly explain why that understandable reaction is missing something. The knights and ladies there aren't a tip of the hat; they're men and women and they kick and breathe. And they represent something that the medieval authors would never have realized because they had never been challenged. They represent the glory of what it means to be a man, and the glory of what it means to be a woman. We speak of the New Eve, Mary, as 'the most blessed and glorious Lady;' we are called to be a royal priesthood, and when we receive the Eucharist we are called 'the servant of God Adam' or 'the handmaiden of God Eve'—which is also meant to be humble, but inescapably means the Knights and Ladies coming before the

numbie, but inescapably means the Knights and Ladies serving before the King of Kings.

"The Orthodox Church knows a great deal about how to be a knight and how to be a lady. It can be smeared, but it has a positive and distinctive place for both men and women. It may be a place that looks bad when we see it through prejudices we don't realize, but there is a real place for it."

"I know a lot of people who think it's not gender-balanced," Mary said.

John said, "What would they hold as being gender balanced?"

"I'm not sure any churches would be considered gender-balanced."

John said, "All right, which churches come closest?"

Mary said, "Well, the most liberal ones, of course."

John said, "That doesn't mesh with the figures. Men feel out of place in a lot of churches. With Evangelicalism and Catholicism, men aren't that much of a minority, about 45%. Go to the more liberal churches, and you'll find a ratio of about two to one, up to about seven to one. Come to an Orthodox parish, on the other hand, and find men voluntarily attending services that aren't considered mandatory—and the closest to a 50-50 balance in America."

Mary said, "But why? I thought the liberal churches had..."

John interrupted. "What are you assuming?"

Mary answered, "Nothing. Liberal churches have had the most opportunity for women to draw things into a balance."

John continued questioning. "What starting point are you assuming?"

Mary said, "Nothing. Just that things need to be balanced by women... um... just that men have defined the starting point..."

"And?" John said.

Mary continued: "And... um... that women haven't contributed anything significant to the starting point."

John paused. "Rather a dismal view of almost two millennia of contributions by women, don't you think?"

Mary opened her mouth, and closed it. "I need some time to think."

John said, "It took me almost four years to figure it out; I won't fault you if you're wise enough to take some time to ponder it. And I might also mention that the image of being knights and ladies is meant to help understand what it means to be man and woman—*Vive la glorieuse difference!*—and the many-layered mystery of masculinity and

femininity, but an image nonetheless. All statements possess some truth, and all statements fall immeasurably short of the truth."

Mary said, "Huh? Are all statements equally true?"

John said, "No. Not all statements are equally true; some come closer to the truth than others. No picture is perfect, but there is such a thing as a more or less complete image. And what I have said about knights and ladies, and many things that could be said about the Church as a society guarding a powerful truth, point to something beyond them. They are great and the truth is greater. There is something in the Priory and the Knights Templar that is poisoned, that infects people with a sweetly-coated pride that ends in a misery that can't enjoy other people because it can't appreciate them, or indeed respect anybody who's not part of the self-same inner ring. That 'inner ring' is in the beginning as sweet as honey and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword, so that struggling to achieve rank in the Priory is a difficult struggle with a bitter end. And in that sense the Priory is an image of the Church... it is a fellowship which has guarded an ancient truth, a truth that must not die, and has preserved it across the ages. But instead of being an inner ring achieved by pride, the Church beckons us to humility. This humility is unlike pride: it is unattractive to begin with, but when we bow we are taller and we find the secret of enjoying the whole universe."

"What is this secret?" Mary asked.

John closed his eyes for a moment and said, "You can only enjoy what you appreciate, and you can only appreciate what you approach in humility. This is part of a larger truth. It takes sobriety to enjoy even drunkenness. If you want to see the one person who cannot enjoy drunkenness, look at an alcoholic. Virtue is the doorway to enjoying everything, even vice.

"There is a treacherous poison beckoning in 'the inner ring', of a secret that is hidden from outsiders one looks down on. The inner ring is a door to Hell."

"You believe that Knights Templar will go to Hell?" Mary said.

John looked at her. "I believe that Knights Templar, and people in a thousand other inner rings, are in Hell already. I don't know how Christ will judge them, but... In the end, some have remarked, there are only two kinds of people: those who tell God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God finally says, '*Thy* will be done.' The gates of Hell are sealed,

bolted, and barred from the *inside*, by men who have decided: 'I would rather reign in Hell than serve in Heaven!' In one sense, Hell will never blast its full fury until the Judge returns. In another sense, Hell begins on earth, and the inner ring is one of its gates."

Mary said, "Wow."

John said, "And there is a final irony. What we are led to expect is that there is a great Western illusion. And Brown is going to help us see past it."

Mary said, "And the truth?"

John said, "There is a great Western illusion, and Brown is keeping us from seeing past it."

"There's a rather uncanny coincidence between Brown's version of original, pristine paganism and the fashion feminism happens to take in our day. Our version of feminism is unusual, both in terms of history and in terms of cultures today. It's part of the West that the Third World has difficulty understanding. And yet the real tradition, call it restored paganism or original Christianity or the Old Religion or what have you, turns out to coincide with all the idiosyncracies of our version of feminism. It's kind of like saying that some 1970's archaeologists exhumed an authentic pagan burial site, and it was so remarkably preserved that they could tell the corpses were all wearing bell-bottoms, which was the norm in the ancient world. If we made a statement like that about clothing, we'd need to back it up. And yet Brown does the same sort of thing in the realm of ideas, and it comes across as pointing out the obvious; most people wouldn't think to question him. And this is without reading classical pagan texts about how marriage might lead a man to suicide because of feminine wrangling, and how any man who couldn't deny his wife anything he chose was the lowest of slaves. Brown is a master of showmanship, at helping you see what he wants you to see and not see what he doesn't want you to see.

"If we decline Brown's assistance in seeing past illusions, it turns out that there's another illusion he doesn't help us see past. And, ironically, it is precisely related to symbol.

"Something profound happened in the Middle Ages, or started happening, that is still unfolding today. It is the disenchantment of the entire universe. There are several ways one could describe it. Up until a certain point, everyone took it for granted that horses, people, and colors were all things that weren't originally created in our minds. Wait, that

were all things that weren't originally created in our minds... wait, that was confusing. It's easier to speak of the opposite. The opposite, which began to pick up steam almost a thousand years ago, was that we think up categories like horses and colors, but they don't exist before we think of them. As it would develop, that was a departure from what most people believed. And a seed was planted that would take deeper and deeper root.

"That's the philosophy way of putting it. The symbol's way of putting it is that the departure, the new thinking, drove a wedge between a symbol and what that symbol represented. If you represented something, the symbol was connected to what it represented. That's why, in *The Lord of the Rings*, the hobbits mention Sauron and Gandalf makes a tense remark of, 'Don't mention that name here!'

"Why is this? The name of Sauron was a symbol of Sauron which bore in an invisible way Sauron's presence. When Gandalf told the Hobbits not to mention that name, he was telling them not to bring Sauron's presence."

Mary said, "That sounds rather far-fetched."

John answered, "Would you care to guess why, when you say a friend's name and she stops by, you always say, 'Speak of the Devil!'"

Mary shifted her position slightly.

John continued. "Those two things are for the same reason. Tolkien was a medievalist who commanded both an excellent understanding of the medieval world, and was steeped in paganism's best heroic literature. He always put me to sleep, but aside from that, he understood the medieval as most modern fantasy authors do not. And when Gandalf commands the hobbits not to speak the name of Sauron, there is a dying glimmer of something that was killed when the West embraced the new way of life."

"The name of something is a symbol that is connected to the reality. Or at least, a lot of people have believed that, even if it seems strange to us. If you read the Hebrew Prophets, you'll find that 'the name of the Lord' is a synonym for 'the Lord' at times, and people write 'the Lord' instead of saying the Lord's actual name: 'the Lord' is a title, like 'the King' or 'the President', not a name like 'Jacob.' People were at first cautious of saying the Lord's name in the wrong way, and by the New Testament most Jews stopped saying the Lord's name at all. This is because people believed a symbol was connected to the reality, and a failure to show proper reverence to the Lord's name was in fact a failure

to show proper reverence to the Lord.

"When the Bible says that we are created in the image of God, this is not just a statement that we resemble God in certain ways. It is a statement that God's actual presence operates in each person, and what you do to other people, you cannot help doing to God. This understanding, too obvious to need saying to the earliest readers, is behind everything from Proverbs' statement that he who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, to the chilling end of the parable in Matthew 25:

"When the King returns in glory... he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you who are damned, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, a stranger and you did not welcome me, lacking clothes and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or sick or in prison and did not care for you?' Then he will answer them, 'I solemnly tell you, insofar as you did not do it for the least of these brothers of mine, you did not do it for me.'"

Mary thought, and asked, "Do you think that bread and wine are symbols of Christ's body and blood?"

John said, "Yes. I believe they are symbols in the fullest possible sense: bread and wine represent the body and blood of Christ, and *are* the body and blood of Christ. Blood itself is a symbol: the Hebrew Old Testament word for 'blood' means 'life', and throughout the Bible whenever a person says 'shedding blood,' he says, 'taking life.' Not only is wine a symbol of Christ's blood, Christ's blood is a symbol of the uncreated, divine life, and when we drink Christ's blood, we receive the uncreated life that God himself lives. This is the life of which Jesus said, 'Unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, you have no life in you.' So the wine, like the bread, is a symbol with multiple layers, Christ's body and blood themselves being symbols, and it is for the sons of God to share in the divine life: to share in the divine life is to be divinized.

"Are these miracles? The question is actually quite deceptive. If by 'miracle' you mean something out of place in the natural order, a special

exception to how things are meant to work, then the answer is 'No.'

"The obvious way to try to incorporate these is as exceptions to how a dismembered world works: things are not basically connected, without symbolic resonance, with the special exceptions of the Eucharist and so on. But these are not exceptions. They are the crowning jewel of what orders creation.

"Things are connected; that is why when the Orthodox read the Bible, they see one tree in the original garden with its momentous fruit, and another tree that bore the Son of God as its fruit, and a final tree at the heart of the final Paradise, bearing fruit each season, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. This kind of resonance is almost as basic as the text's literal meaning itself. Everything is connected in a way the West has lost—and by 'lost', I do not simply mean 'does not have.' People grasp on an intuitive level that symbols have mystic power, or at least should, and so we read about the Knights Templar with their exotic equal-armed crosses, flared at the ends, in red on white. Yes, I know, pretend you don't know there's the same kind of equal-armed cross, flared at the ends, on the backs of our priests and acolytes. The point we're supposed to get is that we need to go to occult symbolism and magic if we are to recover that sense of symbol we sense we have lost, and fill the void.

"But the Orthodox Church is not a way to fill the void after real symbols have been destroyed. Orthodoxy does not need a Harvard 'ymbologist' as a main character because it does not need to go to an exotic expert to recover the world of symbol. Orthodoxy in a very real sense has something better than a remedy for a wound it never received.

"To the Orthodox Church, symbols are far more than a code-book, they are the strands of an interconnected web. To the Church, symbols are not disparate escape routes drilled out of prison, but the wind that blows through a whole world that is open to explore."

Mary pondered. "So we have a very deaf man who has said, 'None of us can hear well, so come buy my hearing aid,' and Orthodox Church as a woman who has never had hearing trouble and asks, 'Why? What would I need one for?'

"And is there something deeper than symbol, even?"

John closed his eyes. "To answer that question, I'm having trouble doing better than paraphrasing Pseudo-Dionysius, and I *wish* we had his *Symbolic Theology*. I presume this means something specific. I assume it

means that everything, even the highest and holiest things that the eye, the heart... I mean mind... I mean intellect, the intellect which perceives those realities beyond the eye... I mean that everything they can perceive is merely the rationale that presupposes everything below the Transcendent One.'

"Yes, there is One who is deeper than all created symbols."

## **Basil's Tale: The Desert Fathers**

Father Basil said, "When I read the introduction to Helen Waddell's [The Desert Fathers](#), I wasn't disappointed yet. At least, that's where I first met these people; Waddell gives one translation of an ancient collection, and if you search on the Web for *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, you can find them easily enough.

"The introduction led me to expect important historical documents in the life of the Church—you know, the sort of first try that's good for you because it's dull and uninteresting, kind of like driving a buggy so you can appreciate what a privilege it is to ride a car. Or like spending a year wasting time on your PC, reinstalling Windows and trying to recover after viruses wreak havoc on your computer, so that when you finally upgrade to a Mac, you appreciate it. Then I actually began to *read* the Desert Fathers, and..."

John asked, "Can you remember any of them? There's..."

Father said, "Yes, certainly."

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An old monk planted a piece of dry wood next to a monk's cell in the desert, and told the young monk to water it each day until... So the young monk began the heavy toil of carrying water to water the piece of wood for year after year. After three years, the wood sprouted leaves, and then branches. When it finally bore fruit, the old monk plucked the fruit and said, "Taste the fruit of obedience!"

Three old men came to an old monk, and the last old man had an evil reputation. And the first man told the monk, "Make me a fishing net," but he refused. Then the second man said, "Make me a fishing net, so we will have a keepsake from you," but he refused. Then the third man said, "Make me a fishing net, so I may have a blessing from your hands," and the monk immediately said, "Yes." After he made the net, the first two asked him, "Why did you make him a net and not us?" And he said, "You were not hurt, but if I had said no to him, he would thought I was rejecting him because of his evil reputation. So I made a net to take away his sadness."

A monk fell into evil struggles in one monastery, and the monks cast him out. So he came to an old monk, who received him, and sent him back after some time. But the monks as the monastery wouldn't receive him. Then he sent a message, saying, "A ship was wrecked, and lost all of its cargo, and at last the captain took the empty ship to land. Do you wish to sink on land the ship that was saved from the sea?" Then they received him.

An old monk said, "He who finds solitude and quiet will avoid hearing troublesome things, saying things that he will regret, and seeing temptations. But he will not escape the turmoil of his own heart."

There was a young monk who struggled with lust and spoke to an older monk in desperation. The old monk tore into him, scathing him and saying he was vile and unworthy, and the young monk fled in despair. The young monk met another old monk who said, "My son, what is it?" and waited until the young monk told everything. Then the old monk prayed that the other monk, who had cruelly turned on the young monk, would be tempted. And he ran out of his cell, and the second old monk said, "You have judged cruelly, and you yourself are tempted, and what do you do? At least now you are worthy of the Devil's attention." And the monk repented, and prayed, and asked for a softer tongue.

Once a rich official became a monk, and the priest, knowing he had

Once a rich official became a monk, and the priest, knowing he had been delicately raised, sent him such nice gifts as the monastery had been given. As the years passed, he grew in contemplation and in prophetic spirit. Then a young monk came to him, hoping to see his severe ascetic discipline. And he was shocked at his bed, and his shoes, and his clothes. For he was not used to seeing other monks in luxury. The host cooked vegetables, and in the morning the monk went away scandalized. Then his host sent for him, and said, "What city are you from?" "I have never lived in a city." "Before you were a monk, what did you do?" "I cared for animals." "Where did you sleep?" "Under the stars." "What did you eat, and what did you drink?" "I ate bread and had no wine." "Could you take baths?" "No, but I could wash myself in the river." Then the host said, "You toiled before becoming a monk; I was a wealthy official. I have a nicer bed than most monks now. I used to have beds covered with gold; now I have this much cruder bed. I used to have costly food; now I have herbs and a small cup of wine. I used to have many servants; now I have one monk who serves me out of the goodness of his heart. My clothing was once costly beyond price; now you see they are common fare. I used to have minstrels before me; now I sing psalms. I offer to God what poor and feeble service I can. Father, please do not be scandalized at my weakness." Then his guest said, "Forgive me, for I have come from heavy toil into the ease of the monastic life, and you have come from richness into heavy toil. Forgive me for judging you." And he left greatly edified, and would often come back to hear his friend's Spirit-filled words.

A monk came to see a hermit, and when he was leaving, said, "Forgive me, brother, for making you break your monastic rule of solitude." The hermit said, "My monastic rule is to welcome you hospitably and send you away in peace."

Once a group of monks came to an old monk, and another old monk was with them. The host began to ask people, beginning with the youngest, what this or that word in Scripture meant, and each tried to answer well. Then he asked the other old monk, and the other monk said, "I do not know." Then the host said, "Only he has found the road—the one who says, 'I do not know.'"

One old monk went to see another old monk and said to him, "Father, as far as I can I say my handful of prayers, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?" Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands

towards Heaven. His fingers blazed as ten lamps of fire and he said, "If you desire it, you can become a fire."

A brother asked an old monk, "What is a good thing to do, that I may do it and live?" The old monk said, "God alone knows what is good. Yet I have heard that someone questioned a great monk, and asked, 'What good work shall I do?' And he answered, 'There is no single good work. The Bible says that Abraham was hospitable, and God was with him. And Elijah loved quiet, and God was with him. And David was humble, and God was with him. Therefore, find the desire God has placed in your heart, and do that, and guard your heart.'"

## Macrina's Tale: The Communion Prayer

Mary looked at Macrina. "And I can see you've got something in your purse."

Macrina smiled. "Here. I was just thinking what a blessing it is to have a prayer book. It is a powerful thing to raise your voice with a host of saints, and this version, the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius's [Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers](#), is my favorite." She flipped a few pages. "This prayer, and especially this version, has held a special place in my heart.

"And... I'm not sure how to put it. Westerners misunderstand us as being the past, but we are living *now*. But in the West, living *now* is about running from the past, trying to live in the future, and repeating the mistakes of the past. Ouch, that came out a lot harsher than I meant. Let me try again... in the East, living now leaves you free to enjoy the glory of the past. You can learn to use a computer today and still remember how to read books like you were taught as a child. And you are free to keep treasures like this prayer, from St. Simeon the New Theologian ("New" means he died in the 11th century):

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From lips besmirched and heart impure,  
From unclean tongue and soul sin-stained,  
Receive my pleading, O my Christ,  
Nor overlook my words, my way  
Of speech, nor cry importunate:  
Grant me with boldness to say all  
That I have longed for, O my Christ,  
But rather do thou teach me all  
That it behoveth me to do and say.  
More than the harlot have I sinned,  
Who, learning where thou didst abide,  
Brought myrrh, and boldly came therewith  
And didst anoint thy feet, my Christ,  
My Christ, my Master, and my God:  
And as thou didst not cast her forth  
Who came in eagerness of heart,  
Abhor me not, O Word of God,  
But yield, I pray, thy feet to me,  
To my embrace, and to my kiss,  
And with the torrent of my tears,  
As with an ointment of great price,  
Let me with boldness them anoint.  
In mine own tears me purify,  
And cleanse me with them, Word of God,  
Remit my errors, pardon grant.  
Thou knowest my multitude of sins,  
Thou knowest, too, the wounds I bear;  
Thou seest the bruises of my soul;  
But yet thou knowest my faith, thou seest  
My eager heart, and hear'st my sighs.  
From thee, my God, Creator mine,  
And my Redeemer, not one tear  
Is hid, nor e'en the part of one.  
Thine eyes mine imperfection know,  
For in thy book enrolled ar found  
What things are yet unfashioned.

Behold my lowliness, behold  
My weariness, how great it is:  
And then, O God of all the world,  
Grant me release from all my sins,  
That with clean heart and conscience filled  
With holy fear and contrite soul  
I may partake of thy most pure,  
Thine holy spotless Mysteries.  
Life and divinity hath each  
Who eateth and who drinketh thee  
Thereby in singleness of heart;  
For thou hast said, O Master mine,  
Each one that eateth of my Flesh,  
And drinketh likewise of my Blood—  
He doth indeed abide in me,  
And I in him likewise am found.  
Now wholly true this saying is  
Of Christ, my Master and my God.  
For he who shareth in these graces  
Divine and deifying is  
No wise alone, but is with thee,  
O Christ, thou triply-radiant Light,  
Who the whole world enlightenest.  
Therefore, that I may ne'er abide,  
Giver of Life, alone, apart  
From thee, my breath, my life, my joy,  
And the salvation of the world—  
For this, thou seest, have I drawn nigh  
To thee with tears and contrite soul;  
My errors' ransom to receive  
I seek, and uncondemned to share  
In thy life-giving Mysteries  
Immaculate; that thou mayst dwell  
With me, as thou hast promised,  
Who am in triple wretchedness;  
Lest the Deceiver, finding me  
Removed from thy grace by guile  
May seize me, and seducing lead

may seize me, and seducing lead  
Astray from thy life-giving words.  
Wherefore I fall before thy face,  
And fervently I cry to thee,  
As thou receiv'dst the Prodigal  
And Harlot, when she came to thee,  
So now my harlot self receive  
And very Prodigal, who now  
Cometh with contrite soul to thee.  
I know, O Savior, none beside  
Hath sinned against thee like as I,  
Nor done the deeds which I have dared.  
But yet again, I know this well,  
That not the greatness of my sins,  
Nor my transgressions' multitude,  
Exceeds my God's forbearance great,  
Nor his high love toward all men.  
But those who fervently repent  
Thou with the oil of lovingness  
Dost cleanse, and causest them to shine,  
And makest sharers of thy light,  
And bounteously dost grant to be  
Partakers of thy Divinity;  
And though to angels and to minds  
Of men alike 'tis a strange thing,  
Thou dost converse with them ofttimes—  
These thoughts do make me bold, these thoughts  
Do give me pinions, O my Christ;  
And thus confiding in thy rich  
Good deeds toward us, I partake—  
Rejoicing, trembling too, at once—  
Who am but grass, of fire: and lo!  
—A wonder strange!—I am refreshed  
With dew, beyond all speech to tell;  
E'en as in olden time the Bush  
Burning with fire was unconsumed.  
Therefore, thankful in mind and heart,  
Thankful, indeed, in every limb,

With all my body, all my soul,  
I worship thee, yea, magnify,  
And glorify thee, O my God,  
Both now and to all ages blest.

## **Barbara's Tale: The Fairy Prince**

Adam looked at his daughter and said, "Barbara, what do you have to share? I can hear you thinking."

Barbara looked at her father and said, "You know what I'm thinking, Daddy. I'm thinking about the story you made for me, the story about the fairy prince."

"Why don't you tell it, Sweetie? You know it as well as I do."

The child paused a moment, and said, "You tell it, Daddy."

Here is the tale of the fairy prince.

---

Long ago and far away, the world was full of wonder. There were fairies in the flowers. People never knew a rift between the ordinary and the magical.

But that was not to last forever. The hearts of men are dark in many ways, and they soon raised their axe against the fairies and all that they stood for. The axe found a way to kill the dryad in a tree but leave the tree still standing—if indeed it was really a tree that was still standing. Thus began the disenchantment of the entire universe.

Some time in, people realized their mistake. They tried to open their hearts to wonder, and bring the fairies back. They tried to raise the axe against disenchantment—but the axe they were wielding was cursed. You might as well use a sword to bring a dead man to life.

But this story is not about long ago and far away. It is about something that is recent and very near. Strange doings began when the son of the Fairy Queen looked on a world that was dying, where even song and dance and wine were mere spectres of what they had been. And so he disguised himself as a fool, and began to travel in the world of men.

The seeming fool came upon a group of men who were teasing a young woman: not the mirthful, merry teasing of friends, but a teasing of dark and bitter glee. He heard one say, "You are so ugly, you couldn't pay a man enough to kiss you!" She ran away, weeping.

The prince stood before her and said, "Stop." And she looked at him, startled.

He said, "Look at me."

She looked into his eyes, and began to wonder. Her tears stopped.

He said, "Come here."

She stood, and then began walking.

He said, "Would you like a kiss?"

Tears filled her eyes again.

He gave her his kiss.

She ran away, tears falling like hail from her eyes. Something had happened. Some people said they couldn't see a single feature in her face that had changed. Others said that she was radiant. Others still said that whatever she had was better than gorgeous.

The prince went along his way, and he came to a very serious philosopher, and talked with him, and talked, and talked. The man said, "Don't you see? You are cornered. What you are saying is not possible. Do

"Don't you see? You are cornered. What you are saying is not possible. Do you have any response?"

The prince said, "I do, but it comes not in words, but in an embrace. But you wouldn't be interested in that, would you?"

For some reason, the man trusted him, and something changed for him too. He still read his books. But he would also dance with children. He would go into the forest, and he did not talk to the animals because he was listening to what the animals had to say.

The prince came upon a businessman, a man of the world with a nice car and a nice house, and after the fairy prince's kiss the man sold everything and gave it away to the poor. He ate very little, eating the poorest fare he could find, and spent much time in silence, speaking little. One of his old friends said, "You have forsaken your treasures!"

He looked at his friend and said, "Forsaken my treasures? My dearest friend, you do not know the beginning of treasure."

"You used to have much more than the beginning of treasure."

"Perhaps, but now I have the greatest treasure of all."

Sometimes the prince moved deftly. He spoke with a woman in the park, a pain-seared woman who decided to celebrate her fiftieth wedding anniversary—or what would have been the fiftieth anniversary of a long and blissful marriage, if her husband were still alive. She was poor, and had only one bottle of champagne which she had been saving for many years. She had many friends; she was a gracious woman. She invited the fairy prince, and it was only much later that her friends began to wonder that that the one small bottle of champagne had poured so amply for each of them.

The prince did many things, but not everybody liked it. Some people almost saw the prince in the fool. Others saw nothing but a fool. One time he went into a busy shopping mall, and made a crude altar, so people could offer their wares before the Almighty Dollar. When he was asked why, he simply said, "So people can understand the true meaning of Christmas. Some people are still confused and think it's a religious holiday." That was not well received.

Not long after, the woman whom he met in the park slept the sleep of angels, and he spoke at her funeral. People cried more than they cried at any other funeral. And their sides hurt. All of this was because they were laughing so hard, and the funny thing was that almost nobody could remember much afterwards. A great many people took offense at this

fool. There was only one person who could begin to explain it. A very respected man looked down at a child and said, "Do you really think it is right to laugh so much after what happened to her?" And then, for just a moment, the child said, "He understood that. But if we really understood, laughter wouldn't be enough."

There were other things that he did that offended people, and those he offended sought to drive him away. And he returned to his home, the palace of the Fairy Queen.

But he had not really left. The fairy prince's kiss was no ordinary kiss. It was a magic kiss. When he kissed you, he gave his spirit, his magic, his fairy blood. And the world looks very different when there is fairy blood coursing through your veins. You share the fairy prince's kiss, and you can pass it on. And that pebble left behind an ever-expanding wave: we have magic, and wonder, and something deeper than either magic or wonder.

And that is how universe was re-enchanted.

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Adam looked down at his daughter and said, "There, Sweetie. Have I told the story the way you like it?"

The child said, "Yes, Daddy, you have," climbed into her father's lap, and held up her mouth for a kiss.

## Epilogue

No one spoke after that.

Finally, after a time, Barbara said, "Can we go outside, Daddy? I bet the snow's real good now."

Father Basil said, "Why don't we all go out? Just a minute while I get my gloves. This is snowball making snow."

Five minutes later, people stepped out on the virgin snow. Macrina said, "This is wonderful. It's like a fairy wonderland."

Paul said, "No. It's much more wonderful than that."

Then the snowballs flew, until Adam said, "See if you can hit that snowplough!"

And then it was time to go home.

**Closeness Spaces:  
Elementary  
Explorations Into  
Generalized Metric  
Spaces, and Ordered  
Fields Derived From  
Them**

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# **Closeness Spaces:**

## **Elementary Explorations Into Generalized Metric Spaces, and Ordered Fields Derived From Them**

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## Abstract

A generalization of metric spaces is examined, in which we are able to determine which of two pairs of points is closer (or if both are equally close), but not initially know how to assign a number to a distance. After the spaces are defined in general, we look at some more specific closeness spaces, and establish the the existence of a metric, which we are able to determine, under certain broad circumstances.

After looking at the closeness spaces, more specific attention is devoted to the closenesses themselves. We begin to define arithmetic operations over closeness spaces, and (given certain restrictions on the space) then complete addition and subtraction to develop a totally ordered group in which the closenesses are embedded. We prove that it is indeed a totally ordered field, and look at some examples. Directions are suggested for future research.

*[Side note when entering this dissertation two decades later: this research includes a way to rigorously define and use infinitesimals. Infinitesimals were long seen as something you wanted to have but could not rigorously define; epsilon-delta proofs in relation to derivatives in calculus represent a masterstroke of how to do an infinitesimal's job using only standard real numbers for epsilons and deltas. Infinitesimals were spoken of as a ghost to be exorcized, and the entire point epsilon-delta proofs were a way to circumvent obvious use of infinitesimals in a mathematically rigorous way. At the time this thesis was written there appear to have been rigorous treatment of infinitesimals; however, so far as one could tell this approach to providing this kind of squeaky-clean rigorous handling of infinitesimals was new when the thesis was written.]*

## Introduction

Intuitively, a closeness space is like a metric space, with balls, symmetry, positive definiteness, and a triangle inequality, boundaries, an induced topology, and other familiar attributes of a metric space. However, it is a space for which we do not specifically know a metric: it is possible that we simply do not know a metric or none is given, or that no metric may exist. The latter holds in certain cases where the real numbers are too coarse of an ordered field to describe the space's distances: such a thing is possible, for instance, when there are infinitesimal and infinite distances. A closeness space might not be thought of so much as a generalization of a metric space (at least in the sense that a metric space is a generalization of  $\hat{\mathbb{R}}^n$ ), but rather as a metric space with a generalization of real-valued distances. It is a metric space which may potentially have nonstandard real numbers (broadly defined) as its distances, rather than necessarily having real numbers under the standard model as its distances.]

In this sense, what is of interest is not only the spaces themselves, but their distances: what kind of group embeds them (we will look at a field which embeds an arithmetic closure of these distances). We will study the topological spaces, but our interest is not only in the spaces, but in the ordered groups and then fields which embed the closenesses. Throughout this thesis, the aim is both to establish certain elementary properties "laying a groundwork" and also to suggest directions for future research.

It is remarked that the approach is not to start with a field and then see for what kind of spaces it can function like a metric; the approach is rather to start with a space and see what kind of field acts as an arithmetic closure to its closenesses, given a certain construction.

# Chapter 1: Notation, Definitions and Terminology

## Notation 1:1:

In this document, a lowercase, indexed variable name is generally understood to be an element of the set designated by the corresponding uppercase letter, provided that the letter is 's' or occurs after 's' in the alphabet. For example:

$$s_i \hat{\in} S$$

Furthermore, we associate in the same way  $\hat{I}_\pm$  with indexing set  $J$ , and  $\hat{I}^2$  with  $K$ . These indexing sets are understood to have no last element.

There will be plainly marked exceptions to this rule.

## Definition 1:2:

A *closeness space*  $C$  is a set  $S$ , together with a function

$$\mathcal{A}': S \hat{\times} S \hat{\times} S \hat{\times} S \hat{\times} \{ '<', '=', '>' \}$$

such that the following conditions hold:

### Definition 1.2.1:

$f$  is defined for each quadruplet of points in  $S$ .

( $S$  is said to be a *space*, and its elements are referred to as its *points*, as elsewhere in topology. The function  $f$  is said to be a *closeness*.)

Intuitively, this condition and those following guarantee that  $\mathcal{A}'$  is comparing the distance between the first two points, and the distance between the last two points to see which one is greater. This condition, and the next four, are simply conditions which guarantee that  $\mathcal{A}'$  is well-

behaved as a function on a pair of pairs of points, only depends on which pair of pairs of points is given, and defines a total ordering up to equivalence classes.

For every six points  $s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4, s_5$ , and  $s_6$  (possibly non-distinct), we have the following conditions hold:

**Condition 1.2.2:**

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) &= \mathcal{A}'(s_2, s_1, s_3, s_4) \\ \mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) &= \mathcal{A}'(s_3, s_4, s_1, s_2) \end{aligned}$$

$\mathcal{A}'$  is not affected by swapping the elements in one pair, or by swapping the pairs. This is the closeness space's version of a metric space requiring symmetry.

**Condition 1.2.3:**

If  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '<'$ , then  $\mathcal{A}'(s_3, s_4, s_1, s_2) = '>'$ .  
 If  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '='$ , then  $\mathcal{A}'(s_3, s_4, s_1, s_2) = '='$ .  
 If  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '>'$ , then  $\mathcal{A}'(s_3, s_4, s_1, s_2) = '<'$ .

**Condition 1.2.4:**

If  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '<'$  and  $\mathcal{A}'(s_3, s_4, s_5, s_6) = '<'$ , then  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_5, s_6) = '<'$ .

**Condition 1.2.5:**

We have  
 $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_1, s_2) = '='$

**Condition 1.2.6:**

If  $s_2$  and  $s_3$  are distinct, then we have

$$\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_1, s_2, s_3) = '<'$$

Every point is closer to itself than the distance between any pair of distinct points; this is the closeness space's version of the positive

definiteness of a metric space.

### Condition 1.2.7:

We have

$$\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_1, s_2, s_2) = '='$$

In other words, there is only one zero. It may be mathematically interesting to remove this restriction, but we will not investigate that possibility.

### Condition 1.2.8:

If  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_3, s_1, s_2) = '<'$  then for every set  $T \hat{=} S$ ,  $S$  containing points arbitrarily close to  $s_3$  (in a sense to be defined below), there exists  $t_1 \hat{=} s_3$ , such that, for every point  $s_4$ , if  $\mathcal{A}'(s_3, s_4, s_1, s_2) = '<'$ .

(What this is getting at, is that if you have a boundary point  $s_2$  to a ball (boundary being outside the ball as with metric spaces), then every point closer to the center than the boundary point has a neighborhood entirely contained inside the ball (closer to the center than the boundary point). This means that a ball with a boundary point has a unique radius: there cannot be a second boundary point further than the center than the first boundary point, because then the first boundary point would be inside the ball; there also cannot be a secondary point closer to the center than the first boundary point, because this axiom says that every closer point has a neighborhood.)

### Condition 1.2.9:

A set  $T \hat{=} S$  is said to hold points *arbitrarily close* to point  $s_3$  (in a sense to be defined below), there exists  $t_1 \hat{=} s_3$ , such that if  $\mathcal{A}'(s_2, t_1, s_2, s_4) = '<'$ , then  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_4, s_1, s_2) = '>'$ .

(Here, we say that if you have a boundary point  $s_2$  to a ball, then every point further from the center than the boundary point has a neighborhood disjoint from the ball. Note that these two conditions may be vacuously satisfied by finite or other discrete metric / closeness spaces,

with which we are not very much concerned.)

These two stipulations together constitute the closeness space's version of the triangle inequality in a metric space. The slight awkwardness of this definition is necessary to permit discrete metric spaces. This awkwardness will recur in other places where we are defining concepts on a very low level without using familiar tools (because we are developing a more general form of such tools), but it should pass.

### **Definition 1.3:**

A set  $T \hat{\in} S$  is said to contain points *arbitrarily close* to point  $s_1$  if the following conditions hold:

#### **Condition 1.3.1:**

$T$  is nonempty and contains at least one point distinct from  $s_1$ .

#### **Condition 1.3.2:**

For every distinct pair of points  $s_2$  and  $s_3$ , there exists  $T_1$  distinct from  $s_1$  so that  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, t_1, s_2, s_3) = '<'$ .

(In other words, for every closeness in the space, there is a point in  $T$  that is closer to  $s_1$ .)

### **Additional terminology 1.4:**

#### **Term 1.4.1:**

Point  $s_1$  is said to be *closer to  $s_2$  than  $s_3$  is* (close to  $s_2$ ) when  $\mathcal{A}'(s_2, t_1, s_2, s_4) = '<'$ .

#### **Term 1.4.2:**

Points  $s_1$  and  $r$  are said to be *equidistant from  $s_2$*  when  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, r, s_2) = '='$ .

**Term 1.4.3:**

Point  $s_1$  is said to be *father from*  $s_2$  than  $r$  is when  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, r, s_2) = '>'$ .

**Term 1.4.4:**

A pair of points is referred to as a *distance*.

**Term 1.4.5:**

The pair  $(s_1, s_2)$  is said to be the *distance from*  $s_1$  to  $s_2$ .

**Condition 1.4.6:**

If distance  $d_1$  is the pair  $(s_1, s_2)$  and distance  $d_2$  is the pair  $(s_3, s_4)$ , then the following three conditions hold:

**Condition 1.4.6.1:**

If  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '<'$ , then  $d_1$  is said to be *less than*  $d_2$ , written  $d_1 < d_2$ .

**Condition 1.4.6.2:**

If  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '='$ , then  $d_1$  is said to be *equal to*  $d_2$ , written  $d_1 = d_2$ .

**Condition 1.4.6.3:**

If  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '>'$ , then  $d_1$  is said to be *greater than*  $d_2$ , written  $d_1 > d_2$ .

**Remark 1:5:**

Equality induces a partition of equivalence on distance. We will abuse notation slightly by referring to a distance, its equivalence class, and

relation simply by referring to a distance, its equivalence class, and elements of its equivalence class interchangeably. Context should make clear which of these is meant; if context is not sufficient to clarify, then we will be more explicit as to which of these is intended.

### **Definition 1.6:**

A *ball about point  $s_1$*  is a set of points such that the following two conditions hold:

#### **Condition 1.6.1:**

Every point in the ball is closer to  $s_1$  than is every point not in the ball.

#### **Condition 1.6.2:**

There does not exist point  $s_2$  in the ball such that the following conditions hold:

##### **Condition 1.6.2.1:**

No point in the ball is further from  $s_1$  than  $s_2$  is.

##### **Condition 1.6.2.2:**

$S$  contains points arbitrarily close to  $s_2$ , which are not contained in  $B$ .

This latter condition guarantees that  $B$  does not contain its boundary, if it does have a nonempty boundary.

As the remainder of the definition and terminology, we have:

#### **Condition 1.6.3:**

If distance  $d = (s_1, r)$ ,  $r$  is not contained in  $B$ , and  $B$  contains points arbitrarily close to  $r$ , then ball  $B$  is said to of *radius  $d$* , or to be the *ball of radius  $d$  centered at  $p$* , and its boundary is said to be the *circle of radius  $d$  centered at  $p$* .

(By the remarks following the triangle inequality, there is at most one

equivalence class of distances which satisfy this property. Note that a ball might or might not necessarily have a radius.)

## **Definition 1.7:**

A set  $T$  is said to have points *arbitrarily close to* point  $s_1$  if  $T$  contains at least one point  $t_1 \hat{\neq} s_1$ , and for every  $t_2 \hat{\neq} s_1$ , there exists  $t_3$  which is closer to  $s_1$  than is  $t_2$ .

## **Definition 1.8:**

The *boundary* of a set  $T$  is the set  $U$  of points  $u$  such that both  $T$  contains points arbitrarily close to  $u$ , and  $\hat{S} - T$  contain points arbitrarily close to  $u$ .

## **Definition of values, having different levels, 1.9:**

We are using the term *value* to refer to mathematical objects which we will use in the construction of the field we are working on. Each value has a level; values of higher levels are determined in terms of values of lower level. The highest level of value will be an element of a field. I will define some (not all) levels of values here. If we use the term without specifying its level, it should be understood to be the last level specified, usually the highest level so far defined, if there is ambiguity. In some cases we will leave an ambiguity when what we are saying applies both to a member of an equivalence class, and its class.

### **Definition 1.9.1:**

A *level 0 value* is defined to be a distance (strictly defined as a pair of points).

### **Definition 1.9.2:**

A *level 1 value* is defined to be an equivalence class of level 0 values under the partition induced by equality. Level 1 values are ordered, in the same way that their members are ordered.

The remaining levels of values will be defined after I have begun to build up the the machinery necessary to explain and use them.

### **Definition 1.10:**

A *level 0 zero* is defined to be a distance  $(s_1, s_1)$ .

**Definition 1.11:**

A *level 1 zero* is defined to be the equivalence class of level 0 zeroes. Zeroes will be defined for all levels greater than or equal to level  $a$ .

**Definition 1.12:**

A level  $n$  value is defined to be *positive* if it is greater than the level  $n$  zero.

**Definition 1.13:**

A *level  $n$  sequence* is defined to be a level  $n$  sequence  $\{\hat{a}^\alpha\}_{\alpha \in J}$ , with  $J$  a totally ordered indexing set.

A *level  $n$  epsilon* is defined to be a level  $n$  sequence  $\{\hat{a}^\alpha\}_{\alpha \in J}$ , of positive level  $n$  values, such that the following two conditions hold:

**Condition 1.13.1:**

Every positive level  $n$  value  $v$  is greater than some  $\varepsilon_\alpha$ .

**Condition 1.13.2:**

Every  $\varepsilon_\alpha$  is greater than or equal to every  $\varepsilon_\beta$ .

**Condition 1.13.3:**

Distance  $d_1$  is said to be *within distance  $d_2$  of distance  $d_3$*  if there is a set of points  $s_1, s_2$ , and  $s_3$  such that  $d_1 = (s_1, s_2)$ ,  $d_2 \hat{\%} \times (s_2, s_3)$ , and  $d_3 = (s_1, s_3)$ .

## Chapter 2: Examples

### Example 2.1:

Every metric space is a closeness space. Two distances are compared by ' $<$ '.

### Example 2.2:

We derive a space  $C$  from  $\hat{\mathbb{R}}^2$  under the Euclidean metric as follows:  
We make  $C$  a copy of  $\hat{\mathbb{R}}^2$ , and then we add a point  $O'$  to the space, and define closenesses as follows:  
 $O'$  is as close to every non-origin point as the origin is.  
 $O'$  and the origin are closer than any other distinct pair of points.

### Theorem 2.1.1:

*This closeness space cannot be described by any metric.*

#### Proof:

We prove this by contradiction.  
Assume that such a metric exists.  
If a metric did induce this closeness, it would have a least nonzero distance  $d$ , the distance from the origin  $O$  to  $O'$ .  
Let the distance from  $O$  to  $(0, 1)$  be  $d'$ .  
By the Archimedean property, there exists  $n$  such that  $d' \tilde{\cdot} n < d$ .  
By repeated application of the triangle inequality on segments from  $(0, 0)$  to  $(i \tilde{\cdot} n, 0)$  and from  $(i \tilde{\cdot} n, 0)$  to  $((i + 1) \tilde{\cdot} n, 0)$ , this means that

$d'$  is at most equal to  $n$  times the distance from  $(0, 0)$  to  $(1 \cdot \tilde{A} \cdot n, 0)$ .

This means that the distance from  $(0, 0)$  to  $(1 \cdot \tilde{A} \cdot n, 0)$  is less than  $d$ , but it is positive because they are two distinct points, and  $d$  is a minimal positive distance.  $\hat{a}'\hat{a}'\blacklozenge$

Q.E.D.

This space is in many ways a space very like a metric space; although it boasts unusual decoration, it has a strong amount of stricture, like a metric space, structure that might not be present in an arbitrary metric space.

### Example 2.2:

Let  $M$  be a metric space with metric  $\mu$  over a set  $E$  of equivalence classes partitioning a set  $S$ . Then we can define a closeness space  $C$  which has  $S$  as its space, and its closeness  $\mathcal{A}'$  defined as follows:

For every four points  $s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4$  in  $S$ :

#### Case 2.2.1:

If  $\mu(s_1, s_2) < \mu(s_3, s_4)$ , then  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '<'$ .

#### Case 2.2.2:

If  $\mu(s_1, s_2) > \mu(s_3, s_4)$ , then  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '>'$ .

#### Case 2.2.3:

If  $\mu(s_1, s_2) = \mu(s_3, s_4)$ , then:

##### Case 2.2.3.1

If  $s_1 = s_2$  and  $s_3 = s_4$  then  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '='$ .

##### Case 2.2.3.2

If  $s_1 \hat{a}'\hat{a}' s_2$  and  $s_3 = s_4$  then  $\mathcal{A}'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '>'$ .

### Case 2.2.3.3

If  $s_1 = s_2$  and  $s_3 \hat{\%}_0 s_4$  then  $\mathcal{A}E'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '<'$ .

### Case 2.2.3.4

If  $s_1 \hat{\%}_0 s_2$  and  $s_3 \hat{\%}_0 s_4$  then  $\mathcal{A}E'(s_1, s_2, s_3, s_4) = '='$ .

In other words, if we have a metric space over equivalence classes, we can compare distances between pairs of elements of the classes by first looking at the distance between the elements' equivalence classes, and then doing something else to break ties — say, seeing where they are the same.

In relation to this, we have:

## Definition and example 2.3:

If we have two closeness spaces  $C$  and  $D$ , with underlying sets  $S$  and  $T$ , then we can take their cross product  $E = C \hat{\%} D$ , with underlying sets  $S$  and  $T$ , then we can take their product  $E = C \hat{\%} D$ , with closenesses compared in the dictionary order.

Specifically, let  $U$  be the underlying set for  $E$ . We compare two distances  $d_1 = (u_1, u_2)$  and  $d_2 = (u_3, u_4)$ , with  $u_1 = (s_1, t_1)$  and  $u_2 = (s_2, t_2)$ ,  $u_3 = (s_3, t_3)$ , and  $u_4 = (s_4, t_4)$ , as follows:

### Case 2.3.1:

If  $(s_1, s_2) < (s_3, s_4)$ , then  $(u_1, u_2) < (u_3, u_4)$ .

### Case 2.3.2:

If  $(s_1, s_2) > (s_3, s_4)$ , then  $(u_1, u_2) > (u_3, u_4)$ .

### Case 2.3.3:

If  $(s_1, s_2) = (s_3, s_4)$ , then:

Case 2.3.3.1:

If  $(t_1, t_2) > (t_3, t_4)$ , then  $(u_1, u_2) > (t_3, t_4)$ .

Case 2.3.3.2:

If  $(t_1, t_2) < (t_3, t_4)$ , then  $(u_1, u_2) < (t_3, t_4)$ .

Case 2.3.3.3:

If  $(t_1, t_2) = (t_3, t_4)$ , then  $(u_1, u_2) = (t_3, t_4)$ .

*N.B. This cross product, in the dictionary order, will be used later.*

### Example 2.3.4:

Let  $S, T = \hat{\alpha}, \hat{\alpha}^2$  under the closeness induced by the Euclidean metric. Then  $U = S \hat{\alpha} \circ T$  may be described as a Euclidean plane, where each point is itself a miniature Euclidean plane. It is a plane with infinitesimal distances, or alternately an infinitesimal Euclidean plane.

A typical ball in this space is the ball with center at the origin  $((0, 0), (0, 0))$  consisting of all points strictly closer to the origin than  $((1, 1), (1, 1))$ . This divides the large-scale plane into three regions: the interior, exterior, and boundary of the disk of radius 1, centered at the origin. The interior of the disk corresponds to miniature planes which are entirely within the ball, where every point is inside. The exterior of the disk corresponds to miniature planes which are entirely outside the ball, where no point is inside. The boundary of the disk corresponds to miniature planes where the interior of the disk of radius 1 centered at the origin (of the small one, not the large plane or metric space) is inside the ball, and its boundary and exterior are outside. The boundary of the given ball in  $U$  consists of, in the miniature planes, all circles of radius 1 centered at the origin which are themselves on the circle of radius 1 in the large plane.

Proof that this satisfies the axioms of the space:

The set of equivalence classes (under equality) of closenesses has a 1-1 order-preserving mapping to the nonnegative real number line cross itself, in the dictionary order. In other words, it is a dictionary order cross product of two totally ordered sets, and therefore totally ordered. This

product of two totally ordered sets, and therefore totally orders. This satisfies axioms 1.2.1-1.2.7.

To satisfy 1.2.8, we let  $s_2$  be closer to  $s_3$  than is  $s_1$ .

If the small planes of  $s_2$  and  $s_3$  are equidistant to the small plane of  $s_1$ , then the small plane position of  $s_2$  is closer to the small plane position of  $s_1$  than is the small plane position of  $s_3$ . There is, by topology, an open disk about the small plane position of  $s_1$  and boundary the small plane position of  $s_3$ ; if we take such a disk in the small plane  $s_3$  is actually contained in, it has points arbitrarily close to  $s_3$ , and is contained in the disk of center  $s_1$  and boundary  $s_2$ .

Every set  $T$  containing points arbitrarily close to  $s_3$  intersects the aforementioned disk infinitely many times. So we take some point inside that as our  $t_1$ ; every point  $s_4$  closer to  $s_3$  than is  $t_1$  and therefore closer to  $s_1$  than is  $s_2$ .

The same argument holds in the case that the small plane of  $s_3$  is closer to the small plane of  $s_1$  than is the small plane of  $s_2$ , save that we simply choose any disk contained in the small plane of  $s_3$ .

1.2.9 is satisfied; we simply have an open disk outside the open disk of center  $s_1$  and boundary point  $s_2$  instead of inside.

**Remark 2.3.4.1**

Note that in this case, a ball in the cross product was not a cross product of two balls, but the boundary of a ball in the cross product was cross product of the boundary of two balls. This leads us to:

**Theorem 2.3.4.2:**

*Let  $C$  and  $D$  be closeness spaces with underlying sets  $S$  and  $T$ , both of which consist of more than one point. Let space  $E = C \tilde{\wedge} D$ , with underlying set  $U = S \tilde{\wedge} T$ . Let ball  $B$  be a ball in  $E$  which does not contain any points  $(s_2, t_2)$  for any point  $s_2$  and some point  $t_2$ , contains all points  $(s_3, t_3)$  for any point  $t$  and some point  $t_3$ , and is centered at point  $u_1 = (s_1, t_1)$ .*

*Then  $B$  is not the cross product of two balls, but the boundary of  $B$  is the cross product of the boundaries of two balls. Furthermore, if the*

*aforementioned boundray is nonempty and contains point  $u_4 = (s_4, t_4)$ , then the boundary consists of the cross product of the circle of radius  $(s_1, s_4)$  of radius  $(t_1, t_4)$  centered at  $t_1$ .*

N.B. All of the hypotheses, which informally could be described as looking like clutter, are needed only to rule out degenerate exceptions. There are a number of equivalent replacements for the requirement that  $B$  contains no points at one  $T$  coordinate and all points at another.

**Proof:**

Proof by contradiction that  $B$  is not the cross product of two balls:

Assume that  $B$  is the cross product of two balls.  $B$  contains all of the points at one  $T$  coordinate,  $t_3$ , and none at another,  $t_2$ . Therefore,  $B$  contains  $u_5 = (s_5, t_5)$  with  $s_5 \hat{=} s_1$ . Every point  $(s_1, t_6)$  is closer to  $u_1$  than is  $u_5$ , so  $B$  contains a point at  $T$  coordinate  $t_6$ , and also does not contain that point.

We consider two cases now:

Case 2.3.4.2.1:

$B$  has an empty boundary. In that case, the further claim is vacuously true because the 'if' clause is not met. In addition, the former claim is also at least vacuously true: we observe that an entire space constitutes a ball, and the boundary of the entire space is empty. Therefore we examine the more interesting

Case 2.3.4.2.2:

$B$  has a nonempty boundary. In that case, we observe that all points on the boundary are equidistant from some point  $u_1$ ; if one were closer to another, we would have an exception to the triangle inequality.

I claim that if  $(s_7, t_7)$  and  $(s_8, t_8)$  are in the boundary  $B$ , then so are  $(s_7, t_8)$  and  $(s_8, t_7)$ :

Assume that  $(s_7, t_7)$  and  $(s_8, t_8)$  are in the boundary  $B$ . Then we can say the following, both for sets of points contained in  $B$ , and sets of points disjoint from  $B$ : there exists a set  $U_7 \hat{=} U$  containing points arbitrarily close to  $(s_7, t_7)$ , and a set  $U_8 \hat{=} U$  containing points  $(s_8, t_8)$ .  $U_7$  is a set of

ordered pairs of points, which contain points of arbitrary close  $S$  coordinate to  $s_7$ , and a set  $U_8$  containing points arbitrarily close to  $(s_8, t_8)$ .  $U_7$  is a set of ordered pairs of points, which contains points of arbitrarily close  $S$  coordinate to  $s_7$ , and arbitrarily close  $T$  coordinate to  $t_7$ , and  $U_8$  is a set of ordered pairs of points, which contains points of arbitrarily close  $S$  coordinate to  $s_8$ , and arbitrarily close  $T$  coordinate to  $t_8$ . Take the cross product  $V$  of the  $S$  coordinates in  $U_7$  and the  $T$  coordinates contained in  $U_8$ , and the cross product  $W$  of the  $S$  coordinates contained in  $U_8$ , and the  $T$  coordinates contained in  $U_7$ . As this argument applies both to sets of points contained in  $B$ , and sets of points disjoint from  $B$ , we have  $(s_7, t_8)$  and  $(s_8, t_7)$  as desired.

This establishes the independence of the  $S$  and  $T$  coordinates of points on the boundary, so the boundary is a cross product of some pair of sets in  $S$  and  $T$ .

This establishes the independence of the  $S$  and  $T$  coordinates of points on the boundary, so the boundary is a cross product of some pair of sets in  $S$  and  $T$ .

These sets must be equidistant from  $s_1$  and  $t_1$  respectively; if they were not, then we could select two radii of different length for the ball, and violate the triangle inequality. So they are subsets of the boundaries of balls; they must be the whole boundary because the cross product of two accumulation points of different sets is an accumulation point of the cross product of the two sets, as we argued above. And this establishes that the radius of the boundary must be the distance from the center to the cross product of two respective boundary points. So we have the boundary of  $B$ , for  $u_4 = (s_1, s_4)$  a point on the boundary, equal to the cross product of the circles of radius  $(s_1, s_4)$  and  $(t_1, t_4)$  centered at  $s_1$  and  $t_1$  respectively, as desired.

Q.E.D.

### Example 2.4:

Any subset of a closeness space is a closeness space.

### Remark 2.5:

The operations of taking a cross product of two closeness spaces in the dictionary order, and taking a subset of a closeness space, are together quite powerful. All other examples here are special cases of the operations taking a cross product of two closeness spaces in the dictionary order

taking a cross product of two closeness spaces in the dictionary order, and taking the subset of a closeness space.

**Example 2.5.1:**

The disjoint union of two closeness spaces  $C$  and  $D$ , in other words a union where  $C$  and  $D$  retain their closeness functions, and every function in one space is closer than every function in another space, is achievable by taking  $\hat{\alpha}, \diamond \times C$ , paring it down until we have only a copy of  $(0, 1)$  where 0 is identified with a copy of  $C$ , and then taking the cross product of the result in  $D$ , and again paring it down until we only have a copy of  $(0, 1)$  where 0 is identified with a copy of  $C$  for which each element is identified with a single element, and 1 is identified with a copy of  $D$ .

If we allow not only finite but transfinite sequences of these two operations (which must be well-ordered, in order to be well-defined), then possible closeness spaces can take an almost unbelievable complexity beyond what is possible for metric spaces. The faintest hint of this is provided by a transfinite algorithm, and partial proof of correctness which is not reproduced here, which seems (given the Axiom of Choice) to be able to embed an arbitrary partial ordering in a totally ordered field. I believe that the power is sufficient to justify making:

**Conjecture 2.5.2:**

Assuming the Axiom of Choice, any closeness space can be generated from  $\hat{\alpha}, \diamond$  under the closeness arising from the usual Euclidean distance metric, by the operation of taking cross products in the dictionary order, and taking subsets.

**Example 2.6:**

The long line appears to be a closeness space under what could intuitively be described as comparing the absolute value of differences. In general we cannot subtract ordinals as we can finite numbers, but we can do something comparable in this case.

We compare pairs of ordinals  $(o_1, o_2)$  and  $(o_3, o_4)$  as follows, in the case that both are distinct pairs:

Without loss of generality, assume that  $o_1 < o_2$  and  $o_3 < o_4$ .

$$\mathcal{A}'(o_1, o_2, o_3, o_4) = '<' \text{ if } o_1 + o_4 < o_3 + o_2.$$

$$\mathcal{A}'(o_1, o_2, o_3, o_4) = '=' \text{ if } o_1 + o_4 = o_3 + o_2.$$

$$\mathcal{A}'(o_1, o_2, o_3, o_4) = '>' \text{ if } o_1 + o_4 > o_3 + o_2.$$

### **Example 2.7:**

The numbering of items in this thesis may be taken to be a finite and discrete closeness space, with closeness compared with a dictionary ordering on the numberings.

## Chapter 3: Towards Constructing a Field

We now define the next level of values:

### Definition 3.1:

A *level 2 value* is defined to be a level 1 sequences of values  $\{d_\alpha\}_{\alpha \in J}$  which is Cauchy convergent: for every element  $\varepsilon_\beta$  of level 1 epsilon  $\{\varepsilon_\beta\}_{\beta \in K}$ , there exists an element  $d_\beta$  of  $\{d_\alpha\}$  such that every subsequent pair of values  $d_{\alpha_1}, d_{\alpha_2}$  are within  $\varepsilon_\beta$  of each other.

What we are doing here is taking the closure of the set of level 1 values under the operation of taking limits, which might or might not be embeddable in  $\hat{A}$ , and might be finer-grained. A level 1 value is included by a sequence that consists exclusively of that value.

### Note 3.2:

We compare two level 2 values  $v_1 = \{d_{1\alpha}\}_{\alpha \in J}$  and  $v_2 = \{d_{2\alpha}\}_{\alpha \in J}$  as follows:

If there is an element  $\alpha_0$  of  $J$  such that, for all subsequent values of  $\alpha_1$  and  $\alpha_2$  we have  $\alpha_1$  and  $\alpha_2$  then  $v_1 \hat{=} v_2$ .

If there is an element  $\alpha_0$  of  $J$  such that, for all subsequent values of  $\alpha_1$  and  $\alpha_2$  we have  $\alpha_1$  and  $\alpha_2$  then  $v_1 \hat{=} v_2$ .

If for every element  $\alpha_0$  of  $J$ , there exist subsequent  $\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \alpha_3$ , and  $\alpha_4$  such that  $d_{1\alpha_1} \hat{=} d_{2\alpha_2}$  and  $d_{1\alpha_3} \hat{=} d_{2\alpha_4}$ , then  $v_1 = v_2$ .

### Definition 3.3:

A *level 3 value* is defined to be an equivalence class of level 2 values under the partition induced by equality. Level 3 values are ordered in the same way that their members are ordered.

**Definition 3.4:**

A *level 2 zero* is defined to be an infinite sequence of level 1 zeroes.

**Definition 3.5:**

The *level 3 zero* is defined to be the equivalence class of the level 2 zeroes.

**Lemma 3.6:**

The set of points whose distances are less than  $v_1$  from point  $s_1$ , for any value  $v_1$  and point  $s_1$ , constitutes a ball.

**Proof:**

It is clear that every point in this set is closer to  $s_1$  than is any point not in the set. So we need only to know that the set does not contain any boundary points.

If there is a boundary point  $s_2$ , then there is an epsilon at that boundary point contained in the set, and an epsilon at that boundary disjoint from the set. From these can be chosen a sequence of distances that converges to  $(s_1, s_2)$  and is inside the set, whereby  $v_1 \hat{\%} \forall (s_1, s_2)$ , and can also be chosen by a sequence of distances that converges to  $(s_1, s_2)$  and is outside the set, whereby  $v_1 \hat{\%} \times (s_1, s_2)$ . So  $v_1 = (s_1, s_2)$ . The ball contains only points strictly closer than  $v_1$ , so it does not contain  $s_2$ .

â†’â†’

Q.E.D.

**Definition 3.7:**

The *supremum* (resp. *infimum*) of a nonempty set  $W$  of level 2 values is defined to be the equivalence class containing the sequences  $v_1$  of values which satisfy the following three conditions:

**Condition 3.7.1:**

All elements of  $v_1$  are contained in some element of  $W$ .

**Condition 3.7.2:**

$v_1$  contains at least one element greater than (resp. less than) or equal to any element of  $W$ .

**Condition 3.7.3:**

$v_1$  is monotonically nondecreasing (resp. nonincreasing).

**Remark 3.7.4:**

Not all sets will necessarily have a supremum or infimum. This a definition of what the supremum is if it exists, not necessarily a statement that one always exists.

There is at most a single equivalence class containing all such sequences, because any one contains an element greater than or equal to any element of any other, arbitrarily far along in the sequence.

The supremum and infimum of the empty set are undefined.

Now, we begin to develop an arithmetic.

**Definition 3.8:**

A value  $v_1$  is said to be *equal to*  $v_2 + v_3$  if  $v_1$  is the supremum over all triplets of points  $s_1, s_2$ , and  $s_3$  of the distance  $(s_1, s_3)$ , *such that the following two conditions hold:*

**Condition 3.8.1:**

$$(s_1, s_2) \hat{=} v_2$$

$$(s_2, s_3) \hat{=} v_3$$

**Condition 3.8.2:**

There do not exist any three points  $s_4, s_5,$  and  $s_6$  such that:

$$(s_4, s_4) \hat{=} v_2$$

$$(s_5, s_6) < v_3$$

$$(s_4, s_6) \hat{=} v_1$$

or

$$(s_4, s_4) < v_2$$

$$(s_5, s_6) \hat{=} v_2$$

$$(s_4, s_6) \hat{=} v_1$$

**Notation 3.8.3:**

A value  $v_1$  is said to be a *difference of  $v_2$  and  $v_3$*  if  $v_2 = v_1 + v_3$ .

**Remark 3.8.4**

This definition does not guarantee the existence of a sum of two values; it only tells how to tell if a given value is equal to the sum of two others.

This value is chosen for its simplicity, specificity, and power; there numerous other ways of defining addition, some of which would seem to be a more generalized version of addition, doing to addition in ordered, cyclic, abelian groups as we know them what metric spaces do to  $\hat{=}$ . However, we will not investigate that generality here, and in particular, we are going to restrict our attention to a specific subset of closeness spaces, those for which addition as here defined is associative and uniquely defined.

If we not only do not restrict our attention, but replace the given condition with the stipulation that  $v_1$  is the supremum over points  $s_1$  of distances from  $s_1$  is the supremum over points  $s_1$  of distances from  $s_1$  to a

point in the union of all closed balls of radius  $v_3$  whose centers lie in a closed ball of radius  $v^2$  centered at  $s_1$ , then we further lose commutativity; at least in the case of the long line, though, we have reproduced ordinal addition.

It appears that looking at those more general cases may be of mathematical interest and may allow the creation of an arithmetic that is looser and more general than that of an ordered, abelian group. However, we do not investigate that possibility here, and have not investigated it, beyond the brief attention paid in this remark.

This definition provides commutativity, and unique subtraction where defined (i.e.  $v_1 - v_2$  may not be defined, but if it is, it is unique; provided that  $v_1 - v_2$  may not be defined, but if it is, it is unique; provided that  $v_1 = v_2 + v_3$ , if  $v_4 < v_3$ , then the distances between pairs of points eligible for the definition of addition will be less by at least a minimum positive amount, by the triangle inequality, so  $v_2 + v_4 < v_2 + v_3 = v_1$ . This observation, as well as establishing that subtraction is not ambiguous (though possibly undefined), proves for us:

### **Theorem 3.9:**

For any three values  $v_1$ ,  $v_2$ , and  $v_3$  for which  $v_2 +$  is defined, we have:

If  $v_1 < v_2$ , then  $v_1 + v_3 < v_2 + v_3$ .

If  $v_1 = v_2$ , then  $v_1 + v_3 = v_2 + v_3$ .

If  $v_1 > v_2$ , then  $v_1 + v_3 > v_2 + v_3$ .

### **Sketch of Proof 3.9.1:**

The first case is established above. The second case is established from the first case by the symmetry of an ordering, and the third case is established by the contradiction which would arise from the transitivity of the ordering if one sum was less than the other.

We now define our next level of value; as we earlier developed a closure under the operation of taking limits, we now define a closure under the operation of addition. Again, we are going with the more specific and powerful definition of addition given, at the loss of some

generally.

### **Hunch 3.10:**

Addition of values is associative.

#### **Suggestion of Proof Idea 3.10.1:**

It seems that this arises from condition 3.8.2. Definition 3.8 is a refined version of earlier, less powerful definitions; we have not devoted enough time to the matter to establish associativity. We will continue on the assumption that this is true; one might say if need be that we are restricting our attention to spaces where addition is associative. We will further restrict attention to spaces which are closed under addition (although a slightly weaker condition is needed for my work, namely that any two level 4 values as defined below are uniquely comparable).

### **Definition 3.11:**

*A level 4 value* is defined to be a finite string of symbols as follows:

#### **Part 3.11.1:**

If  $v_1$  is a variable referring to a level 3 value, then " $v_1$ " is a level 4 value.

#### **Part 3.11.2:**

If " $s_1$ " and " $s_2$ " are two level 4 values, then " $(s_1 + s_2)$ " is a level 4 value.

#### **Part 3.11.3:**

If " $s_1$ " is a level 4 value, then so is " $-s_1$ ".

#### **Part 3.11.4:**

Nothing else is a level 4 value.

We compare level 4 values as follows:

we compare level 4 values as follows.

### **Comparison 3.11.5:**

If for level 3 values we have  $v_1 < v_2$ , then for level 4 values, we have “ $v_1$ ” < “ $v_2$ ” and “ $-v_1$ ” > “ $-v_2$ ”.

If for level 3 values we have  $v_1 = v_2$ , then for level 4 values, we have “ $v_1$ ” = “ $v_2$ ” and “ $-v_1$ ” > “ $-v_2$ ”.

If for level 3 values we have  $v_1 > v_2$ , then for level 4 values, we have “ $v_1$ ” > “ $v_2$ ” and “ $-v_1$ ” < “ $-v_2$ ”.

And we complete comparison by allowing certain manipulations, namely:

### **Part 3.11.6**

If for level 3 values we have  $v_1 = v_2 + v_3$ , then inside a level 4 value  $v_1$  may be substituted or back-substituted for  $v_2 + v_3$  and  $v_3 + v_2$ , then inside a level 4 value  $v_2$  may be substituted or back-substituted for  $v_1 + -v_3$ .

### **Part 3.11.7:**

We may associate and commute while preserving equality.

### **Part 3.11.8:**

We may add a like value to two different values without affecting their comparison.

### **Part 3.11.9:**

Comparison is transitive.  
We now define:

### **Definition 3.12:**

A *level 5 value* is an equivalence class of level 4 values under equality, with addition, additive inversion, and comparison of equivalence classes defined according to the equivalence classes of those operations on respective members.

We now have an ordered abelian group.

**Remark 3.13:**

It is well known that an ordered abelian group may be embedded in a field. (Source: Anand Pillay).

**Definition 3.14:**

For any two values  $v_1$  and  $v_2$ ,  $v_1$  is said to be *of the same magnitude* as  $v_2$  if there exists a positive natural number  $n$  such that either  $v_1 + v_1 + \hat{\leftarrow} + v_1 > v_2$  (with  $v_1$  added to itself  $nn$  times) and  $v_2 + v_2 + v_2 \hat{\leftarrow} v_2 > v_1$  (with  $v_2$  added to itself  $n$  times), or  $v_1 + v_1 + \hat{\leftarrow} + v_1 < -v_2$  (with  $v_1$  added to itself  $nn$  times) and  $-v_2 - v_2 - v_2 \hat{\leftarrow} -v_2 < v_1$  (with  $v_2$  added to itself  $n$  times).

It is clear that the magnitudes are equivalence classes of values.

The value 0 resides in its own magnitude, which will not be named.

**Part 3.14.1:**

Magnitude  $M_1$  is said to be *greater than* (resp. *less than*) magnitude  $M_2$  if it is a different magnitude, and  $M_1$  contains at least one positive value that is greater than (resp. less than) at least one positive value in  $M_2$ .

**Part 3.14.2:**

The magnitude which contains 1 is said to be *finite*.

All greater magnitudes than the finite magnitude are said to be *infinite*.

All lesser magnitudes than the finite magnitude (excluding the

magnitude of 0), are said to be *infinitesimal*. The variable  $\varepsilon$  will hereafter refer to an infinitesimal.

To give a specific example of what kind of ordered field we have, let us look at

### Example 3.15

Let closeness space  $C$  be the space examined in example 2.3.4, namely  $\hat{a}, \hat{a}^2 \tilde{A} - \hat{a}, \hat{a}^2$ , under the closenesses induced by the dictionary order on Euclidean closenesses.

Then the closenesses are of type  $\hat{a}, \hat{a}^2 \tilde{A} - \hat{a}, \hat{a}^2$ , in the dictionary order.

The elements of a minimal imbedding field are of order type  $S \hat{a} \hat{S}$ ,  $\hat{a}, \hat{a}^2 \hat{a}, \hat{a}^2$ , such that all but finitely many of the coordinates of an element of  $S$  are zero.

Comparison of values is a dictionary comparison of their coordinates.

Addition of two values is coordinate-wise addition of reals. I.e. if  $v_1$  and  $v_2$  are values and  $v_{1i}, v_{2i}$  are the  $i^{\text{th}}$  coordinates of  $v_1$  and  $v_2$  respectively, then the  $i^{\text{th}}$  coordinate of  $v_3$  of  $v_3 = v_1 + v_2$  is equal to  $v_{1i} + v_{2i}$ .

Multiplication of two values is as follows:

If  $v_1$  and  $v_1$  are as above, then  $v_3$  has coordinate  $v_{3i}$  equal to  $\sum_{j+k=i} v_{1j} \tilde{A} - v_{2k}$ .

This is isomorphic to the field of ratios of polynomials in a single variable, over the real numbers. Note that, although the order type is fixed, a constant  $c$  chosen so that  $c^0 = 1$ ,  $c^1$  is a number of the lowest infinite magnitude and zero coordinate in other magnitudes, and  $c^{-1}$  is a number of the highest infinitesimal magnitudes, is not a unique constant. Any one such value can be arrived at by multiplying another such value by a nonzero real number.

The interpretation of this representation as given is that the 0-coordinate is the finite component, components of positive  $\hat{a}, \hat{a}^2$  value are infinite components, and components of negative  $\hat{a}, \hat{a}^2$  value are infinitesimal components (or vice versa).

Under this interpretation, we can say that the given closeness space is

like a metric space, using the given field instead of  $\hat{a}$ ,  $\diamond$  as the measure. It could be stated to use the 0 coordinate for the large plane, and the  $-1$  coordinate for the miniature planes at each point of the large plan (in which case the space is interpreted as a roughly Euclidean plane with infinitesimal distances, or to use the 1-coordinate for the large plane, and the 0 coordinate for the small planes (in which case the space is interpreted as an infinite plane of real planes — it is to the Euclidean plane roughly as  $\omega^2$  is to  $\omega$  among ordinals), or indeed  $z$  and  $z - 1$  for any integer  $z$ .

### Example 3.15.1: Non-Standard Analysis

This allows achievement of at least some of the results of nonstandard analysis. For example:

#### Definition 3.15.1.1:

For the duration of this example, we define the *nearest real number* to a finite value to be the value of the same first coordinate, and zero component in the second coordinate. (I.e. a distance of  $3.7 \tilde{A} - 0$  is the nearest real number to  $3.7 \tilde{A} - 23.4$ .  $3.7 \tilde{A} - 23.4$  or  $0 \tilde{A} - 14$  are not the nearest real numbers to anything.)

#### Definition 3.15.1.2:

We define the *limit of a function  $\mathcal{A}'$  at point  $x$*  to be equal to the nearest real number to  $\mathcal{A}'(x + \varepsilon)$ , if such a real number exists and is uniquely defined across all infinitesimals  $\varepsilon$ .

For example, the limit of  $\mathcal{A}'(x) = x + 1$  at  $x = 1$  is the nearest real number to

$$\begin{aligned} \mathcal{A}'(x + \varepsilon) &= \\ f(1 + \varepsilon) &= \\ 1 + \varepsilon + 1 &= \\ 2 + \varepsilon & \end{aligned}$$

which has 2 as its nearest real number.

#### Definition 3.15.1.3:

We define a function  $f(x)$  to be *continuous at point x* if  $f$  is defined at  $x$  and if, for every infinitesimal  $\epsilon$ , we have  $||f(x + \epsilon) - f(x)||$  at most an infinitesimal.

For example, if we have

$$f(x) = x + 1 \text{ if } x \neq 0$$

$f(x) = 0$  otherwise

then we have  $f$  continuous at  $-1$  and  $1$ , but not continuous at  $0$ :

$$f(-1 + \epsilon) - f(-1) = 0 - 0 \quad f(1 + \epsilon) - f(1) = 1 + \epsilon + 1 - 1 + 1 = \epsilon$$

but problems when we examine a negative value of  $\epsilon$  with nearest real number at  $0$ :

If  $\epsilon < 0$ , then  $f(0 + \epsilon) = f(\epsilon)$ , but we have  $f(0) = 0 + 1 = 1$ , and  $0 - 1 = -1$  is not an infinitesimal.

**Definition 3.15.1.4:**

We define the derivative of a function  $f'$  at point  $x$  to be the nearest real number to

$$(f'(x + \epsilon) - f'(x)) / \epsilon$$

if such a number exists and is well-defined across all infinitesimals  $\epsilon$ .

For example, the derivative of  $f(x) = x^2$  is equal to the nearest real number to:

$$(x + \epsilon)^2 - x^2 / \epsilon =$$

$$(x^2 + 2x\epsilon + \epsilon^2 - x^2) / \epsilon =$$

$$(2x\epsilon + \epsilon^2) / \epsilon =$$

$$2x + \epsilon$$

and the nearest real number to  $2x + \epsilon$  is  $2x$ . So we have the derivative of  $x^2$  equal to  $2x$ .

## Closing remark

Providing a nonstandard analysis with derivatives seems straightforward enough; notwithstanding the fundamental theorem of calculus, it is not clear to this author how to adapt these findings to create an integral, although just as epsilon-delta arguments provide a finite workaround to infinitesimals, the core concept of integration in calculus find a finite workaround to summation of an infinite number of infinitesimally thick slices. It might be noted that this system does yet have the infinite sums and infinite integers of non-standard analysis. Perhaps our restricted attention disregarded some closeness spaces or other matters yielding fields that would allow a more powerful non-standard analysis; perhaps work with the closeness spaces involving the ordinals cross  $[0, 1)$  — a nonnegative long real number line — would achieve such things. However, we will draw a limit to the investigation here.

# The Commentary

Memories flitted through Martin's mind as he drove: tantalizing glimpses he had seen of how people really thought in Bible times. Glimpses that made him thirsty for more. It had seemed hours since he left his house, driving out of the city, across back roads in the forest, until at last he reached the quiet town. The store had printer's blocks in the window, and as he stepped in, an old-fashioned bell rung. There were old tools on the walls, and the room was furnished in beautifully varnished wood.

An old man smiled and said, "Welcome to my bookstore. Are you—" Martin nodded. The man looked at him, turned, and disappeared through a doorway. A moment later he was holding a thick leatherbound volume, which he set on the counter. Martin looked at the binding, almost afraid to touch the heavy tome, and read the letters of gold on its cover:

**COMMENTARY  
ON THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS  
IN ONE VOLUME  
CONTAINING A CAREFUL ANALYSIS OF ALL CULTURAL  
ISSUES  
NEEDFUL TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE  
AS DID ITS FIRST READERS**

"You're sure you can afford it, sir? I'd really like to let it go for a lower price, but you must understand that a book like this is costly, and I can't afford to sell it the way I do most other titles."

"Finances will be tight, but I've found knowledge to cost a lot and ignorance to cost more. I have enough money to buy it, if I make it a priority."

"Good. I hope it may profit you. But may I make one request, even if it sounds strange?"

"What is your request?"

"If, for any reason, you no longer want the commentary, or decide to get rid of it, you will let me have the first chance to buy it back."

"Sir? I don't understand. I have been searching for a book like this for years. I don't know how many miles I've driven. I will pay. You're right that this is more money than I could easily spare—and I am webmaster to a major advertising agency. I would have only done so for something I desired a great, great deal."

"Never mind that. If you decide to sell it, will you let me have the first chance?"

"Let's talk about something else. What text does it use?"

"It uses the *Revised Standard Version*. Please answer my question, sir."

"How could anyone prefer darkness to light, obscurity to illumination?"

"I don't know. Please answer my question."

"Yes, I will come to you first. Now will you sell it to me?"

The old man rung up the sale.

As Martin walked out the door, the shopkeeper muttered to himself, "Sold for the seventh time! Why doesn't anybody want to keep it?"

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Martin walked through the door of his house, almost exhausted, and yet full of bliss. He sat in his favorite overstuffed armchair, one that had been reupholstered more than once since he sat in it as a boy. He relaxed, the heavy weight of the volume pressing into his lap like a loved one, and then opened the pages. He took a breath, and began reading.

## **INTRODUCTION**

At the present time, most people believe the question of culture in relation to the Bible is a question of understanding the ancient cultures and accounting for their influence so as to be able to better understand Scripture. That is indeed a valuable field, but its benefits may only be reaped after addressing another concern, a concern that is rarely addressed by people eager to understand Ancient Near Eastern culture.

A part of the reader's culture is the implicit belief that he is not encumbered by culture: culture is what people live under long ago and far away. This is not true. As it turns out, the present culture has at least two beliefs which deeply influence and to some extent limit its ability to connect with the Bible. There is what scholars call 'period awareness', which is not content with the realization that we all live in a historical context, but places different times and places in sealed compartments, almost to the point of forgetting that people who live in the year 432, people who live in 1327, and people who live in 1987 are all human. Its partner in crime is the doctrine of progress, which says at heart that we are better, nobler, and wiser people than those who came before us, and our ideas are better, because ideas, like machines, grow rust and need to be replaced. This gives the reader the most extraordinary difficulties in believing that the Holy Spirit spoke through humans to address human problems in the Bible, and the answer speaks as much to us humans as it did to them. Invariably the reader believes that the Holy Spirit influenced a first century man trying to deal with first century problems, and a delicate work of extrication is needed before ancient texts can be adapted to turn-of-the-millennium concerns.

Martin shifted his position slightly, felt thirsty, almost decided to get up and get a glass of water, then decided to continue reading. He turned a

few pages in order to get into the real meat of the introduction, and resumed reading:

...is another example of this dark pattern.

In an abstracted sense, what occurs is as follows:

1. Scholars implicitly recognize that some passages in the Bible are less than congenial to whatever axe they're grinding.
2. They make a massive search, and subject all of the offending passages to a meticulous examination, an examination much more meticulous than orthodox scholars ever really need when they're trying to understand something.
3. In parallel, there is an exhaustive search of a passage's historical-cultural context. This search dredges up a certain kind of detail—in less flattering terms, it creates disinformation.
4. No matter what the passage says, no matter who's examining it, this story always has the same ending. It turns out that the passage in fact means something radically different from what it appears to mean, and in fact does not contradict the scholar at all.

This dark pattern has devastating effect on people from the reader's culture. They tend to believe that culture has almost any influence it is claimed to; in that regard, they are very gullible. It is almost unheard-of for someone to say, "I'm sorry, no; cultures can make people do a lot of things, but I don't believe a culture could have *that* influence."

It also creates a dangerous belief which is never spoken in so many words: "If a passage in the Bible appears to contradict what we believe today, that is because we do not adequately understand its cultural context."

Martin coughed. He closed the commentary slowly, reverently placed it on the table, and took a walk around the block to think.

Inside him was turmoil. It was like being at an illusionist show, where impossible things happened. He recalled his freshman year of college, when his best friend Chaplain was a student from Liberia, and come winter, Chaplain was not only seared by cold, but looked betrayed as the

icy ground became a traitor beneath his feet. Chaplain learned to keep his balance, but it was slow, and Martin could read the pain off Chaplain's face. How long would it take? He recalled the shopkeeper's words about returning the commentary, and banished them from his mind.

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

### **Genesis**

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

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

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

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

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

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

the electrical circuit and allowing current to flow through the bulb, which grows hot and produces light."

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

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

He decided to see what it would have to say about a problem passage. He flipped to Ephesians 5:

5:21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

5:22 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.

5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

5:24 As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

5:26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

5:27 that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

5:28 Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

5:29 For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church,

5:30 because we are members of his body.

5:31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

5:32 This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it

refers to Christ and the church;

5:33 however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The reader is at this point pondering what to do with this problem passage. At the moment, he sees three major options: first, to explain it away so it doesn't actually give husbands authority; second, to chalk it up to misogynist Paul trying to rescind Jesus's progressive liberality; and third, to take this as an example of why the Bible can't really be trusted.

To explain why the reader perceives himself caught in this unfortunate choice, it is necessary to explain a powerful cultural force, one whose effect cannot be ignored: feminism. Feminism has such a powerful effect among the educated in his culture that the question one must ask of the reader is not "Is he a feminist?" but "What kind of feminist is he, and to what degree?"

Feminism flows out of a belief that it's a wonderful privilege to be a man, but it is tragic to be a woman. Like Christianity, feminism recognizes the value of lifelong penitence, even the purification that can come through guilt. It teaches men to repent in guilt of being men, and women to likewise repent of being women. The beatific vision in feminism is a condition of sexlessness, which feminists call 'androgyny'.

Martin stopped. "What kind of moron wrote this? Am I actually supposed to believe it?" Then he continued reading:

This is why feminism believes that everything which has belonged to men is a privilege which must be shared with women, and everything that has belonged to women is a burden which men must also shoulder. And so naturally, when Paul asserts a husband's authority, the feminist sees nothing but a privilege unfairly hoarded by men.

Martin's skin began to feel clammy.

The authority asserted here is not a domineering authority that uses power to serve oneself. Nowhere in the Bible does Paul tell

husbands how to dominate their wives. Instead he follows Jesus's model of authority, one in which leadership is a form of servanthood. Paul doesn't just assume this; he explicitly tells the reader, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." The sigil of male headship and authority is not a crown of gold, but a crown of thorns.

Martin was beginning to wish that the commentary had said, "The Bible is misogynistic, and that's good!" He was beginning to feel a nagging doubt that what he called problem passages were in fact perfectly good passages that didn't look attractive if you had a problem interpretation. What was that remark in a theological debate that had gotten so much under his skin? He almost wanted not to remember it, and then—"Most of the time, when people say they simply cannot understand a particular passage of Scripture, *they understand the passage perfectly well*. What they don't understand is how to explain it away so it doesn't contradict them."

He paced back and forth, and after a time began to think, "The sword can't always cut against me, can it? I know some gay rights activists who believe that the Bible's prohibition of homosexual acts is nothing but taboo. Maybe the commentary on Romans will give me something else to answer them with." He opened the book again:

1:26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural,

1:27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

The concept of 'taboo' in the reader's culture needs some explanation. When a person says, "That's taboo," what's being said is that there is an unthinking, irrational prejudice against it: one must not go against the prejudice because then people will be upset, but in some sense to call a restriction a taboo is *de facto* to show it unreasonable.

The term comes from Polynesia and other South Pacific islands,

where it is used when people recognize there is a line which it is wiser not to cross. Thomas Aquinas said, "The peasant who does not murder because the law of God is deep in his bones is greater than the theologian who can derive, 'Thou shalt not kill' from first principles."

A taboo is a restriction so deep that most people cannot offer a ready explanation. A few can; apologists and moral philosophers make a point of being able to explain the rules. For most people, though, they know what is right and what is wrong, and it is so deeply a part of them that they cannot, like an apologist, start reasoning with first principles and say an hour and a half later, "and this is why homosexual acts are wrong."

What goes with the term 'taboo' is an assumption that if you can't articulate your reasons on the drop of a hat, that must mean that you don't have any good reasons, and are acting only from benighted prejudice. Paradoxically, the term 'taboo' is itself a taboo: there is a taboo against holding other taboos, and this one is less praiseworthy than other taboos...

Martin walked away and sat in another chair, a high wooden stool. What was it that he had been thinking about before going to buy the commentary? A usability study had been done on his website, and he needed to think about the results. Designing advertising material was different from other areas of the web; the focus was not just on a smooth user experience but also something that would grab attention, even from a hostile audience. Those two goals were inherently contradictory, like mixing oil and water. His mind began to wander; he thought about the drive to buy the commentary, and began to daydream about a beautiful woman clad only in—

What did the commentary have to say about lust? Jesus said it was equivalent to adultery; the commentary probably went further and made it unforgiveable. He tried to think about work, but an almost morbid curiosity filled him. Finally, he looked up the Sermon on the Mount, and opened to Matthew:

5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

5:28 But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman

lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

There is a principle here that was once assumed and now requires some explanation. Jesus condemned lust because it was doing in the heart what was sinful to do in the hands. There is a principle that is forgotten in centuries of people saying, "I can do whatever I want as long as it doesn't harm you," or to speak more precisely, "I can do whatever I want as long as I don't see how it harms you." Suddenly purity was no longer a matter of the heart and hands, but a matter of the hands alone. Where captains in a fleet of ships once tried both to avoid collisions and to keep shipshape inside, now captains believe that it's OK to ignore mechanical problems inside as long as you try not to hit other ships—and if you steer the wheel as hard as you can and your ship still collides with another, you're not to blame. Heinrich Heine wrote:

Should ever that taming talisman break—the Cross—then will come roaring back the wild madness of the ancient warriors, with all their insane, Berserker rage, of whom our Nordic poets speak and sing. That talisman is now already crumbling, and the day is not far off when it shall break apart entirely. On that day, the old stone gods will rise from their long forgotten wreckage and rub from their eyes the dust of a thousand years' sleep. At long last leaping to life, Thor with his giant hammer will crush the gothic cathedrals. And laugh not at my forebodings, the advice of a dreamer who warns you away from the . . . *Naturphilosophen*. No, laugh not at the visionary who knows that in the realm of phenomena comes soon the revolution that has already taken place in the realm of spirit. For thought goes before deed as lightning before thunder. There will be played in Germany a play compared to which the French Revolution was but an innocent idyll.

Heinrich Heine was a German Jewish poet who lived a century before Thor's hammer would crush six million of his kinsmen.

The ancient world knew that thought goes before deed as lightning before thunder. They knew that purity is an affair of the heart as well as the hands. Now there is grudging acknowledgment

that lust is wrong, a crumbling acceptance that has little place in the culture's impoverished view, but this acknowledgment is like a tree whose soil is taken away. For one example of what goes with that tree, I would like to look at advertising.

Porn uses enticing pictures of women to arouse sexual lust, and can set a chain of events in motion that leads to rape. Advertising uses enticing pictures of chattels to arouse covetous lust, and exists for the sole reason of setting a chain of events in motion that lead people to waste resources by buying things they don't need. The fruit is less bitter, but the vine is the same. Both operate by arousing impure desires that do not lead to a righteous fulfillment. Both porn and advertising are powerfully unreal, and bite those that embrace them. A man that uses porn will have a warped view of women and be slowly separated from healthy relations. Advertising manipulates people to seek a fulfillment in things that things can never provide: buying one more product can never satisfy that deep craving, any more than looking at one more picture can. Bruce Marshall said, "...the young man who rings at the door of a brothel is unconsciously looking for God." Advertisers know that none of their products give a profound good, nothing like what people search for deep down inside, and so they falsely present products as things that are transcendent, and bring family togetherness or racial harmony.

It has been asked, "Was the Sabbath made for man, or was man made for the Sabbath?" Now the question should be asked, "Was economic wealth made for man, or was man made for economic wealth?" The resounding answer of advertising is, "Man was made for economic wealth." Every ad that is sent out bears the unspoken message, "You, the customer, exist for me, the corporation."

Martin sat in his chair, completely stunned.

After a long time, he padded off to bed, slept fitfully, and was interrupted by nightmares.

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The scenic view only made the drive bleaker. Martin stole guiltily into the shop, and laid the book on the counter. The shopkeeper looked at him, and he at the shopkeeper.

"Didn't you ask who could prefer darkness to light, obscurity to illumination?"

Martin's face was filled with anguish. "How can I live without my darkness?"

# A Comparison Between the Mere Monk and the Highest Bishop

I believe that if some of the best bishops were asked, "How would you like to step down from all of your honors, and all of your power, and hand the reins over to an excellent successor, and become only the lowest rank of monk at an obscure monastery in the middle of nowhere with no authority over any soul's salvation but your own" would you take it?" their response might be, "Um, uh... *what's the catch?*"

If I may comment briefly on virginity and marriage: in a culture where you try to rip your opponent's position to shreds instead of aiming for fair balance in a critique, St. Gregory of Nyssa's [On Virginity](#) is *meant* to rip marriage to shreds. I don't mean that, and I would say something that I don't think needed to be said, or at least not needed to be said, as much: *true marriage should be seen as having something of the hallowed respect associated with monasticism*. A marriage in its fullest traditional sense, is becoming (or already is) something that should be called exotic if people didn't look down their noses at it. As far as true marriage relates to monasticism, the externals are almost antithetical but the goal is the same: self-transcendence. The person who said, "Men love women. Women love children. Children love pets. Life isn't fair," is on to something. Getting into marriage properly requires stepping beyond an egotism of yourself; raising children, if you are so blessed, requires stepping beyond an egotism of two. And Biblically and patristically,

childlessness was seen as a curse; the priestly father to whom one child was given in old age, the Mother of God herself, bore derision even in his high office because people viewed childlessness as a curse enough to be a sign of having earned divine judgment and wrath. And at a day and age where marriage is being torn from limb to limb, it might befit us to make particular efforts to honor marriage alongside monasticism.

There is one advantage to monasticism; actually, there are several, but one eclipses the others, and that is mentioned when St. Paul recognizes that not everyone can be celibate like him, marriage being a legitimate and honorable option. But he mentions a significant advantage to celibacy: the married person must have divided attention between serving family and the Lord, where a celibate person (today this usually belongs in monasticism) is able to give God an undivided attention, enjoying the blessed estate of a Mary sitting at the Lord's feet as a disciple taking in the one thing that is truly necessary, and not as a Martha who is busily encumbered with many other things. And while St. Paul knows that not everybody can walk the celibate path, he does at least wish that people could offer God an undivided attention. And I have yet to hear Orthodox challenge that any genuine marriage includes a condition of divided attention.

If we leave off talking about bishops just briefly, let's take a brief look at the abbot next to a simple monk under him ("simple monk" is a technical term meaning a monk who has not additionally been elevated to any minor or major degree of sacramental priesthood). The simple monk has lost some things, but he has in full the benefit St. Paul wants celibates to have: everything around him is ordered to give him the best opportunity to work on salvation. Meanwhile, any abbot who is doing an abbot's job is denied this luxury. Some abbots have been tempted to step down from their honored position because of how difficult they've found caring for themselves spiritually as any monk should, and additionally care for the many needs of a monastery and the other monks. An abbot may not focus on his own salvation alone; he must divide his attention to deal with disciples and various secular material needs a monastery must address. An abbot is a monk who must bear a monk's full cross; in addition, while an abbot has no sexual license, he must also bear the additional cross of a father who is dividing his attention in dealing with those under his care. He may be celibate, but he effectively forgoes the chief benefit St. Paul ascribes to living a celibate life.

Chief benefit St. Paul ascribes to living a celibate life.

To be a heirarch brings things another level higher. Right now I don't want to compare the mere monk with a bishop, but rather compare an abbot with a bishop. The abbot acts as a monk in ways that include the full life participation in the services and environment in a monastery. It may be true that the abbot is more finely clad than *other* monks, but abbot and simple monk alike are involved in the same supportive environment, and what abbot and simple monk share is greater than their difference. By comparison, unless the bishop is one of few bishops serving in a monastery, the bishop may be excused for perhaps feeling like a fish out of water. It may be desired that a bishop have extensive monastic character formation, but a bishop is compelled to live in the world, and to travel all over the place in ways and do some things that other monastics rightly flee. Now the heirarch does have the nicest robes of all, and has privileges that no one else has, but it is too easy to see a bishop's crownlike mitre in the majesty of Liturgy and fail to sense the ponderous, heavy crown of thorns invisibly present on a bishop's head all the time. Every Christian must bear his cross, but you are very ignorant about the cross a bishop bears if you think that being a bishop is all about wearing the vestments of the Roman emperor, being called "Your Grace" or "Your Eminence," and sitting on a throne at the center of everything.

Now it is possible to be perfectly satisfied to wear a bishop's robes; for that matter it is possible to be perfectly satisfied to wear an acolyte's robe or never wear liturgical vestments at all. But I know someone who is really bright, and has been told, "*You are the most brilliant person I know!*" The first time around it was really intoxicating; by the fifth or sixth time he felt more like someone receiving uninteresting old news, and it was more a matter of disciplined social skills than spontaneous delight to keep trying to keep giving a graceful and fitting response to an extraordinary compliment. Perhaps the *first* time a new heirarch is addressed as "Your Grace," "Your Emimence," or "Vladyka," it feels intoxicatingly heady. However, I don't believe the effect lasts much more than a week, if even that. There is reason to address heirarchs respectfully and appropriately, but it is really much less a benefit to the bishop than it is a benefit to us, and this is for the same reason children who respect adults are better off than children who don't respect adults. Children who respect adults benefit much more from adults' care, and faithful who respect clergy (including respect for heirarchs) benefit much more from

pastoral care.

As I wrote in [A pet Owner's rules](#), God is like a pet Owner who has two rules, and only two rules. The first rule, and the more important one, is "I am your Owner. Receive freely of the food and drink I have given you," and the second is really more a clarification than anything else: "*Don't drink out of the toilet.*" The first comparison is to drunkenness. A recovering alcoholic will tell you that being drunk all the time is not a delight; it is suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. "Strange as it may sound, you have to be basically sober even to enjoy getting drunk:" drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet. *But you don't need to literally drink to be drinking out of the toilet.*

There is something like a confused drinking out of the toilet in ambition, and in my own experience, ambition is not only sinful, but it is a recipe to not enjoy things. Being an abbot may be more prestigious than being a simple monk and being a bishop may be more prestigious than being an abbot but looking at things that way is penny wise and pound foolish.

Ambition reflects a fundamental confusion that sees external honors but not the cross tied to such nonors. I hope to write this without making married Orthodox let go of one whit of their blessed estate, but the best position to be in is a simple monastic, end of discussion. It is a better position to be a simple monastic than to be an abbot, and it is a better position to be an abbot than a heirarch. Now the Church needs clergy, including abbots and heirarchs, and it is right to specifically pray for them as the Liturgy and daily prayer books have it. Making a monk into a priest or abbot, or bishop, represents a sacrifice. Now all of us are called to be a sacrifice at some level, and God's grace rests on people who are clergy for good reasons. An abbot who worthily bears both the *cross* of the celibate and the *cross* of the married in this all-to-transient world may shine with a double *crown* for ever and ever. But the lot we should seek for is not that of Martha cumbered about with much serving; it is of Mary embracing the one thing needful.

The best approach is to apply full force to seeking everything that is better, and then have God persistently tell us if we are to step in what might be called "the contemplative life perfected in action."

The Patriarch's throne, mantle, crown, title, and so on are truly great and glorious.

But they pale in comparison to the hidden Heavenly honors given to a

but they pale in comparison to the hidden heavenly honors given to a simple monk, an eternal glory that can be present in power here and now.

# Connections

No man is an island. I live in connection with institutions and other people, and I would like to provide a list of some of them. My list of friends is necessarily incomplete because most of them don't have webpages. (If you know me and am wondering why I don't have a link to your homepage, please [contact me](#).)

## Organizations

My connections with these organizations vary. Some I am formally connected with, some informally; with some the connection is present and with some it is past. (And no, I don't speak for them, unless they say so.) There's a disproportionately high list of groups doing things with the mind; my guess as to why is that other communities I'm involved with aren't as likely to have web pages.

### [Calvin College](#)

I completed my bachelor's in pure mathematics at Calvin. In many ways it was like Wheaton: a beautiful campus, challenging classes available, and faculty who care about students. I enjoyed moving about by touch in dark underground tunnels there, and improvising on the chapel organ. It was there that my most prized writings began: [Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement](#) and [The Grinch Who Stole Christmas](#). The Christian Reformed Church, which runs Calvin, puts a heavy emphasis on thinking Christianly, and it shows. (They also have a goofy tendency to worship the human mind, but we won't go into that.)

### [Cambridge University](#)

I earned my second master's at Cambridge, England, a beautiful place where I took the pictures on my [home page](#) and the pictures I used for [Impressions of Cambridge](#), a Myst-like virtual tour.

### [Church of the Great Shepherd](#)

Church of the Great Shepherd has felt about as much of a home as any church has. A lot of things are nice—there's more than one culture present, and the people are interesting—but the one thing that draws me most about it is that there is a community of love, worship, and the presence of the Spirit. There are a lot of little things

I could point to and say "I like this, I like that," but the one overriding interest is that God's love is present. Leaving Church of the Great Shepherd, alongside leaving the people I know at Wheaton, is one of few things I was not looking forward to in my future studies at Cambridge. Church of the Great Shepherd is a place of fond memories for me.

### [Eolas Technologies](#)

One respected book on software development said that, if you find a technically competent boss, you should do everything in your power to keep him. Mike Doyle, CEO and founder of Eolas, is all that and more. He's a brilliant inventor who designed Eolas the way an inventor would design it, and as a person he's surprised me by going the extra mile. I'd love to see him meet Mike Welge, who hired me into the [National Center for Supercomputing Applications](#); both Eolas and NCSA combine deep thought, cool discovery, and technologies taken right out of science fiction books.

### [Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy](#)

IMSA has very much its own feel, and creates a niche both eccentric and intriguing. I would trace my being taught to think and explore as a scholar to IMSA—I consider it the beginning of my higher education, and I graduated ready to take the highest level of coursework in mathematics, computer science, physics, philosophy, and French. I missed my graduation because I was away at a math contest, and IMSA was kind enough to devote a whole minute of silence to me before other graduates walked up to receive their diplomas.

### [Mega Foundation](#)

The Mega Foundation exists to serve some of the needs of very bright individuals. (What special needs could there be? That would take a lot of explaining.) Among other things, the Mega Foundation runs the *Ultranet* (which has been important to me). It provides an environment for spellbinding conversation, and gave the warmest response of any online community when I shared that I'd been accepted to a good graduate school.

### [Newman Foundation](#)

The Newman Foundation at the University of Illinois was founded to provide a home away from home for Catholic students. It appears to be, with the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, one of two

loci of vibrant Christian faith where "Christianity" does not mean "Christianity, revised and edited," or the "Church of Jesus, Buddha, and Socrates," or what some scholars term "Gnosticism." The Foundation runs Newman Hall, where I stayed, and Newman Foundation Koinonia, where a retreat serves as the entrance to a very warm community. The hall has a few priests etc. on staff whose job description is 90% to care about you, whether or not you're Catholic.

### Pooh's Corner

Pooh's Corner is a group of mostly Wheaton students (an administrator and a couple of alumni thrown in) who meet at 9:58 Tuesday evenings to read children's books aloud. It's a colorful tradition, at times quite animated, and the silliness and fellowship are delightful. At the beginning of this year, when we were making signs to invite people, one student suggested the slogan, "Pooh's Corner. Come for the women; stay for the food!" He was naturally met by a hail of crayons, but that sign ended up getting as much applause as any.

### [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#)

Many Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy alumni arrive there, where I earned a master's in applied mathematics with a computational science and engineering option. I was also the first student to graduate with the department's new thesis option. My thesis described a new kind of mathematical structure between a topology and a metric space. It turns out to be easy to use those spaces to derive new types of numbers. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, like many other universities, is a little universe of its own. Other Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy alumni complained that the environment was boring, but I think they missed one of the most valuable lessons from attending a boarding school in the middle of a cornfield (no cars allowed). The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has the [National Center for Supercomputing Applications](#), a library of byzantine complexity, and all sorts of student organizations. There's plenty of reason to find that fascinating.

### [Université de Sorbonne](#)

My time at the Sorbonne is part of why I am so delighted to be accepted to Cambridge. I spent a semester studying abroad, and

when I left France, my heart stayed. There are so many things about France that feel like home: wine, beautiful architecture, and saying hi to friends with a kiss on the cheek are among the more concretely enumerable reasons why. They are important, but there's something of the mindset that's harder to describe and which I prize highly. England and France are not the same country, but I believe that that spark will also be seen in Cambridge.

### [Wheaton College](#)

I went to Wheaton College after high school, and have kept ties since then. When I realized that some community requirements were set in a way I couldn't keep in good conscience, I left; the experience was painful, but Wheaton remains a place of sharp thinkers and considerable kindness. Wheaton remains close to my heart.

## People

### [Angell O de la Sierra](#)

I met Angell over a mailing list, and he has probably extended a warmer welcome to me than anyone else on the list. Of the different things, I value his warmth most. He also is interested in law, medicine, cognitive science, writing, etc.

### [Josh Wibberley](#)

Josh grew up in Turkey, writes, thinks, and makes web pages. He's also good at entering other people's worlds.

### [Robin Munn](#)

Robin is my best friend. He grew up in France, double majored in computer science and philosophy, and wants to provide technical support for missionaries. He wants very much to be a good listener in his interactions with other people.

# Contemplation

## Enjoying something from legal English

A lawyer, one Dr. Sandburg, wrote [The Legal Guide to Mother Goose](#), doing his professional best to rewrite "Jack and Jill went up the hill" with the full precision of a legal document:

The party of the first part hereinafter known as Jack  
And the party of the second part hereinafter known as Jill  
Ascended or caused to be ascended  
An elevation of undetermined height and slope  
Hereinafter referred to as hill,

And it must be conceded that the English of legal documents is rarely held up as an example of how to communicate to people without extensive legal training. However, there is one point where we would do well to pay close attention to legal English.

"Enjoy" is a word frequently used in contracts, appearing like:

4. \_\_\_\_\_ will enjoy an unlimited right to sell, redistribute, publish, make derivative works to...

And "enjoy" means something that is alike powerful and beautiful here. It does not mean—one is tempted to say "has nothing to do with"—an agreement that someone will have pleasure. Contracts like this, even when they say "enjoy", really do not have much to say about how much fun and pleasure either party will take from the agreement. "Enjoy" is a

run and pleasure either party will take from the agreement. Enjoy is a technical term that means something like "derive the full benefits from", so that:

4. \_\_\_\_\_ will **enjoy** an unlimited right to sell, redistribute, publish, make derivative works to...

means something like:

4. \_\_\_\_\_ will **derive the full benefits from** an unlimited right to sell, redistribute, publish, make derivative works to...

And with that view in mind, let's take a look at the opening question of the Westminster Catechism:

Q: 1. What is the chief end of man?

A: Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

"Enjoy" may here include taking delight from God, but I would like to point something out. In this famous catechism, what is enjoyed is not a legal right. (For that matter, [Orthodoxy can get along quote well without the Western obsession with rights.](#)) What is enjoyed is not a legal right such as contracts deal in, but God himself.

## **"Mission exists because worship does not."**

There is something in Protestant missions I would like to look at and then deepen.

Among devout Protestants who care most deeply about mission, there is a saying, "Mission exists because worship does not." The premise of this emphatic saying is that God has never created anyone for the purpose of missions. Every man who ever has been created has been created for one goal only: worshiping God. Or in the language of the catechism, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him together." And some are quick to point out that these are not two separate things: glorifying God and enjoying him are the exact same thing. No one is created for mission; everyone is created for worship. But there is a tragic reality. Some people are not in a position to fulfill the purpose for which they are made. And because some people are deprived of the glorious worship they are made for, and there is this gap in worship, the Christian Church as a whole, and some Christians in particular, should serve in missions.

There are differences between Orthodox and Protestant understandings of mission: Protestant training, such as Wheaton College's *Institute for Cross-Cultural Training*, give a kickstart in both anthropology and linguistics, training people to learn languages and communicate well in cross-cultural situations. The Orthodox history of missions does not ignore language or culture, but its best mission work is to have monks who are trained in holiness go out among people and let their holiness itself speak. If one reads of a St. Herman of Alaska, whose mission work is still bearing fruit in Alaska today, the story is overall not of an endeavor to understand language and culture, but of a man pouring

himself out in love for God and having successful missionary activity precisely because he followed the maxim, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his perfect righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you as well." I've attended courses at Wheaton's *Institute for Cross-Cultural Training* and every person I spoke with was devout. But the content of the training itself, focused on language and culture, is by Orthodox standards a secular idea of how to succeed as a missionary. The Orthodox idea that the best missionary is a monk pursuing holiness as fully as he can, and that missions work when you live among people and seek first the Kingdom of God.

## **Ascesis exists because contemplation does not**

Ascesis, meaning the spiritual disciplines of the Orthodox walk, means an open-ended list that includes prayer, fasting, church attendance, giving to the poor, spiritual stillness, and other things. It is profoundly important in Orthodoxy. But in an even stronger sense than we can say, "Mission exists because worship does not," we can say, "Ascesis exists because contemplation does not." And the observation here is not that there are others who are missing the glory they were made to share. The observation is that we have fallen short of the glory we were made to share, and we need the purifying fire of ascesis. We and others need ascesis, but this is the point. We were not created for ascetical toil. We need ascesis because we have fallen away from the contemplation we were made for, the contemplation which is another name for enjoying God.

And I have wanted to speak of contemplation but find myself falling short. Of our sins and our need to be polished in ascesis it is easy to say something adequate. But for contemplation, words fail me, or at least my command of words. Contemplation is a joy and other things pale in comparison next to it: yet even to speak of it as a joy is misleading, as misleading as reading a contract and think that "enjoy" means nothing more than assuring that someone will experience pleasure. Better, perhaps, is to say that I thirst for honor, I want worldly accolades and am too ungrateful to be satisfied with the worldly honors I have. But when I taste contemplation, such honors grow strangely dim and I find myself wanting what is really good for me, thirsting and sated for real honor, real achievement, real love of others, and the debris I chase after in temptation looks like... in [Silence: Organic Food for the Soul](#) I wrote:

...is that we are like a child with some clay,  
trying to satisfy ourselves by making a clay horse,  
with clay that never cooperates, never looks right,  
and obsessed with clay that is never good enough,  
we ignore and maybe fear  
the finger tapping us on our shoulder  
until with great trepidation we turn,  
and listen to the voice say,  
"Stop trying so hard. Let it go,"  
and follow our father  
as he gives us a warhorse.

And so I am left saying that enjoying God in contemplation is  
beautiful beyond beauty, and words fail me, and ideas too. I want to tell  
of God and contemplation above all else, and nothing I can say fits them.

## Enjoying apples

Apples are a powerful symbol in Orthodoxy. It is not just that the Song of Songs has a lovesick bride say, "Refresh me with apples." Apples appear again and again in [the spiritual treasure housed in the lives of the saints](#). The saints are refreshed with apples; a priest prays to see what paradise is like, and St. Euphrosynos appears to him in a dream and invites him to take whatever he desires. He chose three apples, and the cook Euphrosynos wrapped them up. The priest awoke from the dream and was astonished to find three apples, wrapped as they had been in the vision, fragrant beyond all measure. (When he told what happened, the cook ran to flee from worldly honor.) Another story tells of an abbess, at the end of her life, being given three apples from paradise. It is perhaps a reminiscence of this that in *The Magician's Nephew*, Digory is sorely tempted to steal a Heavenly apple, comes clean about his covetousness, is told of all the evils that would have flown, and then to his astonishment is commanded to take such an apple as he desired to his ailing mother. And he returns home from Narnia and its garden:

...so the fruit of that mountain garden looked different too. There were of course all sorts of coloured things in the bedroom: the coloured counterpane on the bed, the wallpaper, the sunlight from the window, and Mother's pretty, pale blue dressing jacket. But the moment Digory took the Apple out of his pocket, all those things seemed to have scarcely any colour at all. Every one of them, even the sunlight, looked faded and dingy. The brightness of the Apple threw strange lights on the ceiling. Nothing else was worth looking at: you couldn't look at anything else. And the smell of the Apple of Youth was as if there was a window that opened on Heaven.

Such apples are no concoction that began in a fantasy writer's imagination, however creative. There are saints who have tasted them. But what makes the apple so astonishing is that **such apples are a bit like contemplation.**

# **A Cord of Seven Strands**

## Chapter One

"Boo!" Sarah, who had been moving silently, pounced on Jaben, and wrapped her arms around him.

"Hi, Sarah. Just a second." He typed in a few more lines of code, saved his work, and ran *make*. As the computer began chugging away, Jaben reached down and pinched Sarah's knee. She jumped, and squeaked.

"Aren't you ever surprised?"

"By some things, yes. But I have a preconscious awareness of when you're trying to sneak up on me."

"Even when you're deep in concentration, programming your whatever-it-is on the computer?"

"Even when I'm deep in concentration, programming my whatever-it-is on the computer."

Sarah paused, and looked around. They were in the place where their circle of friends met — a big, old house which an elderly couple in the church was allowing them to use. It had many niches and personal touches, nooks and crannies, and was home to a few mice, especially in the winter. (There was a general agreement not to get a cat or mousetraps, but simply to minimize the amount of food left about.) The house even had a not-so-secret secret passage, a perennial favorite of the children who came to visit. This room had deep blue, textured wallpaper, with a painting hanging on the wall: an earth tone watercolor of the sinful woman kissing Jesus's feet. There were bits and pieces of computers lying about, and a few computer books, some of which were falling apart. That room — and the whole house — was a place that bore someone's fingerprints, that said, "I have a story to tell."

"I was listening to the radio," Sarah said, "and the fire danger has gotten even worse. Things have gone from parched to beyond parched. It wouldn't take much to start a blaze."

"I know," Jaben said. "We can only be careful and pray."

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Thaddeus drove up to the rifle range. He reached into the back seat, and pulled out a blue .22 competition rifle, a box of rounds, some nails, a small hammer, some targets... He sat down on a bench, and slowly cleaned his gun. There was a funny smell, he thought, but he did not pay it much attention.

He went over and nailed a target to a stump, then moved everything in front of him and to the left, lay prone, and slowly waited for target and sight to align, and fired. Nine points. Good, but he could do better. He reloaded, and this time went more slowly. He drew a deep breath, grew still, waited even more slowly for the sight and target to line up, and fired. Ten points, dead center. The same for the third round, and the fourth. "Good." Confident, Thaddeus fired a fifth shot, and frowned. He had only gotten seven points.

He started to go up to replace the target — "This time if I slow down and really concentrate, I think I can get 50 points." — and unwittingly kicked over a small plastic bottle. Then he turned around, and said to himself, "I think I'm going to try to shoot the nail." He lay down, loaded another round, and fired. Lead splattered at the top of the target face, and the target fell. He relaxed, and let his gun down.

"Boy, the sun is blistering hot today." Thaddeus blinked; the air seemed to shimmer as if it were a mirage. Then he looked around a bit. His eyes widened, and his jaw dropped.

There, in the dry grass before him, were dancing flames.

Thaddeus groaned; he immediately recognized the funny smell he'd ignored. He hadn't exactly grabbed the right fluid to clean his gun...

He threw his apple juice on the fire, which hissed and sizzled, but did not diminish much. Then he grabbed his gun and ran to his car.

As he drove away, Thaddeus heard the report as the unused rounds exploded.

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Thaddeus ran through the living room, upsetting a game of Mao that was being played. He dialed 911. "There's a fire! Rifle range near this house." After a few questions, he called a phone tree and hurried those present into the cars. Sarah and Jaben joined Thad in his car — a rusty, ten year old black Cadillac with the driver's side window broken and deep blue pictures painted on the side — and the other four got into an equally rusty trade van, a nondescript brown with a ladder, some rope, some tools, several rolls of duct tape, some paint cans, some tents, inside. They locked up, and began to bounce up and down some primitive roads.

As they passed, the spreading wall of fire loomed ahead of them.

"What do we do now?" Sarah said.

"Floor it!" Thad said.

Jaben did. He jounced through the straight stretch of road by the rifle range, where everything on the ground was glowing ashes; the heat, coming through the broken window, was incredible, and singed Jaben's hair. "We're coming through the other side of the fire!" They did, and flew out. Behind them, they could see a falling sapling land on the van. A quarter of a second earlier, and it would have shattered their windshield.

Jaben breathed a little easier as cool air blew in through the window. "Woo-hoo!" shouted Thaddeus. They slowed down, and drove.

## Chapter Two

They continued several miles, and then Jaben pulled into a gas station, low on fuel. As he fueled up, Amos stepped out of the van and walked over.

"What do we do now?"

"Well, I think we're far enough away, and we're near Frank's Inn. It might be nice to sit and collect our thoughts there."

"Jaben, I like a good drink as much as you do—"

"—Miller Genuine Draft does *not* constitute a good drink—"

"—but do you really want the smell of a smoky tavern?"

"That's actually why I thought of Frank's. The new proprietor is allergic to cigarette smoke, and thought it would be nice to have one place in this county where people can have a good drink with their friends without having to breathe that stuff. I like the atmosphere there. People predicted that it would die out, but it's flourished."

"Frank's it is."

There was a moment's silence, as Jaben waited for the tank to fill up. He started to turn away to put the pump up, and Amos said, "You look like you have something to say."

"I know, but I can't think of what." He put the pump up. "It's one of those annoying times when you can't put your finger on what you want to say. I'll think of it later, as soon as you're not accessible."

Amos laughed a deep laugh.

Jaben walked in, paid, and drove to Frank's Inn.

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As they walked in the door, Désirée breathed a sigh of relief. A large "Out of order" sign was on the television. There was some rock music playing, but even with the music the din was not too bad. They sat down around a table, and Jaben waved to the bartender.

A bartender walked over, and said, "Hi, my name's John. Will you be wanting something to eat?"

"Please," seven voices said in unison.

"I'll be back with menus in just a second. What can I get you to drink?"

"I'll have a cherry Coke," Thaddeus said.

"Sprite," Sarah said.

"A pint of Guinness," said Jaben, and winked at the bartender.

"MGD Lite," said Amos.

"I'm sorry," the bartender said, "We don't carry Miller. Can I get you something else?"

"Just give me the closest thing you have to a Miller."

"Ok."

"Strawberry daquiri," said Désirée.

"I'll have a glass of the house white," said Lilianne.

"A strawberry kir," said Ellamae.

"Oh, come, Belladonna, are you sure you wouldn't rather have a strawberry shake? It looks much more you," said Jaben.

Ellamae, who had somehow grown to womanhood without losing the beautiful visage of a little child, gave him a look you could have poured on a waffle.

"Could I see some ID, please?"

Ellamae, doing her best to keep a straight face, fished in her purse and procured a driver's license.

The bartender looked hard at the license, then at her, and said, "Thank you," returning the license, and walked off.

"Too bad he left," said Jaben. "He seemed to raise his eyebrows at hearing that name."

"Who asked you?" said Ellamae, trying to look cross while suppressing a laugh.

"Jaben, would you tell us—" said Amos.

"Shut up," laughed Ellamae.

Jaben continued. "Belladonna, n. In Italian, a beautiful lady. In English, a deadly poison. A striking example of the essential identity of

English, a deadly poison. A striking example of the essential identity of the two tongues."

Ellamae, laughing, said, "Die, Jaben, die!"

Some more people walked in the door, and the bartender came back, set seven menus on the table, and began to distribute drinks. "A strawberry daquiri for you, a glass of the house white for you, a strawberry kir for you, a cherry Coke, a Sprite, a pint of Guinness, and — aah, yes, the closest thing we have to a Miller." He set down a pint of ice-cold water.

Amos looked at his drink a second, and then burst into a deep laugh, shaking his head.

"Jaben, if you ever..." his voice trailed off.

The menus were passed around, and after a little discussion they decided to eat family style. They ordered a meat lover's pizza, a salad, and some French onion soup.

As the circle of friends sat and waited for the food, the song on the radio ended, and a news report came on. "The forest fire that we have all been worrying about is now burning. Starting somewhere near the campgrounds, it has been the subject of an evacuation effort. The rangers had a helicopter with a scoop at the lake for training exercises, and so the blaze should be put out speedily. Authorities are currently investigating the cause of the fire. Details coming up."

Thad sunk into his chair.

Lilianne caught his eyes. After looking for a second, she said, "Want to talk about it?"

"Not here."

"Want to take a walk outside, after dinner?"

Thaddeus nodded.

He really needs to talk — thought Jaben — but he's not in any hurry. Living in Malaysia for a couple of years has that effect. It changes your sense of time. It changes a lot of things.

Jaben longed to be back in France, longed for the wines, longed for the architecture, longed for the sophistication and the philosophical dinner discussions, longed for the language most of all.

"*Tu as amis içi*," Lilianne said in broken French. "You still have friends here."

Yes — Jaben mused — that was true. The friendships in this circle of friends are more friendships in French (or Malaysian) fashion than in the

American sense, which is really closer to acquaintanceship than friendship. Here are friendships to grow deeper in, to last for lifetime instead of for a couple of years until someone moves. Here are kything friendships. That is something. And my friends know what is close to my heart, and give me things that mean a lot to me. Désirée, Lilianne, Ellamae, and Sarah each give me kisses when they see me, and Lilianne is taking the time to learn a little French. She doesn't believe me when I tell her, but she has the gift of languages. *J'ai encore des amis ici*. And God is the same God in France and America; from him come the best of both. Perhaps it would be fitting to give him thanks now.

Jaben brought his hands up to the table. "Shall we pray?"

The others joined hands. Amos said, "Lord, you are faithful, as you were faithful to Israel."

Désirée said, "Lord, you are vast enough to care for our smallest details."

Lilianne said, "Lord, you have the imagination to create all the wonders about us."

Ellamae said, "You are he who searches hearts and minds, and perceives our thoughts."

Thaddeus said, "You are the fount of all wisdom."

Sarah said, "You are the Artist."

Jaben said, "You are the worthy recipient of all our worship."

Then Amos said, "Lord, I confess to you that I have harbored wrath against my white brothers and sisters, and seen them first through the label of 'racist'."

There was a silence. Not a silence at Amos confessing a sin — that was appropriate at that point of this form of prayer — nor that he would be guilty of that particular sin. It was rather that he had the courage to admit it, even to himself. Ellamae was reminded of a time she had spoken with a Canadian and, after a long discussion, watched him finally admit that he was anti-American. Jaben squeezed Amos's hand, and said, "I love you, brother."

Finally Désirée said, "Lord, I have coveted the time of others."

Lilianne said, "Lord, I have been vain, and not always relied on your help."

Ellamae said, "Lord, I have held pride in my heart."

Thaddeus said, "Lord, I have ignored the prompting of your Spirit."

Sarah said, "I have been quick in temper, and impatient."

Sarah said, "I have been quick in temper, and impatient."

Jaben said, "I have also been proud, and been unwilling to embrace America as I have embraced France."

Amos said, "Thank you for the many friends and family" — here he squeezed Désirée's hand — "that I have."

Désirée said, "Thank you for the butterfly I saw today."

Lilianne said, "Thank you for washing us clean from sin."

Ellamae said, "Thank you for drawing us into the great Dance."

Thaddeus said, "Thank you for the helicopter."

Sarah said, "Thank you for letting me paint."

Jaben said, "Thank you for my time in France."

Amos said, "Please allow the fire to be extinguished quickly, and not to do damage to our meeting place."

Désirée said, "Please help me to know the hearts of my friends better."

Lilianne said, "Please draw my heart — all our hearts — ever closer to you."

Ellamae said, "Please bless my music."

Thaddeus said, "Hold me in your heart, and keep my steps safe."

Sarah said, "Bless my touch."

Jaben said, "Bless my wonderful friends."

There was a moment of silence, and then they raised their voices.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Praise him all creatures here below.

Praise him above, ye heav'nly host.

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Amen.

The place grew a little more silent as their harmony filled the room. The stillness was finally broken by Amos saying, "I'm ready for some good food."

Sarah heard some noise behind her, and turned and looked — there was a waiter bringing the food. As it was set on the table, she waited, and Thaddeus scooped some of the soup into her bowl. She took a sip, and said, "This is certainly turning out to be an interesting day."

Jaben reached his arm over her shoulders and gave her a squeeze. "I don't know if I'm going to sleep like a rock tonight, or not be able to sleep at all."

Ellamae said, "Whenever you say that, you sleep like a rock."

Jaben mumbled, "I suppose."

Lilianne took a hearty scoop of salad. "What were we talking about earlier?"

Ellamae said, "Moral theology. Good and evil. Except that I don't think Jaben really wanted to talk about good and evil. I think he wanted to talk about something different."

"But he still wanted to talk about moral theology, like the rest of us," Désirée said.

"How was that again?" said Amos.

Jaben said, "One way to put it would be like this: if goodness is likened to health, and evil to disease and death, then most of the discipline of moral theology may be likened to a debate about the boundary that separates health from disease, life from death. That is certainly a legitimate area of study, but I think it is overemphasized. I would like to see a moral theology that is concerned with the nature of life itself, abundant life. I would like a moral theology that studies people as they dance rather than debate over the boundary line between a dying man and a fresh corpse."

"Aah, yes," Amos said.

Thaddeus said, "Western culture has a very disease-centered view of medicine. The point of medicine is to keep a person out of disease."

"What else would medicine be about?" said Sarah.

"Instead of trying to keep a person out of disease, keeping a person in health. We have some elements of this concept. Preventative medicine kind of makes this step, and gradeschool schedules have physical education. It is picked up by," Thaddeus shrunk back into his chair slightly, and mumbled the words, "New Age—"

He turned to Jaben, waiting for a wisecrack. When none came, he cleared his throat and said, "New Age is half-baked and goofy, and if you talk with a New Ager about medicine, you'll get some garbled version of an Eastern religion's balancing energies or whatnot, but at the heart of that goofiness lies a real idea of cultivating health, a health that is a positive concept rather than a negative concept. That is worth paying attention to."

Désirée said, "That's deep."

Thaddeus paused a second, chasing after a thought. The others read the expression on his face, and patiently waited. Ellamae took a piece of

pizza.

"In China, people do — or at least did — pay doctors, not when they got sick, but when they were well. If you think about it, that difference in custom reflects a profound difference in conceptions of medicine."

Lilianne turned to Amos. "Amos, can you think of a difference in black custom that reflects your ways of thinking?"

Amos paused, looked like he was about to speak, and said, "Could I have a minute to think about that?"

Lilianne nodded.

Sarah said, "Today I had the idea for the coolest painting, and I started sketching it. It's in my studio — a big watercolor, with all of the colors of the rainbow swirling together. The real essence of the picture, though, will take a lot of looking to see. In the boundaries between color and color lie the outlines of figures — horses, unicorns, men fighting with swords, radiant angels."

Jaben said, "Interesting. Where did you get the idea to do that?"

Sarah said, "I don't know where I get my ideas from. I like color, moreso than shape even. I like Impressionist paintings. I guess I was just daydreaming, watching the colors swirl, and I had this idea." She smiled.

Thaddeus smiled, waited a moment, and then poked her in the side. Sarah squeaked loudly.

Jaben said, "Blessed are the ticklish—" and stopped, as Sarah's hands were covering his mouth.

"For the touch of a friend shall fill them with laughter," Amos said through a mouthful of pizza." Thaddeus poked Sarah again. She moved her hands to cover her side and her knee.

Jaben poked her in the other side. In her laughter, she began to turn slightly red.

"Ok, I thought of an answer to your question," Amos said to Lilianne. "Our family structures are different. Where you usually have a nuclear family living together and nobody else, we will often have not just a nuclear family but cousins, aunts, great-aunts, uncles... The extended family lives together, tightly knit. The difference has to do with how white culture is about individualism, and black culture is about community, in a sense. Three of the seven principles of Kwanza — Unity, Collective Work and Responsibility, and Cooperative Economics — are explicitly community oriented, and all seven of them say 'we' and 'our' instead of 'I'

and 'my'. We have all sorts of stories, but you'll have to look pretty hard to find a black Western."

"Was it hard way back when," Ellamae said, "hanging out with a group of otherwise white friends? Is it hard now?"

Amos said, "I'm not sure if you noticed then, but I didn't say 'Hi' to you when you walked by when I was with a group of black friends. It's just one of those things a black man doesn't do. It would be a lot harder if I didn't have some black friends and my family to be around. There are still some people who think I'm trying to act white by hanging around with you."

"And when you liked Country and Western," Désirée said.

"We all have our problems," muttered Thaddeus.

"And when I liked Country and Western, yeah. People say that if you don't like rap, you ain't black. Well, I like rap, but liking Country and Western is even worse in some folks' eyes than not liking rap."

Lilianne frowned. "Nobody thinks that a white man who listens to rap is trying to act black. I suppose that if I made heroic exertions to be like a member of some other race, people might think I was weird, but I can't imagine having to cut back on some part of being myself for fear of someone thinking I was trying to act Chinese."

Désirée nodded. "You got it, honey. It's hard for us."

Lilianne squeezed her hand.

Jaben turned to Amos and said, "There's something I've been meaning to ask you. Why did your parents name you 'Amos'? What with Amos and Andy and all, it seems a rather cruel name to give a little black boy."

Amos said, "I did get teased, and I ran home crying a couple of times. I asked them why. They explained to me what the name means — 'strong', 'bearer of burdens', that it was the name of a prophet. Then, when I was older, they explained to me something else." Here his voice rose. "My parents were determined that Amos and Andy should *not* have the last word about what it means for a black man to be named Amos."

Ellamae nodded. "Your parents named you well. They are strong people. So are you."

"Thank you," Amos said.

"Who are Amos and Andy?" Sarah asked.

"Amos and Andy were a couple of black comedians who acted the perfect stereotype of black men before their audiences."

"Ok," Sarah said. "Kind of like Eddie Murphy?"

Désirée giggled.

"Uh..." Amos's voice trailed off. After a second, he said, "Jaben, help me out here."

"Eddie Murphy's humor is coarse, vulgar, and entirely without class. That stated, he invites his audience to laugh *with* him, and there is a glow of camaraderie about even *Raw*. Amos and Andy invited their audiences to laugh *at* them, to laugh at the stupid blacks. Eddie Murphy is the sort of comedian who would strengthen a racist impression of blacks, but the whole point of Amos and Andy is to pander to racism."

By this time, the food was mostly finished, and the bartender had brought the bill. They fished in their wallets for cash, paid the bill, bagged the remaining food (none of the pizza or soup was left, but there was still some salad), and got up and walked out. Ellamae caught Thad's eyes, and the two of them walked off.

Thad and Lilianne stepped out into the privacy of the street. A car passed by; it was twilight, hot but not humid.

"Riflery is one of the times I can most grow still," he said. "I never touched a gun in Malaysia — was never interested in one, for that matter — and the concentration of riflery is different from the laid-back attitude Malaysians hold. All the same, the slowing down of riflery is a special treat, the one thing you don't have to fight against hurry to do at its own, unhurried pace."

Lilianne walked in silence.

"I must have grabbed the wrong bottle. I remember something smelling funny. I ignored that funny smell, all through cleaning my gun, and with it ignored a gut feeling. I didn't want to know where that gut feeling led; I wanted to clean my gun, and then I wanted to shoot. I fired five rounds — forty-six points — and then shot the nail off the target. And when I looked, a fire had started."

Lilianne said, "You feel awfully guilty."

"Shouldn't I feel guilty? After starting a forest fire?"

"If I had done something like that, would you love me any less?"

They walked in silence past a couple on the street.

Lilianne wanted to speak, but knew the futility of winning an argument. "Amos loves you. Désirée loves you. Ellamae loves you. Jaben loves you. Sarah loves you. I love you."

The two walked on in silence, turned a corner.

"I'm also scared," Thaddeus said. "Will I get in trouble? Will I go to jail?"

"You are in God's hands," Lilianne said.

"I know, but it doesn't make me feel any better," Thad said.

Lilianne stopped walking, turned, and gave him a long, slow hug. "You are in God's hands," she said.

"Thanks, I needed that."

They turned, and walked back in silence. For Thad, it was a silence that was wounded, but also a healing silence, the silence of healing washing over a wound. For Lilianne, it was a praying silence, a listening silence, a present silence. They walked slowly, but the time passed quickly, and they were soon back at the cars, and met the others.

## Chapter Three

Désirée stepped away from the tents and walked down the trail. It had been an exciting day, and she needed some time to quiet down.

She moved down the trail noiselessly. Up above was a starlit sky with a crescent moon, and around her were tall, dark pines. Below was a thick carpet of rusty pine needles. As she walked along, her heart grew still.

Thoughts moved through her mind, in images, sensations, and moments more than in words. She smiled as she recalled Sarah asking, "Kind of like Eddie Murphy?" She also cherished the expression on her husband's face, the look he had when a question arose, and he knew the answer perfectly, but didn't know where to begin to explaining. That look on his face bore the same beauty as it often did when she teased him.

She saw a glint out of the corner of her eye, and looked. For a second, Désirée couldn't make out what it was, and then she recognized it as a monarch butterfly, illuminated by a single shaft of moonlight. Désirée prayed, and slowly reached out her hand; the butterfly came to her finger, rested for just a second, and then flew off into the night.

Désirée sat down on a rock in silence. She heard the footfall of a small animal — a rabbit, perhaps. The sounds of insects rang faintly about her; she slapped a mosquito. To her, it was music, music and a kind of dance. She drank it in, praying as she breathed. Standing up, she walked further along the path, as it passed by the lapping shore of a lake. An abandoned canoe lay along the shore.

O-oh God,

she sang.

O-oh God,  
Build up your house

Build up your house.  
O-oh God,  
Build up your house.  
Your Kingdom in Heaven,  
Your Kingdom on earth.  
O-oh God,  
O-o-o-o-oh.  
A-a-a-a-men.

Stopping in the stillness, she heard a twig snap behind her, a heavier footfall than that of a small animal. Quickly but yet unhurriedly, she melted into the blackness. She looked out, and saw Lilianne's silhouette against the moonlit ripples dancing on the water.

"Désirée?"

Désirée stepped out of the shadows. "How are you, sister?"

"I wanted to talk."

"Something troubling you?"

"No, I just wanted to talk."

"Need to talk, or just be quiet together?"

They walked along the shore together. The path on the shore widened into a clearing filled with tall grass. Désirée took Lilianne's hand, and they spun around, dancing under the starlight.

After a time, they sat down, and Désirée said, "You know, I just realized something."

"What?"

"In parts of Africa, one of the biggest compliments paid for dancing is, 'You dance as if you have no bones.' Dancing is one of the things that couldn't be completely taken away in slavery, and... white folk in general would do better to learn to dance. I mean, really dance. There are so many good things about it, and the people who would benefit the most are the last people you'd find dancing. But what I realized is this, maybe something I saw but didn't believe: you dance as if you have bones, but your dance is no less beautiful for it. It is graceful, and has a different spirit."

Lilianne's blush was concealed by the moonlight and starlight.

"Ever sit and cloudwatch?" Désirée said.

"It's been a while," Lilianne said.

"What about with stars?"

Lilianne shook her head, her fair skin looking almost radiant in the moonlight.

Désirée and Lilianne lay down on their backs next to each other, looking up into the sky.

Lilianne said, "All I see are isolated stars. It's not like clouds, where there are clusters."

"Hush," Désirée said. "Look."

"That bright cluster over there looks like a blob, except a sparse and prickly blob."

"Just relax. Don't rush it."

Lilianne lay on her back. The stars just looked like stars. Then she saw how much brighter some were than others. Her mind began to enter a trance, and she almost thought she heard faint, crystalline singing. Then —

"There!" she pointed to the crescent moon. "There, a Phoenecian trading ship, laden with goods, with the moon as its sail."

Désirée blinked, and said, "That's it. The biggest jewel in the sky. I hadn't thought to look for a picture that would include the moon."

Lilianne sat for a few minutes, breathing in and out, and said, "Let's not look for any more patterns tonight." Thoughts moved in her mind about moderation and enjoyment and "A person who is full doesn't ask for more." She didn't want to see any other patterns. She was content looking on that one.

They lay in stillness for — how long? Neither one of them took any notice of time.

"When you were a little girl," Désirée said, "what did you most like to do?"

Lilianne paused, pondered the question for a few moments, and then said, "I liked to read, or have stories read to me, and imagine — imagine being long ago, and far away. Maybe it would be imagine. I still daydream a lot."

"I'm not sure why I had such difficulty with the stars tonight — or did I?" she continued. "My daydreaming is somewhere faroff, and seeing things in clouds at least requires that you be right there. Somehow I was able to look at the ship, though my mind wandered. Am I making sense?" She saw the two of them, as little girls, laughing and running, hand in hand, through a field in the summer's sun.

"Perfect sense. dear. Don't worry about making sense when you're

telling the truth, my mother always says."

"What about you, Désirée? What did you like to do as a little girl?"

"Ask questions of the grown-ups, and listen. I would ask questions most of all of my elder relatives. I can still remember asking a question of my grandfather, in his old, careworn rocking chair, and listening to all the stories he'd tell. He'd sit there with his corncob pipe, smelling of smoke and the sweat of hard labor, and speak in this deep, deep bullfrog voice. Listening to him always made me feel like I was curled up in his arms and falling asleep. I liked the new stories he told, but the old ones best of all."

"What were some of the stories he told you?"

"Let me see... there's one... wait, I shouldn't tell you that one."

"Why not? You can tell me anything, Désirée."

"Um... You won't get mad at me if you don't like it?"

"Désirée, you know me."

"Ok. Once there was an unusually kind master, Jim, who would talk with his slaves, especially a witty one named Ike. He would tell him his dreams, except, well, they were made more to impress than dreams. And Ike would tell good dreams, too, but they weren't usually quite as good as Jim's.

"One morning, Jim said, 'I had this dream, that I went to Negro Heaven. In there, everything was broken; the houses had holes in the walls and broken windows, and there was refuse in the streets, and the place was full of dirty Negroes.'

"Then Ike said, 'Wow, master, I had the same dream as you. I dreamed that I went to White Heaven. There, everything was silver and gold; there were great, spotless marble mansion, and the streets sparkled. But there wasn't a soul in the place!'"

Lilianne laughed. "That's very funny. It reminds me of Jewish humor."

Désirée said, "I don't know much Jewish humor."

Lilianne said, "Too bad. I'll tell you a couple of their jokes if I can remember them. Jaben commented that Jewish humor is subtle, clever, and extremely funny." She cleared her throat, and said, "Tell me another story."

"Grandpa was always telling stories about the animals, stories that he learned sitting on his grandfather's knee. Let me see... Aah.

"Brer rabbit saw Sis Cow with an udder full of milk, and it was a hot day, and he hadn't had anything to drink for a long time. He knew it was

useless to ask her for milk, because last year she refused him once, and when his wife was sick, at that.

"Brer Rabbit started to think very hard. Sis Cow was grazing under a persimmon tree, and the persimmons were turned yellow, but they weren't ripe enough to fall down yet.

"So Brer Rabbit said, 'Good morning, Sis Cow.'

"Good morning, Brer Rabbit.'

"How're you feeling this morning, Sis Cow?'

"I ain't doing so well, Brer Rabbit.'

"Brer Rabbit expressed his sympathy and then he said, 'Sis Cow, would you do me the favor of hitting this persimmon tree with your head and shake down a few persimmons?'

"Sis Cow said 'Sure' and hit the tree, but no persimmons came down. They weren't ripe enough yet.

"So then Sis Cow got mad, and went to the top of the hill, and she lifted her tail over her back and came running. She hit the tree so hard that her horns lodged in the wood.

"Brer rabbit,' said Sis Cow, 'I implore you to help me get loose.' But Brer Rabbit said, 'No, Sis Cow, I can't get you loose. I'm a very weak man, Sis Cow. But I can assuage your bag, Sis Cow, and I'm going to do it for you.

"Then Brer Rabbit went home for his wife and children, and they went back to the persimmon tree and milked Sis Cow and had a big feast."

Désirée had been speaking with animation, and Lilianne said nothing for a while. Désirée broke the silence. "You don't like it?"

Lilianne paused, and said, "No, and I'm not sure why. Hmm... I've heard a few more of those stories, but I can't remember any off the top of my head. I have this impression of Brer Rabbit as the hero, a hero who is characterized by being—" here she paused, "'intelligent' is not exactly the right word, and 'clever' comes closer but isn't quite what I mean.

'Cunning'. Brer Rabbit manipulates and uses the cow, and it is cast in a good light. The cow is mean, so it's OK to do anything to her. Same logic as 'Take ten!'" Then she hastily added, "Same logic as a lot of things in white culture as well. Same logic as *Home Alone* — the burglars are Bad Guys, therefore it's OK for Kevin to torture them."

She looked at Désirée, forgetting that the faint light would not permit her to read Désirée's expression. She paused, prayed a moment, and said, "Did you like that story?"

"My favorite."

Lilianne shuddered. "It's a terrible thing to bruise a childhood dream. I'm sorry."

They lay in silence for a minute.

Désirée said, "I was hurt, but I'm not sure you did anything wrong. When you're a child, you like things simply because they are, and because they're yours; everything lies under a cloak of wonder. Those stories were time with my grandpa, and they taught me that there is justice and injustice; they taught me that it is good to use my mind; they taught me that there is a time to trust and a time to be wary. Have you seen those *I Learned it All in Kindergarden* posters?"

"Yes."

"I learned it all from Brer Rabbit. I see the problem you point out, but those stories will always be to me the starting-place of wisdom, and a point where I can remember my grandfather's love."

Lilianne lay in silence, pondering what Désirée said. Then she slowly reached through the grass, fumbled, squeezed Désirée's hand, and said, "You ready to go back now?"

Désirée wiped a tear away. "Yes."

"Let's go."

## Chapter Four

Jaben asked, "Could I have the canteen?" As Sarah handed it to him, he took a swig of stale water, and rubbed his eyes. The harsh sun blazed in his eyes. "Why don't we do Bible study now, and then worry about what else to do today? I'm sure we'll be able to find something," he said, then muttered under his breath, "though I'd much rather be programming," and continued, "and, with something to eat, we'll have the day before us."

The others yawned their assent, and went back to the tents to get their Bibles.

"Whose turn was it to read? Lilianne's?" said Sarah.

Lilianne said, "No, I think it was Amos's."

Amos said, "Yeah, that's it." He paused a moment, and said, "Shall we pray?"

They joined hands, and bowed their heads in prayer. Jaben squeezed Lilianne's hand.

Lilianne prayed, "Father, we come before you a little excited, a little nervous. We don't know what the course of the fire will be, or how long it will burn, or why this is happening. We ask that you preserve our meeting place and the property around it, and most of all human life. We thank you that we were able to escape the fire, and we meet to give you glory. Amen."

They were sitting in a circle, on some logs, around a fire pit. Amos said, "I'll be reading from I Kings 18, verses 41-46. Elijah has been chastising king Ahab, there is a drought, and Elijah has at the end of chapter 17 been staying with the widow. Earlier in the chapter, he has his famous contest with the prophets of Baal, where he called fire from Heaven down on the bull." He cleared his throat.

"And Elijah said unto Ahab, 'Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a

sound of abundance of rain.' So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, 'There is nothing.' And he said, 'Go again,' seven times.

"And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, 'Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand.' And he said, 'Go up, say unto Ahab, "Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.'"

"And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode, and went to Jezreel.

"And the hand of the LORD was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel."

Amos had been bending over the Bible, looking intently; now, he rested and sat up.

Jaben said, "Thoughts? Observations?"

Désirée said, "This story is one of my favorites, with the one before it. I like the Elijah stories."

A minute passed, in which they looked at each other. "Lilianne?" Jaben said.

Lilianne stared off in space.

"Lilianne?" he said a bit louder.

"Huh? Oh, I was having a daydream about three mermaids swimming in a moonlit pool, and chasing the fish around, and petting them..." She paused in thought a moment and said, "I think I got into that daydream by thinking about the water in the story."

"Sarah?"

"It's a good story."

Amos said, "What about you, Jaben? You've got to have something to say."

Jaben said, "I always have something to say when I've had my morning bowl of coffee. Ugh, not even an espresso machine. Let me get back to you."

Ellamae said, "Why don't we get some more sleep, then go into town and get something to eat, maybe some coffee, and then maybe, maybe, try this again."

The others nodded their groggy assent and nodded off back to the

THE OTHERS HODDED THEIR GROGGY ASSENT AND PADDED ON BACK TO THE three tents: one for the unmarried men, one for the unmarried women, and one for the married couple.

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Jaben woke up, feeling delightfully refreshed. He felt sweaty, and the air was oppressively hot. The air felt slightly humid to him. He sat up, and looked around. Thaddeus was still sleeping, breathing deep breaths. Jaben slid out of his sleeping bag and stepped out of the tent.

The sun was high in the sky, and the sky was clear. He walked around on the pine needles, and lazily yawned. He walked over to a log, sat on a low part, and began to think.

That was a magnificent passage of Scripture, he thought, and the climax to a larger story. I've always taken away from it something about the wind of the Spirit. In a land dessicated by drought, the servant is told again and again to go back to look for signs of rain, going back even though he has seen nothing. On the seventh time, the servant sees a cloud the size of a man's hand. And then, "Gird up your loins and run, lest the rain overtake you!" That's how the wind of the Spirit blows — nothing for the longest time, and then a faint, imperceptible breeze, and then a storm.

His knee felt funny, as if there were pressure inside.

Now feels like the eye of the storm. Before was the fire, and now a moment of calm, and then there will be cleaning up. But this is a different kind of storm. Or is it?

He felt a soft arm over his shoulders, and turned and looked. Sarah kissed his cheek, and sat next to him.

"Hi, Sarah," Jaben said, and gave her a hug and a kiss. "Are any of the other women up?"

"Yes, we've been up for about an hour. Talking."

"Bout what?"

"Nothing."

"What kind of nothing?"

"Silly stuff. Girl stuff. You wouldn't be interested."

Jaben reached behind her, and touched the back of her neck very, very lightly with the tip of his finger. She curled up.

Jaben looked at Sarah, as she sat back and relaxed. She had straight red hair cascading over her shoulders, and a round, freckled, face, with fair skin and a ribbon of deep red lips. Her body was — 'fat' would be the wrong word; 'plump', perhaps, or 'rounded'. *Gironde*. She was attractive.

He looked at her, and felt glad that there are some women who do not feel the need to be twenty pounds underweight. Jaben smiled. Sarah plays the perfect ditz, he thought, and getting her into a deep conversation is usually impossible, but there's more to her than meets the eye.

"Did you go and see the lake?" Sarah said. "It's still, still, and every now and then a fish breaks the surface, and then ripples spread."

"I just got up. I paced around, and sat down, and thought. Then you came."

"Whatch'ya think about?"

"The Bible passage. I was thinking through. I feel that there's another thought coalescing, coming together, but I can't put my finger on it."

A faint rumbling came from faroff.

Sarah looked thoughtful for a moment, and said, "Think it'll rain?"

"I don't think so. It could, but... Looking for a prediction of the day's events in the Bible has the same aura as using it as a tool for divination. The fact that we read that passage today just means that this particular passage is what came up on the schedule."

"So you don't believe the Bible applies to our lives?"

"I do, it's just — not that way. I wouldn't have been thinking about it if I didn't believe it applied."

The land around them darkened, and they looked up. A cloud was between them and the sun.

"Hi, guys. May I join the conversation?" Lilianne was behind them.

Jaben's hand shot out, and poked Sarah in the side.

"Eep!" Sarah jumped.

Sarah's face turned slightly red, and she turned to face Jaben. "Do you never tire of tickling me?"

Jaben grinned, and winked. "Never."

"Oh, well." Sarah said, in mock resignation. "I suppose it can't be helped." She looked at Lilianne. "Do you think it's time to wake everyone up?"

"Yes, let's go."

A few minutes later, they were all out sitting on the logs. Ellamae said, "I think we've all had some rest now; food wouldn't hurt, but it's nice to be here, and we should be able to pick up that Bible study. What do you think?" Désirée said, "Um..."

"Yes, Désirée?"

"Well," she said

well, she said.

There was a rumble of rolling thunder.

"Never mind. Let's go on with the Bible study."

Amos opened the Bible. "I liked the part where Elijah said—"

Splat! A fat raindrop splattered across the page.

Amos's jaw dropped. He wiped the page off, closed the Bible, and looked up.

Another raindrop hit him in the eye.

Soon rain was falling all around them — sprinkles at first, then rain in earnest, then torrents. It was a warm, wet, heavy rain, with the sky dark as midnight, and the scene suddenly illuminated by flashes of stark, blue lightning. The wind blew about them; trees swayed rhythmically back and forth in the rain. Everything about them was filled with dark, rich, full colors, and was covered with the lifegiving waters.

The seven friends joined hands and danced in the rain.

## Chapter Five

"Well, look what the cat dragged in today!" said the waitress. The friends had burst in the door, laughing, and soaked to the skin. "I wish I had some towels to give you."

"That won't be necessary," Jaben said, looking around the diner. It was a small, cheery place, with a friendly noise about it. "Seven, nonsmoking."

The waitress counted out seven menus, and said, "Walk this way, please."

Sarah said, "Did you see the look on those people's faces when we walked in?"

Thaddeus said, "Yep."

They sat down around the table, and began to look through the menus. But not for long.

"Hey, Désirée. Tell us that joke you told me," said Lilianne.

"Ok," Désirée said. "There was once an unusually liberal and generous slave owner named Jim, who had a witty slave named Ike. Each morning they would tell each other their dreams (or so they said), and the one with the better dream won. Usually it was the master, Jim.

"One morning, Jim said, 'I dreamed that I went to Negro Heaven, and in there everything was broken and dirty. The houses had holes in the walls, the windows were broken, and there was mud in the streets, and there were dirty Negroes all over the place.'

"Ike said, 'Wow, master. We must have dreamed the same thing. I dreamed I went to White Heaven, and everything was spotless and immaculate — gold and ivory — and there were mansions and silver streets, but there wasn't a soul in the place!'"

Lilianne said, "I remembered the joke I mentioned to you last night, Désirée, but couldn't remember. There was a Jew named Jacob, who was

financially in a bad way. He went to the synagogue, and prayed, 'God, my bank account is low, and business is bad. Please let me win the lottery.'

"Some time passed, and he didn't win the lottery. He ran out of money, and was in danger of being evicted. So Jacob went to the synagogue and prayed more fervently, 'God, I've worked for you so hard, and I ask for so little. Please let me, just this once, win the lottery.'

"More time passed, and Jacob lost his house, his car. His family was out on the street. He came to the synagogue, and prayed, 'Why, God, why? Why won't you let me win the lottery?'

"The voice of God boomed forth, and said, 'Jacob! Meet me half-way on this one. *Buy a stupid ticket!*'"

There was silence, and then one laugh, and then another. The waitress came back, and asked, "Are you ready to order yet?"

"Um, uh, order. We were telling jokes. Could you give us a few more minutes?" asked Thaddeus.

"Certainly," the waitress said, walking off.

This time, they made use of their menus, and thought of what to eat. The waitress came at the end, and they ordered — a few sandwiches, some soups, some fish...

"What do you call someone who speaks three languages?" asked Jaben.

"Uh, trilingual?" said Désirée.

"Good. What do you call someone who speaks two languages?"

"Bilingual!" said Sarah, smiling.

"And what do you call someone who speaks only one language?"

There was silence.

"American," Jaben said.

Lilianne, smiling, said, "Here's one. An English politician was speaking in a town near the Scottish border. In his speech, he slowly and emphatically said, 'I was born an Englishman, I was raised an Englishman, and I will die an Englishman.'

"A Scottish voice from the back asked, 'Ach, man. Have you no ambition?'"

After the chuckles died down, Thad said to Ellamae, "You look like you have something to say."

Ellamae nodded, and said, "I do, but it's a story I'm thinking of, not a joke."

"Go ahead and tell it " Désirée said

Go ahead and tell it," Desnee said.

"My mother has a harelip, as you know; that is a bit difficult for her now, but it was devastating to her as a little girl. She was teased quite a bit, and she would tell people that she had cut her lip on a shard of glass — somehow that was easier to admit than a physical deformity from birth. She was always unsure of herself, embarrassed, feeling less than her peers.

"One of the teachers was a kindly, plump little woman, Mrs. Codman, who had a sunny soul and was the delight of the children. Children would clamor about her, and her heart was big enough for all of them.

"The day came for the annual hearing test, when the children would cup their hands to their ears, and Mrs. Codman would whisper a sentence into their ears — something like 'The moon is blue,' or 'I have new shoes,' and the children would say what they heard.

"My mother's turn came, and Mrs. Codman whispered into her ear," — and then Ellamae spoke very slowly, and her voice dropped to a whisper — "I wish you were my little girl."

There was silence. Ellamae sat with a kind of quiet dignity; she glowed.

She continued. "Those seven words changed her life. She became able to trust people, to venture forth, to have courage and see her own beauty. I think those words have changed my life, too. Now that I think of it, the unspoken message she gave me throughout my childhood was, 'I'm glad you're my little girl.'"

She smiled, in a subtle, subdued manner, her elfin features bore a look that was regal, majestic, aristocratic.

"Wow," Thaddeus said. "I never knew that about you or your mother." He paused, closed his eyes in thought a moment, and said, "And I can see how it has shaped you."

Ellamae's eyes teared. "*Terima kasih.*"

Thaddeus's eyes lit up. "*Sama sama.*"

They sat in blissful silence, a silence that spoke more powerfully than words.

Words were not needed.

The food arrived, piping hot; they joined hands and sat together in silence, their wet clothes beginning to dry. Finally, Amos said, "Amen," and they began to eat without breaking the quiet.

Or at least they did not use their voices; I cannot tell you in full truth

that they did not talk. They looked at each other, smiled, squeezed hands, let a tear slide, prayed. No words were exchanged, but a great deal was communicated.

When they finished, the waitress came with the check, and tarried a second.

"Ma'am?" Thaddeus said.

"Yes?" she said, slightly surprised.

"There is something you want to say to us, or ask us. What is it?"

She looked startled, and hesitated.

"You won't offend us. Promise," he said.

"Well, uh... You seem a little odd, not talking a whole meal long."

"That's not really what's on your mind."

"Ok, honey. Why are y'all telling racist jokes?"

Thaddeus said, "Thank you for being honest. To tell you the truth, we were a bit giddy. We probably shouldn't have told those jokes in a restaurant."

"No, I mean, why y'all telling racist jokes in the first place? You guys don't seem the type that needs to tell those jokes. You look me in the eye, for one thing. You confuse me."

"Do you ever tease your friends? Or do your friends ever tease you?"

"All the time."

"Do you ever insult your friends? Or do your friends ever insult you? A real insult, I mean?"

"Never."

"You see these jokes as being insults. Which racist humor may be. But this is not *racist* humor. It's *racial* humor. It's really much more like teasing."

"That joke about the Jew was just plain mean."

"That joke," Lillianne said, "is a Jewish joke, and was told to me by a Jewish friend. It is quite typical of Jewish humor."

The waitress hesitated. "But why do you need it in the first place? Don't race relations matter to you? I would hope so, seeing as how you have a group of friends with both black and white."

"They matter to us a great deal. What would your friendships be like if there was no room for teasing's rowdy energy, if you always had to always walk on eggshells? Wouldn't a friendship be better if it could absorb the energy of teasing and laugh a big belly laugh?"

"Could I have some time to think about it?"

COULD I HAVE SOME TIME TO THINK ABOUT IT.

"Take as much time as you want. We come by this town every now and then; we might stop in, and maybe we'll be able to see you. And at any rate, I think you grasp our point, whether or not you agree with it."

The waitress said, "Thank you." She turned, started to walk away, and said, "And thank you for explaining. By the way, I was listening to the radio, and the fire is put out. The helicopter plus that tremendous rainstorm did it, not to mention flooded a few basements."

"Woo-hoo!" shouted Sarah.

They paid the bill, leaving a generous tip, and headed out the door.

## Chapter Six

The vehicles drove slowly along the winding roads, and as they came closer, each heart prayed that the meetingplace would be OK. As they cleared the last turn, they parked the car and the van, and got out in silence.

The meetingplace was reduced to cinders.

"My computer!" Jaben said.

"My paintings!" Sarah said.

As they stood, speechless, memories flashed through each mind, of moments spent there, treasures that were no more.

"I heard a story," Sarah said through tears, "in which a man was fond of books, and had a massive library. One night, his angel appeared to him in a dream, and said, 'Your time is near. Do you have any questions about the next world?'

"'Will I have at least some of my books?'

"'Probably.'

"'Which ones? There are some that I really want to keep.'

"'The ones you gave away.'"

Jaben completed the thought. "And now the only paintings of yours that you can still see are the ones you gave away." He prayed a moment, and said, "You gave away some paintings that were very close to your heart. Now you can still see them."

"What shall we do? What shall we do?" said Désirée.

Silence.

Then Ellamae, in her high, pure, clear voice, sang the first notes of a song.

Silence.

She sang the notes again, and reached out her hands.

The friends formed a circle, and joined hands.

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise him all creatures here below.  
Praise him above ye heav'nly host.  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.  
Amen.

## Chapter Seven

"Well," Amos said, "we should probably go and talk with the Weatherbys about the house.

Sarah slumped. "I don't wanna talk to them about it."

Amos said, "Neither do I, but we still should, and they are kind people. This is the first time I've thought about visiting them and not wanted to do it."

"What'll we say?" said Sarah.

"I don't know," said Ellamae, "but that is not reason not to go."

"Let's go," said Jaben.

They slowly got into the van.

The drive to the Weatherbys' dilapidated mansion seemed unusually long and slow, and Jaben carefully parked the van in the driveway. The friends got up, and walked up the gnarled path to the front door. Ellamae rang the doorbell, and listened to its echo.

"Well, at least the fire didn't get their home."

"Some of the plants are starting to bloom. The water was invigorating to them."

Silence.

Ellamae rang the doorbell again.

Silence.

"Maybe they're not home," Sarah said.

"That may be," said Ellamae. "We should probably leave them a note, and stop back. She fished in her purse for a pen and a notepad.

They talked a bit about what to say, and then wrote down:

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Weatherby;

As you know, there has been a fire; it was started by a riflery accident with Thaddeus. None of us were hurt (we do not yet know if

others were hurt), but the house you allowed us to use is in ashes.

We do not know what to say. We are very grateful to you for the use of that house, and we know it was a special place to others — children most of all. It was a place of memories for us, and we are the richer for it. We regret both to inform you that that wonderful house of yours is gone, and that you were out when we came, and so have to leave a note.

Thank you for the use of your house. We hope to be able to connect with you in person to speak about this.

The Kythers  
Amos, Désirée, Jaben, Thaddeus, Sarah, Ellamae, Lilianne

The friends walked back, and got back into the van. "Where do we go now?" said Sarah.

"There's the cave where we used to meet before the Weatherbys let us use the house," said Lilianne. "Why don't we go over there?"

"I want to give a gift to the Weatherbys," Sarah said.

"What do you have in mind?" said Jaben.

"I don't know, something special. Maybe something we could make."  
Jaben turned the keys, and they drove off.

---

The cavern was refreshingly cool, with air slowly passing through, sounding like a faint breathing. Amos's flashlight swept over a few small crates that served as chairs and larger ones that functioned as tables, candles, matches, some flashlights, papers, some blankets, some sweaters, a sleeping bag, a pillow, a few other odds and ends, and a toolbox. Jaben struck a match, and lit the three wicks of a large candle. Amos turned the flashlight off.

Sarah picked up a moist flashlight, and pressed the switch.

Nothing happened.

She opened it, and dumped out two corroded D cells.

"Why do we store all of our bad batteries in our flashlights?"

Ellamae, shivering slightly, put on a sweater. It was loose around her elfin frame.

Sarah snuggled up against Thaddeus, and put an arm over Lilianne's shoulder. "You know, it's been a long time since we've role played."

"Where were we?" Thaddeus said, interested.

"You were in the village, outside the castle. Looking for something — I don't remember what."

"And something happened when we drank from the spring," said Lilianne. "It was a cold spring, like the one running through this cave."

Sarah said, "Remember the time we went deep into this cavern, and found that pool this stream empties into, and petted the blind, eyeless fish?"

Lilianne nodded. Sarah had enjoyed that a great deal, and would have waded in had the others not stopped her.

Jaben closed his eyes, and appeared to be concentrating. "You are under a tree outside a chicken coop in the Urvanovestilli city Candlomita. There are children running around. About a hundred feet away, you see a troupe of performing Janra. One is juggling daggers and singing, one is playing a flute, three are doing acrobatics, and two are talking."

Lilianne said, "Janra always make a day more interesting. Let's go over."

Sarah said, "Yes, let's."

Amos said, "Janra always make a day a little *too* interesting, if you ask me."

Sarah said, "Spoilsport! I take Rhoz by the hand and start walking over."

over.

Jaben said, "A little Janra girl comes running, with brightly colored ribbons streaming from her wrists and ankles, and says, 'Spin me! Spin me!'"

Sarah said, "I take her to a clear spot and spin her."

Jaben said, "The path is narrow, and there are people passing through. There aren't any good places to spin her."

Sarah said, "I pick her up, give her a hug and a kiss, and say, 'What's your name?'"

Jaben said, "She says, 'Ank. What's yours?' and, before giving you time to answer, grabs your nose and says, 'Honk!'"

Sarah said, "I'm going to set her down."

Jaben said, "She runs over to Rhoz and says, 'Hey, Mr. Tuz-man! Throw me!'"

Amos said, "I'm going to pick her up and toss her about, while walking to the other Janra."

Jaben said, "A young Janra in a shimmering midnight blue robe approaches you, holding a small knife and a thick, sculpted white candle. He says, 'Greetings, fellow adventurers. May I introduce myself? My name is Nimbus, and I would like to offer you a greeting-gift. This is a candle which I carved. Perhaps, when you light it, it will remind you of the hour of our meeting.'"

Amos said, "I'm going to take it and look at it."

Jaben said, "Wrapped around the candle is a bas-relief sculpture of a maiden touching a unicorn, next to a pool and a forest grove. The detail is exquisite."

Amos said, "I'm going to hand it to Cilana for safe keeping and say, 'Thank you, Nimbus. I hope to be able to get to know you.'"

"Do you know anything about the crystalline chalice?"

Jaben said, "'The crystalline chalice? Yes, have heard of it. I used to own it, actually. The last I heard of it, were rumors that it was either in the towers of the castle, or possibly in the depths of Mistrelli's labyrinth. But those are only rumors, and they are old rumors at that.'"

Sarah said, "What time is it?"

Jaben looked at his watch, and said, "7:58."

Sarah gave him a dirty look, and said, "You know what I mean."

Jaben grinned and slowly said, "Oooh! In the game!"

Sarah continued to give him a dirty look, and said, "Yeeees."

Jaben said, "It is now dusk; you have been on your feet all day, and feel tired, dirty, hungry, and thirsty."

Sarah said, "'Nimbus, would you like to join us for dinner?'"

Jaben said, "'I would love to, but I told a group of friends that I'd meet them for some strategy games and discussion. If you're looking for a good bite to eat, I would recommend *The Boar's Head*;' and here he turns to Rhoz, 'it's the one place in this whole area where you can get a good beer. You know the saying, "Never drink Tuz wine or Urvanovestilli beer!" Well, they don't serve any Urvanovestilli beers. Plenty of Urvanovestilli wines — they even have Mistrelli green."

Ellamae's eyes widened.

"'But for beers, they have a couple of Yedidia and Jec lagers, and then a Tuz stout, and then a Tuz extra stout, and then a Tuz smoked!'"

Amos looked up. "'Thank you, Nimbus.'"

Jaben said, "Nimbus bows deeply, and then walks away at a pace that manages to somehow be both slow and relaxed, and move faster than you could run. After he leaves, a small, multicolored ball rolls between your feet."

Amos, Désirée, Ellamae, Thaddeus, Sarah, and Lilianne said, in unison, "We run, *post haste!*"

Jaben said, "You move along, and manage to clear the game, although you hear its sounds behind you. When you slow down, you come to an intersection of three streets; there is a beggar here."

Ellamae said, "I'm going to give him a silver crown, and say, 'Hi, there! Could you tell us where *The Boar's Head* is?'"

Jaben said, "The beggar points along one of the streets, and says, 'Two streets down, on the corner.' You reach the inn without event, and a pretty waitress leads you to a table. She recommends boar in wine sauce, and the chicken broth soup."

Amos said, "'If there are no objections, I think we'll go with that. I'd like a double of the Tuz smoked.'"

Ellamae said, "I'm going to set the candle Nimbus gave us in the middle of the table, and light it."

Jaben said, "The wick does not burn like most wicks; it sparkles brightly."

Ellamae said, "Interesting. I'm going to watch it."

Jaben said, "The wick burns down to the bottom, and then appears to go out. A thin column of white smoke rises."

go out. A thin column of white smoke rises.

Ellamae said, "That's odd."

Thaddeus said, "I'd like a glass of mild cider."

Jaben said, "She turns to you and nods, and then something odd happens. The candle begins to shoot brightly colored balls of fire. One of them lands in a nearby patron's drink, and another in some mashed potatoes. Most of them bounce down and roll around on the tablecloth, which catches fire. The waitress pours a pitcher of cider from a nearby table over the burning tablecloth, and turns to you, puts her hands on her hips, and says, 'Guests will kindly refrain from the use of pyrotechnic devices while inside the restaurant!'"

Amos buried his face in his hands, and then said, "He gave us a Roman candle!"

Jaben said, "Well of course it's a Roman candle! What did you think it was?"

Amos said, "No, you don't understand. A Janra named Nimbus met us and gave us what looked like a perfectly ordinary candle."

Jaben said, "She rolls her eyes, and says, 'Oooh, Nimbus! Please excuse me one moment.' She walks away, and in a moment returns with something in her hand. 'Please give this to Nimbus for me.' She heavily places a large lump of coal on the table."

Amos said, "I'm going to take it, and say, 'Thank you. And who should I say that this lump of coal is from?'"

Jaben said, "Oh, he knows perfectly well who I am. We're good friends, even if he is always trying to tickle me."

Thaddeus and Lilianne both poked Sarah in the side.

Amos waited until the others had finished ordering, and said, "Well, Nimbus was right about at least one thing."

"Ooh?" Lilianne said.

"When we lit the candle, we remembered the hour of our meeting with him."

## Chapter Eight

She stepped onto the construction site, and looked. The building's frame was almost complete, and workers were beginning to lay conduit and 4x8" sheets for the floors.

A young man — short, pale, wiry, and with sweaty black hair showing from under his headgear — walked over. "This site is dangerous. You need to wear a bump cap."

"A what?"

"A hard hat. Like I'm wearing. C'mon, I'll take you to get one."

They walked along in silence. "Penny for your thoughts," he said.

"Oh, I was just thinking about a book I'm reading."

"What's the title?"

"I'm not sure it's something a construction worker would recognize, let alone read," she said.

"Try me," he said.

"*Addicted to Mediocrity: 20th Century Christians and the Arts*, by Franky Schaeffer."

"Aah, yes. Like *Why Catholics Can't Sing*, only better. I liked, and wholly agree with, the part about the deleterious effects of pragmatism. Franky's father wrote some pretty good books as well; have you read *How Shall We Then Live: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*? The history of art is summarily traced there. *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* is another good title on that topic."

Her jaw dropped. "How long have you been a construction worker?"

"Only a few months. I've worked in a number of other professions — truck driver, child care worker, and firefighter, to name a few, and enjoyed them all. Why do you ask?"

She did not answer the question, but said, "Forgive me for asking this, and I know I'm breaking all sorts of social rules, but why on earth are you

working as a construction worker? Why aren't you working as a software engineer for instance?"

He smiled and said, "Well, I do program in my spare time; I've written a couple of applications in Java. But that's not answering your question."

He stopped walking and closed his eyes in thought for a moment, and then said, "I suppose there are a two reasons, a lesser and a greater. For the lesser — have you read Miyamoto Musashi's *A Book of Five Rings*?"

"No; I don't think I've heard of it."

"*A Book of Five Rings* is considered by many to be *the* canonical book on martial arts strategy. It—"

"You're a martial artist, too?" she said, her jaw dropping further.

"No, but martial arts embody a way of thinking, and that way of thinking is beneficial to learn. *A Book of Five Rings* was written by Miyamoto Musashi, the greatest swordsman in Japanese history, perhaps the greatest swordsman in world history. The book itself is cryptic and deep, and is used as a guidebook by some businessmen and some computer techs, though I came to know about it by a different route. After a certain point, Musashi would enter duels armed with only wooden swords, and defeat master swordsmen armed with the Japanese longsword and shortsword.

"One of the pivotal statements is, '*You must study the ways of all professions.*' And Musashi did. In the book, he likened swordsmanship to building a house, and he was an accomplished artist; he left behind some of Japan's greatest swords, paintings, and calligraphy. Not to mention a lot of good stories. Anyway, his legendary stature as a swordsman came in large part through his extensive study of disciplines that are on the surface completely unrelated to swordplay.

"I had not encountered that book yet in college, but (though my degree is in physics) I studied in subjects all across the sciences and the humanities. And I learned more outside the classroom than inside."

The woman closed her mouth.

"Now I am, in a sense, moving to another phase of my education, learning things I couldn't learn in an academic context."

By this point, they had reached a van.

"And your other reason?" she said.

"My other reason? It's work. Honest, productive, valuable work. It may be less valued in terms of money, and I may eventually settle down as a software engineer — I've gotten a few offers, by the way. But I am

as a software engineer. I've gotten a few offers, by the way. But I am right now building a building that will house books, for people to read and children to dream by. It will give me pleasure to walk in these doors, check out a book, walk by a little girl, watch her smile at the pictures in a picture book, and know that I helped make it possible. Surely that smile is worth my time." He reached into the van, and pulled out a bump cap. "Here's how you adjust the strap to fit your head. The cap should rest above your head, like so, rather than being right on it. That gives the straps some room to absorb the shock if something falls on you from above."

The woman, looking slightly dazed, extended her hand and said, "We've talked, but I don't think I've introduced myself properly. My name is Deborah."

The man shook her hand. "Pleased to meet you, Deborah. My name is Jaben."

## Chapter Nine

Ellamae heard a soft knocking on the door. "Come in, Sunny. I've been waiting for you."

A little girl with long blonde hair walked in, and held up her mouth for a kiss. Ellamae gave her a peck, and then helped her up on the piano bench. "What are you today?"

"I'm a flower. A daisy."

Ellamae thought for a second, and then said, "The petals on a daisy go around; if you move your finger along, you come back to the same one. With music, it's the same, but there's a twist. If you trace along the notes, you come back to the same one." She played a few notes, and then closed her eyes and said, "To you, are the notes a circle, like the petals of the daisy, or a line, like the piano keyboard is laid out?"

"A circle! A circle!" Sunny said enthusiastically.

"Ok. I want you to improvise something for me that sounds like a circle. It's interesting to me that you hear it that way."

"Why?" the little girl asked.

"Why do I want you to play a circle, or why is it interesting?"

"Why is it interesting?"

"Because you hear things in ways that I don't, and sometimes I learn something new from you."

"Even if I'm a little girl?"

"Especially if you are a little girl. To me, the notes sound like a line, and so I want to hear you play. I want to hear the circle through your ears. Besides, it will help me teach you."

"What keys can I use? The big ones, or the little ones, or both?"

"Right now I want you to stay with just the big keys, although you can feel the tips of the little keys to help you keep your place. And remember that, when you are not talking with me or your parents, you need to call

them the white keys and the black keys."

"Why?"

Ellamae closed her eyes in thought. "A smooth surface and a rough surface feel different, right?"

"Yes."

"And loud and quiet sound different, right?"

"Yes."

"There is a difference between the white keys and the black keys that is like those differences to a sighted person."

"On some pianos, the big keys and the little keys feel different. The big keys feel smooth, like hard plastic or glass. The little keys felt smooth, but a different kind of smooth, like bare wood. And on Gramp-Grampa's piano, the big keys feel like that funny stone in Polly's cage. I don't like pianos where the big keys and the little keys feel the same. Is that what you mean?"

Ellamae played a few notes, a musical question. Sunny played a startlingly simple answer.

"You hear and you touch, but they are different, right?"

"Yes, they are different."

"Well, seeing is different from hearing and touch, in the same way. It's hard to describe. Describing seeing to you is kind of like describing music to a man who doesn't hear."

"But music is like dancing! And swimming! And skipping!"

"Well, ok, I guess you're right." Ellamae's eyes lit up. "Imagine that you took off your shirt, and wherever you went, everything became really small and pressed up against your chest and your tummy."

"That would be fun! And confusing."

"But do you see how that would help you know where things are around you?"

Sunny frowned for a second, and said, "I think so."

"That is what seeing is like."

"I wish I could see!"

"I do, too. But you know what? You see a lot of things that other people don't. Your sense of touch picks up on things that most people don't — like one of my friends, Sarah."

"I want to meet her!"

"That can probably be arranged. Anyway, you hear things that other people don't hear. When we improvise together, you do things that I

people don't hear. When we improvise together, you do things that I wouldn't imagine, and in a way I can hear them through your ears. When you play music, you let other people hear the things you imagine, and that is a great gift."

Ellamae placed the child's hands on the keyboard, her left pinky on middle C. "Now, I want you to play music in a circle."

Sunny struck middle C, then the C an octave above, then the C an octave below. She played these three notes, venturing an octave further. Then she added D, F, and G, almost never striking two consecutive notes in the same octave. Then she added E, first playing fragmented arpeggios, and then all five notes, and then the whole scale, ranging all across the keyboard — quite a reach for her little body! Ellamae didn't like it at first; it sounded jumpy and disjointed. Then something clicked within her, and she no longer heard the octaves at all, but the notes, the pure colors of the notes, arranged in a circle. This must be what it is like to have perfect pitch, she thought. Sunny wound the music down.

"That's very good, Sunny. Sometimes I think I learn as much from you as you are learning from me. Did you practice 'By the Water' this week?"

The little girl placed her finger on her lip.

"Do you still remember how it goes?"

Smiling, the child started to plink the tune away, in a light, merry, happy-go-lucky way. Ellamae said, "That's how we play 'At the Circus.' 'By the Water' is slow and restful, like Mommy reading you a story at bedtime. Think about drinking hot cocoa when you are sleepy. Can you play it again?"

Sunny played the song again, but this time at a placid adagio place. Her touch was still light, but it was light in a soft way.

"That's good, Sunny. Now, would you scoot over a little, to the right? Let's play Question and Answer."

Sunny moved, and Ellamae sat down on the bench next to her. Ellamae played a phrase, and the little girl responded. Then she played something slightly different, and the child varied her response. Ellamae played a slightly longer question, and Sunny played a much longer, merrier, dancelike answer.

"That's good, Sunny. Keep your hands dancing on the keyboard."

Ellamae started to play a complex tune, and at the very climax stopped playing. Sunny, without missing a beat, picked it up and completed it. Then Ellamae joined in, and the two began to improvise a duet, a musical

dialogue — sometimes with two voices, sometimes with one, sometimes silent. Many threads developed, were integrated, and then wound down to a soft finish.

They sat in silence for a while, breathless, and then Ellamae reached atop the piano.

"I have something for you, Sunny."

"A CD!" the girl said, with excitement.

"Yes, this is a Bach CD. For practice this week, I want you to spend a half hour listening to the Little Fugue in G minor. Have the CD player repeat on track seven. Then I want you to spend half an hour improvising with the theme. Stay on the big keys; it'll sound a little different, but stick with it. Next time, I'll show you a way to use some of the big keys and some of the little keys."

"Cool!"

A knock sounded from the door. "Is Sunny ready to go yet?"

Sunny gave Ellamae a hug, and turned away. "Mommy! Mommy! Look what Teacher gave me!"

With that, she was off, leaving Ellamae in silent contemplation.

## Chapter Ten

Thaddeus marched down the steps, into the unfinished basement. He ducked under low hanging pipes and air ducts, not bothering to turn on the lights because he knew its nooks and crannies so well. He stepped onto a screw, yelped, and then ducked into a place called "the corner."

There was an armchair among the various odds and ends — old, tattered, and very comfortable. He wrapped a blanket around himself in the cool air, and sunk in.

He closed his eyes, and began to pray:

"Our Father,  
who art in Heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
Forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power,  
and the glory forever.  
Amen."

He began to grow still, grow still.

As he became quiet, he examined himself, confessed his sins. He began to sink deep into the heart of God, and there he rested and loved.

~~Words were not needed~~

words were not needed.

Thaddeus held his spirit stiller than his body, in a listening silence.

"Yes, God?" he asked without words.

He sat, still, in wordless communion, feeling with his intuition, with the depths of his being. And waited.

Gradually, a message formed in his heart. A message of task, of needed and even urgent action, of responsibility.

What kind of assignment, what kind of need? he thought.

Silence. A dark cloud of unknowing. Darkness and obscurity.

What do I do? he wondered.

Wait, child. Wait.

Thaddeus had a timeless spirit; he knew not and cared not whether three minutes had passed, or three hours. He let himself feel the notes of the timeless hymn and Christmas carol, "Let all mortal flesh keep silence." If he rested in God, he could wait.

Thaddeus slowly returned to consciousness, and left, his heart both peaceful and troubled.

## Chapter Eleven

*RING!* Sarah picked up the phone.

A businesslike and official voice said, "Hello. May I please speak with the Squeaky-Toy of the house?"

"Oh, hi, Jaben. What's up?"

"Amos said he was going to meet me for dinner to talk about some stuff, and he hasn't shown up. I called Désirée, and she said he's not in any of his usual haunts. It's not like him to break an appointment, and I was wondering if you would happen to know anything about it."

"Wow, no I don't. The last time I saw him was in the cave. By the way, do you know where my red bouncy ball is?"

"No idea."

## Chapter Twelve

Six friends stood in the cave in the early, early morning; none of them had slept well, and Jaben hadn't bothered to have his morning bowl of coffee.

"I called the police," Désirée said, "and they said that he can't be officially treated as a missing person until he's been gone for twenty-four hours. They asked me a number of questions — his height, weight, physical appearance, when he'd last been seen, and so on — and then left."

"I was praying yesterday," Thaddeus said. "I was praying, and I had a feeling of — urgency, but even more strongly of waiting. I'm confused. Usually, when God tells me to wait, it is for a long period of time. This was an eyeblink. Does this mean that the waiting is over, or that I — we? — should still wait?"

No one answered.

"What do we do now?" Sarah asked.

"We can sing," Ellamae said. "Sing and pray."

"Sing?" Désirée asked incredulously. "At a time like this?"

"How can you *not* sing at a time like this? If you can't sing at a time like this, when can you sing?" Ellamae replied.

Désirée nodded.

Ellamae's high, pure voice began, and was joined by other voices, deeper voices.

"O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless,  
free!

Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me!

Underneath me, all about me, is the current of Thy love

Leading onward, leading homeward to Thy glorious rest above!

"O the deep, deep love of Jesus, spread His praise from shore to shore!

How he loveth, ever loveth, changeth never, nevermore!

How he watches o'er his loved ones, died to call them all his own;

How for them he intercedeth, watcheth o'er them from the throne!

"O the deep, deep love of Jesus, love of every love the best!

'Tis an ocean vast of blessing, 'tis a haven sweet of rest!

O the deep, deep love of Jesus, 'tis a heaven of heavens to me;

And it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee!

Désirée's heart had calmed considerably during the singing. "Let's sing it again," she said. And they did. Then her voice led a song:

"My life flows on in endless song above earth's lamentation.

I hear the sweet though far-off hymn that hails a new creation:

Through all the tumult and the strife I hear the music ringing;

It finds an echo in my soul— how can I keep from singing?

"What though my joys and comforts die? The Lord my Savior liveth;

What though the darkness gather round! Songs in the night He giveth:

No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that refuge clinging;

Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?

"I lift mine eyes; the cloud grows thin; I see the blue above it;

And day by day this pathway smooths since first I learned to love it:

The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart, a fountain ever springing;

All things are mine since I am his— How can I keep from singing?"

"Can we pray now?" There was considerable concern in Ellamae's questioning.

Désirée hesitated, and then said, "Yes. I am calm now."

They joined hands and closed their eyes. For a while, there was silence, finally broken by Désirée's tear-choked voice. "Lord, keep my husband safe."

The songs held new meaning to her.

Jaben said, "I think of myself as a theologian, but I do not know the answers to the questions on our hearts. Lord, hold us in your heart."

The faint echo of a gust of wind was heard in the cave.

Sarah began to hum, "I love you, Lord," and the others joined in.

"Why?" asked Désirée.

Silence.

As the time passed, the silence changed in character. It became deeper, a present silence. The faint sounds — of air passing through the cavern, of people breathing, of cloth rubbing against cloth as people moved — seemed louder, more audible, and yet part of the silence.

"Lord, we come to you with so many things on our hearts," Ellamae said. "In the midst of all this, I wish to thank you for the many blessings we have enjoyed. I thank you for my music, and for all my students, especially Sunny. She is such a delight, and I look forward to seeing her abilities mature. I thank you especially for Amos, for the delight he is to us, his patience, his deep laughter." Voices had been saying "Amen," and Jaben added, "for his taking teasing so well." "If this is the last we have seen of him, we thank you for allowing us to pass these brief moments with such a friend," Ellamae finished.

"Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven," Lilianne joined. "Lord, we come before you in confidence that you have adopted us as your children, and whatever we ask will be done. May our request be your will, drawing on your willingness, as we ask that our fellowship be restored, and our friend and brother be found." They sat for a time, continuing to hold each other's hands, crying, listening to the silence. Then a squeeze went around, and with one voice they said, "Amen."

It had been an hour. The hugs were long and lingering, and Jaben felt the kisses a little more. The six friends went out of the cave and into their days' activities, their hearts deeply troubled and even more deeply at peace.

## Chapter Thirteen

Ellamae had come over to Désirée's and Amos's little white house, ostensibly to help with the housework. They were washing and drying dishes and chattering when the doorbell rang.

Désirée, in the middle of scouring out a dirty pot, said, "Could you get that, honey? My hands are kind of full."

Ellamae set down the dish she was drying, and the towel. She walked over to the front door.

There was a police officer there, and something about his demeanor said that he did not bear good news.

"Mrs. Godfrey?"

"She's in the kitchen, washing dishes. Come on in."

Désirée had rinsed and dried her hands, and came into the living room. She shook the officer's hand. "Hi, I'm Désirée."

"Officer Rick. Would you be willing to sit down for a second?"

With trepidation, Désirée sat down in the armchair. Ellamae perched on the edge of the couch.

"Following up on a call, we found your husband's car in a ditch by the roadside. The windows were broken, and the n-word was spray painted all over the sides."

Désirée brought her hand to her mouth, and her eyes filled with tears. She suddenly looked like a very small woman in a very big chair.

Ellamae closed her eyes in pain. The officer continued. "We are presently fingerprinting the car, and beginning a search of the area. We will call you if we find out anything definite. I'm sorry to bear this news."

Ellamae walked over, and wrapped her arms around Désirée. "Thank you, officer." She paused a moment, and said, "I think we need to be alone now. Sorry you had to bear this news."

The policeman said, "Yes, Ma'am," and stepped out the door.

Désirée and Ellamae stood, held each other, and wept.

## Chapter Fourteen

Jaben walked up the steps of the sanctuary slowly. Sarah was standing next to him, and squeezed his hand; he touched her, but did not feel her. The friends walked into the church quietly; the other members of the congregation gave them a little more space, and a hush fell. Désirée held on tightly to Ellamae's arm.

"Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," the celebrant said.

"And blessed be his kingdom, now and for ever. Amen," the congregation answered.

"Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen," the celebrant prayed.

The processional hymn was Amazing Grace, words and notes that flowed automatically, thoughtlessly, until the fourth verse:

"The Lord has promised good to me  
His word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be,  
As long as life endures."

Jaben had been thinking, a lot, and he held onto those words as a lifeline. With them came a little glimmer of hope that his beloved friend might be OK.

"Glory to God, glory in the highest and peace to His people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King. Almighty God and Father,

*"We worship You we give You thanks we praise You for Your glory"*

WE WORSHIP YOU, WE GIVE YOU THANKS, WE PRAISE YOU FOR YOUR GLORY.

"Glory to God in the highest and peace to His people on earth.  
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God,  
"You take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.  
You are seated at the right hand of the Father, receive our pray'r.  
For You alone are the Holy One, for you alone are the Lord.  
For You alone are the most high, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God, the Father.

"Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth.  
Amen. Give glory to God.  
Amen. Give glory to God.  
"Amen. Give glory to God."

In the music, Jaben felt lifted up into the divine glory — a taste of Heaven cut through his pain.

The celebrant said, "The Lord be with you."

The congregation echoed, "And also with you."

The celebrant bowed his head and said, "Let us pray.

"Almighty God, whose Son our Savior Jesus Christ came to seek out and save the lost: grant that we, looking in the divine Light you give us, and thinking in the holy wisdom you bestow on us, may succeed in the endeavors you set before us, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*"

A reader stepped up and said, "A reading from Ruth.

"But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.'

"The Word of the Lord."

"Thanks be to God," the congregation answered.

The celebrant said, "We will read the Psalm together in unison."

The whole congregation read aloud, "O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.

You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,'

even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.'"

Two tears slid down Lilianne's and Désirée's cheeks.

"The word of the Lord," the celebrant said.

"Thanks be to God," the congregation answered.

"A reading from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians," another reader announced.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

"Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

"For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is. our righteousness. holiness and redemption.

Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'

"The Word of the Lord," concluded the reader.

"Thanks be to God," answered the congregation.

Jaben mulled over the texts.

The congregation rose, singing, "Alleluia! Alleluia! Opening our hearts to Him.

Singing Alleluia! Alleluia! Jesus is our King."

"A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke," said the celebrant.

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'

"The Gospel of the Lord."

"Praise to you, Lord Christ," answered the congregation, and sat down.

The celebrant walked behind the pulpit, and said, "There was a Baptist minister who would every Sunday stand behind the pulpit and say, 'The Lord be with you!' And every Sunday, the congregation would answer, 'And also with you.'

"One Sunday, he said 'The Lord be with you!' as usual, but the microphone was turned off, and his voice did not carry very well in the large sanctuary. The congregation did not respond.

"He tapped the microphone, and saw that there was no sound, and so he said in a loud voice, 'I think there's a problem with the mike!'

"The congregation answered, 'And also with you.'"

There was a chuckle throughout the congregation. Jaben's nose wrinkled in distaste. Jaben objected strongly to Kant's idea of Religion Within the Bounds of Reason. He was quite fond of Chesterton's statement that, among intellectuals, there are two types of people: those that worship the intellect, and those that use it. He objected even more strongly to America's idea of Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement. It wasn't that he didn't like a good joke, or having a bit of fun. It was just that he didn't confuse those things with edifying instruction in the Word of God. When his irritation wore off, he began to sink into thought.

Jaben slowly turned the Scripture passages over in his mind. Each one seemed to say something about Amos.

It was then and there that Jaben Onslow Pfau decided that he would do everything he could, whatever the cost, come Hell or high water, to rescue Amos Regem Godfrey, his dear and beloved friend and brother.

## Chapter Fifteen

There was a clamor of people around the friends. A black man, standing 6'8" at just under 300 pounds, built like a brick wall, and bearing a gentle radiance, approached them, along with his little mother. The woman said, "I remember when Amos and my son were wee little boys, and there was rain after a heavy truck drove through the street. They both played in the mud, happy as pigs in a blanket!"

The man said, "If there's anything we can do to help, just tell us."

Jaben said, "As a matter of fact, Bear, yes, there is."

"Yes?" the man said eagerly.

"Could we join you for dinner? I need to think, and having more company and less work to do would help me."

"Certainly," Bear said. "It would be a pleasure," his mother added.

"What are we having?" Thaddeus said eagerly.

"Rice and gravy, fried chicken, and peach cobbler."

"Mmm, soul food," Thaddeus said, smiling. "I'll try not to drool on the way over."

"Ok," Bear said, his deep voice rumbling into an even deeper laughter.

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Different people were in and out of the kitchen at different times, although Grace, Bear's mother, and Lilianne were always in. A pleasing aroma filled the house; Thad wasn't the only one who found it hard not to drool.

Bear picked Jabben up and squeezed him in a big Bear hug. Then he set him down, and, placing his arm over Jabben's shoulder, asked, "So, whatchya thinkin' about, Bro?"

Jabben closed his eyes. "I want to find Amos, if he's dead or alive. I know you're supposed to leave this to the authorities, but it is on my heart to do so. I want to do whatever it takes, whatever the cost, to find him."

Sarah walked out of the kitchen, her ears cocked. "I'm in."

"Me, too," said Lilianne's voice.

"How're you going to do that?" Bear asked, his eyebrows raised in curiosity.

"Don't bother me with details."

"I'm going with you, too," said Ellamae, and squeezed his hand.

"Do you want to use my gun?" Bear asked. His gun was legendary in the town as an elephant gun with a laser sight.

"Bear, you know I can't hit the broad side of a barn with a sniper rifle."

"I'm in," said Thaddeus, his eyes wide with interest. "Could we go out in the forest and shoot a few crabapples?"

"Just a second while I go get it." Bear disappeared up some stairs.

"Honey, you *know* I'm in," said Désirée.

Bear returned, carrying a very large rifle. He held it out to Thaddeus. Thaddeus hefted it, and said, "Let's go."

As the two walked out the door, Thaddeus asked, "Why do you use such a massive gun, Bear? Nothing you hunt needs that kind of firepower."

A stick snapped under Bear's weight. "I don't know. It's me, I guess. Same reason I use a sixteen pound sledgehammer, or thirty-two when they'll let me bring one. Part of it is toy and... you know the saying, 'The only difference between a man and a boy is the size of the toy.'"

"How do you turn the laser sight on?" Thaddeus asked. "I've never used one."

"Here," Bear said. "Like this."

Thaddeus lowered himself to the ground, and said, "See that crabapple tree out at battlesight zero? See that crabapple that sticks out

crabapple tree out at battlesight zero? See that crabapple that sucks out to the far left?"

"Battlesight zero for this gun is about three times what you're used to."

"Oh, yeah. Thanks. I'll adjust accordingly. Anyway, see that crabapple?" "The really little one?" Bear asked. "Uh-huh." Thaddeus grew still, his body's tiny swaying decreasing and decreasing. The tiny crabapple glowed red. Then it stopped glowing, and Thaddeus closed his eyes.

*Boom!* A resounding, thunderous gunshot echoed all around.

The crabapple was no longer there.

Thaddeus rubbed his shoulder, and handed the gun to Bear.

"I'm sorry, Bear, but I can't use that gun. It's much too heavy for me, and the kick from that one shot is going to give me bruises. I can feel it now. I really appreciate the offer; I have for a long time longed to fire Bear's gun. But I can't use it. I need to stick with my .22."

"You are a true marksman, Thaddeus, and a good man. I hope that you don't meet anything that requires the firepower to take down a grizzly."

"Oh, that reminds me," Thaddeus said. "I heard this from Jaben. Which is better to have if you're attacked by a grizzly: a 10-gauge, or a hollow-nosed .45?"

"Ummm..." Bear hesitated.

"The shotgun, because you can use it as a club when it runs out of ammo."

Bear laughed a deep, mighty laugh, and then they walked back. That man, Bear thought, was not entirely telling an innocent joke.

## Chapter Sixteen

*Ring, Ring, Ring, Ring.* "We're sorry, but the number you have dialed is an imaginary number. Please hang up, rotate the phone clockwise by ninety degrees, and dial again. *Beep!*"

"C'mon, Jaben. Pick up the phone." The voice paused, and reiterated, "Pick up the phone."

Jaben picked up the phone. "Leave me alone, Thad! I've talked with Bear, and he's given me time off. I need to do some thinking."

"Amos is in Mexico."

"*What?!?*"

"Amos is in Mexico."

"How do you know that? Did he call you? Is he OK?"

"No, he didn't call me. I was just... praying, and Amos is in Mexico."

"Ok. That changes my plans."

"Mine, too."

"Let's meet at the cave tonight. Could you call the others? I still need to do some processing."

"I already have called the others."

"Ok, see you there."

"See ya! Wouldn't want to be ya!"

## Chapter Seventeen

Only one candle flickered, but the cave did not seem dark. The air was cool, but the Kythers were much too excited to feel cold. They were there with a mission, with a purpose.

Jaben said, "I think we should take a day to prepare, and then leave for Mexico. In a way, a day is not nearly enough time, but in another way a day may be more than we can afford. We need to use the time wisely. What will you do? I will work on securing material provisions."

Lilianne said, "I will pray. Pray and fast."

Thaddeus said, "I will talk with God."

Désirée said, "I will talk with my kin for support."

Sarah said, "I don't know what I'll do. Maybe tell loved ones goodbye for a while, I'm going on an adventure."

Ellamae said, "Plant a tree."

"What?" Sarah asked.

"Martin Luther was asked what he would do if he knew what the Lord were coming the next day. His answer was very simple: plant a tree. It was the ultimate scatological response. Instead of nonstop singing, prayer, fasting, and wailing about 'I am a worm!' he reasoned that he had been planning to plant a tree, and if that was worth doing at all, it would be worth doing when the Lord returned. So he said he would plant a tree. Apart from packing, I'm just going to spend my day normally, and then go."

"I'm with you," said Sarah.

## Chapter Eighteen

Ellamae smiled at the familiar knock on the door. "Come in, Sunny," she said.

Sunny bounced in. "Teacher, teacher, I've been waiting to play for you." She jumped up on the piano bench.

"Go ahead and play," Ellamae said, looking with wonder on this little child.

Sunny began to play, and Ellamae listened with a shock. She had not taught the girl about different keys yet — other than C and the pentatonic key of the black keys, which were plenty to start with — and the child was confidently playing music in G minor. It sounded vaguely like Bach, at very least a set of variations on the theme of his little fugue — and then Ellamae realized what she was listening to. Ellamae was listening to a fugue in one voice.

She realized with a start that the music had shifted to the key of E minor, and was growing fuller, richer, deeper. Many different threads were introduced, developed, and then integrated. The music rose to a crescendo and then came to a sudden and startling conclusion. There was silence.

"Do you like it?" Sunny said, a bashful smile on her face.

"Yes, I like it very much. Did it take you all week to compose?"

"I didn't compose it, Ellamae. I improvised it."

"Sunny, how would you like to take a walk?"

"A walk? Where?"

"To go visit my friend Sarah. I'll leave your mother a note, and not charge for this lesson. I'm going to look for my friend Amos, and I may not be back for a while. I love the keyboard, but I'd like to spend these last moments doing something else. Will you come with me?"

"I would love to!"

Ellamae wrote out a note, and taped it to the door of the lesson room, and then said, "C'mon, Sunny. Take my hand."

As they walked out, Sunny turned her face up to the light, and said, "The sunlight is warm today!"

Ellamae said, "It is. Perhaps feeling sunlight is better than looking at sunlight. What did you do this past week?"

Sunny said, "I don't know."

"Yes, you do," replied Ellamae.

"I got to ride a horse bareback with my Mom. That was fun. The horse was hot, and I could feel him breathing in and out, and I could feel the wind kissing my face."

"Is wind a mystery to you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Sighted people find wind to be confusing; we can see what it does, like blow leaves around, but we can't see the wind itself. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit is like wind that way."

"I don't find wind confusing. I feel it, and hear it, and hear what it does. It's like a friend, moving around me and hugging me. Is that like the Spirit? I don't find God to be confusing; he's like a friend, or a warm bowl of soup, or... I don't know what else to say, but he isn't confusing."

Ellamae pondered these words. Perhaps later the child would know the side of God that is wild and mysterious — or was everything so wild and mysterious to her that she made her peace with them, and was not frightened at the wild mystery of God? This was a voice that could call God 'Daddy', and be completely unafraid.

"Is that like the Spirit?" Sunny repeated. "Is that like the Spirit, Teacher?"

"I don't know. I'm not a theologian. I think it is, but in a different way than Jesus meant. Maybe wind is different to blind people and sighted people. I wonder what else is—"

"What's a theo-lo-, a the-, a the-o-loge-yun?" Sunny interrupted.

"A theologian is someone who devotes his life to studying the nature of God, and faith, and hope, and love. A theologian is somebody who reads the Bible and learns deep lessons from it."

"Why aren't you a theo-logian? I think you're a theologian. I'm a theologian. Today I learned that God loves me. That's a deep lesson. I think everybody should be a theologian."

"Yes, but a theologian is somebody who does that in a special way, and

Yes, but a theologian is somebody who does that in a special way, and is more qualified—wait, that isn't right, a theologian is—" Ellamae paused, and closed her eyes. "I don't know. I don't know what makes a theologian. Maybe you and I are theologians. I don't know."

"But I thought grown-ups knew everything!"

"Nonononononononono!" Ellamae said. "Grown-ups don't know everything. Here's a story I was told when I was a little girl like you in Sunday school.

"An Indian and a white man were standing together on a beach. The white man took a stick, and made a small circle in the sand. He said, 'This is what the Indian knows.'

"Then he made a big circle around the small circle, and said, 'This is what the white man knows.'

"The Indian took the stick, and made a really, really, really big circle around both of the other two circles, and said, 'This is what neither the Indian nor the white man knows.'"

They were walking along a primitive road, and Ellamae bent over, saying, "Give me your finger. Point with it." She drew a small circle along the dirt, and said, "This is what children know."

Then she drew a larger circle, overlapping with the former circle, but not engulfing it. "This is what grown-ups know. Grown-ups know more than children know, but we also forget a lot of things as we grow up, and some of them are important. So grown-ups know more than children, but children still know some pretty big things that grown-ups don't."

Then she walked around in an immense circle, dragging Sunny's fingertip through the sandy dirt. "This is what neither children nor grown-ups know, but only God knows. Do you see?"

Sunny's face wrinkled in concentration. "Yes. So you want to tell me the things I ask, but you don't know them."

"Yes," Ellamae said, continuing to walk along.

"What do children know that grown-ups don't?" asked Sunny.

Ellamae took a long time to answer. "You know how sometimes I say something, and you ask me a question, and I change what I said? That's because you brought up something I forgot, like singing being like dancing. There are other things. Jesus said to become like a little child to enter; children know how to believe, and how — 'honest' is close, but not quite the right word. When a little boy says, 'I love you,' he means it. Children know how to imagine and make-believe, and how to play. Most

adults have forgotten how to play, though a few remember (maybe by taking time to play, maybe by making work into play). That is sad most of all. This life is preparing us for Heaven, and what we do in Heaven will not be work or rest, but play. You live more in Heaven than most grown-ups."

Sunny listened eagerly. "But you remembered."

"Yes, but not easily. And not all of it. I am lucky to have friends who know how to play."

By this time they had reached Sarah's house, and Sarah saw them and came out to greet them. They sat down on a log, with Sunny in the middle.

"Teacher tells me that you're tickulish," Sunny said.

"Maybe I am and maybe I'm not," Sarah said.

Sunny poked Sarah in the side. Sarah squeaked.

"Sarah is not a Squeaky-Toy," Sarah said, sitting up and looking very dignified (and forgetting that Sunny was blind).

Sunny poked Sarah in the side. Sarah squeaked.

"Sarah is not a Squeaky-Toy," Sarah reiterated.

Sunny poked Sarah in the side. Sarah squeaked.

Sarah grabbed Sunny's hands. "I hear you like music."

"Yes, I like it a lot. I especially like to play piano. What's your name?"

"Sarah."

"I love you, Sarah-Squeak."

"Thank you, Sunny." She paused, debated whether or not to say "It's 'Sarah', not 'Sarah-Squeak'," and continued, "What do you think of when you play music?"

"Music stuff. Do you play music?"

"No, but I paint. Painting is kind of like music."

"What do you do when you paint?"

"Well, I take all sorts of different colors, and I use differing amounts to make different forms and shapes, and when I am done people can see through my painting what I was thinking of, if I do it well."

"I take different notes, and I use differing amounts to make different melodies, and when I am done people can hear through my music what I was thinking of, if I do it well. Yep, painting is like music."

Sarah pondered the painting of rainbow colors she had been working on. "You know, I'd like for you to do something with me sometime. I'd like for you to improvise a song for me, maybe record it so I can hear it a

like for you to improvise a song for me, maybe record it so I can hear it a few times, and I'll see if I can translate it into a painting."

"What about words? Can you translate it into words?"

"I can't translate music into words. I don't know if anyone can. But maybe, if I tried hard enough and had God's blessing, I could translate it into a painting of color. Hmm, that gives me an idea of music for the deaf." She turned to Ellamae. "What about a video where each instrument or voice was a region of the screen, and the color went around the color wheel circle as the notes go around, and the light became more intense as you went up an octave? And they became bigger and smaller as the notes became louder and softer?"

"I'd like to see that. Music for the deaf," Ellamae said.

"Miss Sarah, please hold your arm out and pull up your shirt sleeve," Sunny said."

Sarah, curious, did as the child asked.

Sunny placed her fingers on Sarah's bare arm, and started to play it as if it were a piano keyboard. "*That* is music for people who can't hear," she said.

Sarah and Ellamae nodded.

## Chapter Nineteen

Thaddeus slowly got out materials — the right materials — and started cleaning his gun. Ellamae ducked in the doorway, and said, "What's up?"

Thaddeus said, "Cleaning my gun. Taking care of details." He looked at a small box of ammunition, and said, "And you?"

"I don't think we'll be needing that," Ellamae said. "No good will come of it."

"There's more than people in Mexico. There are animals. I'd prefer to be prepared," Thaddeus said.

"No good will come of it," Ellamae said.

## Chapter Twenty

Jaben thought about his visit with the Weatherbys. He called to apologize and explain why they wouldn't all be able to come then to talk in person, and they gave him — unasked-for, undeserved — a thousand dollars in traveller's cheques. He was very happy for the money. The friends had plenty of equipment from their other adventures, but money was tight, and he hadn't known where it was going to come from. Perhaps Bear.

When he finished packing the van, it contained:

- Children's toys: a truck, a doll, a top...
- Thaddeus's .22 competition rifle.
- A small box of ammunition.
- Gun cleaning supplies.
- A large box of MREs, military rations ("Meal Ready to Eat' is three lies in one," a marine had told them, but they'll keep you moving).
- Books:
  - The Bible, in four different translations (one Spanish, one French, and two English).
  - Madeline l'Engle's *A Wind in the Door*, the very first book (besides the Bible) that he thought of to bring along. (He identified very strongly with Charles Wallace.)
  - Jon Louis Bentley's *Programming Pearls*, for serious thinking about programming.
  - Larry Wall's *Programming Perl*, for light and humorous reading.
  - Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*, for pleasure, and to use road time to explain to his friends exactly *why* he believed that television

was a crawling abomination from the darkest pits of Hell.

- Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*. When Jaben first saw this book sitting atop a television, he thought, "The author could only think of four?" For that, he found this book to be far deeper than Postman's, and (in thinking about what to pack) thought it would be a good book to help appreciate nature and Mexico.
  - *A Treasury of Jewish Humor*, edited by Nathan Ausubel. Jaben found Jewish humor to be subtle, clever, and extremely funny, as did Lilianne; the others were beginning to catch on.
  - Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*, to share with Sarah most of all.
  - Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self*, which he had read much too quickly and wanted to peruse, at least in part, to better understand his own culture.
  - Philip Johnson's *Darwin on Trial*. This book, apart from some web articles, was the first contact he had that changed the way he looked at academia. He thought there were some arguments to add to the ones in the book, but he couldn't put his finger on them.
  - Oliver Sack's *An Anthropologist on Mars*, to stimulate his mind and help show him different ways of thinking.
  - A small box of black pens (which had the most tremendous knack for disappearing) and a hardcover blank book to write in.
- Three climbing ropes.
  - Four notebooks, three of which were half-filled with miscellaneous scrawl.
  - The traveller's cheques.
  - A heavy-duty, broad-ranging medical kit, including a snakebite kit.
  - Lanterns.
  - Kerosene.
  - Various people's clothing, personal toiletries, etc.
  - Three large hunting knives, one of which had a serrated back.
  - A water drum.
  - Tents, groundcloths, and sleeping bags.
  - About 50 pounds in batteries.
  - Seven lantern flashlights.

- Six canteens.
- Five Swiss Army Knives.
- Four pair of binoculars.
- Three coils of bailing wire.
- Two rolls of duct tape.
- Sarah's red bouncy ball.

Jaben packed it in as best he could; the equipment was smaller than it sounded, and they had a big van. He arranged it like furniture, and then called the others to come in. They joined hands in prayer, and hit the road at sundown.

## Chapter Twenty-One

"Hello, and thank you for choosing Kything Airlines, where we not only get you there, but teach you how to pray. We will be cruising at an altitude of about fifteen to thirty-five hundred feet after hills, railroad crossings, and speed bumps, and zero feet otherwise. Our destination is Mexico City, Mexico, with an estimated time of arrival in thirty minutes. This is your copilot Jaben speaking, and our captain for this flight is Thaddeus."

"Dude," Thad said, "this van does like zero to sixty in fifteen minutes when it's loaded like this. But your point is well taken. I'll try not to speed."

"Yeah, I know. If this van were a computer, it would be running Windows now. Anyways, I'd like to take this time for a debriefing on Mexican culture," Jaben said.

"Don't we usually pray when we start off on a trip?" asked Sarah.

"Yes, but I would like to use the time to talk about Mexican culture when it will make a clear impression on people's minds," Jaben answered.

"But prayer is more important!" Sarah insisted.

"Yes, it's more important, but the more important things do not always take place first. Important and urgent are two separate things. You put your clothes on before you visit your friend, even though visiting your friend is more important," Jaben explained, although he was not satisfied with his example.

"I still think prayer is more important," Sarah said.

I'm not going to get into an argument, Jaben thought. An argument is definitely not the right way to start off this trip. "Very well, then, Sarah," he said. "Why don't you pray?"

"Me?" Sarah said with the earnest pleasure of a child. "I would love to.

"Dear Father, thank you for this trip, for all the good times we've had with Amos, even the time he named me Squeaky-Toy (even though I only let Jabben use that name). Father, I pray that you would help us find Amos, and Father, help us bring him back safely. And, oh, Father, please let him be all right. Amen."

Jabben took a couple seconds' more prayer to cool down, and let go of his angry thoughts about Sarah. Then he said, "Ok, for a primer on Mexican culture... let's see. Touch. When you enter or leave a room, you give everyone a firm handshake; if you don't, everyone will think you're rude. Kissing cheeks is OK among girls, and side hugs are OK on special occasions. In general, we'll have to back off on touch in public, and particularly avoid what would look like couples' PDA. This means both you and me, Sarah. We should talk less, and particularly avoid extended public conversations between the sexes. In general, avoid real, deep kything except when we're alone and away from eyes. Wait, that's not exactly right. Etiquette is very important, and chivalry and 'ladies first', and you stand when an elder enters. Address people by honorifics. Be formal; to quote Worf, 'Good manners are *not* a waste of time.' Mexican culture is much more community oriented than but our peculiarities in community that *can* be misunderstood in the United States, *will* be misunderstood in Mexico."

"Is Mexican culture higher-context than American culture?" Ellamae asked.

"Mmm, good question. Most cultures are less low-context than American culture; some Native American cultures are as high-context as the Japanese, and I think the Romance cultures are high-context. So by general guesswork and geneology, I would expect Mexican culture to be higher in context level. Except I don't know much about what that context is. There are some superstitious remnants of Roman Catholicism, but Rome is more a behind-the-scenes, unseen force than it is the pulsating life in the Catholics we know, especially Emerant. Like the grandmother in *Household Saints*. Um, what else... aah, yes, time. You'll fit in perfectly, Thaddeus. The rest of us, particularly me, will have to work on it. When you agree to meet someone at noon, that's noon, give or take two or three hours. Mexicans will wonder what the hurry is all about. Try not to fidget."

"How does Hispanic culture compare to black culture?" asked Désirée.

"Very similar: the two are probably closer than either is to white

very similar, the two are probably closer than either is to white American culture. On, and girls, avoid eye contact with men; everybody, avoid flirting," Jaben stated.

Sarah said, "I can't wait to get to Mexico. Seeing another country will be so much fun!"

Jaben said, "Sarah, as I remember, you haven't been out of the country, right?"

"No," she said.

"Ok. A couple of tips on crossing cultures: prepare to have expectations violated that you didn't even know you had. Crossing cultures is both wonderful and terrible, and it's particularly rough the first time. Or at least I've heard it is for most people; I don't experience culture shock the same way. It will look to you like people are doing all sorts of things the wrong way, and some of them will indeed be wrong, but a great many are just different, and some of them better," Jaben said. "Try not to complain, or at least not to take a complaining attitude."

"Oh, dear!" Sarah said. "That sounds frightful."

"It is, and it isn't," Jaben said. "You'll love Mexico, and, knowing you, you'll walk away with at least twenty different paintings in your head, and be able to execute all of them perfectly. Which reminds me, did anyone bring a camera?"

There was no response.

"Good. We are not coming as shutterbug tourists, and taking a bunch of pictures wouldn't be proper. Let's see... what else... Aah. Does anyone know the Hacker's Drinking Song?"

"Nope," said Lilianne.

"Ok, let me sing the first two verses.

"Ninety-nine blocks of crud on the disk,  
Ninety-nine blocks of crud,  
Patch a bug and dump it again,  
One hundred blocks of crud on the disk.

"One hundred blocks of crud on the disk,  
One hundred blocks of crud,  
Patch a bug and dump it again,  
One hundred and one blocks of crud on the disk."

The others joined in with a thunderous noise:

"One hundred and one blocks of crud on the disk,  
One hundred and one blocks of crud,  
Patch a bug and dump it again,  
One hundred and two blocks of crud on the disk..."

They continued singing noisily until the wee hours of the morning.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

"Wake up," a voice said. "Wake up; the sun is high in the sky."

"Oh, hi, Lilianne, can't I sleep more?" Thaddeus said.

"No, we should get moving."

"I like to be well-rested when I drive. My reflexes are faster."

"Speaking of faster, I'd like to congratulate you on the stop you made when you decided you were too tired to drive. I didn't know this van could stop that fast," Lilianne said.

"Could I have just a half-hour more sleep?"

"I'm setting my watch."

After another half-hour of sleep, Thaddeus was indeed alert; they drove along, stopping at an IHOP for breakfast. The conversation consisted mostly of how to rearrange the equipment to be more comfortable, and breakfast was followed by about half an hour of rearrangement. The friends got in, their stiffness reduced, and felt better about sitting down. This time, Ellamae rode shotgun.

"I'm bored," Sarah said as they hit the road.

"How would you like to play riddles?" Jaben asked.

"I would love to!" said Sarah.

Jaben said,

"A man without eyes,  
saw plums in a tree.  
He neither ate them nor left them.  
Now how could this be?"

"That's impossible!" Sarah said. "A cabin on a mountain—"

Sarah paused. "Are the eyes he doesn't have literal eyes, like you and I have?"

"Literal eyes."

Literal eyes.

"Not like the eye of a storm?"

"Not like the eye of a storm."

"And he literally saw? Did he see in a dream?"

"He literally saw, as I literally see you now."

"Exactly the same?"

Jaben closed his eyes. "There is a slight difference, that is understandable if you know a bit of biology or psychology."

"That's not a fair riddle!" Sarah said. "You know that only Ellamae knows psychology. Don't give me a riddle I can't answer!"

"You do not need to know of biology or psychology to solve this riddle. In fact, I never thought of connecting this riddle with biology or psychology until now."

"I know what the answer is," said Ellamae.

"What is it?" Jaben asked, smiling.

"The man had only one eye. He took some of the plums, but not others."

Sarah sat, silently, and then said, "Ooooooooooh."

Jaben said, "*Et voila!*"

"How did psychology tell you that?" Sarah asked, confused.

"Put one hand over your eye," Ellamae said. "Do you notice anything different in how things look?"

"Yeah, everything looks flat like in a picture."

"Your depth perception (things not looking flat, but having depth) is what happens when your brain takes input from both eyes (which are in slightly different positions, and see something slightly different) and puts them together. A man who had only one eye would see slightly differently from someone with two eyes — like you did when you covered one eye with your hand."

"Ok, what's the next riddle?"

Jaben chanted in a lyrical voice,

"'Twas whispered in Heaven, 'twas muttered in Hell,  
And echo caught faintly the sound as it fell;  
On the confines of earth 'twas permitted to rest,  
And in the depths of the ocean its presence confes'd;  
'Twill be found in the sphere when 'tis riven asunder,  
Be seen in the lightning and heard in the thunder;

"Twas allotted to man with his earliest breath,  
Attends him at birth and awaits him at death,  
Presides o'er his happiness, honor, and health,  
Is the prop of his house, and the end of his wealth.  
In the heaps of the miser 'tis hoarded with care,  
But is sure to be lost on his prodigal heir;  
It begins every hope, every wish it must bound,  
With the husbandman toils, and with monarchs is crowned;  
Without it the soldier and seaman may roam,  
But woe to the wretch who expels it from home!  
In the whispers of conscience its voice will be found,  
Nor e'er in the whirlwind of passion be drowned;  
'Twill soften the heart; but though deaf be the ear,  
It will make him acutely and instantly hear.  
Set in shade, let it rest like a delicate flower;  
Ah! Breathe on it softly, it dies in an hour."

The van was silent for a minute, and then Ellamae said, "The letter 'h'."

"You have a sharp mind," Jaben said.

A light of comprehension flashed in Sarah's eyes, as she murmured parts of the riddle to herself, and then she said, "Give us a riddle that will take longer to solve, and that Ellamae won't get."

Jaben closed his eyes, thinking, waiting. Then, as if not a moment had passed, he pulled a duffel bag onto his lap, and said, "What have I got in my pocket?"

"What have I got in my pocket? What have I got in my pocket?" Sarah said, again murmuring to herself, and said, "I know! A pair of pliers!"

"No," Jaben said. "My pliers is on my knife. And it's something very specific, not my wallet."

"A picture of me!" she said, beaming.

"No, I forgot to pack that. But I usually carry a picture of you in my pocket. I like to look at you."

"Ok, I give up. What is it?"

Jaben put the duffel bag back, reached into his pocket, and pulled out an annulus, which had a metallic shimmer and yet was not of metal. He handed it to Ellamae, and said, "Hold it in the sunlight."

Ellamae smiled. and said. "The sunlight is hot. and vet the CD-ROM

remains cool. On the inner edge of the central hole I see an inscription, an inscription finer than the finest penstrokes, running along the CD-ROM, above and below: lines of fire. They shine piercingly bright, and yet remote, as out of a great depth: 42 72 65 61 64 20 61 6E 64 20 74 65 6C 65 76 64 73 69 6F 6E 73. I cannot understand the fiery letters and numbers." She looked very elfin.

"No," said Jaben, "but I can. The letters are hexadecimal, of an ancient mode, but the language is that of Microsoft, which I will not utter here. But this in the English tongue is what is said, close enough:

"One OS to rule them all, One OS to find them,  
One OS to bring them all and in the darkness bind them."

## Chapter Twenty-Three

The friends stopped for a picnic lunch on the grass. Thaddeus remarked that it was a cool day, although sunny, and the women protested until Jaben pointed out that Thaddeus, having lived in Malaysia and spent a lot of time with Indians, used the words 'hot' and 'cool' to distinguish weather that will melt a brass doorknob from weather that will merely make it a bit mushy. They ate MREs and talked *de tout et de rien*, of everything and nothing, and then packed up the waste and left.

As they got into the van, Jaben picked up *A Treasury of Jewish humor*, and said, "Here, from the introduction. An anti-Semite says to a Jew, 'All our troubles come from the Jews!'

"'Absolutely! From the Jews—and the bicycle riders.'

"'Bicycle riders! Why the bicycle riders?'

"'Why the Jews?'"

There was a chuckle, but Désirée said, "You know, Jaben, your jokes are good, but I think we're all kinda laughed out now. Or at least I am. Why don't we do something else?"

"Did Jaben pack *A Wind in the Door*?" Sarah asked.

Lilianne smiled. All of the Kythers had read the book cover to cover at least three or four times, and Sarah knew it by heart. It was the book from which they had taken their name, alongside a lesser and obscure document listing 100 ways of kything.

Jaben rummaged among the bags, and produced a small, battered black book. "Lilianne, why don't you read?"

Lilianne took the book gently, and said, "Since we all know *Wind* so well, I'm just going to open it at random, look until I find something good, and read it aloud, and then we can talk about it. Lessee..." she opened the book to the middle, and read silently, then said, "Aah, here. Page eighty-one. Meg and Proginoskes are talking.

"Meg says, 'Okay, I can get to the grade school all right, but I can't possibly take you with me. You're so big you wouldn't even fit into the school bus. Anyhow, you'd terrify everybody.' At the thought she smiled, but Proginoskes was not in a laughing mood.

"'Not everybody is able to see me,' he told her. 'I'm real, and most earthlings can bear very little reality.'" Lilianne closed the book.

"That's my favorite part!" Sarah said, with an animated smile. "Or one of my favorites; I like positive parts. But 'most earthlings can bear very little reality' is true. Most people, when they grow up, lose their childhood. I don't mind that they become adults. That's good. But they stop being children and that's really sad. You can't be a true adult without being a child. Some people have asked me when my interminable childhood was going to end, and I have always told them 'never'. I was surprised and happy when Jaben told me, 'You have somehow managed to blossom into womanhood without losing the beauty of a little girl.' Jaben was the first to understand me.

"Children are able to bear reality. They are so expert at bearing reality that they can even bear not-reality just as easily. Santa Claus and Easter bunny and fairies don't harm them like they'd harm an adult, because they are from the same source as a deeper reality — faith and goodness and providence and wonder. This is why, when children pray, things happen. People are healed. Their prayers are real. This is also why Chesterton said, 'A man's creed should leave him free to believe in fairies,' or kind of. A child who looks at some leaves and sees the wee folk is wrong, but not nearly as wrong as the adult who looks at the human body and sees nothing but matter. Not only because the error is worse, but because the child knows he is a child and wants to grow up, and the adult thinks he already *is* grown up. I still want to grow up; it's a shame when a person's growth is stunted by thinking he's grown up. Anyways, God is too big and too real for us to deal with — so is his Creation — but most children can bear something they can't handle, and most adults can't bear much of anything they can't handle. Like death; our culture denies death, whether it is tearing the elderly and dying out of their houses and isolating them in hospitals and nursing homes, or this whole porn of death like Arnold Schwarzenegger movies. And that philosopher Kant's — what was it called? The book that cut faith into —"

"*Religion Within the Bounds of Reason*," Jaben said.

"I like the Jews who told Moses, 'We don't want to see the Lord. Be our

LIKE THE JEWS WHO TOLD MOSES, 'WE DON'T WANT TO SEE THE LORD. BE OUR prophet for us that we don't see him, so we don't die.' I count myself really, really, really lucky to have friends who can bear reality, who kythe, who touch me, who look into my paintings, who can see that I am not a ditz."

Thaddeus winked at her. "Yes, Squeaky-Toy."

"Hey!" Sarah said. "Only Jaben is allowed to call me that."

"Me rorry," Thad said affectionately.

A silence fell. Jaben began to hum a strand from a French lovesong — <<*Elle est femme, elle est gamine*,>> and when Sarah asked what he was humming, he explained that a man was singing of his beloved, that she was both a woman and a child. Sarah smiled, not feeling the slightest hint of romantic interest. Jaben was presently undecided as to whether he wanted to live celibate or married — presently not dating anyone, not seeking to, but not closed to the possibility — and yet was fascinated by lovesong and love poetry. It had taken Sarah some time to understand that his collection of erotica — from all places and all times — was not pornographic and was perused without lust by *un chevalier parfait, sans peur et sans reproche*. She was finally persuaded, not by the force of his arguments (for she knew how often forceful arguments could be wrong), but by the passion and the purity of his heart. Jaben had memorized Baudelaire's *l'Invitation au Voyage*, and had made his own translation of the Song of Songs because, he said, politics had coerced translators into bowlderizing the English rendition and using wooden literality to obscure its meaning. Sarah had turned a very bright shade of red when Jaben explained to her the meaning of "I have entered my garden;" her skin matched her shining hair, and Jaben had revelled in her beauty. Thereafter, and after Jaben gave explanations to un-bowlderize other areas of the Bible, she always giggled at certain texts. Sarah found it quite curious that most of the sexual content in the Bible was softened considerably, but none of the violence; in her mind, it was connected not only to the behavior of many Christians — who wouldn't touch a film with nudity (not even *Titanic*, which Sarah loved and Jaben hated), but didn't flinch at movies that were rated 'R' for violence, let alone cartoons that show how funny it is to drop an anvil on someone's head — but to a movie ratings system that, in the words of one magazine article, found "massaging a breast to be more offensive than cutting it off."

These — and many other things like them — were thought about in the

car. Some of them were discussed; others did not need to be said aloud, because of the common understanding between them; this gave the dialogue a unique potency and depth, and thus it remained the next day, and the day after, until when — as they were in Texas, approaching the Mexican border — something interesting happened.

    Their radiator blew out.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

"Well," Jaben said. "we just passed a town. Let's some of us stay with the van and some of us go in. Drink a goodly bit of water, he said, grabbing a canteen, "and we'll hope to be back soon." They talked amongst themselves, and Thaddeus, Jaben, and Sarah decided to go, leaving Désirée, Lilianne, and Ellamae to sit in the van's shade.

"Do you think you could ever write like Kant," Sarah said.

"Certainly," Jaben answered, "if I tried hard and studied a certain book."

"Which of Kant's books?" Sarah asked.

"Not one of Kant's books," Jaben said. "The *Handbook of Applied Cryptography*."

Sarah's eyes lit up, and then filled with perplexity. "You don't like that type of deep philosophical writing?"

Jaben said, "It is hard to think deep thoughts. It is harder still to think deep thoughts and record them faithfully. It is hardest to think deep thoughts and record them faithfully in a manner that people will understand. *That* is what I aim for."

As they walked around, they passed an abandoned 1950's truck, rusted and with one window broken. A small animal scurried behind a tire.

"Stop," Sarah said. "I want to look at this truck." They stopped, and Sarah stood, looked at the truck, tilted her head, bent over, walked a bit, and walked further. Then she finally said, "Okay. I have my picture ready," and continued talking into town as if not a moment had passed.

After stopping in a gas station, they found an auto body and repair shop, and junkyard, advertising, "Largest parts selection in fifty miles." There was a tall man who was sitting in a rocker in the shade outside the shop, and rose to greet them. "Hello, folks. May I help you?"

"Yes. Our van's radiator blew out, and we were looking for a mechanic." Jaben tried not to wince, thinking about the damage that the repairs would do to their funds.

"I wish Bear were here. He's so good with cars," said Sarah.

"You know a guy named Bear? The Bear I know is almost seven feet tall, weighs three hundred pounds—"

"—and has an elephant gun with a laser sight," Jaben finished. "How do you know him?"

"He's my cousin." Now all those present were astonished. "How do you know him?"

"He's my friend and my boss. My name's Jaben, by the way, and this is Thaddeus and Sarah."

"I'm Jim. I think I might have heard of you. What are y'all doing down here?"

Jaben's smile turned to a frown. "We are looking for our friend Amos, who has disappeared, and whose location we do not know."

Jim's jaw dropped. "Amos has disappeared? Bear said the best things about him. They used to play together as little boys, and—ooh, I'm not going to tell you that story, because Bear and Amos (if you find him) will kill me."

Jaben said, "He has, which is why we're on this adventure. It may be a fool's errand, but we want to see it through."

The mechanic looked at him with a deep, probing gaze. "Your friendship runs that deep?"

"Our friendship runs that deep," said Jaben.

The mechanic closed his eyes for a second, then said, "Come on over to my truck. I'll throw a blanket in the bed so the metal doesn't burn you, and there are a few containers of iced tea in the fridge. Y'all look like you're melting. The repair is on me. What's the make and model of your van?"

Jaben was so surprised that he forgot to tell James the requested information. Sarah ran up and gave him a hug and a kiss. Thaddeus asked, "What can we do to thank you?"

The mechanic took out a notebook, and wrote something on it. "This is my number. You can give me a call when you find Amos, or give up the chase. And, if you want to do something else, you can bring Amos by here when you find him. I've always wanted to meet him. Did Bear ever show you that gun of his?"

you that gun of his.

Thaddeus pulled his shirt collar aside to reveal several bruises. "These black and blue marks are from firing it, once. He offered to let me take his gun with us, but I can't handle a gun like that."

"Yep, that sounds like something Bear would do. He's a big man with an even bigger heart. Would you step inside? The fridge is there, and some of my tools. I've got several vans with radiators in the junkyard. Any of you handy with tools?"

Jaben raised his hand.

"All right. Here's my leather gloves; I don't want you burning your hands. Let's go."

## Chapter Twenty-Five

Jim invited them to stay for the night — which they did, unrolling their sleeping bags in the living room. In the morning the women especially were happy to have a real shower. After a breakfast of eggs and bacon, Jaben asked about where to get certain supplies, and insisted on paying for a siphon, a 12-pack of cigarette lighters with 7 left, a stack of old newspapers (*USA Today*, Jaben was glad to see, so he wouldn't feel bad about burning them), and a couple of other odd items. They drained the water drum and refilled it afresh, and left with a hearty goodbye and thank you, hugs and a kiss from Sarah.

There seemed to be not much change on the road from Texas to Mexico; they stopped at a border town on the way to change some money, and two or three hours after crossing the border, they came on the town of Juarez and decided to stop for lunch.

The marketplace was wild, colorful, and full of smells. It had an energy about it that was lacking in American supermarkets. "Ooh, look!" Sarah said, and walked over to a vendor. There were several paintings, and she was looking intently at a small painting of a seashell on the sand. "Two hundred pesos," the vendor said.

Jaben looked at the painting, looked at the vendor, and pulled out seventy pesos. "*Este dinero es suficiente.*"

The vendor seemed slightly surprised, and took the money.

As they walked over to the fruit stands, Jaben said, "I don't mind that you bought that picture, Sarah, but we are not here as tourists, and money is tight. Please don't buy anything else we don't need."

"But Jaben, look!" Sarah said, holding the picture up.

He looked, and there was a glimmer of comprehension in his eyes. The picture was a deep picture, and he would need some more time to understand it. The artist must have been talented. "Thank you for buying

it, Sarah," Jaben said slowly.

Picking up a few oranges, Jaben asked the vendor, "*Cuánto cuestan estas naranjas?*"

"*Uno peso.*"

As well as the oranges, they purchased some bananas, avocados, and a chili pepper or two for Thad to munch on. The friends sat down in a corner, and talked, and watched the children play. They were kicking a rock around; their clothing was well worn and their bodies thin, and yet the children seemed to be playing in bliss. One of them walked over, and Ellamae gave the little girl half of her orange. Thaddeus pulled out a knife and was about to cut up one of the avocados, when Sarah reached into the pockets of her baggy pants, and said, "I know why I brought my red bouncy ball along!"

Jaben said, "No, wait. Sarah!"

Sarah had already rolled the ball down the street. A child kicked it, and it knocked the avocado out of Thaddeus's hand, and looked very sheepish. Then Sarah batted it back to the children, and—

Perhaps the best way to describe the ensuing chaos would be to say that it would have given Amos a headache, and that Jaben loved it. The ball was tossed around; people said things in English and in Spanish, not understanding the words and yet somehow understanding the meaning; there was dance; there was chaos. At one point, two teams formed, but they were trying to give the other team possession of the ball, and then that shifted, and then there were three teams, and then none. At one point, the friends and the children were all hopping on one foot; at another, they were all weaving a pattern in the air with their hands. There was touch; there was tickling; there was dodging. At the end of the joyous romp, Jaben sat down, exhausted; Sarah took the ball, and placed an arm over Jaben's shoulder (Jaben shifted away, and said, "Not here. Remember what I told you."), and said, "So, Jaben, how'd you enjoy your first game of Janra-ball?"

Jaben laughed. "I didn't think it was possible."

## Chapter Twenty-Six

As they drove along, the desert gave way to rocky land. The friends pulled over about an hour's drive away from Mexico city, and got out to go.

Ellamae and Sarah started to head around a rocky corner — the first words out of Sarah's mouth when they stopped were, "I really need to pee!" — and stopped cold in their tracks. Ellamae, her voice stressed, said, "Thaddeus, come here. There's a rattlesnake raised to strike."

Jaben said, "Whatever you do, don't move a muscle. Be a statue."

Sarah said, "Still is the last thing I can be right now. I'm—"

Jaben said, "Recite to me the subjects of your last five paintings."

Sarah said, "I can't do that. I'm too scared."

Jaben calmly said, "Yes, you can. What is the first—"

*Bang!* A gunshot sounded. Ellamae and Sarah jumped high. The rattlesnake fell to the ground, dead.

Thaddeus was crouched on a rock, holding a smoking gun. He loaded another round, and then walked over. He drew a hunting knife. "You guys know that rattlesnake meat is considered a delicacy?"

Sarah quivered, and said, "Thank you, Thaddeus. Now if I can change my pants—"

Ellamae looked in his eyes, and said, "I'm sorry for what I said about your gun. You saved my life."

Thaddeus opened his mouth to say something, then closed it as he had nothing to say. Finally, he said, "You're welcome."

Jaben said, "Thaddeus, I've always wondered why you didn't even get a gun with a clip. Not that you have to have a semi-automatic, but..." his voice trailed off.

Thaddeus and said, "This was the only good rifle that was within my price range when I brought it, and I brought it for target practice, not for

hunting. But as to the other aspect — I just decided that I wanted to practice until my aim was good enough that I would never need to shoot twice."

Ellamae said, "Again, thank you."

They set up camp, and soon fell into a deep sleep.

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

Two warriors, clad in black, holding unsheathed katanas, silently approached each other in the forest. A sliver of moonlight fell. They circled around each other, slowly, crouched, waiting.

Then one of them swung, and there was a counter. Silence. Another swing. A flurry of motion. They circled.

They were both masters, and as they fought — one of them swinging, the other swiftly evading the razor sharp blade — it became apparent that one was greater than the other.

The greater swordsman lowered his weapon and closed his eyes, and in an instant the lesser struck him down.

Ellamae awoke, greatly troubled by her dream, but decided to tell no one.

As she drifted off to sleep again, Ellamae wondered who had really won the duel.

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

They pulled into Mexico City early in the morning, the stench of smog only a hint of how bad it would get. Thaddeus had no difficulty finding the governmental buildings, nor Jaben in finding the appropriate bureaucrats. Getting anything useful out of them was a different matter.

As the friends sat down for lunch, Jaben said, "I'm a little disappointed at progress, but not surprised. Mexican bureaucracies are almost impossible to navigate if you don't know someone on the inside."

"That stinks!" Sarah said. "Aren't the officials supposed to help people?"

"Sarah, culture shock is difficult. It's a leading cause of suicide, right up there with divorce. There is great beauty in seeing a new country, but also great pain. I'm surprised at how well you're adapting; you're in the hardest part now," Jaben said.

"Stop talking philosophy at me!" Sarah snapped, and then repeated her question. "Aren't officials supposed to help people?"

"Yes, but in this culture you don't just see someone when you want something from them. Relationships are very important, and you cultivate a relationship with someone inside the bureaucracy before trying to get something out of them. In a way, what we are doing is rude, asking for services without taking the time to first establish a connection. Except we have to be rude, because—"

"I still think it stinks," Sarah said.

"I would rather we were dealing with an American bureaucracy, too. American bureaucracies are sluggish and Machiavellian and do things wrong, but they have a rare achievement in being responsive to the needs of strangers — a Brazilian I know was amazed when he got a scholarship after just filling out a form, without knowing anyone on the inside. But we don't have that now; we are looking for Amos in Mexico, and therefore

have to deal with a Mexican bureaucracy. I didn't expect much, but I wanted to check just in case. Being open to the wind of the Spirit blowing, eh?" Jaben answered.

"So what do we do now?" Désirée asked, rubbing her arm nervously.

"We go to Tijuana," Thaddeus stated.

"What?" several voices said in unison.

"The voice of the Spirit says to go to Tijuana."

"Ok," Désirée said.

They finished their lunch in silence, and got into the van. As they pulled out of the city, Lilianne said, "Thaddeus, I'd give your driving in Mexico City about, oh, an 8.7."

"Really?" Thaddeus said, his eyes widening. "On a scale of 1 to 10?"

"No, on the Richter scale."

## Chapter Twenty-Nine

As they drove, Jaben said, "Sarah, remember that one time when you asked me what I didn't like about television, and I said, 'Sarah, I'd really like to explain it to you, but I have to go to bed some time in the next six hours?'"

"Yeah, I remember that. Why?" Sarah said.

"We're going to have a few days driving to Tijuana, and I think this would be a good time to give your question the answer it deserves," Jaben said.

"Ok," Sarah said thoughtfully. "But you still like Sesame Street?"

"I grew up on it, but no. I do not like Sesame Street," Jaben said.

"Why not?" Sarah said, with sadness in her voice.

"I mean to give your question the answer it deserves."

Ellamae cocked her ears, attentive. So did Lilianne.

"I have a number of thoughts to give. I would like to begin by reading the foreword to Neil Postman's book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, the first one I read on that score:

"We were keeping our eye on 1984. When the year came and the prophecy didn't, thoughtful Americans sang softly in praise of themselves. The roots of liberal democracy had held. Wherever else the terror had happened, we, at least, had not been visited by Orwellian nightmares.

"But we had forgotten that alongside Orwell's dark vision, there was another—slightly older, slightly less well known, equally chilling: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Contrary to common belief even among the educated, Huxley and Orwell did not prophesy the same thing. Orwell warns us that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley's vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of

their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

"What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny "failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions." In *1984*, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.

"This book is about the possibility that Huxley, not Orwell, was right."

Jaben closed the book.

## Chapter Thirty

Jaben said, "Let's see. The first part of *Amusing* talks about how different media impact the content of discourse. Somewhat overstated, I think, but an extremely important point."

Sarah asked, "You mean there's a difference between reading something in a book and reading it on the web?"

Jaben replied, "Yes, there is. The web appears — and in some ways is — an author's dream come true. It is a kind of text where you can read about a surgical procedure and click on a link to see an MPEG of it being performed, or have transparent footnotes that actually pull up the document quoted. All of this has wonderful potential, but there is a dark side. For starters, a book has to be purchased or picked up at the library, which means that you have to invest something to get it, and if you're reading it, you have to get up and walk to put the book away and get another one. This makes for some commitment to the present document, which is not present on the web. Furthermore, putting color pictures in books is prohibitively expensive. This makes it more likely that a book which draws people's attention will do it with substance. But images are far cheaper on the web, and images grab attention much faster than books do. So if you'll look at a corporate website, you will find sound bites and flashy pictures, and almost nothing thought-provoking. *The web has potential to be far better than books, but it also has a strong tendency to be much worse.*"

"You mean with all the porn that's out there?" Sarah asked.

"Well, that's a part of it. But even apart from that — have you ever gone to look for some information on the web, and found yourself clicking all sorts of silly links, and looked at your watch and realized that an hour had gone by, completely wasted?"

"Well, yeah, but I thought that was just me."

"It's not just you. It's the Web."

Sarah pondered this in silence.

"Technology — some more than others — is something I treat like a loaded gun, or like alcohol. It can be beneficial, very beneficial, but you should never lay the reins on the horse's neck, and never treat it as something neutral. It has a sort of hidden agenda. Have you heard of the Sorcerer's Bargain?" Jaben explained.

"No, what's that?"

"In the Sorcerer's Bargain, the Devil says, 'I will give you power if you will give me your soul.' But there's a problem — obviously, you lose your soul, and less obviously, it isn't really you that has the power at all. All that has really happened in the exchange is that you've lost your soul. You haven't gained anything."

"That stinks," Sarah said.

"It does, and something of that is what happens with technology. Mammon and Technology are twin brothers, and I think I see part of why Jesus said, 'No man can serve two masters. Either he will love the one and hate the other, or else hate the one and love the other. You cannot serve both God and Mammon.' What I find fascinating is that he did not refer to money as a slave, but as a master. With technology — have you noticed that I use e-mail for all sorts of technical and intellectual matters, but never for personal matters? That I walk over and talk with you in person?"

"Yes, and it means a lot to me," Sarah said.

"Technologies have an obvious benefit, and a less obvious, insidious cost; there is always a cost, and with some it is worse than others. With—"

"Are you a Luddite?" Sarah asked.

"I am at present riding in a van; one of my hobbies is writing computer programs; I have a massive collection of books; I eat prepared foods, wear clothes, telephone people, and speak language. All of these are technologies, and I use them in clean conscience. Someone said of war, 'I don't think we need more hawks or more doves. I think we need more owls.' I don't want to be a hawkish technology worshipper or a Luddite dove. I want to be an owl.

"As I was saying, television has an incredible darkside. It is a sequence of moving images that stimulates the senses and makes brain cells atrophy. I fervently believe that, since the beginning of time, the twilight hours have belonged to the teller of tales and the weavers of songs. You

hours have belonged to the teller of tales and the weavers of songs. You know I like music, and role play, and listening to Désirée tell stories, and all sorts of things. But television is among pass-times what nihilism is among philosophy, what Bud Lite is among beers. That is why, I think, the author of the 100 ways of kything said, "Television is a crawling abomination from the darkest pits of Hell. It is a pack of cigarettes for the mind. It blinds the inner eye. It is the anti-kythe. A home without television is like a slice of chocolate cake without tartar sauce."

## Chapter Thirty-One

Jaben said, "The second half of the book deals with how television is impacting public life, how everybody is always expecting to be amused. A good place to start is," he said, flipping through the text, "let's see..."

After some more flipping, he started fiddling with the folded sheet of paper being used as a bookmark. "I'm not sure that there's a good, concise place to begin, and the problem may get worse with *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*."

"The author could only think of four?" Ellamae asked.

Jaben idly opened the sheet of paper, and then his eyes widened. "This'll do nicely. It must have been left as a bookmark by the previous patron to check the book out. It's a seminar announcement:

"The Middle School PTA is sponsoring a free parent education seminar — Why are we slowing down?"

"We're being pulled over," Thaddeus said.

Jaben reached into his wallet and pulled out 70 pesos, handing them forward to the front.

They stopped, and Thaddeus unrolled the window. "*Buenos dias, señor*." He held out the money; the officer took it, said "*Gracias*," and walked back.

Jaben put his foot on the pedal and rolled up the window at the same time.

"It's really cool that in Mexico you can pay a speeding ticket on the spot without having to go into an office. That would have cost us so much time," said Sarah.

"Why are you smiling, Jaben?" Sarah asked, after a moment had passed.

"That wasn't exactly paying a ticket, Sarah."

"Well what was it then."

"A little bit of grease on his palm."

"You bribed a police officer?" Sarah asked, incredulous.

"Yes, Sarah. It's not the same as in America." Jaben said, folding the paper, sticking it in the book, and closing the book.

"I can't believe you did that!" Sarah said. "Does breaking the law only count in the United States, not in Mexico? There is no authority except from God, and Romans 13 and all."

"Sarah, do you know why the cop pulled us over?"

"Because Thad thinks that he's in Malaysia."

"Uh, ok. You have a point there. But do you know why else he pulled us over?"

"Yes, he was going to write a ticket."

"No, the cop had no intention whatsoever of writing a ticket."

Sarah closed her eyes in concentration for a minute. "Are you saying he pulled us over in the hope of receiving a bribe?"

"No, I'm saying he pulled us over in the *certainty* of receiving a bribe."

"Well, if a corrupt cop pulls us over, why don't we go in and report him?"

"Sarah, do you know what would happen if we did that?"

"Yes, they'd put him under discipline."

"Not exactly."

"Ok, I give up. What would happen?"

"We'd be laughed out of court," Jaben said.

Sarah opened her mouth, then closed it.

"Police officers are paid much too little, like the majority of other Mexicans, and it's an accepted part of the culture. In our country, bribes are associated with corruption and subversion of justice, but in Mexico they do not have that meaning. It's just an informal income distribution system with very little overhead. The outrage you are experiencing is culture shock."

"So there's nothing wrong with Mexico? All there is is difference? You can critique American culture, but Mexican culture is off limits?"

"No; there are a great many things wrong with Mexican culture, some of which make me sick. It's a macho culture, but women hold all the power —"

"Go, women!" Sarah cheered. Jaben decided not to recite Ambrose Bierce's definition of 'queen', and continued, "—and it's an unhealthy, manipulative power that they hold. If you were my wife, you might get me

manipulative power that they hold. If you were my wife, you might get me drunk and steal money from my wallet. The phenomenon exists in the United States; it's just not so stark. It's why there were all those bumper stickers saying, 'Impeach President Clinton and her husband.' In many families, the husband's off doing his own thing, drinking with his buddies, and the wife is meeting her emotional needs with her children, especially her oldest son. It's not incestuous, but it's very unhealthy. In contradistinction to our own culture's exaggeration of 'leave and cleave', a man will choose his mother and sister over his wife and children. They have the opposite error. Mexican culture emphasizes family and community, but certain aspects of familial community are very unhealthy. Their culture is as much marked by the Fall as our own."

Sarah sat in thought, and said, "Why do you condemn these things, but condone bribing an officer?"

Jaben said, "Later, I'd like to talk with you about implications of fundamental beauty. But for now, just trust me on this."

"Ok," Sarah said slowly. "I'll trust you."

## Chapter Thirty-Two

"The Middle School PTA," Jaben read, "is sponsoring a free parent education seminar by So-and-so, a highly sought after seminar leader who combines practical strategies with a high energy 'you can do it' approach to parenting middle schoolers. So-and-so has been a professional communicator for over 20 years as a parent, teacher, clinical counselor, author and professor at the Adler School of Professional Psychology. She has addressed school districts, corporations and community organizations throughout the Chicago area on the subject of parenting. Noted for her ability to get audiences involved using a highly interactive humorous format, she has consistently received the highest level ratings for her warm, knowledgeable and practical presentations.

"So-and-so will tackle how to help your child develop attitudes and skills essential to withstanding peer pressure. She will also provide concrete ways to encourage building self-esteem in both our children and ourselves through practical techniques *that actually work*. Drawing on her years of experience in working with teenagers, So-and-so shares proven ideas you can use immediately. Don't miss this lively, inspiring and humorous session!" Jaben folded the sheet of paper, set it in the book, and closed it.

"What's wrong with that?" Désirée asked.

"Well, it doesn't distinguish between the presenter being entertaining and her being an expert in dealing with adolescents," Ellamae said.

Jaben said, "On one televangelist's show that Postman addresses, the saved get to play themselves before and after, and, Postman says, they are saved twice: by being brought into the presence of Jesus, and made a movie star. To the uninitiate, Postman says, it is hard to tell which is the higher estate." They discussed a bit more; Jaben did not say much of anything additional, beyond encouraging the others to sit down and read

the book, and that a week of careful television watching and attending consumer oriented services (for which he recommended a perusal of *Why Catholics Can't Sing*), listening to people, and otherwise examining American life would reveal a lot to a perceptive mind. Asked about Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, he said, "That's another discussion for another day."

## Chapter Thirty-Three

Sarah said, "What was that about fundamental beauty?"

Jaben said, "There is a trinity of the good, the true, and the beautiful, in which we must neither confound the elements nor divide the substance. Those three words describe the same — being, but in different ways. And there is something I have called 'fundamental beauty', for lack of a better term in any language, to refer to something that is fundamental and is of the character of beauty that is shared between different things, things that may look different on the surface. My favorite example is singing and dancing — in one sense, they are not very much alike at all — one is sound, the other is motion, and (my physics training notwithstanding) the two are not the same. But in another, deeper way, there is something very much the same about them. They are both beautiful in the same way. *They share the same fundamental beauty.*

"The Chinese character for 'metaphor' is a compound character, a little like an English word like 'doughnut', and the constituent characters are 'hidden' and 'analogy'; there can be a hidden analogy, a shared fundamental beauty, between two objects that may look very different. A recognition of shared fundamental beauty seems to me to lie at the heart of all metaphor, and the more striking and poetic the metaphor the more disparate on the surface the two things are, and the more closely they share a fundamental beauty. When a poet compared a woman to a red, red rose, the comparison was not anatomical in character, nor along any other literal lines; he was rather seeing a shared fundamental beauty.

"The present grandmaster of ninjutsu, Masaaki Hatsumi, wrote in *Essence of Ninjutsu* about talking with a photographer who took pictures of horses, and had to deal with a basic problem: horses know when they're being watched, and stiffen up. When she takes a picture, she stands with her back to the horse, waits until the horse relaxes, and then

swiftly turns around and snaps a shot before the horse can tense up. He commented that it is like the ninjutsu 5th degree black belt test, where the master stands with an unsheathed katana over the disciple, and then sometime in the next thirty minutes gives a shout and brings the sword down. The disciple has to get out of the way. The grandmaster saw a likeness between the two disciplines at that point; you might say that he saw the same fundamental beauty, and commented that two disciplines, no matter how far apart, will share something in common. This kind of point of connection might also be why Musashi wrote in *A Book of Five Rings*, 'You must study the ways of all professions.' If so, it is most definitely *not* a lesson which should be confined to martial artists.

"What I realized in our discussion about bribing cops is that, not only is it possible for two different-looking things to share the same fundamental beauty, but it is possible for two similar-looking things to have very different fundamental beauties. I hesitate to use the term 'beauty' in reference to bribing a cop, but the fundamental essence of bribing an American cop and bribing a Mexican cop are different. They look the same, but the heart is different, just as ninjutsu and horse photography look quite different, but at that one point are very similar."

Sarah looked pensive for a few minutes, and said, "I see, Jaben. I really see. I'm glad I trusted you on this one."

By this point, it was getting very late, and so they pulled over and got ready to set up camp.

## Chapter Thirty-Four

They stopped in the rocks, and began to unload the groundcloths, sleeping bags, and tents. They were unpacking, when they heard a rustle. "What's that?" Ellamae said. Immediately, Thaddeus had his gun aimed at the sound.

Five bandits stepped out from behind the rocks, followed by more. They were armed with rifles. "Drop your gun," the leader said, in a thick but understandable accent.

Thaddeus casually cast aside his rifle.

"Give us your money, your women."

"No," Thaddeus said, stepping forward. "It will not help you."

"We will kill you," said the leader.

"No," Thaddeus said.

"Give now!"

"No," Thaddeus said.

The angry leader aimed his gun, grinned wickedly, and pulled the trigger.

*Click.* The gun jammed.

The leader angrily shook the gun, struck it against the rock, and successfully fired three shots into the air. Then he took aim once again, and pulled the trigger.

*Click.*

"My God is bigger than your gun," said Thaddeus.

The man threw down his gun, and drew a wicked-looking knife. He started advancing.

Thaddeus had the knife with a serrated back, but did not draw it.

Thaddeus looked intently into his eyes.

The brigand slowed his pace.

Thaddeus kept his intense, probing gaze.

The brigand stopped.

Thaddeus closed his eyes for a moment, and then looked with all the more focus.

The brigand stood still, returning his gaze.

"*Te amo*," Thaddeus said in broken Spanish, praying with his whole heart that it wouldn't be misunderstood.

The brigand sheathed his knife, took his gun, and walked away.

One by one, each of his thirty companions followed, leaving the six friends alone.

"Thanks be to God," Ellamae said.

Thaddeus collapsed in fear, relief, and exhaustion.

## Chapter Thirty-Five

Packing away the equipment after eating another round of MREs, the friends got into the van. Désirée rode shotgun, and the others got into the back. "And the *Four Arguments*?" Ellamae said, looking at Jaben.

"I'm not going to treat them all; there's a reason why those arguments are given in a long book. It's necessary for a fair treatment. I'm only going to mention, for example, the argument that 'the programming is the packaging, and the advertising is the content', and advertising's role in harmful manipulation. But I do want to treat Mander's argument of artificial unusualness, in conjunction with a transposed argument from Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*.

"Television is inherently boring," Jaben began.

"Tell us something new," Désirée said from up front.

"No, really. Even more than you think. Have you ever had a professor tape a class session, and be bored silly with the videotape even though your professor was an engaging speaker? Television has lousy picture quality, and the viewing area is only a tiny portion of your visual field, and the sound is terrible. It's a sensory medium, but its stimulation is second rate at best.

"When a person has a handicap, he can sometimes find ways to work around it, and become far stronger than a normal person would be. You know how weak I was in gradeschool. This happened with television; they found a number of unnatural ways of making material *artificially unusual*, kind of like taking a dull technical document and making it appear interesting by italicizing lots of text and putting an exclamation point at the end of each sentence. They do things like camera changes, or moving the camera, or adding music, or putting in computer graphics. These things are called technical events, and the rate of technical events seems to be going up; when Mander wrote his *Four Arguments*, he claims

that the average rate of technical events was one every ten seconds; Postman wrote a few years later, and said that the average rate of technical events was one every three and a half seconds; last time I watched television and counted technical events, it was toeing the line of one technical event per second. This is why, if you go to Blockbuster and rent an old movie — even an old color movie — it appears boring. The number of technical events to keep you stimulated is much lower, and it doesn't meet your threshold for interesting. It makes an interesting experiment to watch ten minutes of regular programming (doesn't matter whether it's sitcoms, tabloids, X-files, news, or other mindless entertainment), ten minutes of commercials, ten minutes of PBS, ten minutes of a movie from this decade, and then ten minutes of some 1960's movie, and monitor both the number of technical events, and how excited or bored you are. This, incidentally, ties in to sex and violence in TV and movies; it's not just that some of the producers have questionable morals, but also that a bit of skin flashing across the screen is stimulating in a way that wholesome shows cannot be. Two people respectfully talking through a disagreement doesn't have nearly the same camera appeal as a bit of a fistfight.

"This is where Allan Bloom comes in. In *The Closing of the American Mind*, he talks about different things that are crippling American students — interestingly, though he is not writing from a moralistic perspective, he is concerned about many of the same things we are, such as promiscuity and divorce of parents. He could be quoted in a sermon to argue that sin is harmful and that, in fact, God has given us moral law, not for *his* own good, but for *our* own good, just as the Bible says. One of the things he says in particular as a crimp on American students is drugs. The argument is terrifying, and if it were believed by our youth, it would keep them away from narcotics like no 'do drugs, do time' posters ever could.

"The argument is very simple. Once you have done drugs — once you have cheaply and for nothing experienced the godlike heights of pleasure associated with the greatest successes — a heroic victory in battle, or the consummation of a marriage — what, in your day to day life, could you *possibly* experience to compete with that? What can possibly compare? Suddenly, everything is bleak, dull, grey, boring. Everything.

"It would be like — remember that time when we were in the cave, our

eyes comfortably adjusted to the candlelight, and Sarah thought that Désirée and Amos looked so cute snuggling, and whipped out her pocket camera and snapped a picture? There was an instantaneous and tremendously bright flash of light, and then none of us could see *anything*, not even the candles' flames. This is why, by the way, I never use a flashlight when I am outside; I regard it as an implement of blindness rather than an implement of sight, because it brightly illuminates one area but prevents you from seeing the others. That's why, when Lilianne offered me a flashlight that one time, I said, 'No thanks, I want to see.' If you have to use a flashlight, you will never step out from a cabin into brilliant summer moonlight, and I don't know how to tell you — fair is the sunlight, fairer still the moonlight, fairest of all is the light of thy face —

"Television, video games, movies, are things that embody the same fundamental ugliness as drugs. Non-chemical narcotics, you might call them. The strength of this is hard to recognize if you've used them enough to get inured to them, but I remember the first time I watched that one James Bond movie, with 007 and 006 and that Georgian pilot... I was on the edge of my seat with lust after the usual James Bond opening of half-naked women — I believe the proper term for that is 'artistic porn' — and it still quickens my pulse to remember how my heart was pounding when James Bond was free falling and climbing into the free falling airplane. If you've seen the movie, you probably didn't experience it that way. Hollywood needs to build a stronger and stronger brew to have the same effect on people, and I was much more strongly affected by the movie than most other people would — just like I would be extremely affected by what would be to a drug addict just a little bit to tide him over until he needed more.

"After you've watched TV, where all the men have high-paying jobs and all the women look sexy in their tight clothes, and there's a camera change every second, and there is music and perhaps a laugh track, and every conversation is exciting and witty — just what, exactly what, in your normal experience is going to compete with that? Talking with your friends has lulls in the conversation, and not everything is a witty retort; running provides you with something like the same camera change, but the people who go for long runs aren't the people who sit in front of a television. A book, however profound, is not stimulating enough to even

lose a competition with television. So people watch television, at, what, six hours a day? Television is kind of like alcohol; a little bit can be good (or, in the case of television, tolerable), a lot at once induces a stupor, and a lot over time rots the brain."

The discussion that followed was vivid and animated. Sarah was disappointed to learn that Sesame Street had been created by a group of former advertisers, and listened with interest to Jaben's argument that advertising embodies the same fundamental ugliness as porn: "It arouses desires that cannot have a righteous fulfillment, in this case spending money on material possessions beyond even what natural greed would produce. This is, incidentally, why a television is the most expensive household appliance you can buy; it deducts from your pocketbook for long after you've paid it off." Lilianne was particularly interested in this claim; her way of believing (each believer, she said, who is in full orthodoxy has very much his own way of believing) placed a particular emphasis on living simply. "What should I do with my television, then?" asked Lilianne, who felt that she would never look at a television again in the same way. Jaben's reply was simple: "Give it to Thad. He could always use a new target."

## Chapter Thirty-Six

It was not long before they arrived in Tijuana, and searched everywhere. They searched high and low, in the resorts and in the slums; they prayed; Lilianne said glumly, "We're looking for a needle in a haystack." After a week of searching, Jaben said, "This city is too noisy. I need to go out into the countryside to think."

The friends drove aimlessly, and pulled over for a lunch of MREs. Each person grabbed one, and they sat down on the edge of a cornfield.

"So what do we do now?" Sarah asked.

"I don't know," Thaddeus said. "I felt positive that the Spirit was pulling us to Tijuana."

"At least we tried to be faithful," Ellamae said.

Jaben pulled out the Windows CD-ROM, placed it on the tip of his index finger, and ran his thumb along the edge. "I wonder. I think—"

"Why is the ground trembling?" Sarah asked.

The friends dropped their food and staggered to their feet.

There, not fifty feet away, molten rock was spewing into the air. A chunk landed ten feet away.

The heat was incredible.

Jaben hurled the annulus into the lava, where it disappeared in a burst of lambent flame. "Let's run!"

They did run, and this time Thaddeus's driving was estimated to be about a 9.5 on the Richter scale. They drove and drove, and after a time realized they were lost.

"We're approaching a small village," Lilianne said. "Maybe they'll be able to tell us where we are, or how to get to the nearest city."

"We'd better not," said Jaben.

"Men! Always refusing to ask directions," Sarah said.

"It's not that, Sarah. You know I ask directions at home," Jaben said.

"Which is why you should do it here, too," Sarah said, crossing her arms and nodding her head.

"It's standard procedure in Mexico, if you don't know where something is, to make up directions. They could give us driving directions to Brazil," Jaben said.

"They could hardly leave us more lost than we are now," Lilianne said. Jaben said, "Slow down. I want to get out."

Thaddeus stopped the van.

Jaben got out, and walked to the doorway of the nearest hovel. "*Por favor,*" he asked, "*dísez cómo encontrar—*"

"Jaben?" a faint voice queried from the darkness within.

"*Amos!*"

## Chapter Thirty-Seven

Amos was weak and slightly emaciated, but hardly ever had the friends seen so beautiful a sight as he — Désirée had never been so happy. They gathered around him, and laid hands in prayer; healing flowed through Ellamae's fingers, and Amos stood up, strengthened.

"*Por favor, dínez con nosotros,*" the peasant said.

It was a simple meal; the friends were each given a few corn tortillas.

"This isn't much food," Sarah said. "How much do they have?"

"Eat it," Jaben said. "This is more than they can spare. The family will go hungry tonight."

"I know!" Sarah said. "We could give them some of our MREs."

"No," Jaben said. "I'd be happy to give them, but to a great many Mexicans, corn is food and food is corn. Our own ancestors had difficulty finding food in a New England whose waters were teeming with lobster. Each culture has its own baggage, and these simple folk are giving us the only food they know. A gift of MREs would not do them much good."

Sarah wasn't the only one to wipe a tear from her eyes.

The meal was mostly quiet; Amos explained how he had been abducted, beaten, and left for dead in a field, and how the peasants had taken him in and slowly nursed to health. "Will this make it hard for you not to hate white people?" Jaben asked.

"Very hard," Amos said. "But you're worth it."

The peasant family consisted of a grandmother, a mother, a father, a teenaged son, a preteen daughter, two little boys, and a baby girl. They were all thin, and lines of suffering were etched on all but the youngest of faces, but at the same time there was a real joy, a glow, about them. "I would like to go to mass with them, if they go to mass, but we should really be going back," Jaben thought. "I need to get back to work." Still, he did not wish in the least to haste this moment.

After the meal, they said goodbye, gave *abrazos*, and then Jaben reached into the sheath on his left hip and pulled out a thick Swisschamp Swiss Army Knife, showed them every one of its twenty-seven features (the children liked the magnifying glass), and then ceremoniously handed it to the father. The man's eyes lit up.

Sarah stared at Jaben; she knew what that knife meant to him, where he had taken it. Then she ran to the van, and ran back, and threw her red bouncy ball to the children, gave them each a kiss, and departed.

## Chapter Thirty-Eight

Jaben said, "Amos, you're the guest of honor. Would you like to make the reading selection? We have *Darwin on Trial*, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, *A Wind in the Door*, *Four*—"

"*A Wind in the Door*," Amos said.

Jaben handed him the small volume. Amos opened it, flipped one way, flipped another way, closed the book, opened it, turned a few pages, and said, "Aah, here. Page 82." He read terrifying words as Proginoskes showed Meg a moment when stars had been murdered — Xed.

"I've had a lot of time to think, and to feel, and I've realized something. It is a chilling feeling — un-Named, Xed — to know that someone hates you. Their brutality, their words, their blows hurt, but not nearly as badly as the real knowing that there was hate. My stomach hurt so much when they were done beating me, but the pain was nothing. Désirée, remember the time when we were dating, and I got my thumb in your eye? I know that hurt, but it only hurt physically. With hate it is different. It is a hurt of the spirit, and it is worse. Terribly worse.

"I am drawn to *Wind*, as you are, for its bliss and beauty. But it shows as very real the power of evil, and this passage was the one my heart was drawn to. I never knew how real the story was until I knew that there were men who could kill me. Hate is a very real power, and I have come to appreciate that, in the end, Proginoskes gave everything he had to give to stop the Echthroi. He gave until there was nothing left to give. Hate is so evil, that sometimes it costs that much."

Amos opened his mouth, then closed it, then began to weep. Ellamae and Sarah crawled across the baggage; Ellamae was first, kissing him on the forehead, and Sarah wrapped her arms around him. Their tears began to mingle with his, and soon all but Thad (who was with them in spirit) joined in the embrace; no one offered him anything to say, because they

saw his pain was so great. And they stayed together for hours.

## Chapter Thirty-Nine

There was healing in Ellamae's touch, and that of the others — restoration not only for Amos's wounded body, but for his broken soul. Their love was a healing balm, and after a day of weeping and eating MREs as fast as he could keep them down, Amos graced them with his deep, rich smile, and a day later he called for a rousing chorus of "99 bottles of beer," sung very loudly and very off-key, sometimes in several keys at once. This was one of Amos's favorite traditions, and it had surprised more than a couple of people who knew how truly good his baritone voice was. They were in Texas, approaching Jim's village, when something interesting happened.

Their radiator blew.

Jaben and Amos walked into the village, although by the end of the walk they had each drunk a canteen dry, and were thirsty and sorefooted when they reached Jim's shack. Jim rose to greet them, and said, "Hi, Jaben, and is this Amos? Why the sheepish grin, Jaben?"

Jaben shuffled, cleared his throat, and said, "I'm embarrassed to say this, but could we impose on you for another radiator?"

Jim laughed, and said, "Sure. I just got another van of your make and model in this week. I thought your new radiator had a bit more life in it. Would come with me to the yard? I'll step inside for my tools."

Jim was pleased to make Amos's acquaintance, and it was mostly those two who were talking as Jim and Jaben worked on the radiator ("You'd make a great mechanic," Jim said — "I might try that when my present position ends," Jaben replied). It wasn't that long before the friends' van had a new radiator, and it wasn't long after that that they were sitting at Jim's regular table, with the card table pulled up, eating collard greens and smothered pork chops.

Sarah opened the conversation, by saying, "I'm grateful to you, Jim,

and I trust you."

Jim smiled, and said, "Thank you. Out of curiosity, why do you trust me?"

"Your touch is that of a trustworthy man."

"How can you tell that from touch?"

"You know when two strangers are sitting next to each other on the bus, and their legs are touching? Their bodies are touching, but their spirits aren't touching. They aren't really touching.

"I've had hugs that felt like handshakes, and handshakes that felt like hugs; what most people know is that a touch means different things depending on how much of the body is touching and where, but what most people don't know is that a touch also is different depending on how much of the spirit is touching and where. Children's hugs can be the best, because when they're touching you, they aren't doing anything else, not anything; you're their whole universe, and you're wrapped in their trusting arms. There is something in the touch of a child who has not yet learned to draw back, just like there is something in the words of a child who has not yet learned guile. I don't mean that young children can't lie, or pull back — but a child who will transparently lie about stealing cookies still doesn't know how to put guile into real and honest communication, and a child who draws back and says 'I don't want to hug you' still doesn't know how to draw back when he's touching someone. I —"

"So that's why your hug reminded me of a child," interrupted Jim.

Sarah began to blush, and continued. "You can tell a lot about a man by the way he touches. Kind of like what you can tell by whether and how he looks you in the eyes — *eye contact* is a form of touch — only moreso. Your touch has a lot of strength — even apart from your calloused hands, I can tell that you spend a lot of time applying force when you fix things — but it is a strength with complete control and gentleness. You are strong, but I do not fear you. And it is a touch that draws me into your heart. You have a big heart. If you were a man whom I couldn't trust, you would be holding something back; you can tell when a person's holding back, and his touch says, 'There is something about me that I don't want you to know.' But your touch doesn't say that. It's transparent. Even when you gave me a handshake, when I touched your hand, I felt your heart."

Jim sat, with his mouth open. "What else do you know about me?"

"Not much " Sarah said "I'm not an astrologer "

NOT MUCH," SARAH SAID. "I'M NOT AN ASTROLOGER."

"You saw more of Sarah than she usually shows at first glance. Most people think she's a ditz," Lillianne said.

Jaben got up, and gently pulled Sarah's hair aside, so he could see part of her scalp.

"What are you doing?" Sarah asked.

"What an odd tattoo," Jaben said. "It says, 'Do not exceed 65 PSI.'"

Sarah hit Jaben, and he sat down.

Amos said, "It's so good to have your friendship, your community, your banter.

Désirée said, "It's so good to have you back, Amos. Our communion is restored; our fellowship is complete."

Amens circled round the table. They joined hands over the meal:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

Praise him all creatures here below.

Praise him above, ye heavenly host.

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Amen.

They dug in, and for a time people were silent as they enjoyed the meal. Then Thad said, "I had a mystical experience when we were driving out of Tijuana. It was my first mystical experience while driving."

Jim raised his eyebrows, and said, "A mystical experience while driving? I thought they came in church, and deep meditation, and things like that. I've never had one. I'm too ordinary."

Thaddeus smiled, and said, "Those moments are gifts from God, that come quite often unexpected. The biggest qualification you can have is a sense of need before God. And there is something ordinary about the mystical — no, that's not quite right, or maybe there is. There is something mystical about the ordinary. Mysticism is not this strange and remote thing; it is very near to us, and you may know more mystics than you think. Every child is born a mystic. The problem is how to keep him that way."

Jim said, "So how do you become a mystic? Do you read a book, or spend a lot of time praying, or whatever?"

Thaddeus said, "I don't know. I don't know how I became a mystic. It's not something you can achieve by doing the right things; it's a gift from God. It's kind of like asking what we did to achieve being given two

GOD. IT'S KIND OF LIKE ASKING WHAT WE DID TO ACHIEVE BEING GIVEN TWO radiators; the answer is that we did, quite properly, nothing; we cooperated with your gift and God's, but it was given. Prayer can be helpful, but if you try praying six hours a day to make yourself a mystic —

"To borrow from a Zen koan:

"A master observed that a novice was very diligent in prayer; he prayed an hour a day more than anyone else, and could shut out all distractions. One day, the master asked the novice, 'What are you doing?'

"The novice said, 'I am praying hard to make myself a mystic.'

"The master took a tile, set it before the novice, and began to polish it vigorously. 'What are you doing?' the novice asked.

"'I am polishing this tile to make it into a mirror,' the master answered.

"'You can't make a tile into a mirror by polishing it!' the novice protested.

"'And neither can you make yourself into a mystic by prayer,' the master answered.

"Prayer is a fundamental part of mysticism, and there are good books — I can think of *Experiencing God* and, let's see, *Tales of a Magic Monastery*, which is my personal favorite. But if you go to a book and say, 'This will make me a mystic,' you are setting yourself up for failure."

"What was your last mystical experience like? How did you manage to drive and have a mystical experience at once? How much more often do they come when you become an experienced mystic?" James asked.

"I don't know how to describe it. I was driving, and I was with God, and I was suddenly very aware of his presence and love for me, in, under, and through everything around me. I was also intensely aware of my surroundings; it helped me drive, if anything. But I would not too much dwell on mystical experiences; they are a blessing, but there are far greater blessings, those that non-mystics think are dull next to mysticism. It's hard to explain," Thaddeus answered.

James said, "I am still listening with interest."

Thaddeus said, "I feel like I'm in a bind, like I can only explain these things to someone who needs no explanation — and, in saying this, I probably sound otherworldly and mysterious and an initiate of circles you cannot hope to probe. It is not like that at all. Perhaps my best advice is this: if you value mysticism, forget completely about being a mystic, and seek God with your whole heart. God will make you a mystic if he wants."

Jim said, "I am already doing that."

Thaddeus said, "Then I have nothing to add to you."

Ellamae held her plate, and said, "Could you give me a pork chop?" and then, receiving the food, said, "I think you were following God when you gave us the radiator. It helped us receive our friend back. And the story about that —"

"What is the story about you finding him? Were the Mexican police much help?"

An animated recounting of the story's events followed, and lasted long into the night. They stayed the night, showered, packed up, and headed on the road home.

## Chapter Forty

Jaben said, "Ellamae, why don't you choose our Bible reading today? It's been a while since we read the *sacra pagina*."

Ellamae said, "I'd like to read the extended commentary on the words 'The just shall walk by faith,' as found in Hebrews chapter eleven. It's my favorite passage of Scripture."

Jaben handed a Bible and a flashlight to Lilianne, and said, "Lili, will you do the honors?"

Lili took the book reverently, opened it, flipped a few pages, and began, "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen. Because of it the ancients were well attested. By faith we understand that the universe was ordered by the word of God, so that what is visible came into being through the invisible. By faith Abel offered to God a sacrifice greater than Cain's. Through this he was attested to be righteous, God bearing witness to his gifts, and through this, though dead, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and 'he was found no more because God had taken him.' Before he was taken up, he was attested to have pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him, for anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, warned about what was not yet seen, with reverence built an ark for the salvation of his household. Through this he condemned the world and inherited the righteousness that comes through faith.

"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise; for he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and maker is God. By faith he received power to generate, even

though he was past the normal age — and Sarah herself was sterile — for he thought that the one who had made the promise was trustworthy. So it was that there came forth from one man, himself as good as dead, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sands on the seashore.

"All those died in faith. They did not receive what had been promised but saw it and greeted it from afar and acknowledged themselves to be strangers and aliens on the earth, for those who speak thus show that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land from which they had come, they would have had the opportunity to return. But now they desire a better homeland, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

"By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac descendants shall bear your name.' He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead, and he received Isaac back as a symbol. By faith regarding the things still to come Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and 'bowed in worship, leaning on the top of his staff.' By faith Joseph, near the end of his life, spoke of the Exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his bones.

"By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that he was a beautiful child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter; he chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. He considered the reproach of the Anointed greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the recompense. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's fury, for he persevered as if seeing the one who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith they crossed the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted it they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after being encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with the disobedient, for she had received the spies in peace.

"What more shall I say? I have not the time to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, did what was righteous, obtained the promises,

conquered kingdoms, and what was righteous, obtained the promises, they closed the mouths of lions, put out raging fires, escaped the devouring sword; out of weakness they were made powerful, became strong in battle, and turned back foreign invaders. Women received back their dead through resurrection. Some were tortured and would not accept deliverance, in order to obtain a better resurrection. Others endured mockery, scourging, even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, sawed in two, put to death at sword's point; they went about in skins of sheep or goats, needy, afflicted, tormented. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered about in deserts and on mountains, in caves and in crevices in the earth.

"Yet all these, though approved because of their faith, did not receive what had been promised. God had foreseen something better for us, so that without us they should not be made perfect."

Lilianne closed the book.

Sarah said, "That's awesome."

Ellamae said, "The part I like best about this is that there was no distinction made between those who were miraculously saved and those who died in faith. None whatsoever. In Daniel, the three men, Shadrach, Mechach, and Abednego say, 'Our God can save us, but even if he does not, know, O king, that we will not bow down.' Some manuscripts even say, 'if he cannot.' It reminds me of—

"Thaddeus, when you were looking down the barrel of that brigand's gun, what was going through your mind?" she asked

"My heart was completely at peace," Thaddeus said.

"Did you know that the gun was going to jam?"

"No."

"Did you pray that the gun would jam?"

"No."

At this, Ellamae was surprised. "What did you pray?"

"I prayed that God's will would be done."

There was silence for a second, and then Jabben said, "I like how the text says that we are strangers and aliens, that this world is not our home: we look for a better country, a heavenly one. I fit in better in French culture than American culture, but not even very well there; no culture on earth is a home. Each culture is a cave, as Bloom reminds us, and I can't wait for the day when I will climb *out* of the caverns and behold the sun in all its glory."

Amos said, "The chapter reminds me of the words, 'Here I stand, ready to live, ready to die.'"

Ellamae said, "'My name is Aragorn, son of Arathorn. If by life or death I may serve you, that I shall.'"

Jaben said, "Jewish tradition holds that the prophet Isaiah was sawn in two."

"Interesting," Lillianne said. "What was the story?"

"I don't know. I haven't spent nearly as much time studying the Talmud and Jewish tradition as I should. Maybe reading the Babylonian Talmud will be my next project."

"All things in this chapter point to the King of the Jews," Ellamae said. "Every righteous man was a shadow of the One who was to come. And there is more — I cannot say it."

The conversation went on for hours, days. Before they knew it, the friends pulled into a driveway...

## Chapter Forty-One

It was dusk as the van pulled out, finally at home, and slowed down. Everybody got out, yawning, Thaddeus still, out of habit, carrying his rifle slung over his shoulder. They closed the van doors and walked along, silently, when —

a roaring sound was heard

"Look out, a bear!"

the Spirit moved in Thaddeus's heart like rapid fire. "Shoot it."

Thaddeus, bewildered, was pushed into a dimension beyond time, out of ordinary time, and automatically took what seemed an eternity slowly aiming the gun into the bear's mouth, frozen open, hoping by some providence to sever part of the time

fired

a resounding, thunderous gunshot echoed

the bear staggered

Thaddeus looking at his smoking .22 in confusion

*BOOM!* another gunshot echoed

the bear staggered

*BOOM!* another gunshot echoed

the bear staggered

*BOOM!* another gunshot echoed

the bear fell

a stick snapped

a massive man, holding a massive gun, walked out of the forest

the gun still aimed at the dying bear

"Bear!" Désirée said. "Boy, are you a sight for sore eyes!"

"You're back. Is that Amos I see? How are you, Amos?"

"Happy."

Bear drew a few paces back from the grizzly's body, cautiously set his

smoking gun down, still pointing at the grizzly, and then drew all seven friends into his enormous, thick, strong, gentle arms. "Good to have y'all back, folks. Good to have ya back."

## Chapter Forty-Two

It was good to be back in church. The seven friends filed into the sanctuary and sat down.

"Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," the celebrant said.

"And blessed be his Kingdom now and forever. Amen," the congregation answered.

"Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord," the celebrant said, joined by the congregation in saying, "Amen."

Then came the opening hymn:

"Here in this place new light is streaming,  
Now is the darkness vanished away,  
See in this space our fears and our dreamings,  
Brought here to you in the light of this day.  
Gather us in— the lost and forsaken,  
Gather us in— the blind and the lame;  
Call to us now, and we shall awaken,  
We shall arise at the sound of our name.

"We are the young— our lives are a myst'ry,  
We are the old— who yearn for your face,  
We have been sung throughout all of hist'ry,  
Called to be light to the whole human race.  
Gather us in— the rich and the haughty,  
Gather us in— the proud and the strong;  
Give us a heart so meek and so lowly,  
Give us the courage to enter the Song.

"Here we will take the wine and the water,  
Here we will take the bread of new birth.  
Here you shall call your sons and your daughters,  
Call us anew to be salt for the earth.  
Give us to drink the wine of compassion,  
Give us to eat the bread that is you;  
Nourish us well, and teach us to fashion  
Lives that are holy and hearts that are true.

"Not in the dark of buildings confining,  
Not in some heaven, light-years away,  
But here in this place the new light is shining,  
Now is the Kingdom, now is the day.  
Gather us in and hold us forever,  
Gather us in and make us your own;  
Gather us in— all peoples together,  
Fire of love in our flesh and our bone."

Then all the voices stepped into the timeless, eternal song:

"Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth.  
Lord God, heavenly King, Almighty God and Father,  
we worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for your glory.  
Glory to God.

"Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of  
God.  
You take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us.  
You are seated at the right hand of the Father:  
receive our prayer, receive our prayer.

"For You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord.  
You alone are the Most High. Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit  
In the glory of God the Father, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.  
Amen."

"The Lord be with you," the celebrant said.

"And also with you," answered the congregation.

"Let us pray," the celebrant began.

"Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope,  
and charity; and, that we, the redeemed, may obtain what you promise,

make us work with you the work of your redemption; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever." The congregation joined in, "Amen."

"A reading from the book of First Kings," the reader said.

"Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, 'What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?' 'Give me your son,' Elijah replied. He took him from her arms, carried him to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed.

"Then he cried out to the Lord, 'O Lord my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?' Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the Lord, 'O Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!' The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave him to his mother and said, 'Look, your son is alive!' Then the woman said to Elijah, 'Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.'"

"The Word of the Lord," the reader said.

"The psalm will be read with the women on the even numbered verses, and the men on the odd numbered verses."

The women began, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you."

The men answered, "You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!"

"For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help."

"From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows."

"The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the Lord will praise him— may your hearts live forever!"

"All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him,"

"for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations."

"All the rich of the earth will feast and worship: all who go down to the

dust will kneel before him— those who cannot keep themselves alive."

"Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord."

"They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it."

"A reading from the book of Acts," the reader said.

"Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

"As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and had a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'

"'Who are you, Lord?' Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. 'Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what to do.'"

"The word of the Lord," the reader said.

"Thanks be to God," answered the congregation.

The congregation rose, singing:

"Alleluia, alleluia! Give thanks to the risen Lord,  
Alleluia, alleluia! Give praise to his name!"

"The holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to St. Luke," the celebrant said.

"Glory to You, Lord Christ," the congregation answered.

"Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

"When the Pharisee who invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.' Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.' 'Tell me, teacher,' he said. 'Two men owed

I have something to tell you. Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

"Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled.' 'You have judged correctly,' Jesus said. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came to your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.' Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'"

"The Gospel of the Lord," the celebrant said.

"Praise to You, Lord Christ," the congregation answered.

"There is a Redeemer," the preacher began, "Jesus, God's own son,' begins one song. I'm not going to inflict my singing voice on you, but that's how the song begins. Today I want to talk to you about the message of redemption in the Gospel, in the whole Bible. This is one of the most important messages in Scripture.

"Forgive and forget. Forgive and forget. That's what our culture says, and I don't agree with that. I've thought and prayed, and I really don't agree with that. If you forgive, you don't forget. If you forget, you don't forgive. God takes evil, and makes it better than if nothing had gone wrong. The New Jerusalem will be better than Eden ever could have been — that's how powerful a God we serve. *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthane?* My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? These were the words that Christ cried in agony on the cross, and they were not new. He was quoting, and more specifically he was quoting the first verse of the twenty-second psalm. In those days, people emphasized memory a bit more than we do now. They didn't memorize Bible verses; they memorized the whole Bible. To those who were looking on, the Pharisees leering at him, Jesus was quoting the whole psalm, the Psalm of the Cross: I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me. They divide my clothing among them; for my garments they cast lots. They pierced

my hands and my feet. These words, and others, foretold the exact way and manner of Christ's death, and in quoting them, Jesus was saying, 'Look, you who have pierced me. This prophecy is fulfilled this day in your midst.'

"The beginning of psalm twenty-two is a psalm of lament, but the end is a psalm of triumph, and those are the verses we read earlier in the service. The cross is the balance point of the story, but not its end. God's strength at work is very powerful, and they take the cross, because it was the most evil moment, the hour when darkness reigned, and placed it at the heart of his triumph. Christ trampled death by death, and when he rose from the dead, the power of death was forever broken, like the stone table in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. And not only can death not hold *him* any longer, but death is now too weak to hold those who believe. When the body dies, the spirit is held in God's heart until the resurrection we await, when the dead in Christ shall rise first, and the body will surge with power and be reunited with the spirit. That is how God has redeemed death.

"I want to tell you something important. God isn't just trying to restore Eden, he has a whole, new, bigger project. He can redeem me; he can redeem you. He redeemed the sinful woman in our Gospel reading, and not only left her with a new beauty but left behind one of the most beautiful stories in the whole Bible — and that story was very widely circulated among the ancient Church. The point of saving us, Lewis tells us, is to make us into little Christs. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else. God is transforming us so that we may become gods and goddesses to reign with him forever in the holy City. Let me repeat that. God is transforming us so that we may become gods and goddesses to reign with him in the holy City.

"I would like to tell you a story. I prayed, and hesitated now — Lord, I pray, bind me from saying anything that would harm these little ones, bind the power of the Evil One, and keep me in your heart. But I'll tell the story, with a warning that I don't agree with all of it. When I told it to one young man, he asked me, 'So, do you really believe that God created man just to prove a point?' I stepped back and said, 'No. I don't believe that. That's not why I told the story at all; it's just that I don't know how to tell the story without it looking that way.' So I ask you to excuse my weakness, and I pray that you will see what in this story I mean to tell: God's power and wisdom as manifest in his redemption

God's power and wisdom as manifest in his redemption.

"In the very beginning, before God created the heavens and the earth, he created angels, stars of light to shine in the light of glory. He created one star higher and holier than any of the others, and named him Lucifer, the Light-Bearer.

"Lucifer saw his own wisdom, majesty and glory, and told God, 'I want you to give me my rightful place, as head of you as well as head of the angels. I am wiser than you.'

"God could have zapped Lucifer then and there, and that would have established his power. But not his wisdom. So God decided on something very different.

"'Very well, then,' God said, 'Prove it. I'll unfold my plan, and you'll unfold yours.'

"The great Dragon shouted in rebellion, and swept the sky with his tail, and flung down a third of the stars, and a third of the stars chose to become dragons, vipers, worms.

"Then God created Heaven and earth; he set the stars, in their courses, and created glory after glory after glory: no two blades of grass alike, thousands upon thousands of species of beetles, and as the crowning glory man, created godlike in his image, pure, holy, spotless.

"Then the Dragon appeared in the form of a serpent, and beguiled the woman, and the woman pulled the man down with her. The whole creation became accursed, and began to rot, with poison seeping in a wound.

"'Well, then,' the Dragon said, 'Who is wiser now?' And God wept.

"Then God pointed to one person and said, 'You see that man?'

"'Yes,' the Devil said.

"'Hey, there!' God said to the man. 'You in the desert. Build a huge boat.'

"And the man did. When the wind and rain came, the man and his household were saved.

"Then the Devil walked on the earth, and said, 'I see not one who is righteous,' and God said, 'Have you considered my servant Job?' And Job, bewildered, saw his children and his property taken away, and then his health — and cried in agony, cursing the day of his birth, but refusing to curse God like the Serpent said he would. In the midst of his misery, Job said, 'I know that my redeemer liveth, and in my flesh I shall see God. Though he slay me, yet shall I praise him.'

"The story unfolded, and God sent a prophet to give his people Law. When they strayed, he sent prophets, never tiring of loving them. Finally, in the fullness of time, he sent his Son, to become a man.

"This man was a stranger in a strange land, and passed through the world like a flame. The Serpent spoke beguiling words into the ear of one of his disciples, and he was betrayed, and nailed to a piece of wood, and left to die. And darkness reigned.

"'Surely you will acknowledge,' said the Serpent, 'that I am wiser?'

"God raised his Son from the dead, in a new and incorruptible life, surging with power. And the Devil trembled with fear.

"His Spirit filled those who were his Son's disciples, and they burst forth with new life. The Serpent tried everything to stop them — even making some of the people God had called to persecute them. God was not discouraged; he called one of the persecutors to join in the new life." The preacher took off his glasses, and said, "I'd like to read to you now from one of the letters written by that persecutor:

"'Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

"The Church — I mean you and me, not just people who wear a white collar — stands as a family for Christ, his brother and sister and mother, as children for God the Father, as God's *magnum opus*, as a servant to the world, as a witness to the world, as a mother and family to those who believe, and lastly as a warrior against Satan. This is the secret God has concealed in his bosom, and his many-sided wisdom is displaying so that all of the angels and even all of the demons, Satan himself, can look and see the wisdom of God's plan.

"Christ came once; he will come again, and then every knee shall bow. Then the redeemed shall stand holy, spotless, pure, and perfect, gods and goddesses, sons and daughters of God, to enter into his eternal paradise. Then the Dragon will look and see beyond any question or doubt that God's plan is wiser. Then, and *only* then, will Satan and all his minions be

cast into the lake of eternal fire.

"I'd like to conclude by saying that Heaven is off in the future, but it is also here now. We can, and should, bring Heaven down to earth. Each time we forgive, each time by God's grace we work good out of evil, there is Heaven. When we arrive at the Holy City, we will see that Heaven has always been very close. Let's pray.

"Lord, thank you for being the Redeemer, and calling us out of our sin, out of our filth. Thank you for calling me out of my slavery to the bottle and my worship of alcohol. Help us to be co-workers and co-redeemers with you, with hearts that are holy and lives that are true. In Jesus' name, amen.

"Will you please stand?"

The congregation rose, and said with one voice,

"I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,  
Maker of Heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

"I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from Heaven:

by the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and  
was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into Heaven

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.

He has spoken through the Prophets.

I believe one holy Catholic and apostolic Church.

I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

I look for the resurrection of the dead

...FOR THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD,  
and the life of the world to come.  
Amen."

A deacon said aloud, "Father, we pray for your holy Catholic Church;"  
The congregation answered, "That we all may be one."

"Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve  
you;"

"That your Name may be glorified by all people."

"We pray for all bishops, priests, and deacons;"

"That they may be faithful ministers of your Word and Sacraments."

"We pray for all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the  
world;"

"That there may be justice and peace on the earth."

"Give us grace to do your will in all that we undertake;"

"That our works may find favor in your sight."

"Have compassion on those who suffer from any grief or trouble;"

"That they may be delivered from their distress."

"Give to the departed eternal rest;"

"Let light perpetual shine on them."

"We praise you for your saints who have entered into joy;"

"May we also come to share in your heavenly kingdom."

"Let us pray for our own needs and those of others."

A time of silence ensued.

The celebrant said, "Let us confess our sins against God and our  
neighbor."

The friends knelt in silence.

"Most merciful God," the celebrant began, joined by the people,

"We confess that we have sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed,  
by what we have done,  
and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart;  
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,

have mercy on us and forgive us;

that we may delight in your will

that we may delight in your will,  
and walk in your ways,  
to the glory of your Name.  
Amen.

The celebrant raised his hand, and said, "Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. Amen.

"The peace of the Lord be always with you."

"And also with you," the congregation answered.

The friends exchanged the Kiss of Peace; Jaben placed his lips on Sarah's cheek and planted a kiss. It was not romantic, erotic, or sexual, but it was very much real. Their bodies touched; their spirits touched. Jaben gave the kiss his whole attention; he wasn't doing anything else, not anything. This is why—Sarah thought afterwards—the Kiss of Peace between friends should not just be a handshake, but a hug, or even better a kiss. And why I like Jaben's kisses best of all.

The kiss bore the same fundamental beauty as singing  
dancing  
a small white feather in the air  
a placid lake  
deep green seaweed swaying under the ocean  
a glass of dry white wine  
silence  
stillness  
moonlight  
starlight  
crystalline ice  
a fire of roses  
a child falling asleep in its mother's arms  
agape  
life.

Someone said that, when thinking of singing Alleluia, one should not so much think of "We start and stop this song," as, "There is a song which always has been going on and always will go on, and when we sing, we step into it for a time."

This kiss was not a momentary kythe, but a moment stepping into the

Eternal Kythe.

It lasted less than a second, but it filled eternity.

The offering plates were passed around, and the voices joined together singing the doxology:

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow.  
Praise him, all creatures here below.  
Praise him above, ye heavenly host.  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.  
Amen."

The celebrant said, "The Lord be with you."

"And also with you," answered the congregation.

"Lift up your hearts," the celebrant said.

"We lift them to the Lord," the congregation answered.

The celebrant said, "Let us give thanks to the Lord our God."

The congregation answered, "It is right to give him thanks and praise."

The celebrant said, "It is right and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth. For by water and the Holy Spirit you have made us a new people in Christ Jesus our Lord, to show forth your glory in all the world. Therefore, we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of Heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:"

The eternal Song arose like incense:

"Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of pow'r and might.  
Heaven and earth are filled with your glory.

"Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of pow'r and might.  
Heaven and earth are filled with your glory.

"Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest.  
Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest.

"Blessed, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.

"Blessed, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest."

The celebrant said, "Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love

you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

"He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

"On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, 'Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.'

"After supper he took the cup of wine, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, 'Drink this, all of you. This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me.'

"Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:"

The whole congregation said, with one voice,

"Christ has died.

Christ is risen.

Christ will come again."

The celebrant said, "We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

"Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

"All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. Amen.

"And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say:"

Celebrant and congregation joined voices in a natural, almost chantlike recital:

"Our Father  
which art in Heaven,

1 11 11 11

hallowed be thy name.  
Thy Kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who have trespassed against us.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil,  
for thine is the Kingdom,  
and the power,  
and the glory forever.  
Amen."

The celebrant said, "Alleluia! Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;"  
"Therefore let us keep the feast! Alleluia!" the congregation answered.  
All said in unison,

"Most merciful Lord,  
your love compels us to come in.  
Our hands were unclean,  
our hearts were unprepared;  
we were not fit even to eat the crumbs from under your table.  
But you, Lord, are the God of our salvation,  
and share your bread with sinners.  
So cleanse and feed us with the precious body and blood of your Son,  
that he may live us and we in him;  
and that we, with the whole company of Christ,  
may sit and eat in your Kingdom.  
Amen."

The celebrant held up the elements, and said, "The gifts of God for the  
People of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and  
feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving."

The congregation was seated for a moment, and then rose with the  
power and energy of a song:

"The heavens are telling the glory of God,  
and all creation is shouting for joy

and all creation is shouting for joy.

Come, dance in the forest, come, play in the field,  
and sing, sing to the glory of the Lord.

"Praise for the sun, the bringer of day,  
He carries the light of the Lord in his rays;  
The moon and the stars who light up the way  
Unto your throne.

"The heavens are telling the glory of God,  
and all creation is shouting for you.

Come, dance in the forest, come, play in the field,  
and sing, sing to the glory of the Lord.

"Praise for the wind that blows through the trees,  
the sea's mighty storms, the gentlest breeze;  
They blow where they will, they blow where they please  
To please the Lord.

"The heavens are telling the glory of God,  
and all creation is shouting for joy.

Come, dance in the forest, come, play in the field,  
and sing, sing to the glory of the Lord.

"Praise for the rain that waters our fields,  
And blesses our crops so all the earth yields;  
From death unto life her myst'ry revealed  
Springs forth in joy.

"The heavens are telling the glory of God,  
and all creation is shouting for joy.

Come, dance in the forest, come, play in the field,  
and sing, sing to the glory of the Lord.

"Praise for the fire who gives us his light,  
The warmth of the sun to brighten our night;  
He dances with joy, his spirit so bright,  
He sings of you.

"The heavens are telling the glory of God,  
and all creation is shouting for joy.

Come, dance in the forest, come, play in the field,  
and sing, sing to the glory of the Lord.

"Praise for the earth who makes life to grow,  
The creatures you made to let your life show;  
The flowers and trees that help us to know

The heart of love.

"The heavens are telling the glory of God,  
and all creation is shouting for joy.  
Come, dance in the forest, come, play in the field,  
and sing, sing to the glory of the Lord.

"Praise for our death that makes our life real,  
The knowledge of loss that helps us to feel;  
The gift of yourself, your presence revealed  
To lead us home.

"The heavens are telling the glory of God,  
and all creation is shouting for joy.  
Come, dance in the forest, come, play in the field,  
and sing, sing to the glory of the Lord.  
Sing, sing to the glory of the Lord."

As they came up to receive communion, Jaben thought, "The body and blood of Christ. Real food and real drink."

Thaddeus thought, "The body of Christ, the Church. I am mystically united with the whole body of Christ, across all ages and all nations, and — what I hold more special still — I drink the divine life."

Désirée thought, "United again with my husband; made one in two ways now."

Amos thought, "United again with my wife; made one in two ways now."

Lilianne thought, "Here is a magic beyond anything in my daydreams, anything I can dream of."

Ellamae thought, "This chalice holds a fluid more precious than ichor. This cup is the Holy Grail."

Sarah thought, "God descends to meet my senses, and oh, how I appreciate that taste, that touch. He goes Within me."

They sat in silence after returning to their seats.

"Let us pray," the celebrant said.

The congregation joined him in saying,

"Eternal God, heavenly Father,  
you have graciously accepted us as living members  
of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ,  
and you have fed us with spiritual food

in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.  
Send us now into the world in peace,  
and grant us strength and courage  
to love and serve you  
with gladness and singleness of heart;  
through Christ our Lord.  
Amen."

The celebrant raised his hand in blessing, and said, "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! May the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever.", and the congregation said, "Amen."

They sang a recessional filled with joy:

"For the beauty of the earth  
For the glory of the skies,  
For the love which from our birth  
Over and around us lies.

"Lord of all, to Thee we raise,  
This our hymn of grateful praise.

"For the beauty of each hour,  
Of the day and of the night,  
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,  
Sun and moon, and stars of light.

"Lord of all, to Thee we raise,  
This our hymn of grateful praise.

"For the joy of human love,  
Brother, sister, parent, child,  
Friends on earth and friends above,  
For all gentle thoughts and mild.

"Lord of all, to Thee we raise,  
This our hymn of grateful praise.

"For Thy church, that evermore  
Lifteth holy hands above,  
Offering upon every shore

Shining upon every shore  
Her pure sacrifice of love.

"Lord of all, to Thee we raise  
This our hymn of grateful praise."

"For Thyself, best Gift Divine,  
To the world so freely given,  
For that great, great love of Thine,  
Peace on earth and joy in heaven.

"Lord of all, to Thee we raise  
This our hymn of grateful praise."

The celebrant raised his right hand in benediction, this time lowering his ring finger to meet his thumb. "Go forth into the world in peace, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit."

The congregation answered, "Thanks be to God."

## **Chapter Forty-Three**

Jaben was awoken by a phone call. "Be at Mortmain's Cove at 6:00 PM, and bring your friends along." He set the phone back on the receiver, and looked at his clock. 3:43 AM. Jaben scratched his head in puzzlement, and then drifted off to sleep.

## Chapter Forty-Four

The friends' van pulled around the corner, and they piled out. "I wonder what this could be about," Désirée murmured.

Jaben put his arm over Ellamae's shoulder, and said, "Ellamae, there's this one joke I've got to tell you. You'll laugh so hard, your breasts will fall off."

Then he glanced down at her chest for a moment, and said, "Oh, wait. You've already heard it."

Ellamae did not immediately react, then her mouth opened with a most delicious expression of "I can't believe I just heard what I thought I heard," and started laughing, and hit him in the arm. "Naughty, naughty," she said.

Thad said, "Ok. You are in a field. There is a clown suit, a crowbar, and a laptop here. Above are ominous clouds."

"I go west," Amos said.

"I do not recognize the verb 'I'."

"Take clown suit."

"Taken."

"Wear clown suit."

"The clown suit is about three sizes too small for you, and its colors clash with each other and your skin. Definitely you. You see—"

"Hullo, what's this?" said Ellamae.

Another van came up. It had no license plates.

Four men in white sheets stepped out. Two of them were carrying shotguns, and one of them was holding a box, about a fifteen by fifteen by six inches. The last one stepped out, and said, "Which of you is Jaben?"

Jaben stepped forward and said, "Me."

"Jaben," the Klansman said with a sneer. "Don't you think that when we get rid of one of *them*, it is with good reason?"

"We have rescued our friend," Jaben said calmly. "Is that not good reason?"

"No. You are ashamed of being white, and you are a disgrace to our race."

"I am very proud of being white," Jaben said. "I am proud of all the paintings and philosophy and poetry my race has produced. And I believe that loving others of your race comes before loving people not of your race."

"You do?" the Klansman asked with some surprise.

"Most definitely. But I don't think race defines the end of love. I believe in loving myself, my kin, my race, all of humanity, in an ever expanding circle of love. Your love of your kindred helps you love whites who are not your relations; my love of whites helps me love men who are not white. I am the richer for the friendships I have had with people who are not white, most of all Amos and Désirée. You would be the richer if you could expand your circle of love as well."

The Klansman snorted. "I did not come here to discuss philosophy with you. I came to challenge you to a duel." He opened the box to reveal two silver handguns. "Each of these is a .45."

"I don't believe in fighting. You can as much win a duel as win an earthquake."

Another Klansman fired a warning shot into the air. The echo resounded. "You will enter this duel, or we will mow down you and your friends, starting with the two of *them*."

Jaben closed his eyes, and prayed silently. His friends — not touching him, not moving — prayed with him. Then he opened his eyes, and said, "Ok."

Ellamae looked at him in absolute shock.

Jaben said — loud enough for the Kythers to hear — "Trust me," and walked over, and whispered something in Ellamae's ear.

Ellamae gulped.

Jaben walked over to the Klansmen, took one of the pistols. He stepped to the side, pointed the gun up, and turned his back.

The Klansman took the other pistol, and stood back to back with Jaben.

"One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. Nine. Ten."

Jaben turned, fired a shot into the air, and dropped his gun to the ground. "My brother!" he cried, facing his adversary.

ground. My brother. He cried, facing his adversary.

The Klansman turned, took aim, and shot him through the heart.

## Chapter Forty-Five

Ellamae was the first to reach him, and caught him before he reached the ground. She knelt down and held him, his hot blood coursing over her shirt. She kissed him on the forehead, and Jaben smiled. Then the life left his eyes.

The others gathered around, for one last embrace. Thaddeus closed Jaben's eyes, which were still open, vacant, empty. Ellamae's voice once again rose in a song that was high, clear, pure. It was immediately joined by Sarah's voice, Thaddeus's, Lilianne's, Désirée's, and Amos's.

"When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.  
It is well, it is well,  
With my soul, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

"Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul."

Amos could not sing. His voice was choked with tears.

"It is well, it is well,  
With my soul, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

"My sin! O the bliss of this glorious thought,  
My sin! not in part, but the whole,  
Is nailed to the Cross and I hear it no more

Is nailed to the Cross and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

It is well, it is well,  
With my soul, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

"And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be made sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,  
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul.

It is well, it is well,  
With my soul, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul."

They sang a second time.

"When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well, it is well,  
With my soul, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

"Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

It is well, it is well,  
With my soul, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

"My sin! O the bliss of this glorious thought,  
My sin! not in part, but the whole,  
Is nailed to the Cross and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

It is well, it is well,  
With my soul, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

"And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be made sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,  
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend

The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul.  
It is well, it is well,  
With my soul, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul."

Amos choked back tears long enough to say, "Let's sing it a third time."

This time, they sang more slowly:

"When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.  
It is well, it is well,  
With my soul, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

"Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed his own blood for my soul."

Here they all stopped, and for a time there was only a sound of tears. Then the song continued, loudly, powerfully, mightily.

"It is well, it is well,  
With my soul, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

"My sin! O the bliss of this glorious thought,  
My sin! not in part, but the whole,  
Is nailed to the Cross and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!  
It is well, it is well,  
With my soul, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

"And, Lord, haste the day when our faith shall be made sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,  
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul

EVEN SO, IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL.  
It is well, it is well,  
With my soul, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.  
"Amen."

Lilianne looked up, and looked around. The Klansmen had all fled in terror.

The Kythers had been so deeply enraptured in the song that they had not even heard the sound of the van.

"The gun!" Sarah said. "We still have a gun with their fingerprints on it. Maybe the police can trace whoever it was, and bring them to justice."

Ellamae picked up the gun with two fingers, as if she were holding a dead fish, and moved it a few paces away. Then she went into their van, took out a container and a cigarette lighter, poured some kerosene on the gun, and lit it.

"No," she said. "That is not the way."

She looked at Sarah, and said, sadly, "An eye for an eye only ends by making the whole world blind."

## Chapter Forty-Six

"I can't believe he's gone," Désirée said. "Or that his life was cut so short."

"I don't believe that he's gone," Lilianne said. "Or that his life was cut short."

"Explain," Désirée said, raising her eyebrows.

"You know Hebrews chapter 11, that great chapter cataloging all the heroes of faith? After that, Paul writes, 'Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.'

"The image is that of a stadium, where all those who have completed the race and received their laurel wreaths are standing around, excited, cheering on those who are still running. I may never hear from Jaben again this side of Heaven, but that doesn't mean he isn't here with us, watching us, praying, smiling on us. Jaben only lived a few years, but he managed in his own special way to cram more living into the scant years that he did live, than many people would live in a hundred years. I don't know how to explain it, but his life was complete."

The conversation gave way to a deep and powerful silence, a silence on which Jaben smiled.

## Chapter Forty-Seven

Friends and family gathered inside the church, weeping.  
The pastor began,

"I am the Resurrection and the Life, says the Lord.  
Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will live  
and whoever lives and believes in me  
will never die.

"I know that I have a living Defender  
and that he will rise up last, on the dust of the earth.  
After my awakening, he will set me close to him,  
and from my flesh I shall look on God.  
He whom I shall see will take my part:  
my eyes will be gazing on no stranger.

"For none of us lives for himself  
and none of us dies for himself;  
while we are alive, we are living for the Lord,  
and when we die, we die for the Lord:  
and so, alive or dead,  
we belong to the Lord.

"Blessed are those  
who die in the Lord  
Blessed indeed, the Spirit says;  
now they can rest for ever after their work."

"The Lord be with you," the pastor said softly.

"And also with you," answered the congregation, even more softly.

"Let us pray."

There was a deep, still, empty silence, a wounded, grieving silence,  
that after a time took the form of the celebrant's words:

that after a time took the form of the celebrant's words:

"O God of grace and glory, we remember before you this day our brother Jaben. We thank you for giving him to us, his family and friends, to know and to love as a companion on our earthly pilgrimage. In your boundless compassion, console us who mourn. Give us faith to see in death the gate of eternal life, so that in quiet confidence we may continue our course on earth, until, by your call, we are reunited with those who have gone before; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

"Amen," all said together.

"Most merciful God," the celebrant said, "whose wisdom is beyond our understanding: Deal graciously with Amos, Désirée, Lilianne, Ellamae, Thaddeus, Sarah, Wallace, Elizabeth, and Bear in their grief. Surround them with your love, that they may not be overwhelmed by their loss, but have confidence in your goodness, and strength to meet the days to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord."

An Amen filled the church.

"A reading from the Song of Songs," said the reader.

"Set me as a seal on your heart,  
as a sigil on your arm.  
For love is stronger than death,  
more relentless than Hades.  
Its flame is a flash of fire,  
a flame of Yahweh himself.  
Many waters cannot quench love,  
neither can floods drown it.

"The Word of the Lord," the reader said.

"Thanks be to God," the congregation answered.

"A reading from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

"What you sow must die before it is given new life; and what you sow is not the body that is to be, but only a bare grain, of wheat I dare say, or some other kind; it is God who gives it the sort of body that he has chosen for it, and for each kind of seed its own kind of body.

"Not all flesh is the same flesh: there is human flesh; animals have another kind of flesh, birds another and fish yet another. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; the heavenly have a splendor of their own, and the earthly a different splendor. The sun has its own splendor

the moon another splendor, and the stars yet another splendor; and the stars differ among themselves in splendor. It is the same too with the resurrection of the dead: what is sown is perishable, but what is raised is imperishable; what is sown is contemptible but what is raised is glorious; what is sown is weak, but what is raised is powerful; what is sown is a natural body, and what is raised is a spiritual body.

"The Word of the Lord," the reader said.

"Thanks be to God," the congregation echoed.

All rose, and the pastor said, "The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John."

The congregation answered, "Glory to you, Lord Christ."

"Do not let your hearts be troubled.  
You trust in God, trust also in me.  
In my Father's house there are many places to live in;  
otherwise I would have told you.  
I am going now to prepare a place for you,  
and after I have gone and prepared you a place,  
I shall return to take you to myself,  
so that you may be with me  
where I am.  
You know the way to the place where I am going.'

"Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus said:

'I am the Way; I am Truth and Life.  
No one can come to the Father except through me.'"

The pastor closed the Bible, saying, "The Gospel of the Lord."

The congregation answered, "Glory to you, Lord Christ."

The pastor paused, and began, "A conservative, someone said, is someone who interprets the book of Jonah literally and the Song of Songs figuratively. A liberal is someone who interprets the book of Jonah figuratively and the Song of Songs literally." He paused, and then continued. "I'm not sure where that would place Jaben; I don't know how Jaben interpreted Jonah, but I do know that he interpreted the Song of Songs on at least three levels: a literal level, a figurative level, and a level of human relationships. He explained to me the last one by saying that if

of human relationships. He explained to me the last one by saying that if marriage is the crowning jewel of human relationships, as the Bible leads us to believe, then we should expect a book devoted to marriage to not only be a book about marriage, but a book about every human relationship. 'Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes, that wreak havoc on our vineyards' means to deal with the little problems that wreak havoc on a relationship, and that is sound advice for a marriage and sound advice for any other friendship.

"The Song of Songs was Jaben's favorite book, so much so that he made his own translation — that and, he said, the fact that existing translations are highly bowdlerized. Remind me to tell you sometime later what happened when the scholars working on the NIV made mistake of translating the greatest Song well. What you have in your Life Application Bible isn't what the translators—

"I normally read from the King James at funerals, but Jaben would not have liked that. The King James, he said, is a wonderful monument of Elizabethan prose that should respectfully be permitted to rest in peace. So other readings in the service were taken from the New Jerusalem Bible, the most current English equivalent to the French *Bible de Jérusalem* that Jaben read, but the passage from the Song of Songs was from Jaben's own translation. I would read other passages, but there are children listening.

"I thought about having 'His Banner Over Me Is Love' sung at this service, but I decided not to, for two reasons. The first reason is that it is a bouncy song, and does not very much sound like a dirge. And the second and most important reason? Jaben would have rolled over in his grave. The ultimate emasculation of an erotic text, he said, is to take a woodenly literal translation that obscures its meaning, and make it into a children's song. Come to think of it, I will tell you of one portion of Jaben's translation. He translated 'His banner over me is love' as 'He is gazing on me with desire.'

"Jaben was a brilliant man; he spoke four languages fluently, received a bachelor's degree in physics, and did things with computers I can't begin to understand. He was also quite a joker. I'll never forget the time he was talking with a senior political science major who was looking for a job, put an arm around his shoulder, and said, 'What did the computer science graduate say to the humanities graduate?' 'What?' 'I'll have the burger and fries, please.'

"And yet, as I think about him, not his humor, nor even his intelligence, strike me as most important about him. To explain exactly what *was* most important, I will in a moment tell you about his death.

"Jaben believed in living counterculturally. He believed in working to establish a culture of life in the midst of a culture of death. He always, always had time for people, from the youngest to the oldest. He would play with children, and sit at the feet of the aged and listen to their stories. He wouldn't have anything of disposable relationships—he kept up correspondence with his friends in France, and made a conscious decision to stay with his friends here until death. God alone knew how soon that death would come.

"His friend Amos was abducted, and I have never seen friendship so deep as in that seven-stranded cord of friends. He and the other friends left, and traveled through Mexico to find Amos, and at last came back as seven friends, singing loudly and off-key. That is quite a story, to be told another time. But when he came back—

"Amos was abducted out of hate, a hate that is real and not only white against black. Amos is struggling hard not to be consumed by the same hate that consumed his adversaries, and I ask you, brothers and sisters, to pray for him. He bears a heavy burden. The men who left Amos to die in Mexico were enraged that he be brought back alive, and insisted on a duel — their way. Jaben was not allowed to choose the place and weaponry as used to be the etiquette when duels were fought. The place was Mortmain's Cove and the weapon was a magnum .45. Jaben deliberately fired into the air, and then his opponent shot him through the heart.

"His last words, spoken to his murderer just before his death, were, 'My brother!'

"His next to last words, whispered into Ellamae's ears as he faced death, were, '*Tell my brothers and sisters that I love them.*'

"To understand the full extent of these words, let me tell you something. *Jaben was an only child.*

"When he said, 'Tell my brothers and sisters that I love them,' he was talking about you. And me. He loved us, and loves us still.

"When Jesus knew that his hour was approaching, he said over and over again, 'Love one another' — the heart of Christian ethics — and 'There is no love like this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'

That is exactly what Jaben did. He gave his life as a ransom for Amos and

that is exactly what Jaben did. He gave his life as a ransom for Amos and the others. He decided to try to rescue Amos, whatever the cost — even his life.

"He gave more than money or time. He gave himself, his life. He lived well. He died well. We have before us the body of a man, of a hero. He is no longer with us. But his love remains.

"Let us pray.

"Lord, thank you for the scintillating light that shone in your servant Jaben. We stand bereaved; his candle burned short, but it blazed. Grant that each of us may learn from him and carry him in our hearts, and that you would enfold him in your own heart. Draw us into your heart. In Jesus' name, Amen."

The congregation began to rise, as the pastor said, "In the assurance of eternal life given at Baptism, let us proclaim our faith and say,"

One united voice said,

"I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

"I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

"I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.  
Amen."

The pastor said, "Lord, help us to be like you, just as your servant Jaben was like you. Let us be shaped in your image, in preparation for

that day when we shall ever be changing from glory to glory, in your presence even more fully than he is in your presence. Help us to know that we are strangers, we are aliens, we are not of this world, even as Jaben was not of this world, and is in it no longer. Draw us all into your eternal home, with its many dwelling places, in your eternal heart. Amen."

The pastor stood in silence for a full minute, the silence breathing life into the prayer. Then he closed his eyes, and said, "Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to you our brother Jaben, who was reborn by water and the Spirit in Holy Baptism. Grant that his death may recall to us your victory over death, and be an occasion for us to renew our trust in your Father's love. Give us, we pray, the faith to follow where you have led the way; and where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, to the ages of ages." The congregation joined him in saying, "Amen."

The pastor and the others ordained walked over to the coffin, and prayed, "Give rest, O Christ, to your servant with your saints,"

The people joined him, saying,

"where sorrow and pain are no more,  
neither signing, but life everlasting."

"You alone are immortal," the pastor continued, "the creator and maker of mankind; and we are mortal, formed of the earth, and to earth shall we return. For so did you ordain when you created me, saying, "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." All of us go down to the dust; yet even at the grave we make our song: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia."

All said in unison,

"Give rest, O Christ, to your servant with your saints,  
where sorrow and pain are no more,  
neither sighing, but life everlasting."

The pastor turned to the body, and said, "Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend your servant Jaben. Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Receive him into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light." And all the people said, "Amen."

The pastor raised his hand in benediction, and said, "The peace of

The pastor raised his hand in benediction, and said, "The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always," and the congregation joined him in saying, "Amen."

"Let us go forth in the name of Christ," the pastor said.

"Thanks be to God," the people answered.

As the body was carried out from the church, the people chanted:

*"Christ is risen from the dead,  
trampling down death by death,  
and giving life to those in the tomb.*

"Into paradise may the angels lead you,  
At your coming may the martyrs receive you,  
and bring you into the holy city Jerusalem."

## Chapter Forty-Eight

Désirée said, "Remember Sarah's first time making hamburgers? She put raw meat on top of hamburger buns, and then put them in the oven at 550. When someone smelled smoke, the buns and the outside were burnt to a crisp, and the inside of the burgers was still raw. We scraped off the charred buns, and put fresh ones, and Amos said, 'Jaben, would you return thanks for this meal?'

"And Jaben folded his hands, and bowed his head, and began, 'Lord, bless the hands that repaired this meal...'"

A chuckle moved among the friends.

"Or remember," Désirée said, "the time when Bear ate a steakhouse out of shrimp, and the time after that that Jaben outate Bear? I never saw Bear stare like that. Or you, Amos, dear." She gave her husband a squeeze.

"Or remember that time on the internet when Jaben advertised free, automated technical support for all versions of Windows, and created a CGI that would read in a user's question, and then display a page that said, 'Your computer appears to be infected with a piece of malicious code known as Windows. To remedy this problem, try upgrading to the most recent version of Debian or Redhat.' Man, some of the flames he got after that!

"Or remember the time Jaben installed a Blue Screen of Death screensaver on Bear's laptop? I never seen Bear so mad.

"Or remember the time when he went into a bike shop, and opened the entire supply of locks the store had around a bar, and walked up to the front counter, and said, 'These aren't very effective, are they?'

"Or remember the time when Sarah was working on a paper, and called out, 'How do you spell "Approximately?'" And Jaben answered, 'Q-F-R-3.' And Sarah said, 'No, really. I want a real spelling of a real word,'

and Jaben answered, 'A-L-M-O-S-T?'

"Or remember that one last time when he called his medical insurance, waited for thirty minutes listening to music, and then said, 'Hello. I'm calling to inquire as to whether mental health will pay for singing lessons for the voices in my head?'"

The six friends were holding hands in a circle, laughing, weeping. Ellamae wiped a tear from her eye, and then softly whispered, "Fare thee well, Jaben. Adieu."

## Chapter Forty-Nine

Jaben looked. "Aah, Pope Gregory. There is something I'd like a theologian's feedback on."

"Yes?"

"My theories of prophecy. When I have asked people on earth to look at it, they have said that the theories are too deep to comment on."

"Aah, yes," the Pope said with a twinkle in his eyes. "They are great favorites in this realm. It serves to continually astonish us how someone so intelligent, so devout, and so open to the Spirit's leading could be so completely wrong."

Jaben looked, then smiled, then laughed, then laughed harder, then roared with laughter. His whole form shimmered with mirth. His laughter echoed throughout Heaven, and shook the foundations of Hell. Finally, he stopped laughing, and said, "That's the funniest thing I've ever heard."

He paused a second, and asked, "Will you introduce me to the folk here?"

"Mary!"

"Welcome, child," smiled the lady. "I have been waiting for you for ages."

"What news do you have to tell me?"

"Désirée is with child, though she does not know it, and will give birth to a man-child who will be no ordinary child."

"What will his name be?"

"His name shall be called Jaben."

"And what do you have to tell me of yourself?"

"Only this: I love you." She held him to herself as a little child.

Jaben asked Gregory, "Who was the greatest saint of all? Paul? Francis of Assisi? Theresa of Avila?"

"Come, let me show you to her." He introduced her to a little girl. "This child's name is Roberta. She lived in fourteenth century Italy, and you have not heard of her. She died at the age of seven in an epidemic, and she was not particularly attractive or bright — she was slightly retarded — she worked no miracles, and she was very easy to ignore (and most everyone did ignore her). She certainly wasn't canonized. If you were to find an earthly account of her life, it would strike you as that of an ordinary and somewhat dull child. But here, we look at things a little differently. God saw into her heart, and saw faith, hope, and love such as never has occurred in mere man before and will never occur again."

"Hi, Mister," the child said. "May I please hold your hand?"

They walked along, and saw three men talking. "Who are these?" he asked Gregory.

"These are Peter, Augustine, and Aquinas."

Jaben felt a moment of awe, and said, "May I join your theological discussion?"

"What a funny idea!" Aquinas said. "We weren't discussing theology. There is no need for that here. You don't need a picture of a friend when you can see his face. We were doing something far holier — telling jokes."

"Aah, wonderful. May I tell you my favorite joke? It involves you three."

"Certainly. Sit down."

"There is a seminary student who is about to finish his studies, when he is killed in a car accident. He goes and waits outside the Pearly Gates.

"Peter asks the first person in line, 'Who are you?' And then Augustine replies, 'I'm Augustine.' 'Prove it,' Peter says. So you talk for a time about the *Civitas Dei*, and Peter lets him in, saying, 'Welcome to Heaven, my dear friend.'

"Then Peter asks the next person in line, 'Who are you?' And Thomas replies, 'I'm Thomas Aquinas.' 'Prove it,' Peter says. So the two talk for a time about how Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* can enlighten our understanding of the Natural Law. And he says to Aquinas in turn, 'Welcome to Heaven, my dear friend.'

"Finally, it's the seminary student's turn, and so you ask him, 'Who are you?' He replies, 'Well, I'm, like, Nabal, and I was, like, studying all this really cool stuff in seminary about how we can bring together the best in, like, Christianity and New Age and other religions, and how it's OK to honor the goddess in our worship, and then this car like creams me, and

honor the goddess in our worship, and then this ear, here, creates me, and so here I am.'

"Peter pauses a second, and says, 'Very well, then. You'll have to prove who you are, just like Augustine and Aquinas.'

"Augustine? Aquinas? Like, dude, man, who are they?"

"Welcome to Heaven, my dear friend."

They were swept up with a merry, joyful mirth, and then, another voice called out, "Come! Sing the great song! Dance the great dance!"

He was swept away in a tempest of fire and wind and motion — wholly wild, wholly uncontrollable, wholly good. Song was over it and in it and through it. Notes flowed in and out to something beyond notes, and this incredible unfathomable motion was somehow also perfect peace. It was neither work nor rest, but play — pure, unending, awesome, wondrous play.

At last he found himself before a throne of seven stones.

"Daddy! I have been so longing to meet you!"

"Why, child? You have known me from childhood."

"But oh, Daddy, how I long to touch your face."

"Blessed are you who long to touch my face, for that you shall. Come. Touch."

After a time, the Father said, "What else is on your heart, child?"

"Many things, but only one thing."

"Yes?" "My friends, and the men who murdered me. I want them to know each other, to be reconciled, and I want them all to be with me in the New Jerusalem. Oh, Daddy, will you give me that?"

"Absolutely."

With that, Jaben sunk into the Father's heart of love, never again to leave.

solī deo gloria  
marana tha

# **Creation and Holy Orthodoxy: Fundamentalism Is Not Enough**

## **Against (crypto-Protestant) "Orthodox" fundamentalism**

If you read Genesis 1 and believe from Genesis 1 that the world was created in six days, I applaud you. That is a profound thing to believe in simplicity of faith.

However, if you wish to persuade me that Orthodox Christians should best believe in a young earth creation in six days, I am wary. *Every single time* an Orthodox Christian has tried to convince me that I should believe in a six day creation, I have been given recycled Protestant arguments, and for the moment the entire conversation has seemed like I was talking with a Protestant fundamentalist dressed up in Orthodox clothing. And if the other person claims to understand scientific data better than scientists who believe an old earth, and show that the scientific data instead support a *young* earth, this is a major red flag.

Now at least some Orthodox heirarchs have refused to decide for the faithful under their care what the faithful may believe: the faithful may be

expected to believe God's hand was at work, but between young earth creationism, old earth creationism, and "God created life through evolution", or any other options, the heirarchs do not intervene. I am an old earth creationist; I came to my present beliefs on "How did different life forms appear?" before becoming Orthodox, and I have called them into a question a few times but not yet found reason to revise them, either into young earth creation or theistic evolution. I would characterize my beliefs, after being reconsidered, as "not changed", *and not* "decisively confirmed": what I would suggest has improved in my beliefs is that I have become less interested in some Western fascinations, such as getting right the details of how the world was created, moving instead to what might be called "mystical theology" or "practical theology", and walking the Orthodox Way.

There is something that concerns me about Orthodox arguing young earth creationism like a Protestant fundamentalist. Is it that I think they are wrong about how the world came to be? *That is not the point*. If they are wrong about that, they are wrong in the company of excellent saints. If they merely hold another position in a dispute, that is one thing, but bringing Protestant fundamentalism into the Orthodox Church reaches beyond one position in a dispute. Perhaps I shouldn't be talking because I reached my present position before entering the Orthodox Church; or rather I haven't exactly *reversed* my position but de-emphasized it and woken up to the fact that there are bigger things out there. But I am concerned when I'm talking with an Orthodox Christian, and *every single time* someone tries to convince me of a young earth creationism, all of the sudden it seems like I'm not dealing with an Orthodox Christian any more, but with a Protestant fundamentalist who always includes arguments that came from Protestant fundamentalism. And what concerns me is an issue of *practical* theology. Believing in a six day creation is one thing. Believing in a six day creation like a Protestant fundamentalist is another matter *entirely*.

## A telling, telling line in the sand

But, you may say, Genesis 1 and some important Fathers said six days, literally. True enough, but may ask a counterquestion?

Are we obligated to believe that our bodies are composed of earth, air, fire and water, and not of molecules and atoms including carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen?

If that question seems to come out of the blue, let me quote St. Basil, *On the Six Days of Creation*, on a precursor to today's understanding of the chemistry of what everyday objects are made of:

Others imagined that atoms, and indivisible bodies, molecules and bonds, form, by their union, the nature of the visible world. Atoms reuniting or separating, produce births and deaths and the most durable bodies only owe their consistency to the strength of their mutual adhesion: a true spider's web woven by these writers who give to heaven, to earth, and to sea so weak an origin and so little consistency! It is because they knew not how to say "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Deceived by their inherent atheism it appeared to them that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and

In reading the Fathers, one encounters claims of a young earth. However, often (if not always) the claim is one among many disputes with Greek philosophers or what have you. To my knowledge there is no patristic text in which a young earth is *the* central claim, let alone even approach being "the article by which the Church stands or falls" (if I may borrow phrasing from Protestant fundamentalist cultural baggage).

that was all was given up to chance.

At this point, belief in his day's closest equivalent to our atoms and molecules is called an absolutely unacceptable "spider's web" that is due to "inherent atheism." Would you call Orthodox Christians who believe in chemistry's molecules and atoms inherent atheists? St. Basil does provide an alternative:

"And the Spirit of God was borne upon the face of the waters."  
Does this spirit mean the diffusion of air? The sacred writer wishes to enumerate to you the elements of the world, to tell you that God created the heavens, the earth, water, and air and that the last was now diffused and in motion; or rather, that which is truer and confirmed by the authority of the ancients, by the Spirit of God, he means the Holy Spirit.

St. Basil rejected atoms and molecules, and believed in elements, not of carbon or hydrogen, but of earth, air, fire, and water. The basic belief is one Orthodoxy understands, and there are sporadic references in liturgical services to the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water, and so far as I know no references to modern chemistry. St. Basil seems clearly enough to endorse a six day creation, and likewise endorses an ancient view of elements while rejecting belief in atoms and molecules as implicit atheism.

Why then do Orthodox who were once Protestant fundamentalists dig their heels in at a literal six day creation and make no expectation that we dismiss chemistry to believe the elements are earth, air, fire, water, and possibly aether? The answer, so far as I can tell, has *nothing whatsoever* to do with Orthodoxy or any Orthodox Christians. It has to do with a line in the sand chosen by Protestants, the same line in the sand described in [Why Young Earthers Aren't Completely Crazy](#), a line in the sand that is understandable and was an attempt to address quite serious concerns, but still should not be imported from Protestant fundamentalism into Holy Orthodoxy.

## Leaving Western things behind

If you believe in a literal six day creation, it is not my specific wish to convince you to drop that belief. But I would have you drop fundamentalist Protestant "creation science" and its efforts to prove a young earth scientifically and show that it can interpret scientific findings better than the mainstream scientific community. And I would have you leave Western preoccupations behind. Perhaps you might believe St. Basil was right about six literal days. For that matter, you could believe he was right about rejecting atoms and molecules in favor of earth, air, fire, and water—or at least recognize that St. Basil makes *other* claims *besides* six literal days. But you might realize that really there are much more important things in the faith. Like how faith plays out in practice.

The fundamentalist idea of conversion is like flipping a light switch: one moment, a room is dark, then in an instant it is full of light. The Orthodox understanding is of *transformation*: discovering Orthodoxy is the work of a lifetime, and perhaps once a year there is a "falling off a cliff" experience where you realize you've missed something big about Orthodoxy, and you need to grow in that newly discovered dimension. Orthodoxy is not just the ideas and enthusiasm we have when we first come into the Church; there are big things we could never dream of and big things we could never consider we needed to repent of. And I would rather pointedly suggest that if a new convert's understanding of Orthodoxy is imperfect, much less of Orthodoxy can be understood from reading Protestant attacks on it. One of the basic lessons in Orthodoxy is that you understand Orthodoxy by walking the Orthodox Way, by attending the services and living a transformed life, and not by reading books. And if this goes for books written by Orthodox saints, it goes all

the more for Protestant fundamentalist books attacking Orthodoxy.

Science won't save your soul, but science (like Orthodoxy) is something you understand by years of difficult work. Someone who has done that kind of work might be able to argue effectively that evolution does not account for the fossil record, let alone how the first organism could come to exist: but here I would recall *The Abolition of Man*: "It is Paul, the Pharisee, the man 'perfect as touching the Law' who learns where and how that Law was deficient." Someone who has taken years of effort may rightly criticize evolution for its scientific merits. Someone who has just read fundamentalist Protestant attacks on evolution and tries to evangelize evolutionists and correct their scientific errors *will be just as annoying to an atheist who believes in evolution*, as a fundamentalist who comes to evangelize the unsaved Orthodox and "knows all about Orthodoxy" from polemical works written by other fundamentalists. I would rather pointedly suggest that if you care about secular evolutionists at all, pray for them, but don't set out to untangle their backwards understanding of the science of it all. If you introduce yourself as someone who will straighten out their backwards ideas about science, all you may really end up accomplishing is to push them away.

Conversion is a slow process. And letting go of Protestant approaches to creation may be one of those moments of "falling off a cliff."

# **C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*:**

## **Science and Magic, Spirit and Matter, and the Figure of Merlin**

I write as someone who grew up first having my father read [The Chronicles of Narnia](#) to my brother and me at bedtime (my Mom recounted how Matthew and I were wide awake even when my father was nodding off), then reading [The Chronicles of Narnia](#) again and again, and eventually reading practically every essay, book, and story of Lewis's that I could get my hands on. I've read "Dymer" and [The Discarded Image](#) and am aware of one and only one major work of Lewis's that I have not read, a textbook that to my knowledge has not been superseded. I have been told that I write like an Englishman; if that is true, it is much more probably Lewis's influence than anyone else.

And, as Orthodox, I have written [A Pilgrimage from Narnia](#) and backed away from Lewis's objective of "mere Christianity". I still respect Lewis, but the Orthodox Church has a great many treasures and some of them are not even hinted at when he presents standard Christianity.

[The Abolition of Man](#) is a short book and is my favorite among Lewis's nonfiction writing. I could wish it were much longer. [That Hideous Strength](#) corresponds to [The Abolition of Man](#), at much greater length, and is expressed through masterful fiction instead of the prose argument of [The Abolition of Man](#). For a long time I have considered it the deepest of his fiction.

But I here write another [Pilgrimage from Narnia](#).

Having finally gotten around to finding what to do with free time after some generous time off from holidays and recuperating from sickness (my job and my boss are really good), I reread C.S. Lewis, [That Hideous Strength](#), in the hope that it would inspire something for me to write. Partway through I imagined a work consisting entirely of questions about how Druidry is envisioned in [That Hideous Strength](#). And in the end I arrived at inspiration for something to write, albeit not something I either welcomed or envisioned.

A physics teacher or show, I don't remember which, said that the Holy Grail of physics would be a so-called "Grand Unified Theory", which would essentially mean that everything we know about physics could be boiled down to a set of equations that could be written on one half of a side of a sheet of paper. And something, in a perverse way, is true for ancient Druids. Almost everything we reliably know about them could be written on one half of a sheet of paper. They are almost unknown from historical sources, and almost equally inaccessible to archaeological knowing: one source, cited in the Wikipedia article, says, "not one single artefact or image has been unearthed that can undoubtedly be connected with the ancient Druids."

Now there were ancient writers about Druids; Roman Caesars had something to say about the Druids of Gaul. But if their accounts were written today, they would be called Orientalist and dismissed even for grounds other than political correctness.

For those not familiar with the label of 'Orientalism', I would recall a conversation I sat in on at Cambridge, with German student who was researching for a thesis on 18th century English Orientalist views on China, and a Chinese student. The Chinese student, understandably enough, thought the German student would know a fair amount about China. But she did not, or at least she said she did not. And perhaps the German student was understating her knowledge: perhaps her flawless

command of the English language was accompanied by a flawless command of English manners. But she very well may not have known anything real about China: not because she was an academic professional slouch, but simply because Western Orientalist views of China are so far disconnected from life in China that even extensive understanding of China would not shed much light on Orientalism as studied.

Orientalist views are a projection: Charles Baudelaire's "*tout n'est que l'ordre, luxe, calme et volupté*" ("there is nothing but order, luxury, calm, and voluptuousness") really tells us nothing about *any* of the Asian constellation of cultures, and much about... *Charles Baudelaire*. Trying to read Orientalist sources to understand the people described is like trying to read a book of dirty jokes to understand the psyche of beautiful women. A "beautiful woman" in dirty jokes is only a projection of male desire, and unrefined male desire at that; beautiful women may exist well enough but their psyches are not to be found from dirty jokes, and Orientalism is far enough from reality that it actually makes sense for a Ph.D. student at Cambridge University, studying English Orientalism about China, to simply not attempt to understand much of Chinese culture: she might have been saving her elbow grease for topics that would actually illuminate her understanding of English views of China, and China and Chinese culture themselves were not among them.

The Roman reports we have of ancient Druids may illuminate something about Rome, although we have much knowledge of Rome already; they are Orientalist and do not tell us much about Druids. And again, what we reliably know about ancient Druids can fit on one half of one side of a sheet of paper.

Now what, in specific, did I find haunting about [That Hideous Strength](#)? Not all of it, and for that matter there is much in the book that is not objectionable; Lewis describes it as a counterpart to [The Abolition of Man](#), which is deep and truthful through and through. But there is an occult bent, not entirely hidden, and there was something that made my skin creep this time through when Venus's influence on Ransom's house is elaborated by saying that there is a lot of copper to be found around it. A quick Google search later for "Venus copper alchemy" turns up what I already really knew: that there is some identification between Venus and copper in alchemy. (I didn't go beyond the first search engine results page. Nor am I convinced it would have been particularly wise.) The

Melchizedek mentioned is the immortal Melchizedek of alchemy, not the prefiguring type of Christ in the Bible.

As a rule, Lewis sticks to what he, and a great many in his wake, calls "mere Christianity." That is, he tried as a rule to stick to those things that Christians had held in common for twenty centuries, and while a couple of clarifications to this might be given, in [The Chronicles of Narnia](#) Aslan appears somewhat as a traveler from afar; the question of who Aslan's mother might be and what significance she might hold is never even whispered and the reader is drawn into the narrative in such a way that the question probably never arises in the reader's mind. And with a nod of recognition to the fact that the Chronicles of Narnia are *not* a deliberately concocted allegory (and that it betrays a profound misunderstanding to read the book as a coded catechism), there is a reason the reader is never invited to even think about Aslan's mother: the question of who Christ's mother is, how great or small, and what it means for her to be great, has been an area of disagreement among Christians. Orthodox venerate her primarily as Mother, Catholics as Virgin, Puritans saw an ordinary mortal woman who is not to be venerated on pain of idolatry, and perhaps many Protestants today see as an "agree to disagree" matter, that is, not an essential question to Christianity. With obscure exceptions, Lewis rarely if ever discusses the place of the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, because "mere Christianity" such as he tried to limit himself to meets a bit of obstacle in the question of who is Mary and how we should relate to her, because there has

It might be commented that C.S. Lewis's popularity as a writer is owed partly to his efforts as writer to stick with "mere Christianity." Now this is not the only factor; he was profoundly gifted and managed to communicate in terms everyday Joe and Janes can read, and it is an unworthy suggestion to suggest that his sticking to mere Christianity was a mercenary move to increase his readership. But he chose to write in such a way that Catholic, High Anglican, Low Anglican, Lutheran, Calvinist, Arminian, Anabaptist, and so on and so forth can all read and find mostly or completely things they agree with. Even Orthodox find the teaching of the Greek Fathers in Lewis's words that the Gates

been no "mere Christian" agreement such as Lewis argues, and the question is significant enough that any stance in it is profound, specifically including "It's been centuries now. Can't we just agree to disagree?"

I should like to clear away a distraction now and say that I am not bothered by Lewis's portrayal of devils, nor am I bothered by the presence of devils in the fictional work corresponding to [The Abolition of Man](#), in which devils are not explicitly mentioned. In *that* sense the fictional portrayal is, if anything, *more* true than [The Abolition of Man](#), as the project and doctrines critiqued in [The Abolition of Man](#) are, to put it bluntly, inspired by diabolical plans. To anyone who objects to the discussion of devils in Lewis's work, I would say that Lewis understands spiritual struggle and his discussion of devils is true to the mark, or more pointedly that the one work which is the Orthodox Church's canonical anthology of post-Biblical spiritual classics is the [Philokalia](#), and the [Philokalia](#) spends more time discussing devils and their operations than any other work I've read. The fact that Lewis portrays diabolical plans as impinging on human history is no irresponsibility as a novelist, nor need it be chalked up to poetic conceit. If Lewis were to deny that his story of a diabolical assault on the earth were an unreal kind of story to tell, plenty of Orthodox at least might say that even if Lewis were to present it as a poetic conceit, it is no more a fantastic kind of thing to introduce to a story than Mary and Jane Studdock's getting hungry and tired.

Now the book, being labeled "a fairy-tale for grown-ups" by its author, should be given room for poetic license. However, amidst explanation of things that are mere Christianity and which were already under attack when Lewis wrote the book, is separated by no clear divider by Lewis from the less popular elements of mere Christianity that he defends. And these speculations are not Orthodox, nor Catholic, nor Methodist, nor Calvinist, nor Anabaptist, nor any major thread of what he considered mere Christianity, but occult in character, and these may be the most seductive passages in a book that seduces well enough with Truth. A discussion surrounds Merlin and related topics:

of Hell are bolted and barred from the *inside*, that the world is comprised of two kinds of people: those who tell God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God ultimately says, "Thy will be done."

What exactly he [*Merlin*] had done there [*in Bragdon wood, where he was believed to be in suspended animation under a university campus*] they did not know; but they had all, by various routes, come too far to either to consider his art mere legend and imposture, or to equate it with what the Renaissance called Magic. Dimble even maintained that a good critic, by his sensibility alone, could detect the difference between the traces which the two things had left on literature. "What common measure is there," he would ask, "between ceremonial occultists like Faustus and Prospero and Archimago with their midnight studies, their forbidden books, their attendant fiends or elementals, and a figure like Merlin who seems to produce his results simply by being Merlin?" And Ransom agreed. He thought that Merlin's art was the last survival of something older and different—something brought to Western Europe after the fall of Numinor and going back to an era in which the general relations of mind and matter on this planet had been other than those we know. It had probably differed from Renaissance Magic profoundly. It had possibly (though this was doubtful) been less guilty: it had certainly been more effective. For Paracelsus and Agrippa and the rest had achieved little or nothing: Bacon himself—no enemy to magic except on this account—reported that the magicians "attained not to greatness and certainty of works." The whole Renaissance outburst of forbidden arts had, it seemed, been a method of losing one's soul on singularly unfavorable terms. But the older Art had been a different proposition.

But if the only possible attraction of Bragdon lay in its association with the last vestiges of Atlantean magic, this told the company something else...

The paragraph may make some readers want to read the book. Now I can accept something like Lewis's poetic conceit, if it is poetic conceit. I do not see the division between Merlin's age and our own, or whatever older thing there may have been that had a last survival in Merlin's age. *Animism or old-fashioned paganism are different from*

At least in medieval sources, there is a story about how the Devil caused a son to be incarnate in a virgin who had slipped in her prayers once, how great prayers were uttered

*the Renaissance magus or today's neo-Pagan as a virgin is different from a woman divorced.* The man who practices the animism he learned at his mother's knee as a member of his tribe or clan is a very different picture from the Renaissance magus, who bears a sword with which to cut through their society's Gordian knots, and a messianic fantasy with it. The traditional animist is embedded in the fabric of his society's existence; the Renaissance magus stood over and against society, viewing it as a rather despicable raw material to be used in Utopian plans; it is the Renaissance magus whose mantle left behind has created what we now know as political ideologies. "(though this was doubtful) been less guilty": animism and Renaissance magic alike put men in thrall to devils, and one hears of a missionary starting to converse with a local who knew the Bible, and nervously being pulled aside, and rightly told that he was a witch doctor. But I had rather find myself in the company of the traditional animist, who had no messianic fantasy about how to transform the world, than a magus. And in that qualified sense I agree to a point that is connected to Lewis's, even though it differs and may differ significantly.

There are phrases and sections that give a thrill. At one point it is mentioned that Ransom's company has a knowledge of XYZ point of Arthuriana that orthodox Arthurian scholarship would not reach for several centuries. But when I look at things in the book that thrilled me most, they seemed if anything to be poisoned. A lost world is a haunting reality; this is true of any finished epoch in history but the Atlantean society and magic Merlin represents are doubly exotic.

prayers were uttered, and Merlin was saved, a good man called a prophet in the legends, who none the less retained the supernatural powers of the figure the Devil intended. I do not say that this makes sense on Christian grounds—much of the Brut does not—but that is how the story is told, and it is not clear to me from the medieval versions of the legends how Lewis has this "special exception" character be a representative of a tradition or College.

## The blaring obvious

Perhaps most obvious of the ways that the story is occult is its Arthurian themes. I have read quite a lot of medieval Arthurian legends by today's standards, quite a lot: the Brut, Chrétien de Troyes, and Sir Thomas Mallory, but that only scratches the surface of even just the *medieval* tellings. The best way I can think of concisely describing Sir Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* is as a terse thousand page synopsis of the library's worth of sources Mallory himself read. Now any serious student of the Arthurian legends will acknowledge that Mallory didn't just abridge; he made transformations of his work and rendered cycles of romances to be a little more like a novel. And I wrote my own riff on the Arthurian legends in [The Sign of the Grail](#), and the best way I can describe that is that I tried to write a Christian treatment of the Arthurian legends, and even in my successes I found the thing I was attempting was impossible. (I have not read Robert de Borron, arguably the medieval author I should most have read as he made the most effort to draw the legends into the Christian fold.) And there are things absent from the narrative that are abundantly present in the legends: the Puritan critique I am aware of is not that magical phenomena lurk around every corner and supply practically every plot device, nor the married flirting of courtly love (my brother years ago asked me, "If [Sir Lancelot]'s such a great knight, how come he has a crush on the queen?"), or for that matter of open adultery such as the story of Tristram and Yseult that was drawn into Arthurian orbit, but rather the Puritans raised objections to unending pages of open manslaughter. I would, off the cuff, place the combats between knights as at least half of Mallory and easily half of the Brut, as combat with it being a frequent occurrence for two mighty knights to hack each other to death's door and be well a fortnight later. In that regard the legends are comparable to a U.S. R-rated action-

adventure movie: there may be sex, but the bulk of the R comes from violence.

But the Arthurian legends are deeply occult, and it takes no heresiologist who has studied occult symbols to find treacherous occult symbolism behind seeming innocence. It is plain on a naive reading that magic and magical phenomena is a pillar of Arthurian foundations. And at the risk of a daft comparison between Lewis and myself, I will mention that Lewis also neglects completely the interminable fighting of medieval Arnold Schwarzenegger movies, and the central Arthurian figure Lewis brings is not Ransom (who has enough transcendence and wonder of his own), but Merlin, who is the riveting center of attention in the company of Ransom before he is awakened and even more rivets attention on himself once he has entered the picture in the most direct sense. One definition of a rounded character in literature is not about having such-and-such many attributes defined, but of believably surprising the reader. Lewis's Merlin is perhaps the most concentrated character in believable surprises in all of the literature I have read; he far eclipses the other characters, even Ransom, in a book whose characters are rounded enough. [That Hideous Strength](#) represents the culmination of a trilogy of which the first two books are not in particular Arthurian; Lewis does a deft job of shifting courses between [Out of the Silent Planet](#) to [Perelandra](#), where [the Unman appears and tells his tales to an Unfallen Eye](#), although here, even as he uses the symbolism of Mars and Venus much as John Gray does, he has two genders. In [That Hideous Strength](#) he discusses "the Seven Genders" in a way unconsciously unsettling to someone who had embraced his use of astrological symbolism in [Perelandra](#). In [Perelandra](#) the two genders covered are in fact two basic realities we would do well to acknowledge; in [That Hideous Strength](#) this is diluted and the genders represent more seven generic qualities than gender or sex as we know them; this is no gender rainbow, or at very least no **conscious** gender rainbow, but it muddies the foundation laid in [Perelandra](#). And when Lewis joins [That Hideous Strength](#) to the other two, deftly, he incorporates an element that is arguably more occult than the stories or supernatural plot element to be found in the other two books. He welds in the Arthurian legends, and the central Arthurian character in the book is the most magical, the Devil's son (though this attribution is denied in the text). And the result is more occult than the

astrology, which a perceptive reader of Lewis and the Middle Ages—and *not* the average Joe C.S. Lewis fan—is not about what is called (in a muddy term) "judicial astrology," the casting of horoscopes to inform a day's decisions, but something more like a worldview where the influences of the planets did the job of science as an overall enterprise, and "judicial astrology" was more like the specific application of science in engineering: perhaps a valid distinction if Lewis was writing for other medievalists only, but a subtle and not-at-all-obvious distinction given the fact that C.S. Lewis was probably the twentieth century's best loved Christian author and *Perelandra* and [That Hideous Strength](#) were written for a reading public who had no clue of the distinction between today's (judicial) astrology and the outlook represented by medieval astrology as a whole. C.S. Lewis did write, I believe in the well-named [The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature](#), that people in the Middle Ages or more probably the Renaissance would be astonished that astrology was lumped in with magic by readers today: magic asserted human power, while astrology asserted human impotence. Any number of such subtle distinctions can be made, but they are overly fine to the majority audience of the twentieth century's most popular Christian writer, the overwhelming majority of whom do not have enough history to understand how you can use and apparently endorse major astrological themes without being in the same league of the "Star Scrolls" sold in vending machines that I as a little boy wanted so much and my mother firmly forbade.

Now it may be asked, "Did you not read the label? Lewis offered a fairy tale for grown-ups." And this categorization both is and is not true; it seems to represent a fair description where categories break down. The characterization and plot are those of a modern novel; the only novel-length book I have read that I would characterize as a fairy tale is [Phantastes](#), by Lewis's role model, George MacDonald. Psychological as opposed to a more mythic motivation moves all of the characters; Lewis does deal in archetypal characters and fills [The Chronicles of Narnia](#) with the repentant traitor, the apostate: but he does not deal in the minutia of their psychology. He does deal with the minutia of how Mark Studdock comes to reject the N.I.C.E. and of how Jane Studdock refuses to be open to the embrace of a child. Of my own writing, [The Fairy Prince](#) hovers on the allegorical, and does not hover over the minutia of its characters'

psychology even when a profound change is implied. [Firestorm 2034](#) is speculative fiction, looks at its characters' psychology, and I would only with reservation call it a fairy tale. (If I were to choose a term for it, it would be "culture fiction", a term applicable to some degree to most of my fiction.) If I were to bring a paragraph's description of [That Hideous Strength](#) into a fragment of a sentence, I'm not sure I could do better. But [That Hideous Strength](#) is a novel, some of the best speculative fiction around, but not a fairy tale.

And all of this is beside the point. The basic moral question that I raise here is, "Does [That Hideous Strength](#) arouse a haunting lust for things occult?" And if it does, this represents a flaw, whether or not it may also be called a fairy-tale for adults. Arousing impure desire is a flaw to Christian writing, and this is not just true of sexual lust. There are other lusts around, and merely sexual lust is somewhat dwarfed by lusting for magic (or, really, magick), which is properly called an unnatural vice. And this latter thirst is a propeller in [That Hideous Strength](#).

## **A complication: Turning back the clock?**

The rough draft as I created it had a section that I later took out; partly because it was loosely connected with the main point as originally envisioned, and partly because a friend's disagreement suggested that it might be a liability to include. After thinking further, I wish to re-include it:

There is some speculation in the book that, if not specifically occult, is at least speculation and not mere Christianity:

"But about Merlin?" asked Mrs. Dimble presently.

"Have you ever noticed," said Dimble, "that the universe and every little bit of the universe, is always hardening and narrowing and coming to a point?"

His wife waited as those wait who know by long experience the mental processes of the person who is talking to them.

"I mean this," said Dimble in answer to the question she had not asked. "If you dip into any college, or parish, or family—anything you like— at a given point in its history, you always find that there was a time before that point when there was more elbow room and contrasts weren't quite so sharp; and that there's going to be a time after that point where there is even less room for indecision and the choices are even more momentous. Good is always getting better and bad is always getting worse: the possibilities of even apparent neutrality are always diminishing. The whole thing is sorting itself out all the time, coming to a point, getting sharper and harder..."

The Orthodox Church may know of a decisive turning point in the Incarnation of Christ, and perhaps others, but not of less elbow room by the year. If anything, in Orthodoxy in my time and locale, things are a free for all compared to the sharp Church discipline of the ancient church. Sins are lightly forgiven that would have a period of penitence of years' exclusion for communion. There are multiple bishops in any number of cities, and while things might not usually match [the former Anglican free for all in the Western Rite](#), today's Orthodoxy looks like a madhouse compared to better timesâ€”until you recognize why nineteenth century Russia has been called a Gnostic wonderland with everything to satisfy damnable curiosities, and the great Christological Ecumenical Councils of the fourth century were called, not because there was a golden age, but precisely because of how serious the problems were. The state of Orthodoxy today may look like a madhouse by historic standards, but still a Heaven that has beckoned in Orthodoxy in every age beckons now. Despair is no more an option than the legalism of "True Orthodoxy" or "Genuine Orthodoxy." There is if anything more elbow room today than historically, certainly more this year than last year.

Some qualifications may be needed: once one knows that Bultmann did not invent de-mythologizing and over a millenium earlier St. (Pseudo-)Dionysius did a much better job of it, it is recognized as inappropriate to read Genesis 1 as meaning that God spoke with physical lips and a tongue. Certainly God commanded: but anthropomorphism of the Father is forbidden as icons of the Father are forbidden. (The interesting truth is not that the Father may not be directly portrayed, but that the Incarnate son *may*, and in fact should, be portrayed.) And likewise for actions. The entire process of maturity includes a Vinedresser who prunes branches, and part of this pruning is that some things may not be done. As St. Paul famously said, "[But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put childish things behind me.](#)"

And there are other things that could complicate things. Christ counterculturally held a child as the model for entering into the Kingdom: when he chose his disciples the last "as one untimely born"

kingdom, when he chose his disciples, the last, as one authority says (i.e. as a miscarriage) had top-notch scholarly learning; apart from St. Paul, Christ selected a diverse group of apostles who were children as far as book-learning was concerned. But more to the point, if we accept the process of maturity as described in the paragraph above, it must be remarked that this is a truth of personal development: I as a child appropriately spoke, understood, and reason as a child, but my coming to an age to put childish things behind me do not mean that it is wrong for the youngest members of my parish to speak, understand as a child. And my childhood was not license for my grandparents to behave as befits a child. Things may grow sharper with people's processes of maturity; or may not: but this is a personal process, not a universal law. And on the key point under discussion in this passage, concerning magic and the relationship between spirit and matter. I have suggested earlier, in contradistinction to Lewis's timeline portrayal, that the opposite of the Renaissance magus is not a member of some almost-forgotten College of magic that has left traces on our literature, but was becoming extinct in the sixth century, but animism, as learned at a mother's knee and as practiced by cultures since before recorded history and continues to be practiced today.

Let me quote more of the same passage:

"Everything is getting more itself and more different from everything else all the time... Even in literature, poetry and prose draw further and further apart."...

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

"No. I *had* thought of that. Merlin is the reverse of Belbury. He's at the opposite extreme. He is the last vestige of an old order in which matter and spirit were, from our point of view, confused. For him, every operation on Nature is a kind of personal contact, like coaxing a child or stroking one's horse. After him came the modern man to whom Nature is something dead—a machine to be worked, and taken to bits if it won't work the way he pleases... In a sense Merlin represents what we've got to get back to in some different way..."

My Orthodox response, is "*That's not what Rome would call a doctrinal development. It's a Western perversion.*" Regarding the first point on literature, we are indeed more specialized but as regards Bible translation we are worse. The King James Version is my preferred translation when I am reading in English, even though I have read any translation I wanted to. Someone has said, "The problem with the King James Version is the translators' shaky grasp of Hebrew; the problem with all modern translations is the translators' increasingly shaky grasp of English." The issue Lewis was concerned about in [The Elephant and the Fern Seed](#) has changed only by further specialization. And the difference between the King James Version and modern translations is that the King James Version is the work of Renaissance men, polymaths who were both scholars of original languages and wordsmiths in their own right, and often quite devout. By contrast, the average modern Bible translator is a specialist of the sort Lewis raised concerns about in [The Elephant and the Fern Seed](#), a specialist in ancient language and culture who is no published wordsmith at least. This is not a good thing, and that is part of why even though the King James Version used language that was old-fashioned when the translation was new, it has not been superseded in quality, even though the NIV (Now Indispensable Version) has exceeded it in current sales. Poetry and prose indeed grow further apart, to their detriment. Part of why G.K. Chesterton has his own following is that his prose never really leaves poetry behind; I've seen a Calvinist quote a passage from Chesterton that explicitly condemns Calvinism, partly because even though it condemned his beliefs it brought together the best of poetry and prose and bore a truth he could (in general) recognize. Now it may be commented that half-poetic prose is rare and Chesterton is significant partly as an exception. I would not contest the point. But however much the separation of poetry and prose may be a fact in Western historical development, it is not history sharpening all things, nor is it permanent. Fashions in education today may well create super-specialists far more than generalists, but my point is that this is a shift in fashion, and a point of how Western history has played out, but *not* the next step in the world's process of improvement.

And a similar, but deeper, disturbance is in the difference between Merlin's coaxing and stroking compared to the modern man's view of a machine that is to be pulled to bits if it does not satisfy. And on that score

Merlin is not a member of a College that was vanishing even in late antiquity, but a figure who agrees with Orthodoxy about the nature of Creation. Not, of course, in any sort of magic being lawful. But given the basic options of coaxing and pulling to bits, the Orthodox relationship is that of coaxing, and [I tried to commit to writing how Orthodox view Creation in "Physics."](#)

To give a hint and just illuminate things a little, I would comment that the more devout or higher up in the hierarchy a person is, the better with animals. It is a commonplace that animals, including wild animals, do not disturb monastics. I do not ask you to believe it, but even one journalist talked about eating lunch at Mount Athos, having a monk tell visitors not to worry about more than one boar in the bushes, and then telling his visitors, "Let me know when you're done with your melons and other food, and I'll give the signal." So the people finished their lunches, threw down their melon rinds as expected, and then the monk spoke and the boars devoured the rinds and other food remnants (all of the while not harming any of the people). Less spectacularly, there was one monastery which I used to visit, and I am told, though I did not see this myself, that the deer would approach and eat from the monastics' hands. I do know that I was visiting the monastery, in major deer hunting country where one wore a fluorescent orange hat and I lost count how many gunshots I heard, that two deer let another person and me approach within thirty feet of them. They slowly got out of our way after that, but they could have been keeping a whole lot more of a respectful distance than they did. The senior monk told me that the deer knew they were safe at the monastery. And even with domestic animals, I remember visiting someone and being told that the cat was bite-happy and would only settle down into the arms of clergy and monastics—I was advised to set the cat down. But I have in general been able fairly easily to make friends with animals—a dog that had been used as bait for pit bulls started by nervous barking, and ended by laying on his back in a condition of complete vulnerability, hoping for a good scratch. And I remember one time when a friend was moving in; all the rest of the friends were asked to carry things but I was handed the end of a leash and told the dog was uncomfortable and afraid of men. But even though at the beginning the dog was very clearly unhappy to be at the opposite end of his leash from me, I kept coaxing him by my actions and twenty minutes later he snuggled up with me, and to my astonishment approached the other men

snuggled up with me, and to my astonishment approached the other men in our group, sniffing hands and otherwise making doggy efforts to make friends. I don't believe this is some special or unique personal ability; clergy, monastics, and devout Orthodox faithful may or may not consider themselves good with animals, or even particularly interested in them, but when animals enter the picture, they are usually able to connect. In Lewis's story it may be poetic conceit that Ransom can have a chat with Mr. Bultitude or a tiger and they would thereafter be safe enough company, but that bit of imagination is in continuity with something real, if perhaps less spectacular.

This account is inadequate, but part of the picture has to do with headship. "Headship," as used in Evangelical circles, refers to a debate of whether a husband and wife are equal as regards authority or whether there is a relationship between husband and wife that is somewhat like that of the head and the body. To affirm it, in egalitarian circles, is taken to afford husbands a domination that greatly injures [what is good for women](#). And the overall reply to that is perhaps not, as John Piper said, that the ways husband and wife serve each other mirror the ways Christ and the Church serve each other, and if this distinguished service is removed from marriage, marriage ceases to illuminate Christ and the Church. A better reply is to say, [the full picture of headship is so far out of your orbit that it is probably pointless to press this point on its own](#).

There is a head-body relationship portrayed in Scripture and developed in the saints, which sees (this list is open-ended):

<b>Head</b>	<b>Body</b>	
God	Christ	As I write this in the wake of Christmas, I write as someone who has grown from a boy who likes to receive gifts to a man who likes to give them. Now as a boy I already liked to give gifts, and as a man I still like to receive gifts, but I would comment that the line between a boy
Christ	The Church	
Christ	Mankind	
Heaven	Earth	
Holy of holies	Sanctuary	
Paradise	The rest of the inherited world.	
Contemplative	Active	
That which meets God	Ordinary reason	
Spiritual wisdom	Practical wisdom	

Archetype	Image
Eternity	Time
Sunday, the Eighth Day	The whole sacred week
New Testament	Old Testament
Christ's return in glory	Christ's first coming with glory veiled
Christ	Mature men
Husband	Wife
Man	Woman
Adult	Child
Spiritual Creation	Material Creation
The spiritual sense of Scripture	The literal sense of Scripture
Spirit	Body
Mankind	Nature
Vinedresser	Vine
Worker	Work
Gardener	Garden
Mother	Home
Master	Pupil
Pastor	Flock

**But absolutely not**

Renaissance magus Nature  
Renaissance magus Society  
Renaissance magus Magic

The difference between the first long list and the second short list hinges on a single Greek word, *katakurieuo* used when Christ said that Gentile authorities "lord it over" those beneath them, but such is not permitted among Christians. And the term is not an exact match here; we are told in Genesis to domineer the creation, but there is a difference: domineering leadership can have a place and has to have a place (as, for instance, when a small child tests whether the rules are real), but there is

who likes to receive gifts and a man who likes to give them is a remarkably fine line.

Such is part of the truth for many things on this list, so that even in the distinction one may find a single essence.

an ocean of difference who domineers as a fierce medicine to free and nurture a disciple, and one who leads to make others an extension of his ego, or domineers to break a soul. And even when domineering is lawfully exercised, it is the exception, not the rule. The spirit of *katakuriuo* is the normal baseline in the Renaissance magus and mercy the exception; the servant leadership based on Christ is the normal baseline in all of these headships and an iron rod the exception. If there is an iron rod, it is much sooner applied to oneself than others—which is also not shared by the magus.

And there is a further point in St. Maximus the Confessor: all of these differences are to be transcended. In Christ there is no longer male nor female. In Christ even the distinction between created man and nature on the one hand, and uncreated God on the other, is transcended. The transformation reaches that far.

## What was lost rejected dismantled in the Scientific Revolution

The birth of science was heralded through the metaphor of sexual violence to a woman, personified Nature. As to why this was, let me draw an analogy with marriage. Marriage is a profound thing and leaves an indelible mark, so that there is no way to hit an Undo and Reset button and simply restore the mere friendship that preceded the romance. And the very depth of its mark is attested to in the absolute misery of either side of a divorce, of feeling squashed like a bug, and pouring anger over everything in the relationship. Coarse jokes attest that you can't simply wipe away a marriage and be where you started: "A wife is only temporary. An ex-wife is forever."; "When two divorced people sleep together, there are four people in the bed." The relationship can be torn apart, but it is deep enough of a thing that you can't just reset it to how things were before.

Something as deep as a divorce with the older way of relating to Nature is found in early modern science, and that is why there are all the sexually violent lurid imagery about torturing and raping the personification of Nature. Mary Midgley, in [Science as Salvation](#), argues:

It may be easier to see if we notice the way in which the pioneers of [scientific mechanist views] went about reshaping the concept of Nature. Very properly, they wanted to try the experiment of depersonalizing it. With that in view, the first step they surely needed to take was to stop using the feminine pronoun, or indeed any personal pronoun for 'Nature' altogether. But this was not done. We come to one more of the strange compensatory myths, dreams or dramas that are my theme. The literature of early modern science is

crises that are my theme. The literature of early modern science is a mine of highly-coloured passages that describe Nature, by no means as a neutral object, but as a seductive but troublesome female, to be unrelentingly pursued, sought out, fought against, chased into her inmost sanctuaries, prevented from escaping, persistently courted, wooed, harried, vexed, tormented, unveiled, unrobed, and 'put to the question' (i.e. interrogated under torture), forced to confess 'all that lay in her most intimate recesses', her 'beautiful bosom' must be laid bare, she must be held down and finally 'penetrated', 'pierced' and 'vanquished' (words which constantly recur).

Now this odd talk does not come from a few exceptionally uninhibited writers. It has not been invented by modern feminists. It is the constant, common idiom of the age. Since historians began to notice it, they have been able to collect it up easily in handfuls for every discussion...

This exceedingly foul imagery, persisting over time, attests to the durability and depth of the relationship that was being destroyed. Its vileness is like a divorce, ripping apart what cannot simply be dropped by dropping a personal pronoun. It is grieving, of a perverse sort: those who would object that for someone, "every operation on Nature is a kind of personal contact, like coaxing a child or stroking one's horse," can't undo that relationship simply by dropping personification in speech in nature. The old relation to nature could only be dropped by ripping apart the persona of nature. Those who take Newton's mathematical work to be a manual of rape may be wrong, but they are less wrong than you might think. And if Lewis's fictional Merlin lived from "every operation on nature is a kind of personal contact, like coaxing a child or stroking one's horse," know that *this is not a last survival in an ancient world of something far more ancient, but a common treasure held by East and West alike until centuries after the Great Schism, and held by the Orthodox Church today.*

## The lot of de-mythologizers

Is there room for the de-mythologizing discipline of science? Orthodox are on very shaky ground to dismiss de-mythologizing disciplines altogether. As was hinted at earlier, one of the most profound texts in the history of science is a profound and much more interesting de-mythologizing enterprise than the sciences founded with modernity, and with people who demean their discipline with the physics envy that says they are just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics (a claim that is very demeaning if is false, and much more demeaning if it happens to be true). The enterprise of de-mythologizing as we know it followed up a de-anthromorphized physics in Newton with a de-anthropomorphized psychology in behaviorists like Skinner. And no Orthodox can complain about de-mythologization as such; one of the most singular of the Church's texts finds its climax in the words,

The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more our words are confined to the ideas we are capable of forming; so that now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing...

So this is what we say. The Cause of all is above all and is not inexistent, lifeless, speechless, mindless. He is not a material body, and hence has neither shape nor form, quality, quantity, or weight. He is not in any place and can neither be seen nor be touched. He is neither perceived nor is he perceptible. He suffers neither disorder nor disturbance and is overwhelmed by no earthly passion. He is not powerless and subject to the disturbances caused by sense perception. He endures no deprivation of light. He passes through no

change, decay, division, loss, no ebb and flow, nothing of which the senses may be aware. None of all this can either be identified with it nor attributed to it.

Again, as we climb higher we say this. He is not soul or mind, nor does he possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is he speech *per se*, understanding *per se*. He cannot be spoken of and he cannot be grasped by understanding. He is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. He is not immovable, moving, or at rest. He has no power, he is not power, nor is he light. He does not live nor is he life. He is not a substance, nor is he eternity or time. He cannot be grasped by the understanding since he is neither knowledge nor truth. He is not kingship. He is not wisdom. He is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is he a spirit, in the sense in which we understand that term. He is not sonship or fatherhood and he is nothing known to us or to any other being. He falls neither within the predicate of nonebeing nor of being. Existing beings do not know him as he actually is and he does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of him, nor name nor knowledge of him. Darkness and light, error and truth—he is none of these. He is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to him, but never *of* him, for he is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of his preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; he is also beyond every denial.

However, this great classic needs to be placed today alongside a much lesser work such as is found in the following little chapter of the heart-warming [Everyday Saints and Other Stories](#):

In Egypt, in whose ancient Christian past there had once been many grand monasteries, there once lived a monk who befriended an uneducated and simple present farmer. One day this peasant said to the monk, "I too respect God who created the world! Every evening I pour out a bowl of goat's milk and leave it under a palm tree. In the evening God comes and drinks up my milk! He is very fond of it! There's never once been a time when even a drop of milk was left in the bowl."

Hearing these words, the monk could not help smiling. He kindly and logically explained to his friend that God doesn't need a bowl of goat's milk. But the peasant so stubbornly insisted that he was right that the monk then suggested that the next night they secretly watch to see what happened after the bowl of milk was left under the palm tree.

No sooner said than done. When night fell, the monk and the peasant hid themselves from the tree, and soon in the moonlight they saw how a little fox crept up and lapped up all the milk until the bowl was empty.

"Indeed!" the peasant sighed disappointedly. "Now I can see that it wasn't God!"

The monk tried to comfort the peasant and explained that God is a spirit, that God is something so completely beyond our poor ability to comprehend in our world, and that people comprehend His presence each in their own unique way. But the peasant merely stood hanging his head sadly. Then he wept and went back home to his hovel.

The monk also went back to his cell, but when he got there he was amazed to see an angel blocking path. Utterly terrified, the monk fell to his knees, but the angel said to him:

"That simple fellow had neither education nor wisdom nor book-learning enough to be able to comprehend God otherwise. Then you with your wisdom and book learning took away what little he had! You will doubtless say that you reasoned correctly. But there's one thing that you don't know, O learned man: God, seeing the sincerity and true heart of this good peasant, every night sent the little fox to that palm tree to comfort him and accept his sacrifice."

I cannot call this story the equal to the climax to St. Pseudo-Dionysius's greatest work. I cannot. But in our de-mythologized age, we much less need to beat such a drum even more than see what the learned monk could not: that God accepted and drank the milk offered to him, perhaps by means of a fox. [And we can show kindnesses to God when he suffers, perhaps in the person of our neighbor.](#) It is a loss to say that God does not suffer when you are standing by a neighbor who is suffering and you can help. God does not suffer in himself, but he does suffer in our

neighbor, and when we meet Christ's Judgment Throne we will find that the way we treated the suffering is how we treated Christ. Really, most of us have more productive things to do than de-mythologize things further.

The temptation here is to campaign for a program of re-mythologizing life, to call out, "Stop burning down the rainforests in South America! Reforest the Sahara!" And, for reasons discussed in [Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony with Nature: Anatomy of a Passion](#), this is a solution worthy of a magus and a spiritual dead end. What we may have instead, on a much smaller nuanced level, is a layer of spiritual awareness. One monk, who for exceptional reasons was working not on Mount Athos but at a U.S. print shop, discussed the unstable and unreliable print machines, and he talked about massaging and coaxing, and how you do not curse a machine that will not cooperate: those curses are real and have an effect. And I would specifically point out that a machine is about as far as you can get for a matter-based machine, understood by the laws of physics, and such a *kind* of thing as an early modern scientist would project onto much larger screen. He was not, for instance, talking about how to coax a tomato vine in your garden. He was talking about how to handle a machine, and while I do not remember him using the word 'love', the upshot of his discussion was that even a machine is something you govern through love. And he did not present this in particularly romanticized terms; it was a matter of fact man describing what work was like.

"Mother" and "matter" come from the same archaic root; in earlier ages the distinction was not so sharp. And we would do well to look on this whole creation on us as our mother, much as when we step into a temple we are stepping into an icon. I do not wish to push the point too far, but in the absence of a magus-paradigmed reform programme, we can open the doors of our heart to God, to our neighbor, to Creation, to everything we are able to love, and let God work with us.

What more are we to do to a right relationship? I think it's more of what sanctified relationships will do to us.

# **Creation and Holy Orthodoxy: Fundamentalism Is Not Enough**

## **Against (crypto-Protestant) "Orthodox" fundamentalism**

If you read Genesis 1 and believe from Genesis 1 that the world was created in six days, I applaud you. That is a profound thing to believe in simplicity of faith.

However, if you wish to persuade me that Orthodox Christians should best believe in a young earth creation in six days, I am wary. *Every single time* an Orthodox Christian has tried to convince me that I should believe in a six day creation, I have been given recycled Protestant arguments, and for the moment the entire conversation has seemed like I was talking with a Protestant fundamentalist dressed up in Orthodox clothing. And if the other person claims to understand scientific data better than scientists who believe an old earth, and show that the scientific data instead support a *young* earth, this is a major red flag.

Now at least some Orthodox heirarchs have refused to decide for the faithful under their care what the faithful may believe: the faithful may be

expected to believe God's hand was at work, but between young earth creationism, old earth creationism, and "God created life through evolution", or any other options, the heirarchs do not intervene. I am an old earth creationist; I came to my present beliefs on "How did different life forms appear?" before becoming Orthodox, and I have called them into a question a few times but not yet found reason to revise them, either into young earth creation or theistic evolution. I would characterize my beliefs, after being reconsidered, as "not changed", *and not* "decisively confirmed": what I would suggest has improved in my beliefs is that I have become less interested in some Western fascinations, such as getting right the details of how the world was created, moving instead to what might be called "mystical theology" or "practical theology", and walking the Orthodox Way.

There is something that concerns me about Orthodox arguing young earth creationism like a Protestant fundamentalist. Is it that I think they are wrong about how the world came to be? *That is not the point*. If they are wrong about that, they are wrong in the company of excellent saints. If they merely hold another position in a dispute, that is one thing, but bringing Protestant fundamentalism into the Orthodox Church reaches beyond one position in a dispute. Perhaps I shouldn't be talking because I reached my present position before entering the Orthodox Church; or rather I haven't exactly *reversed* my position but de-emphasized it and woken up to the fact that there are bigger things out there. But I am concerned when I'm talking with an Orthodox Christian, and *every single time* someone tries to convince me of a young earth creationism, all of the sudden it seems like I'm not dealing with an Orthodox Christian any more, but with a Protestant fundamentalist who always includes arguments that came from Protestant fundamentalism. And what concerns me is an issue of *practical* theology. Believing in a six day creation is one thing. Believing in a six day creation like a Protestant fundamentalist is another matter *entirely*.

## A telling, telling line in the sand

But, you may say, Genesis 1 and some important Fathers said six days, literally. True enough, but may ask a counterquestion?

Are we obligated to believe that our bodies are composed of earth, air, fire and water, and not of molecules and atoms including carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen?

If that question seems to come out of the blue, let me quote St. Basil, *On the Six Days of Creation*, on a precursor to today's understanding of the chemistry of what everyday objects are made of:

Others imagined that atoms, and indivisible bodies, molecules and bonds, form, by their union, the nature of the visible world. Atoms reuniting or separating, produce births and deaths and the most durable bodies only owe their consistency to the strength of their mutual adhesion: a true spider's web woven by these writers who give to heaven, to earth, and to sea so weak an origin and so little consistency! It is because they knew not how to say "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Deceived by their inherent atheism it appeared to them that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and

In reading the Fathers, one encounters claims of a young earth. However, often (if not always) the claim is one among many disputes with Greek philosophers or what have you. To my knowledge there is no patristic text in which a young earth is *the* central claim, let alone even approach being "the article by which the Church stands or falls" (if I may borrow phrasing from Protestant fundamentalist cultural baggage).

that was all was given up to chance.

At this point, belief in his day's closest equivalent to our atoms and molecules is called an absolutely unacceptable "spider's web" that is due to "inherent atheism." Would you call Orthodox Christians who believe in chemistry's molecules and atoms inherent atheists? St. Basil does provide an alternative:

"And the Spirit of God was borne upon the face of the waters."  
Does this spirit mean the diffusion of air? The sacred writer wishes to enumerate to you the elements of the world, to tell you that God created the heavens, the earth, water, and air and that the last was now diffused and in motion; or rather, that which is truer and confirmed by the authority of the ancients, by the Spirit of God, he means the Holy Spirit.

St. Basil rejected atoms and molecules, and believed in elements, not of carbon or hydrogen, but of earth, air, fire, and water. The basic belief is one Orthodoxy understands, and there are sporadic references in liturgical services to the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water, and so far as I know no references to modern chemistry. St. Basil seems clearly enough to endorse a six day creation, and likewise endorses an ancient view of elements while rejecting belief in atoms and molecules as implicit atheism.

Why then do Orthodox who were once Protestant fundamentalists dig their heels in at a literal six day creation and make no expectation that we dismiss chemistry to believe the elements are earth, air, fire, water, and possibly aether? The answer, so far as I can tell, has *nothing whatsoever* to do with Orthodoxy or any Orthodox Christians. It has to do with a line in the sand chosen by Protestants, the same line in the sand described in [Why Young Earthers Aren't Completely Crazy](#), a line in the sand that is understandable and was an attempt to address quite serious concerns, but still should not be imported from Protestant fundamentalism into Holy Orthodoxy.

## Leaving Western things behind

If you believe in a literal six day creation, it is not my specific wish to convince you to drop that belief. But I would have you drop fundamentalist Protestant "creation science" and its efforts to prove a young earth scientifically and show that it can interpret scientific findings better than the mainstream scientific community. And I would have you leave Western preoccupations behind. Perhaps you might believe St. Basil was right about six literal days. For that matter, you could believe he was right about rejecting atoms and molecules in favor of earth, air, fire, and water—or at least recognize that St. Basil makes *other* claims *besides* six literal days. But you might realize that really there are much more important things in the faith. Like how faith plays out in practice.

The fundamentalist idea of conversion is like flipping a light switch: one moment, a room is dark, then in an instant it is full of light. The Orthodox understanding is of *transformation*: discovering Orthodoxy is the work of a lifetime, and perhaps once a year there is a "falling off a cliff" experience where you realize you've missed something big about Orthodoxy, and you need to grow in that newly discovered dimension. Orthodoxy is not just the ideas and enthusiasm we have when we first come into the Church; there are big things we could never dream of and big things we could never consider we needed to repent of. And I would rather pointedly suggest that if a new convert's understanding of Orthodoxy is imperfect, much less of Orthodoxy can be understood from reading Protestant attacks on it. One of the basic lessons in Orthodoxy is that you understand Orthodoxy by walking the Orthodox Way, by attending the services and living a transformed life, and not by reading books. And if this goes for books written by Orthodox saints, it goes all

the more for Protestant fundamentalist books attacking Orthodoxy.

Science won't save your soul, but science (like Orthodoxy) is something you understand by years of difficult work. Someone who has done that kind of work might be able to argue effectively that evolution does not account for the fossil record, let alone how the first organism could come to exist: but here I would recall *The Abolition of Man*: "It is Paul, the Pharisee, the man 'perfect as touching the Law' who learns where and how that Law was deficient." Someone who has taken years of effort may rightly criticize evolution for its scientific merits. Someone who has just read fundamentalist Protestant attacks on evolution and tries to evangelize evolutionists and correct their scientific errors *will be just as annoying to an atheist who believes in evolution*, as a fundamentalist who comes to evangelize the unsaved Orthodox and "knows all about Orthodoxy" from polemical works written by other fundamentalists. I would rather pointedly suggest that if you care about secular evolutionists at all, pray for them, but don't set out to untangle their backwards understanding of the science of it all. If you introduce yourself as someone who will straighten out their backwards ideas about science, all you may really end up accomplishing is to push them away.

Conversion is a slow process. And letting go of Protestant approaches to creation may be one of those moments of "falling off a cliff."

# The Damned Backswing

**Kaine:** What do you mean and what is the "damned backswing"?

**Vetus:** Where to start? Are you familiar with category theory?

**Kaine:** I have heard the term; explain.

**Vetus:** Category theory is the name of a branch of mathematics, but on a meta level, so to speak. Algebraists study the things of algebra, and number theorists study the things of number theory—an arrangement that holds almost completely. But category theory studies common patterns in other branches of mathematics, and it is the atypical, rare branch of mathematics that studies all branches of mathematics. And, though this is not to my point exactly, it is abstract and difficult: one list of insults to give to pet languages is that you must understand category theory to write even the simplest of all programs.

The achievements of category theory should ideally be juxtaposed with Bourbaki, the pseudonym of a mathematician or group of mathematicians who tried to systematize all of mathematics. What came out of their efforts is that trying to systematize mathematics is like trying to step on a water balloon and pin it down; mathematicians consider their discipline perhaps the most systematic of disciplines in academia, but the discipline itself cannot be systematized.

But the fact that Bourbaki's work engendered a realization that you cannot completely systematize even the most systematic of disciplines does not mean that there are patterns and trends that one can observe, and the basic insight in category theory is that patterns recur and these patterns are not

category theory is that patterns recur and these patterns are not limited to any one branch of mathematics. Even if it does not represent a total success of doing what Bourbaki tried and failed to do, it is far from a total loss: category theory legitimately observes patterns and trends that transcend the confines of individual subdisciplines in mathematics.

**Kaine:** So the "damned backswing" is like something from category theory, cutting across disciplines?

**Vetus:** Yes.

**Kaine:** And why did you choose the term of a damned backswing?

**Vetus:** Let me comment on something first. C.S. Lewis, in a footnote in [Mere Christianity](#), says that some people complained about his light swearing in referring to certain ideas as "damned nonsense." And he explained that he did not intend to lightly swear at all; he meant that the ideas were incoherent and nonsense, and they and anyone who believed in them were damned or accursed. And I do not intend to swear lightly either; I intend to use the term "damned" in its proper sense. Instead there is a recurring trend, where some seemingly good things have quite the nasty backswing.

**Kaine:** And what would an example be?

**Vetus:** In the U.S., starting in the 1950's there was an incredibly high standard of living; everything seemed to be getting better all the time. And now we are being cut by the backswing: the former great economic prosperity, and the present great and increasing economic meltdown, are cut from the same cloth; they are connected. There was a time of bait, and we sprung for it and are now experiencing the damned backswing.

**Kaine:** So the damned backswing begins with bait of sorts, and ends in misery? In the loss of much more than the former gain? Do you also mean like addiction to alcohol or street drugs?

**Vetus:** Yes, indeed; for a while drinking all the time seems an effective way to solve problems. But that is not the last word. The same goes from rationalism to any number of things.

**Kaine:** Do you see postmodern trends as the backswing of modern rationalism?

**Vetus:** All that and less.

**Kaine:** What do you mean by "and less"?

**Vetus:** The damned backswing did not start with Derrida. The understanding of "reason" that was held before the Enlightenment was a multifaceted thing that meant much more than logic; even as Reason was enthroned (or an actress/prostitute), Reason was pared down to a hollowed-out husk of what reason encompassed in the West before then. It would be like celebrating "cars", but making it clear that when the rubber hits the road, the truly essential part of "a set of wheels" is the *wheel*—and enthroning the wheel while quietly, deftly stripping away the rest of the car, including not just the frame but engine, and seats. The damned backswing of rationalism was already at work in the Enlightenment stripping and enthroning reason. And the damned backswing was already at work in economic boom times in the West, saying that yes, indeed, man *can* live by bread alone.

And perhaps the strongest and most visible facet of the damned backswing occurs in technology. There are other areas: a country erected on freedoms moves towards despotism, just as Plato said in his list of governments, moving from the best to the worst. But in technology, we seem to be able to be so much more, but the matrix of technology we live in is, among other things, a surveillance system, and something we are dependent on, so that we are vulnerable if someone decides to shut things off. Man does not live by bread alone, but it is better for a man to try to live by bread alone than live by SecondWife alone, or any or all the array of technologies and gadgetry. The new reality man has created does not compare to the God-given reality we have spurned to embrace the new, and some have said that the end will come when we no longer make paths to our neighbors because we are entirely engrossed in technology and gadgetry.

**Kaine:** And are there other areas?

**Vetus:** There are other areas; but I would rather not belabor the point. Does this make sense?

**Kaine:** Yes, but may I say something strange?

**Vetus:** Yes.

**Kaine:** I believe in the damned backswing, and in full.

**Vetus:** You're not telling me something.

**Kaine:** I believe in the damned backswing, but I do not believe that [the fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge](#).

**Vetus:** What? Do you mean that you partly believe in the damned backswing, and partly not? Do you believe in the damned backswing "is true, from a certain point of view"?

**Kaine:** I understand your concern but I reject the practice of agreeing with everyone to make them feel better. If I believed in the damned backswing up to a point, I would call it such.

**Vetus:** How do you believe it, if you reject that [the fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge](#)?

**Kaine:** Let me ask: do Calvinists believe in the Sovereignty of God?

**Vetus:** Is the Pope Catholic? (I mean besides John XXIII.)

**Kaine:** Let me suggest that the Reformed view of Divine Sovereignty could go further than it actually does.

**Vetus:** How? They are the most adamant advocates of Divine Sovereignty, and write books like [No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism](#).

**Kaine:** There's an awfully strong clue in the title.

**Vetus:** That the author believes so strongly in the Divine Sovereignty that he cannot countenance creaturely freedom?

**Kaine:** Not quite.

**Vetus:** Then what is the clue? I don't want to guess.

**Kaine:** The clue is that the author believes in the Divine Sovereignty so weakly that he cannot countenance creaturely freedom, and that if there is one iota of creaturely freedom, there is not one iota of Divine Sovereignty.

His is a fragile Divine Sovereignty, when in actual fact God's Sovereignty is absolute, with the last word after every exercise of creaturely freedom. There is no exercise of freedom you can make that will impede the exercise of the Divine Sovereignty.

**Vetus:** I could sin. In fact, I *do* sin, and I keep on sinning.

**Kaine:** Yes, but God is still Sovereign and can have the last word where there is sin. To get back to Lewis for a second, "All of us, either willingly or unwillingly, do the will of God: Satan and Judas as tools or instruments, John and Peter as sons." The Divine Sovereignty is the Alpha and the Omega, the Founder of

the beginning, and works in and through all: "even Gollum may have something yet to do."

**Vetus:** But what?

**Kaine:** "But what?", you ask?

For starters, there is Christmas. Good slips in unnoticed. God slips in unnoticed. True, it will become one of the most celebrated holidays in the Western world, and true, the Western world will undertake the nonsensical task of keeping a warm, fuzzy Christmas without Christ or Christmas mentioned once. But us lay aside both Christian bloggers speaking in defense of a secularized Christmas, and bloggers telling retailers, "You need Christmas, but Christmas doesn't need you." You speak of the damned backswing coming from an unexpected place; this is nothing next to God slipping in unnoticed.

There will be a time when God will be noticed by all. At the first Christmas, angel hosts announced good news to a few shepherds. When Christ returns, he will be seen by all, riding on the clouds with rank upon rank of angels. At the first Christmas, a lone star heralded it to the Magi. When he returns, the sky will recede as a vanishing scroll. At the first Christmas, a few knees bowed. When he returns, every knee will bow. And the seed for this victory is planted in Christmas.

And the same seeds of glory are quietly planted in our lives. You are not wrong to see the damned backswing and see that it is real: but one would be wrong to see it and think it is most real. Open one eye, and you may see the damned backswing at work. Open both eyes wide, and you may see [God at work, changing the game.](#)

And God will work a new thing in you. Not, perhaps, by taking you out of your sufferings or other things that you may pray for; that is at his good pleasure. But you have heard the saying, "We want God to change our circumstances. God wants to use our circumstances to change us." Whole worlds open up with forgiveness, or repentance, or any virtue. If you are moulded as clay in the potter's hands, unsought goods come along the way. [The best things in life are free,](#) and what is hard to understand is that this is not just a friend's smile, but

suffering persecution for the sake of Christ. It was spiritual eyes wide open that left the apostles [rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame \[and violence\] for Christ's name. And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."](#) Also he said, ["Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."](#) This newness begins here and now, and it comes when in circumstances we would not choose God works to give us a larger share in the real world. We enter a larger world, or rather we become larger ourselves and more able to take in God's reality. And all of this is like the first Christmas, a new thing and unexpected. We are summoned and do not dare disobey: [Sing unto the LORD a new song; sing unto the LORD all the earth.](#) And it is this whole world with angels, butterflies, the Church, dandylions, energetic work, friends, family, and forgiveness, the Gospel, holiness, the I that God has made, jewels, [kairos](#), love, mothers, newborn babes, ostriches, preaching, repentance from sins, singing, technology, unquestioning obedience, variety, wit and wisdom, xylophones, youth and age, and zebras.

The damned backswing is only a weak parody of the power of [God the Gamechanger.](#)

**Dark Patterns /  
Anti-patterns and  
Cultural Context  
Study of Scriptural  
Texts:**

**A Case Study in Craig  
Keener's *Paul, Women, and  
Wives: Marriage and Women's  
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## **Abstract**

The author suggests how the concept of 'patterns' in architecture and computer science, or more specifically 'dark patterns' / 'anti-patterns', may provide a helpful vehicle to explicitly communicate tacit knowledge concerning problematic thought. The author also provides a pilot study which seeks to provide a sample analysis identifying indicators for the 'surprising cultural find' pattern in which cultural context is misused to explain away offending Bible passages.

# Introduction to Patterns, Dark Patterns, and Anti- patterns

The technical concept of *pattern* is used in architecture and computer science, and the synonymous *dark patterns* and *anti-patterns* refer to patterns that are not recurring best practices so much as recurring pathologies; my encounter with them has been as a computer programmer in connection with the book nicknamed 'GoF' [\[1\]](#). Patterns do not directly provide new knowledge about how to program; what they do provide is a way to take knowledge that expert practitioners share on a tacit level, and enable them both to discuss this knowledge amongst themselves and effectively communicate it to novice programmers. It is my belief that the concept is useful to Biblical studies in providing a way to discuss knowledge that is also held on a tacit level and is also beneficial to be able to discuss explicitly, and furthermore that dark patterns or anti-patterns bear direct relevance. I hope to give a brief summary of the concept of patterns, explaining their application to Biblical studies, then give a pilot study exploring one pattern, before some closing remarks.

Each pattern consists of a threefold rule, describing:

1. A context.
2. A set of forces within that context.
3. A resolution to those forces.

In the contexts of architecture and computer science, patterns are used to describe best practices which keep recurring and which embody a certain 'quality without a name'. I wish to make a different application, to identifying and describing certain recurring problematic ways of thought in Biblical or theological inquiry which may be understood as dark

... pattern of theological inquiry which may be understood as dark patterns, which often seem to be interlaced with sophistry and logical fallacy.

Two examples of what a dark pattern, or anti-pattern might be are the *consolation prize*, and the *surprising cultural find*. I would suggest that the following provide instances of the consolation prize: discussion of a spiritual resurrection, flowering words about the poetic truth of Genesis 1, and Calvin's eucharistic theology. If you speak of a spiritual resurrection that occurs instead of physical resurrection, you can draw Christians far more effectively than if you plainly say, 'I do not believe in Christ's physical resurrection.' The positive doctrine that is presented is a consolation prize meant to keep the audience from noticing what has been taken away. The context includes a text that (taken literally) a party wants to dismiss. The forces include the fact that Christians are normally hesitant to dismiss Scripture, and believe that insights can give them a changed and deepened understanding. The resolution is to dress up the dismissal of Scripture as a striking insight. Like other patterns, this need not be all reasoned out consciously; I suggest, via a quasi-Darwinian/meme propagation mechanism, that dismissals of Scripture that follow some such pattern are more likely to work (and therefore be encountered) than i.e. a dismissal of Scripture that is not merely undisguised but offensive.

In the surprising cultural find, a meticulous study is made of a passage's cultural context to find some basis to neutralise the passage so that its apparent meaning does not apply to us. The context is similar to that of the consolation prize, if more specific to a contemporary Western cultural setting. The forces, beyond those mentioned for the consolation prize, include ramifications of period awareness and the Standard Social Science Model: there is a very strong sense of how culture and period can influence people, and they readily believe claims about long ago and far away that which would seem fishy if said about people of our time and place. The resolution is to use the passage's cultural setting to produce disinformation: the fruits of careful scholarly research have turned up a surprising cultural find and the passage's apparent meaning does not apply to us. The passage may be presented, for instance, to mean something quite different from what it appears to mean, or to address a specific historical situation in a way that clearly does not apply to us.

It is the dark pattern of the surprising cultural find that I wish to

investigate as a pilot case study in this thesis.

# Case Study

## Opening Comments

The aim of this case study is to provide a pilot study of how the surprising cultural find may be identified as a dark pattern. In so doing, I analyse one sample text closely, with reference to comparison texts when helpful.

I use the terms *yielding* to refer to analysis from scholars who presumably have interests but allow the text to contradict them, and *unyielding* to refer to analysis that will not allow the text to contradict the scholar's interests. Yielding analysis does not embody the surprising cultural find dark pattern, while unyielding analysis does. I consider the boundary to be encapsulated by the question, 'Is the text allowed to say "No!" to a proposed position?'

Ideally, one would compare two scholarly treatments that are alike in every fashion save that one is yielding and the other is unyielding. Finding a comparison text, I believe, is difficult because I was searching for a yielding text with the attributes of one that was unyielding. Lacking a perfect pair, I chose Peter T. O'Brien's *The Letter to the Ephesians*[\[2\]](#) and Bonnie Thurston's *Reading Colossians, Ephesians & 2 Thessalonians: A Literary and Theological Commentary*[\[3\]](#) to represent yielding analysis and Craig Keener's *Paul, Women, Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* [\[4\]](#) to represent unyielding analysis. I was interested in treatment of [Ephesians 5:21-33](#). When I use Biblical references without a book, I will always be referring to Ephesians. All three of secondary sources present themselves as making the fruits of scholarly research accessible to the layperson. O'Brien provides an in-depth, nonfeminist commentary. Thurston provides a concise, feminist commentary. Keener provides an in-depth, Biblical Egalitarian

monograph. Unfortunately, the ordered copy of Thurston did not arrive before external circumstances precluded the incorporation of new materials (and may have been misidentified, meaning that my advisor and I both failed after extensive searching to find a yielding feminist or egalitarian treatment of the text). My study is focused on Keener with comparison to O'Brien where expedient.

There seems to be an interconnected web of distinguishing features to these dark patterns, laced with carefully woven sophistry, and there are several dimensions on which a text may be examined. The common-sense assumption that these features are all independent of each other seems to be debatable. One example of this lack of independence is the assumption that what an author believes is independent of whether the analysis is yielding: the suboptimal comparison texts were selected partly because of the difficulty a leading Christians for Biblical Equality scholar and I experienced trying to locate yielding feminist analyses other than Thurston in Tyndale's library. I do not attempt to seriously investigate the interconnections, beyond commenting that features seem interconnected and less independent of each other than most scholars would assume by default.

The substance of my inquiry focuses on observable attributes of the text. I believe that before that point, observing a combination of factors may provide cues. I will mention these factors, but not develop them; there are probably others:

- Is the book a monograph organised around one of today's hot issues, or e.g. a commentary organised around the contents of a Biblical text?
- If you just open the book to its introduction, do you meet forceful persuasion? Are those first pages written purely to persuade, or do they attempt other endeavours (e.g. give factual or theoretical background that is not especially polemical)? What is the approach to persuasion?
- Does the book contain anything besides cultural arguments finding that Biblical texts which apparently contradict the author's camp need not be interpreted that way?
- How much does the author appear able to question our Zeitgeist (in a direction other than a more thorough development of assumptions

in our Zeitgeist)?

- What, in general, does the publisher try to do? The publisher is not the author, but publishers have specific aims and goals. It would seem to require explanation to say that a company indiscriminately publishes yielding and unyielding analysis because both resonate equally well with its editorial climate.

There will be a decided imbalance between attention paid to Keener and O'Brien. Part of this is due to external constraints, and part is due to a difference between O'Brien and Keener. With one major exception, described shortly, O'Brien's analysis doesn't run afoul of the concern I am exploring. If I were writing cultural commentary for my texts as Keener and O'Brien write cultural commentary for their texts, I would ideally spend as much time explaining the backgrounds to what Keener and O'Brien said. I believe they are both thinkers who were shaped by, draw on, and are critical of their cultures and subcultures. Explaining what they said, as illuminated by their context, would require parity in treatment. However, I do not elaborate their teachings set in context, but explore a problem that is far more present in Keener than in O'Brien or Thurston. I have more of substance to say about how Keener exhibits a problem than how O'Brien doesn't. As such, after describing a problem, I might give a footnote reference to a passage in O'Brien which shows *some* analogy without seeming to exhibit the problem under discussion, but I will not systematically attempt to make references to O'Brien's yielding analysis as wordy as explanations of Keener's unyielding analysis.

The one significant example of unyielding analysis noted in O'Brien is in the comment on 5:21: O'Brien notes that reciprocal submission is not enjoined elsewhere in the Bible, points out that 'allelous' occurs in some contexts that do not lend themselves to reciprocal reading ('so that men should slay one another'[\[5\]](#)), and concludes that 'Believers, submit to one another,' means only that lower-status Christians should submit to those placed above them. This is as problematic as other instances of unyielding analysis, and arguably more disturbing as it lacks some of the common indicators alerting the careful reader to be suspicious. There is a point of contact between this treatment and Keener's: both assume that 5:21 and 5:22-6:9 are not merely connected but are saying the same thing, and it is one thing only. It is assumed that the text cannot enjoin of

us both symmetrical and asymmetrical submission, so one must be the *real* commandment, and the other is explained away. Both Keener and O'Brien end up claiming that something is commanded in 5:21 with clarificatory examples following, without asserting that either 5:21 or 5:22-6:9 says something substantively different from the other about submission. I will not further analyse this passage beyond this mention: I consider it a clear example of unyielding analysis. This is the one part of O'Brien I have read of which I would not say, '...and this is an example of analogous concerns addressed by yielding scholarship.'

The introductions to O'Brien and Keener provided valuable cues as to the tone subsequently taken by the texts. Both are written to persuade a claim that some of their audience rejects, but the divergence in how they seek to persuade is significant. Keener's introduction is written to persuade the reader of Biblical Egalitarianism: in other words, of a position on one of today's current issues. The beginning of O'Brien's introduction tries to persuade the reader of Pauline authorship for Ephesians, which they acknowledge to be an unusual position among scholars today; the introduction is not in any direct sense about today's issues. O'Brien's introduction is written both to persuade and introduce the reader to scholarly perspectives on background; while nontechnical, it is factually dense and heavy with footnotes. Keener's introduction seems to be written purely to persuade: he give statistics<sup>[6]</sup> concerning recent treatment of women which are highly emotionally charged, no attempt being made to connect them to the text or setting of the Pauline letters. Keener's introduction uses emotion to bypass rationality, using loaded language and various other forms of questionable persuasion explored below; a naive reader first encountering this debate in Keener's introduction could well wonder how any compassionate person could be in the other camp. O'Brien works to paint a balanced picture, and gives a fair account of the opposing view before explaining why he considers it inadequate. O'Brien seeks to persuade through logical argument, and his book's pages persuade (or fail to persuade) as the reader finds his arguments to be sufficient (or insufficient) reason to accept its conclusions.

## **Emotional Disinformation**

Among the potential indicators found in Keener, the first broad heading I found could be described as *factual disinformation* and *emotional disinformation*. 'Disinformation', as used in military intelligence ordinarily denotes deception through careful presentation of true details; I distinguish 'factual disinformation' (close to 'disinformation' traditionally understood) from 'emotional disinformation', which is disinformation that acts on emotional and compassionate judgment as factual disinformation acts on factual judgment. While conceptually distinct, they seem tightly woven in the text, and I do not attempt to separate them.

## **An Emotional Plea**

One distinguishing feature of Keener's introduction is that it closes off straightforward rebuttal. Unlike O'Brien, he tries to establish not only the content of debate but the terms of debate itself, and once Keener has established the terms of debate, it is difficult or impossible to argue the opposing view from within those terms. Rebuttal is possible, of course, but here it would seem to require pushing the discussion back one notch in the meta-level hierarchy and arguing at much greater length. O'Brien seems more than fair in his style of argument; Keener loads the dice before his reader knows what is going on.

One passage is worth citing for close study [\[7\]](#):

There are issues where most Biblically conservative Christians, including myself, disagree with prominent elements of the feminist movement... But there are other concerns which nearly all Christians, including myself, and nearly the whole women's movement plainly share....

[Approximately two pages of alarming claims and statistics, including:] ...Although "bride-burning" is now illegal in India, it still happens frequently; a bride whose dowry is insufficient may be burned to death so that her husband can find a new partner. There is no investigation, of course, because it is said that she simply poured cooking oil over herself and set herself on fire accidentally.... A Rhode Island Rape Crisis Center study of 1700 teenagers, cited in a 1990 InterVarsity magazine, reported that 65% of the boys and 47% of the girls in sixth through ninth grades say that a man may force a

of the girls in sixth through ninth grades say that a man may force a woman to have sex with him if they've been dating for more than six months.... Wife-beating seems to have been a well-established practice in many patriarchal families of the 1800's....

But while some Christians may once have been content to cite proof-texts about women's subordination to justify ignoring this sort of oppression, virtually all of us would today recognise that oppression and exploitation of any sort are sinful violations of Jesus's commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves and to love fellow-Christians as Christ loved us. [Keener goes on to later conclude that we must choose between a feminist conception of equality and an un-Christian version of subordination.]

The text starts by presenting Keener as Biblically conservative, moves to a heart-wrenching list of wrongs against women, implicitly conflates nonfeminist Christians with those who condone rape and murder, and presents a choice crystallising the fallacy of the excluded middle that had been lurking in prior words. It has more than one attribute of emotional disinformation.

Keener both identifies himself as Biblically conservative and says that, among some Christians, the egalitarian position is the conservative one (contrast chapter 4, where 'conservative' means a reactionary misogynist). Why? People are more likely to listen to someone who is perceivedly of the same camp, and falsely claiming membership in your target's camp is a tool of deceptive persuasion.

The recitation of statistics is interesting for several reasons.

On a strictly logical level, it is a non sequitur. It has no direct logical bearing on either camp; even its rhetorical position assumes that conservative, as well as liberal, members of his audience believe that rape and murder are atrocities. This is a logical non sequitur, chosen for its emotional force and what impact that emotional recoil will have on susceptibility. The trusting reader will recoil from the oppression listed and be less guarded when Keener provides his way to oppose such oppression. The natural response to such a revolting account is to say, 'I'm not that! I'm the opposite!' and embrace what is offered when the fallacy of the excluded middle is made explicit, in the choice Keener later presents.

Once a presentation of injustice has aroused compassion to

indignation, most people do not use their full critical faculties: they want to right a wrong, not sit and analyse. This means that a powerful account of injustice (with your claims presented as a way to fight the injustice) is a powerful way to get people to accept claims that would be rejected if presented on their logical merits. Keener's 'of course' is particularly significant; he builds the reader's sense of outrage by adding 'of course' with a (carefully studied but) seemingly casual manner. It is not obvious to a Western reader that a bride's murder would be left uninvestigated; adding 'of course' gives nothing to Keener's logical case but adds significantly to the emotional effect Keener seeks, more effectively and more manipulatively than were he to visibly write those words from outrage.

The sentence about proof-texts and loving one's neighbour is of particular interest. On a logical level, it is restrained and cannot really be attacked. The persuasive and emotional force—distinct from what is logically present—is closer to, 'Accepting those proof-texts is equivalent to supporting such oppression; following the Law of Love contradicts both.'

This is one instance of a broader phenomenon: a gap between what the author *entails* and *implicates*. Both 'entail' and 'implicate' are similar in meaning to 'imply', but illustrate opposite sides of a distinction. What a text *entails* is what is implied by the text in a strictly logical sense; what a text *implicates* is what is implied in the sense of what it leads the reader to believe. What is implicated includes what is entailed, and may often include other things. The entailed content of 'But while some Christians...' is modest and does not particularly advance a discussion of egalitarianism. The implicated content is much more significant; it takes a logically tight reading to recognise that the text does not entail a conflation claiming that nonfeminist Christians condone rape and murder. The text implicates much more than it entails, and I believe that this combination of restricted entailment with far-reaching implication is a valuable cue. *It can be highly informative to read a text with an eye to the gap between what is entailed and what is implicated.* The gap between entailment and implicature seemed noticeably more pronounced in Keener than in yielding materials I have read, including O'Brien. Another example of a gap between entailment and implicature is found close [\[8\]](#), '...the secular generalization that Christians (both men and

women) who respect the Bible oppose women's rights is an inaccurate caricature of these Christians' admits a similar analysis: the entailment is almost unassailable, while the implicature establishes in the reader's mind that the conservative position is excisable from respect for the Bible, and that the nonfeminist position denies something basic to women that they should have. The term 'women's rights' is by entailment the sort of thing one would not want to oppose, and by implicature a shorthand for 'women's rights as understood and interpreted along feminist lines'. As well as showing a significant difference between entailment and implicature, this provides an example of a text which closes off the most obvious means of rebuttal, another rhetorical trait which may be produced by the same mindset as produces unyielding analysis.

What is left out of the cited text is also significant. The statistics given are incomplete (they focus on profound ways in which women suffer so the reader will not think of profound ways in which men suffer) but as far as describing principles to discriminate yielding versus unyielding analysis, this seems to be privileged information. I don't see a way to let a reader compare the text as if there were a complementary account written in the margin. Also, a careful reading of the text may reveal a Biblical nonfeminist position as the middle fallaciously excluded earlier, in which sexual distinction exists on some basis *other* than violence. All texts we are interested in—yielding or unyielding—must stop somewhere, but it is possible to exclude data that should have been included and try to conceal its absence. Lacunae that seem to have been chosen for persuasion rather than limitation of scope may signal unyielding analysis.

## Further Examples

In a discussion<sup>[9]</sup> of the *haustafel's* ([Ephesians 5:21 and following](#)<sup>[10]</sup>) injunction that the husband love his wife based on Christ's love for the Church, Keener says, 'Indeed, Christ's love is explicitly defined in this passage in terms of self-sacrificial service, not in terms of his authority.' The passage does not mention that self-sacrificial service is a defining feature of Christ's model of authority, and in these pages the impression is created that the belief in servant love is a Biblical Egalitarian distinctive, so that the reader might be surprised to find the conservative

O'Brien saying<sup>[11]</sup>:

...Paul does not here, or anywhere else for that matter, exhort husbands to rule over their wives. They are nowhere told, 'Exercise your headship!' Instead, they are urged repeatedly to love their wives (vv. 25, 28, and 33). This will involve each husband showing unceasing care and loving service for his wife's entire well-being...

O'Brien is emphatic that husbands must love their wives; examples could easily be multiplied. Keener argues for loving servanthood as if it were a claim which his opponents rejected. The trusting reader will believe that nonfeminists believe in submission and egalitarians alone recognise that Paul calls husbands to servant love. I believe that this selective fact-telling is one of the more foundational indicators: some factual claims will be out of a given reader's competence to evaluate, but so far as a reader can evaluate whether a fair picture is presented, the presence or absence of selective fact-telling may help.

Chapter 4 is interesting in that there are several thoughts that are very effectively conveyed without being explicitly stated. The account of 'conservatives' (i.e. misogynistic reactionaries) is never explicitly stated to apply to Christians who disagree with Keener, but works in a similar fashion (and for similar reasons) to the 'Green Book' which introduces the first major argument in [The Abolition of Man.](#)<sup>[12]</sup> By the same mechanism as the Green Book leads the reader to believe that claims about the outer world are in fact only claims about ourselves, not the slightest obstacle is placed to the reader believing that Keener exposes the true nature of 'conservatism', and that the picture of Graeco-Roman conservatism portrayed is a picture of *conservatism*, period, as true of conservatism today as ever.

A smaller signal may be found in that Keener investigates inconvenient verses in a way that never occurs for convenient ones. Keener explores the text, meaning, and setting to 5:22-33 in a way that never occurs for 5:21; a careless reader may get the impression that 5:21 doesn't *have* a cultural setting.

## **Drawing on Privileged Information**

I would next like to outline a difference between men's and women's communication, state what Keener's Roman conservatives did with this, and state what Keener did with the Roman conservatives. One apparent gender difference in communication is that when a woman makes a claim, it is relatively likely to mean, 'I am in the process of thinking and here is where I am now,' while a man's claim is more likely to mean, 'I have thought. I have come to a conclusion. Here is my conclusion.' Without mentioning caveats, there is room for *considerable* friction when men assume that women are stating conclusions and women assume that men are giving the current state of a developing thought. The conservatives described by Keener seem frustrated by this friction; Keener quotes Josephus [\[13\]](#):

Put not trust in a single witness, but let there be three or at least two, whose evidence shall be accredited by their past lives. From women let no evidence be accepted, because of the levity and temerity of their sex; neither let slaves bear witness, because of the baseness of their soul.

This passage is introduced, "...regards the prohibition of women's testimony as part of God's law, based in the moral inferiority inherent in their gender." The reader is not likely to question whether it's *purely* misogyny for a man (frustrated by women apparently showing levity by changing their minds frequently) to find this perceived mutability a real reason why these people should not be relied on as witnesses when someone's life may be at stake. Keener has been working to portray conservatives as misogynistic. Two pages earlier[\[14\]](#), he tells us,

An early Jewish teacher whose work was undoubtedly known to Paul advised men not to sit among women, because evil comes from them like a moth emerging from clothes. A man's evil, this teacher went on to complain, is better than a woman's good, for she brings only shame and reproach.

This, and other examples which could be multiplied, deal with something crystallised on the previous page[\[15\]](#). Keener writes,

Earlier philosophers were credited with a prayer of gratitude that

they were not born women, and a century after Paul a Stoic emperor could differentiate a women's soul from that of a man.

The moral of this story is that believing in nonphysical differences between men and women is tantamount to misogyny. This is a highly significant claim, given that the questions of women's ordination and headship in marriage are largely epiphenomenal to the question of whether we are created masculine and feminine at every level of our being, or ontologically neuter spirits in reproductively differentiated bodies. Keener produces a conclusion (i.e. that the human spirit is neuter) *without ever stating it or drawing the reader to consciously consider* whether this claim should be believed. In a text that is consistently polite, the opposing view is not merely negated but vilified: to hold this view (it is portrayed) is tantamount to taking a view of women which is extraordinarily reprehensible. Either of these traits may signal unyielding analysis; I believe the combination is particularly significant.

## **Tacit and Overt Communication**

Although the full import of tacit versus overt communication is well beyond my competency to address, I would like to suggest something that merits further study.[\[16\]](#) Keener seemed, to a significant degree, to:

- *Tacitly convey most of his important points, without stating them explicitly.*
- *Present claims so the opposing view is never considered.*
- *Build up background assumptions which will produce the desired conclusions, more than give explicit arguments.*
- *Work by manipulating background assumptions, often provided by the reader's culture.*

As an example of this kind of tacit communication, I would indicate two myths worked with in the introduction and subsequently implied. By 'myth' I do not specifically mean 'widespread misconception', but am using a semiotic term comparable in meaning to 'paradigm': '[M]yths act as scanning devices of a society's *'possibles'* and *'pensables'*' [\[17\]](#). The two myths are:

- *Men are powerful and violent aggressors, whilst women are powerless and innocent victims.* The alarming claims and statistics[18] mention aggression against men only in the most incidental fashion.
- *The accurate spokesperson for women's interests is the feminist movement.* Keener diminishes this myth's force by disclaiming support for abortion (and presenting a pro-choice stance as separable from other feminist claims), but (even when decrying prenatal discrimination in sex-selective abortion[19]) Keener refers to the feminist movement interchangeably as 'the feminist movement'[20] and 'the women's movement'[21], and does not lead the reader to consider that one could speak for women's interests by contradicting feminism, or question the *a priori* identification of women's interests with the content of feminist claims.

## Argument Structure

As well as the emotional disinformation explored in many of the examples above, there are several points where the nature of the argument is of interest. Five argument-like features are explored:

- Verses which help our position are principles that apply across all time; verses which contradict our position were written to address specific issues in a specific historical context.
- X had beneficial effect Y; X was therefore purely instrumental to Y, and we may remove X if we no longer require X as an instrument to Y.
- The absolute position taken in this passage addresses a specific historical idiosyncrasy, but the relative difference between this passage and its surroundings is a timeless principle across all times.
- If X resonates with a passage's cultural context, then X need not be seen as part of the Bible's revelation.
- We draw the lines of equivalence in the following manner...

'Verses which help our position are principles that apply across all time; verses which contradict our position were written to address specific issues in a specific historical context' is less an argument than an

emergent property. It's not argued; the text just turns out that way. Keener gives a diplomatically stated reason why Paul wrote the parts of 5:22-6:9 he focuses on: 'Paul was very smart.'[\[22\]](#) The subsequent argument states that Paul wrote in a context where Christians behaving conservatively would diminish he perceived threat to social conservatives. Keener writes[\[23\]](#), 'Paul is responding to a specific cultural issue for the sake of the Gospel, and his words should not be taken at face value in all cultures.' There is a fallacy which seems to be behind this argument in Keener: being timeless principles and being historically prompted are non-overlapping categories, so finding a historical prompt suffices to demonstrate that material in question does not display a timeless principle.

'X had beneficial effect Y; X was therefore purely instrumental to Y, and we may remove X if we no longer require X as an instrument to Y.' Keener argues[\[24\]](#) that the [haustafel](#) mitigated prejudice against Christianity, which is presented as a reason why we need not observe the [haustafel](#) if we do not perceive need for that apologetic concern.

'The absolute position taken in this passage addresses a specific historical idiosyncrasy, but the relative difference between this passage and its surroundings is a timeless principle across all times.' A text embodies both an absolute position *in se*, and a relative difference by how it is similar to and different from its surrounding cultural mainstream. 5:22-33 requires submission of wives and love of husbands; that absolute position can be understood with little study of context, while the relative difference showed both a continuity with Aristotelian haustafels and a difference by according women a high place that was unusual in its setting. The direction of Keener's argument is to say explicitly[\[25\]](#) that the verses should not be taken at face value, and to implicitly clarify that the absolute position should not be taken at face value, but *part* of the relative position, namely the sense in which Paul was much more feminist-like than his setting ('[A quote from Plutarch] is one of the most "progressive" social models in Paul's day... It is most natural to read Paul as making a much more radical statement than Plutarch, both because of what Paul says and because of what he does not say,'[\[26\]](#)) is a timeless principle that should apply in our day as well as Paul's. Without proper explanation of why the relative difference should be seen as absolute, given that the absolute position is idiosyncratic, the impression is

strongly conveyed that respecting Paul's spirit means transposing his absolute position so that a similar relative difference exists with relation to our setting.

'If X resonates with a passage's cultural context, then X need not be seen as part of the Bible's revelation.' This is often interwoven with the previous two arguments. Apart from showing a feminist-like relative difference, Keener works to establish that Paul used a *haustafel* in a way that reduced Christianity's perceived threat to conservatives. This is presented as establishing that therefore wives are not divinely commanded to submit.

'We draw equivalences in the following manner...' This is not a single argument so much as an attribute of arguments; I believe that what is presented as equivalent can be significant. In the autobiographical comments in the introduction, Keener writes<sup>[27]</sup>:

"But it's part of the Bible!" I protested. "If you throw this part out, you have to throw everything else out, too." I cannot recall anyone having a good response to my objection, but even as a freshman I knew very well that if I were consistent in my stance against using culture to interpret the Bible, I would have to advocate women's head coverings in church, the practice of holy kisses, and parentally arranged marriages.

What Keener has been arguing is not just the relevance of culture but the implicit necessity of a piecemeal hermeneutic. The implication (beyond an excluded middle) is that using culture to argue a piecemeal, feminist modification to Paul is the same sort of thing as not literally practicing the holy kiss.<sup>[28]</sup> The sixth of seven chapters, after emotionally railing against slavery, argues that retaining the institution of marriage while excising one dimension is the same sort of thing as abolishing the institution of slavery; 'The Obedience of Children: A Better Model?'<sup>[29]</sup> explicitly rejects the claim that marriage is more like parenthood than owning slaves. While no comparison is perfect, I believe that these are examples of comparisons where it is illuminating to see what the author portrays as equivalent.

In some cases, the argument types I have described are not things which must be wrong, but things which lack justification. The claim that

an absolute position is parochial but the relative difference is timeless is not a claim I consider to be unjustifiable, but it is a claim which I believe *requires* justification, a justification which is not necessarily provided.

In my own experience at least, this kind of argument is not purely the idiosyncrasy of one book. The idea this thesis is based on occurred to me after certain kinds of arguments recurred. Certain dark patterns, or anti-patterns, came up in different contexts like a broken record that kept on making its sound. I'm not sure how many times I had seen instances of 'X had beneficial effect Y; X was therefore purely instrumental to Y, and we may remove X if we no longer require X as an instrument to Y,' but I did *not* first meet that argument in Keener. These arguments represent fallacies of a more specialised nature than *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* ("after the fact, therefore because of the fact") or *argumentum ad ignorantiam* ("appeal to ignorance"). I believe that they allow a persuasive, rational-seeming argument of a conclusion not yet justified on logical terms. The experience that led to the formation of my thesis was partly from repeatedly encountering such fallacies in surprising cultural find arguments.

## Conclusion

I have tried to provide a pilot study identifying indicators of unyielding analysis. These indicators are not logically tied in the sense of 'Here's something which, on logical terms, can only indicate unyielding analysis.' The unyielding analysis I have met, before and in Keener, has been constructed with enough care to logic that I don't start by looking at logic. There are other things which are not of logical necessity required by unyielding analysis, but which seem to be produced by the same mindset. I have encountered these things both in the chosen text and in repeated previous experiences which first set me thinking along these lines.

At a fairly basic level, the case study is a study of a cultural dimension of communication. I believe that portions of this pilot study may be deepened by the insights of scholars from humanities which study human culture and communication. I believe that some of my remarks would be improved by a serious attempt to connect them with high-context and low-context communication as studied in anthropology. If I am doing a pilot study that cannot provide much of any firm answers, I do hope to suggest fruitful lines of inquiry and identify deep questions which for which interdisciplinary study could be quite fruitful.

It is unfortunate that my control text made little use of emotion. I believe my case study would have been better rounded, had I been able to contrast emotion subverting logic in Keener with emotion complementing logic in the control text. As it is, the case study lends itself to an unfortunate reading of "logic is good and emotion is bad", and gives the impression that I consider the bounds of legitimate persuasion to simply be those of logic.

On a broader scale, it is my hope that this may serve not only as a pilot study regarding unyielding analysis but a tentative introduction of a modified concept of 'pattern', or rather 'dark pattern' or 'anti-pattern' in

theology. The concept of pattern was introduced by the architect Christopher Alexander and is sufficiently flexible to be recognised as powerful in computer science. I believe there are other patterns that can be helpful, and I would suggest that books like Alexander's *The Timeless Way of Building*[\[30\]](#) are accessible to people in a number of disciplines.

## Directions for Further Inquiry

There were other indicators which I believe could be documented from this text with greater inquiry, but which I have not investigated due to constraints. Among these may be mentioned:

- *Misrepresentation of material.* Recognising this would seem to require privileged information, and work better for an area where the reader knows something rather than nothing, but I believe that a reader who knows part of the covered domain stands to benefit from seeing if it is covered fairly.
- *Doing more than a text presents itself as doing.* A certain kind of deceit, in which the speaker works hard to preserve literal truth, has a complex quality caused by more going on than is presented. I believe an exploration of this quality, and its tie to unyielding analysis, may be fruitful.
- *Shared attributes with a test case.* A small and distinctive minority of cases qualify to become test cases in American legal practice; they possess a distinct emotional signature, and portions of Keener's argument (i.e. 'Would [Paul] have ignored her personal needs in favour of the church's witness?'[\[31\]](#)) are reminiscent in both argument and emotional appeal of test cases.
- *An Amusement Park Ride with a Spellbinding Showman.* Especially in their introductions, O'Brien seems to go out of his way to let the reader know the full background to the debate; Keener seems more like a fascinating showman who directs the reader's attention to certain things *and away from others*; knowing the other side to statistics cited[\[32\]](#)—or even knowing that there *is* another side—destroys the effect. A careful description of this difference in rhetoric may be helpful, and I believe may be tied to disinformation in that there is a difference in working style; yielding persuasion suffers far

less from the reader knowing the other side than does unyielding persuasion.

More broadly, I believe there is room for inquiry into the relation between this use of patterns and that in other disciplines. The application I have made is not a straight transposition; in architecture and computer science patterns are a tool to help people communicate about best practices to follow, not identify questionable practice to criticise as I have done here. What becomes of the Quality Without a Name may be interesting. This thesis only suggests two patterns; GoF[33] describes twenty-three computer programming patterns broken into three groups, so that they provide a taxonomy of recurring solutions and not merely a list. A taxonomy of Biblical studies patterns could be a valuable achievement.

Lastly, I would suggest that a study of *sharpening* and *leveling* would be fruitful.[34] 'Sharpening' and 'leveling' refer to a phenomenon where people remembering a text tend to sharpen its main points while leveling out attenuating factors. For many texts, sharpening and leveling are an unintended effect of their publication, while Keener seems at times to write to produce a specific result after sharpening and leveling have taken effect. What he writes *in itself* is more carefully restrained than what a reader would walk away thinking, and the latter appears to be closer to what Keener wants to persuade the reader of. Combining narrow entailment with broad implicature is a way for an author to write a text that creates a strong impression (sharpening and leveling produce an impression from what is implicated more than what is entailed) while being relatively immune to direct criticism: when a critic rereads a text closely, it turns out that the author didn't really say the questionable things the critic remembers the author to have said.

## Footnotes

[1] I.e. the 'Gang of Four': Gamma, Erich; Helm, Richard; Johnson, Ralph; Vlissides, John, *Design Patterns: Elements of Reusable Object-Oriented Software*, Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1994.

[2] Leicester: Apollos, 1999.

[3] Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 1999.

[4] Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992.

[5] Rev. 6:8, RSV.

[6] Keener, pp. 7-9.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 6-9; compare almost any of O'Brien pp. 4-47.

[8] Keener, p. 9.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 167.

[10] A *haustafel* is a household code such as the one found in Ephesians; for my purposes, the Ephesians *haustafel* stretches from 5:21 to 6:9.

[11] O'Brien, p. 419.

[12] Lewis, C.S., chapter 1, pp. 1-26, San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1943, 2001.

[13] Keener, p. 163; O'Brien in pp. 405-438 does not cite a non-Biblical primary source likely to be similarly repellent, and portrays opposing secondary sources as mistaken without setting them in a disturbing light, i.e. in footnote 211, page 413.

[14] Keener, p. 161.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 160.

[16] My attempts to find material discussing how these things work, academic or popular, have had mixed success. If I were to write a thesis around this issue, I would initially explore works such as Michael I. Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, and anthropological

treatments of the high-context/low-context and direct/indirect axes of human communication (which suggest relevant lines of inquiry). C.S. Lewis's account of the Unman's dialogue with the Lady in *Perelandra* (chapters 8-11, pp. 274-311 in *Out of the Silent Planet / Perelandra*, Surrey: Voyager Classics, 1938 / 1943), seems to represent a very perceptive grappling with the issue of tacit communication in relation to deceit.

[17] Maranda, Pierre, 'Elusive Semiosis', *The Semiotic Review of Books*, Volume 3, Issue 1, seen in 2003 at <http://www.bdk.rug.nl/onderzoek/castor/srb/srb/elusive.html>.

[18] Keener, pp. 7-9.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 141. Contrast O'Brien's comments on 6:5-9 in 447-456, seemingly the most obvious place to portray at least *some* of the text as parochial; O'Brien disclaims that Paul was making any social comment on slavery (p. 448), but unpacks the verses without obviously approaching the text from the same mindset as Keener.

[23] Keener, p. 170.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 174-8. O'Brien covers some of the same basic facts without obviously presenting argument in this vein (pp. 405-409).

[25] Keener, p. 170.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 4; contrast the series preface before O'Brien: 'God stands over against us; we do not stand in judgment of him. When God speaks to us through his Word, those who profess to know him must respond in an appropriate way...' (page viii).

[28] Remember that Keener is an American. The suggestion he makes is more significant in U.S. than English culture. U.S. culture has a place for giving kisses to one's romantic partner, to family, and to small children, but not ordinarily to friends. Because of this, culture shock affects almost any attempt to consider ecclesiastical usage. 'Greet one another with a holy kiss.' serves in U.S. Evangelical conversation as the standard example of a New Testament injunction which cannot be taken seriously as a commandment to follow. It seem to be often assumed as an example of cultural noise in the Bible.

[29] Keener, pp. 186-188; contrast O'Brien, pp. 409-438, where he elaborates the text's analogy with Christ and the Church as a model for understanding marriage, rather than comparing to slavery (which Keener not only does but works to give the reader a reservoir of anger at slavery which may transfer when he argues that marital submission is like slavery).

[30] Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

[31] Keener, p. 148.

[32] *Ibid.* pp. 7-8.

[33] I.e. the 'Gang of Four': Gamma, Erich; Helm, Richard; Johnson, Ralph; Vlissides, John, *Design Patterns: Elements of Reusable Object-Oriented Software*, Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1994.

[34] Comments from Asher Koriat, Morris Goldsmith, and Ainat Pansky in 'Toward a Psychology of Memory Accuracy (in the 2000 *Annual Review of Psychology* as seen in 2003 at [http://www.findarticles.com/cf\\_o/m0961/2000\\_Annual/61855635/p7/term=](http://www.findarticles.com/cf_o/m0961/2000_Annual/61855635/p7/term=)) provide a summary, with footnotes, suggesting the basic psychological mechanism. An accessible treatment of a related, if not identical, application to what I suggest here is found on pp. 91-94 in Thomas Gilovich's *How We Know What Isn't So*, New York: The Free Press, 1993.

# **Dastardly Duo Considered Harmful: “Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives” and “Wounded By Love”**

A couple of years ago, perhaps, I heard that the pairing of *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives: The Life and Teachings of Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica* and *Wounded By Love: The Life and Wisdom of Saint Porphyrios* were blasting through the ranks, and the last endorsement I heard for *Wounded by Love* was earlier the month this article was posted.

Both are associated with precious Elders, and neither is appropriate for most Orthodox to read. Let me explain some of why:

## **Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives: *It's an occult book!***

I'm not really sure how to explain this. *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives* is simply the most occultic book I have read from any canonical author. It never advocates any kind of cursing, but with the terrain it covers, it describes just how someone could kill another in a motorcycle accident by a thought, or three examples of how a subconscious curse of envy could shatter another person's beautiful *objet d'art*.

The book and its message are extremely subtle, but that is not a good thing. The snake, we read in Genesis, was extremely subtle. Speaking as the author of [The Sign of the Grail](#), I have read Arthurian legends at length, and Merlin is asked to exercise "subtlety," with meaning including but not limited to magic powers, but only one version I've read (T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*) gives any sense of how one might go about achieving the kinds of effects you covet from the never-neverland of the Arthurian literary tradition that flourished in the Middle Ages and remains a name people have heard of.

This book offers an occult dimension that I have failed to see in reading half of the collected works of the [Ante-Nicene Fathers and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers](#). One work whose title I forget discusses sorcerors as charlatan illusionists and then gives the equivalent of how explaining how a modern magic trick works. But even then, I have no Orthodox work which so sensitizes the reader to how one may lay a potent curse.

If we look for parallels Western Christianity, I recall a fantasy-novel-loving friend who read mainstream fantasy at length, but put down a Charles Williams novel because of how much more occultic it was than

anything in the fantasy literature she was drawn to. (Charles Williams was a member of the Inklings but tried hard to be a Christian without decisively severing ties to the occult and Rosicrucianism.) I've read three of Charles Williams' novels (that's about three too many on my part). Those three novels show the closest parallel I am aware of to the subtle and occultic character of *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives*.

This is not to say that the book is 100% false. Precious few of even the worst books are 100% false, and cultivating inner calm in chaotic circumstances with eyes fixed on God and the Light is a very valuable lesson, but there are better and less occult Orthodox treatments of the matter.

One example of a cleaner source for peaceful thoughts is Fr. Thomas Hopko's 55 maxims, of which #52 is, "Focus exclusively on God and light, not on sin and darkness." A slightly longer form is available in [an Ancient Faith Radio podcast on Fr. Thomas Hopko's 55 maxims](#):

"Focus exclusively on God and light. Never focus on darkness, temptation, and sin. That's classic teaching. Fill yourself with good things. Don't be mesmerized by dark things. Don't meditate on evil things. Meditate on good things, and God will take care of the rest."

**Wounded by “*Wounded by  
Love:*”  
*Monastic TMI!***

There is such a thing as Too Much Information (TMI). Perhaps the most common way of violating a listener’s boundaries with TMI is to provide excessively visceral details, and *Wounded by Love* does not vividly describe carnal temptations or the like, even though we may assume that someone who grew up as an incredibly strong and rugged mountain man presumably faced certain temptations common to men with a decent amount of testosterone.

But that is not the only form of TMI. There is a rather strong rule, violated especially at the end of this title, that monastics do not share their esoteric experiences with laity, period, and even in the book the elders advise the future monastic elder not to speak of at least some spiritual experiences and charisms strictly to them: the demons might hear. But he, or rather the sisters whom he oversaw, placed things in public sight that should never have been leaked outside monastic circles. As I wrote to my spiritual father:

The latter divulges esoteric monastic experiences in ability including an Abbot traveling spiritually without having left his monastery physically for decades, and a kind of limited omniscience where the protagonist could see through anything (late in life and physically blind, he did perhaps chastely the work of a water witch, although it might be better to suggest that the latter is demonic parody of a legitimate aspect of charism).

Christ told people to do their good works in secret, and this applies

much more forcefully to monastic spiritual experiences. Monastics normally view the parading of their intimate experience before the public eye to be a great misfortune, and I believe the rule is much more intended for the benefit of laity than for monastics themselves. It is a rule of mystagogy that you do not mock people with realities they are not ready to cope with, and one minor application is the advice that if you know the truth, and you know that another person will reject the truth if told, *you do not tell the other person that truth*. It's better for the other person before Christ's Judgment Throne not to have rejected the truth, and it is better for *you* not to have pushed the other person into that position. And that is really just the least, most diluted shade of mystagogy as it can and should in Orthodoxy. Molesting the reader with monastic TMI is simply not needed.

## Beware of *all* fashions

Peter Kreeft, one amiably writing Roman apologist, discussed at some point differences between ancient and modern concepts of authorship. The modern concept, especially if we forget the hard work of editors who try to make authors look better in print, tends to say, “If it has your name on it, you are responsible for 100% of its content,” where the ancient conception can admit many hands and classic books are more the work of a school of people sharing the same sympathies than one individual. What is interesting is the remark that follows: Kreeft does not state that the ancient fashion is better, or for that the matter that the modern fashion is better, but advises us to beware of *all* fashions.

The spiritually questionable character of *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives* and *Wounded by Love* is not really a feature of *Orthodoxy*; it is a feature of *fashion*. It applies to the two books that were fashionable five years ago, and it applies to the one or more ebooks that will be fashionable five years in the future. *Fashions really exist in Orthodoxy as much as NPR, and they are no more helpful.* But this is not any reason to throw up our hands in despair.

One thing I explained to a newly illumined Orthodox about reading recommendations, as another person explained to me when I was myself newly illumined, is that I should have a relationship with a priest who could provide helpful books to read. If you are a bookworm, part of your spiritual father or parish priest’s job description is to recommend good books. And indeed a priest who knows you personally and hears your needs in your confessions may be the best person in the world to give you something better than you could know to ask for. (Now it is entirely possible for a parish priest to recommend an obvious dud, but that is *much* less serious of a problem than *any* problem that is seductive in character.) However much parish priests may be wrong about the

helpfulness of the occasional dud, they are usually familiar with many books and human spiritual needs, *and they are significantly more often right than the rumor mill is.*

## A dark memorial, and a warning sign

I would suggest that these two books by Orthodox elders be remembered.

There are many strands within Judaism, but 6,000,000 is the first number a Jewish child hears, and the sense is not just, “This happened in the past,” but “This could happen again.” And recent events do nothing to prove this to be groundless paranoia or confusion between what is past and what is future. Dietrich Bonhoeffer watched one professor he admired after another rally behind the swastika. (On a much lesser scale, I’ve watched one theology professor after another sign a petition, older than a certain rainbow-colored Supreme Court judicial legislation, demanding that organizations extend any benefit extended to married couples to same-sex couples even if their religious tradition and conscience simply reject such vindication of others’ inimical demands.) In my mind the question is not why so many theology professors Bonhoeffer admired stood behind the Nazi flag; it is why that one person, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, bucked an *overwhelming* consensus. Something similar is akin to my puzzlement, not about how innumerable Protestant efforts to reconstruct the ancient Church went awry, but how the one such effort I know well, the Evangelical Orthodox Church which entered canonical Orthodoxy and provided one of my dear past parish priests, got it right.

The Orthodox Church remembers the bloodshed of its members across the centuries, [many of whom are commemorated in the saints’ lives](#), but the Eastern Orthodox Church’s “This could happen again” is not about bloodshed. “This could happen again” is about heresies. One Subdeacon, a little bit lightly, said, “Arius gets it worse in the Liturgy than

Judas,” and founders of subsequent heresies such as Nestorius are said to be “taught by Arius.” Arius was not the first heretic by any means, and St. Irenaeus’s long and dull [Against Heresies](#) predates Arius by over a century. However, there is reason to call Arius the father of heretics. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church was formed after some vein of Presbyterianism ordained someone who denied that Jesus was the Son of God, and Protestants I know from mailing lists have, without even needing to know post-Biblical Orthodox texts, that Arianism is not just one heresy among others; it is the one heresy that keeps on popping up, possibly comparably to gnosticism. And if the Jewish population is sharply aware that genocide has happened in the past and could happen again, this is not odd; what is odd to me historically is not that a genocide was *started*, but that a genocide was *stopped*. But the Orthodox consciousness is not as much of bloodshed, but of heresy and heterodoxy.

And all in this lie two little books that have swept Orthodoxy as a fad, both written by monastic elders. Perhaps they are not front and center as far as problems go. But they show much less about healthy Orthodoxy than healthy fads, and there is a warning about whatever next flourishes in the rumor mill.

# Death

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

Closing bit by bit the gates of Hell,  
Bolting and barring them from the inside,  
We seal our decision,  
Not strong enough to die rightly in life,  
We sink to death in death,  
Sealing ourselves twice dead.  
Choolest thou this day,  
Which thou shalt abide.

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

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

Right poetic and wondrous it may sound right now,  
Right poetic and wondrous it is in its heart,  
But it cometh almost in disguise,  
From a God who wishes our humility never to bruise,  
To give us better than we know to ask,  
And until we see with the eyes of faith,  
Our humble God allows it to seem certain,  
That he has things wrong,  
That we are not in the right circumstances for his work,  
When his greatest work is hid from our eyes,  
Our virtue not to crush,  
Knowing that we are dust,  
And not crushing our frame dust to return.  
Right frail are we,  
And only our Maker knows the right path,  
That we may shine with his Glory.

Canst thou not save thyself even?  
Perchance thou mayest save another.  
Be without fear, and of good cheer:  
He saved others, himself he cannot save,  
Is but one name of Heaven.  
Canst not save thyself?  
Travail to save another.  
Can God only save in luxury?  
Can God only save when we have our way?  
Rather, see God his mighty arm outstretched in disaster,  
Rather, see glory unfurl in suffering.  
Suffering is not what man was made for,  
But bitter medicine is better,  
And to suffer rightly is lifegiving,  
And to suffer unjustly has the Treasure of Heaven inside,  
Whilst comfort and ease sees few reach salvation:  
Be thou plucked from a wide and broad path?  
Set instead on a way strait and narrow?  
Give thanks for God savest thee:  
Taking from thee what thou desirest,  
Giving ever more than thou needest,  
That thou mightest ever awaken

That thou mightest ever awaken,  
To greater and grander and more wondrous still:  
For the gate of Heaven appears narrow, even paltry,  
And opens to an expanse vast beyond all imagining,  
And the gate of Hell is how we imagine grandeur,  
But one finds the belly of the Wyrn constricting ever tighter.

Now whilst the noose about our necks,  
Tightens one and all,  
Painful blows of the Creator's chisel stern and severe,  
Not in our day, nor for all is it told,  
That the Emperor hears the words,  
In this sign conquer,  
The Church established,  
Persecutions come to an end,  
And men of valor seeking in monastery and hermitage,  
Saving tribulations their souls to keep,  
The complaint sounded,  
Easy times rob the Church of her saints,  
Not in our day does this happen:  
For the noose is about our necks,  
More than luxury is stripped away;  
A Church waxen fat and flabby from easy living,  
Must needs be sharpened to a fighting trim,  
Chrismated as one returning to Orthodoxy,  
Anointed with sacred oil for the athlete,  
And myrrh for the bride.  
And as Christian is given gifts of royal hue,  
Gold, frankincense, and myrrh:  
Gold for kingship,  
Frankincense for divinity,  
Myrrh for anointing the dead,  
A trinity of gifts which are homoousios: one,  
Gold and frankincense which only a fool seeks without myrrh,  
Myrrh of pain, suffering, and death,  
Myrrh which befits a sacrifice,  
Myrrh which pours forth gold and frankincense.  
And as the noose tightens about our neck,  
As all but God is taken from us,

And some would wish to take God himself,  
The chisel will not wield the Creator,  
The arm of providence so deftly hid in easy times,  
Is bared in might in hard times,  
And if those of us who thought we would die in peace,  
Find that suffering and martyrdom are possible,  
We must respond as is meet and right:  
Glory to God in all things!

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

For contemplation made were we.  
Unseen warfare exists because contemplation does not.  
Yet each death thou diest well,  
A speck of tarnish besmircheth the mirror no more,  
The garden of tearful supplication ever healeth,  
What was lost in the garden of delights:  
Ever banished our race may be from the garden of delights:  
'Til we find its full stature in vale of tears,  
'Til we find what in death God hath hid

IN WE FIND WHAT IN DEATH GOD HATH MUD,  
'Til each microcosm of death given by day to day,  
Is where we seek Heaven's gate, ever opening wide.

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

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

**Devotees of Fr.  
Cherubim (Jones)  
the Half-Converted  
Demand his  
Immediate  
Canonization and  
Full Recognition as  
"Equal to the  
Heirophants"**

Adamant devotees of Fr. Cherubim (Jones) the Half-Converted demand immediate canonization and full recognition as "Equal to the Heirophants". They have stepped beside their usual tactics of demanding canonization whether or not Fr. Cherubim the Half-Converted should be canonized, and demanding that any problems be swept under the carpet, to insist that he be called, "Equal to the Heirophants."

Much of the work in his wake consolidated in the book, *Christ the Eternal Doubt*. Our devotee explained, "Cherubim Jones saw more than anything the spiritual toxicity of postmodernism. And he sensed, perhaps even more than he realized, that the proper rebuttal to postmodernism is to reconstruct modernism: indeed, there are powerful modernist currents

in his thought even when he seems to condemn all Western trends. The great grandfather of modernism was René DesCartes, and Blessed Cherubim Jones uncovered layer after layer of this philosopher whose very name means 'Born Again' and whose *Meditations* put doubt on a pedestal and said, in essence, 'Doubt what you can; what remains after doubt is unshakable.' And Λογος or Logos is interchangeable, one might almost say homoousios, with logic and with doubt." And to quench the ills of the postmodern world, Cherubim Jones the Half-Converted mined a vein that would come together in the classic *Christ the Eternal Doubt*.

Fr. Cherubim the Half-Converted has left a considerable wake; the tip of the iceberg is in his contribution to a wave of committed Evangelicals deciding that being Orthodox is an indispensable aid to pursuing their cottage industry of reconstructing the ancient Church. The sycophant excitedly commented, "Yes; there was an article on this phenomenon in *The Onion Dome*. It was a bit like that article in *The Onion*, um, what was it... there was a woman, a strong woman, who overcame years of childhood abuse to become a successful porn star. And this is nothing next to what happened when he was the only fashionable Orthodoxy the communist East could listen to."

Fr. Cherubim the Half-Converted was indeed very concerned that his version of the Fathers be adhered to. He pointed out that many Church Fathers, in giving the theology of the created world, absolutely denied that matter was made from atoms and molecules, but insisted that science properly interpreted proves that matter was made from the four elements: "earth, air, fire, and water." And he drew a line in the sand here, and most of his devotees are extraordinarily suspicious about whether you can be Orthodox and believe anything like modern atheistic chemistry.

There is some slight controversy surrounding Fr. Cherubim the Half-Converted's teaching on the phantom tollbooth. His position, as carried forth by others, is that practically every major element of [The Phantom Tollbooth](#) is already in the Fathers and is attested in quite ancient liturgy. Consequently, many argue, the book [The Phantom Tollbooth](#) is no mere imaginative children's tale, but an entirely literal factual account describing life beyond the mundane.

# A disruptive take on (un)-branding

## An opening “Heads up!”

This article is intended to do something that is usually best avoided, at least in the context of an article.

Some students of culture describe semiotic frames that define a society’s *possibles et pensables*: they shape what is seen as **possible** and what is even **thinkable** within a society. And it is usually preferable to handle communication so that you aren’t asking people to overhaul their mental frameworks: if you can think far enough outside the box that you find *possibles et pensables* the sort of thing that can be easily brought into question, that’s a wonderful thing to be able to do, but it is usually best kept under wraps, and usually best kept in a back pocket.

This piece is designed to delve into deeper work and not be as quickly digested as other fare. It’s harder to process than an article intended to persuade you between two options that we both *already* understand well enough. I tried to think about how to make my point while dodging working on what is seen as possible and what is even thinkable, and I don’t see how to eliminate that work from my point. I want to revise what is seen as **possible** and what is **thinkable** about branding today.

## Where did *branding* come from anyway?

To the best of my knowledge, and to only present the beginning and end of a story, branding was once what happened when cattle owners would use a hot iron symbol to *brand* an identifying mark on cattle they owned, to be able to claim whose cattle they were if there were any question. There is a fairly close equivalent to this in the modern business world, but the equivalent isn't really "how a company communicates itself and its offering to the outside world." It's really much more the unsexy practice of attaching metal tags to valuable company equipment that say, "This is property of XYZ corporation, serial number 12345." And while there may be good reasons for engaging in this part of due diligence, it is hardly that interesting or deep.

Not so with real branding in today's business world, not by any stretch. As I have prepared and thought about the question, I'm not sure I can think of an equally significant concept that I have met. To pick two examples from my own field in information technology, Agile development and open source software may be significant concepts, but I do not see the same niches and layers. There is some theory about open source software as such, and people may complain that a company that releases software under an open source license but "drops patches [external contributions] on the floor" isn't really walking the walk, but in my experience the theory that most open source software developers are interested are the computer science and software engineering issues concerning their tools and pet projects, and you simply don't have subspecialized high value consultants on the theory and ideology of open source. But branding is in fact a *very* big concept, and you do have high-value consultants actively engaged for their expertise in some

specialization or subspecialization somewhere under the “branding” umbrella.

And with this significance comes something else, maybe something less attractive: however useful or prominent it may be, it is far from a worldwide universal, and I am not aware of any Great Teachers who have thought in terms of branding. Not only that, but Socrates might very well have lived to a ripe old age, instead of being condemned to death, if he had lived a brand that would have been socially acceptable to the citizens of his city. (The entire story of his gadfly’s teaching and life is an example of how to avoid branding yourself if you want to succeed and live.) Discussion of branding may be anachronous if applied to Socrates, but the principle justifies such an intrusion.

## Two seismic shifts, one after another

In the popular *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, that a shift had taken place in wisdom literature: that is, what people have written about how to succeed as a person; one definition offered for such wisdom is, “skill for living.” Whenever the text was written, the author had apparently read a great deal of wisdom literature over time and made [a cardinally important distinction between a \*character ethic\* and a \*personality ethic\*](#). Up until about World War II, the basic framing assumption in wisdom literature in the U.S. is that success is success arising from character. One needs to be diligent, and humble, and merciful to others, and so on. In short, we need virtuous living to get ahead. These virtues may include practices: Ben Franklin’s “A penny saved is a penny earned” is an exhortation to the virtue of thrift. But success is acquired through growing as a person, by growing in virtue.

The subsequent sub-par *personality ethic* was much more superficial; it offered tips and tricks to get ahead, while avoiding anything calling for real internal transformation. And while there are definitely mere practices that we could do better (I could smile more), most of my problems aren’t on the level of personality, but where I need to do more inner work. The shift Covey documents is a seismic shift, and it is difficult to overstate its significance. Something like the character ethic and the personality ethic exist at least to some extent side-by-side in information technology: there are people who have been educated in computer science and software engineering, and who maintain a lifelong curiosity towards those areas as well as working their way through fads and individual tools, and there are educational programs that just teach buzzwords and individual tools with only incidental coverage of deeper

issues in theory. A manager who has dealt with both kinds of programmers will know the difference well.

I would posit, or rather point out, that there has been a second shift after a shift from a *character ethic* to a *personality ethic*: a shift from a *personality ethic* to a (personal) *brand ethic*. There are books I've read that offer an induction into a brand ethic in ways that someone who's not already an insider will understand: but I don't remember anything I've read treating as a live question whether we need a *brand ethic* or a *personality ethic*, or whether we need a *brand ethic* or a *character ethic*. Personality has a place: it has a place because a personal brand on Twitter that incorporates some amount of what feels like personality is a stronger brand than one that is one-dimensional. The place for personality is neither more nor less than what the brand ethic calls for. And that's *odd*.

## **But you, *C.J.S. Hayward*, have a brand!**

In one sense, at least some people will say that I have a brand, and one that I have consciously contributed to. This blog's background, for instance, is one touch out of many things that provide a sense of brand. Old-fashioned, exaggeratedly recognizable links could be called another. None the less, I meet the concept of a personal brand with some degree of puzzlement. I've written dialogues before, but I'm drawing a blank at how to flesh out a dialogue with pretty much any of the world's great teachers about marketing-style branding as a paradigm for how to relate to others. I do not find branding in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), I have difficulty envisioning what Sun Tzu or other sages would say, and for that matter I do not think that Muhammad would have understood the concept, and if he *had* understood it, would find it to be extremely offensive: much as democracy's foundational attitude that you have a say in things is profoundly un-Islamic (when George Bush was pushing to endow Iraq with democracy, my comment to friends was, "I wish that Bush would herald a goal that would be less offensive to Muslims, like a hambone in every pot.").

It is possible for brands to be layered. It is possible for brands to have depth. It is possible for brands to present a tip of an iceberg with lots of room to dig. However, I would pick as a particularly bad piece on personal branding a book chapter which advised the reader to pick three positive adjectives on the list, and simply decide, "These will be my brand." And this isn't just one book. When a company has announced that XYZ represent its values, it gives the impression of something arbitrarily chosen and tacked on, something plastic, something that would really make Michael Polanyi squirm.

Our close contemporary Michael Polanyi ([Wikipedia](#)), to pick one of the achievements he is best known for, argued essentially that knowledge is not something separate from people. When people are initiated into a tradition of expert practice, there is knowledge tacitly held by those who are already insiders in the culture of expert practices, and this knowledge is tacitly transmitted to people who are being trained to become insiders, without ever being held or passing consciously to those in *either* role. He comments that swimming coaches and swimmers alike breathe differently from non-swimmers in that they expand their lungs to hold more air when they breathe in, and they keep more air in their lungs when they breathe out, using their lungs this way for added buoyancy. Other explanations may be available in this case, but, the broader picture is one that uses *tacit knowledge*, or to take the deliberately chosen title of his magnum opus, **Personal Knowledge**, and recognize that we have many layers beyond the surface. And I'm trying to imagine Polanyi reading a text telling him to pick three adjectives that should identify him as his personal brand. I see him squirming, much like the Far Side cartoon entitled, "Baryshnikov's ultimate nightmare" that shows a square dance caller saying, "*Swing your partner 'round and 'round, now promenade left and don't fall down...*"

However, the concern I raise, which may or may not be terribly distinct from Polanyi, isn't just that a personal brand is shallow, or at least has been shallow in every book I've read telling me I need a personal brand. It's also designed as artificial and plastic, not real and alive. It may have an alive motif, like the handmade-looking lettering and art in cookie-cutter Starbucks locations. But it is what Neal Stevenson described in [In the Beginning was the Command Line](#), in describing a mediated and vicarious experience waiting in line for a ride at Disneyland:

The place looks more like what I have just described than any actual building you might find in India. All the stones in the broken walls are weathered as if monsoon rains had been trickling down them for centuries, the paint on the gorgeous murals is flaked and faded just so, and Bengal tigers loll amid stumps of broken columns. Where modern repairs have been made to the ancient structure, they've been done, not as Disney's engineers would do them, but as

thrifty Indian janitors would—with hunks of bamboo and rust-spotted hunks of rebar. The rust is painted on, of course, and protected from real rust by a plastic clear-coat, but you can't tell unless you get down on your knees.

And on this point I'd like to mention a point from *The Cost of Discipleship*. I don't know now whether I'd agree with the suggestion Bonhoeffer makes, but he highlights that the [Sermon on the Mount](#) says both [Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven](#), and also that we are to conceal our good deeds: [But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth](#). Asking how these two incongruous commands fit together, Bonhoeffer says that we should do good deeds but hide them from ourselves, that we should reach a state of doing goodness that we do it without being aware of it. Now whether that should exactly be believed in reference to the Gospel, I don't know. But something like that is true of some secular skill. I remember a conversation with a Unix professional who said that in a job interview he had claimed to be a Unix wizard because that was required in that social situation, but it would have been “an outright lie” for him to make that claim among his peers. I assure you he was very competent. But his competency had reached a level where (among other things) he knew how little he knew and how much more there was to know, and like almost any good Unix wizard, he found calling himself a Unix wizard to feel like an outright lie. When I was asked in high school as the school's student Unix system administrator, I hesitated, and I was both surprised and delighted when a friend said “Yes” for me; I would have been making an outright lie (in my mind) to make that claim. Nor is this a specific local feature of Unix wizardry. That is just an example close to my experience, and it seems that nobody considers themselves what in H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* terms would be called Morlocks. There is a kind of “reverse hypocrisy” here. A Morlock, to expert practitioners, is someone else at a higher level of skill. (Linus Torvalds has voiced confusion about why others consider him technical.)

The general rule is that the most confident in their performance are usually the most-overconfident, and the most competent are actually less confident; unlike the over-confident, they are guided by a sharply tuned inner self-criticism the same self-criticism that in any competent practice

inner self-criticism, the same self-criticism that in any competent practice of classical music means that musicians hear their performance mistakes more quickly than even the most discerning audience members. What is going on here is the same thing as was told to me as a child, which I'll leave in politically incorrect terms:

An Indian and a white man were standing on a beach, and the white man drew a small circle and said, "This is what the Indian knows." Then he drew a larger circle around it and said, "This is what the white man knows." Then the Indian drew a huge circle encompassing both other circles and said, "This is what neither the Indian nor the white man knows."

And this quality, of seeing a huge encompassing circle of things that none of us know, is foundational to being a genuine expert almost anywhere. Hence a high school biology text compares the discipline of biology to trying to discern the characters, plot, and themes of a long and intricately complex movie, when all you have is half a dozen stills in varying conditions. Hence one biology teacher I remember fondly saying very emphatically that we don't know what's going on: all that biologists know now is only a tiny slice of the truth.

So what does this all mean for branding? It means a couple of things, and perhaps it may be good to have three positive adjectives you seek to represent. But one thing it means is that people are often not aware of their good (and bad) properties, or at least not all of them. This *might* be true morally, but it is also true in terms of professional competence. I remember going to a presentation on getting a government job and the "stupid questionnaire" (the presenter's preferred term) where you were asked to rate yourself from 1 up to 5 on different areas of competency. Now coming from a business background where I had been asked to rate myself 1 to 10 in competency and advised the higher self-rating I gave, the harder test questions would be asked of me, thought of rating myself mostly 3's with a couple of 4's on the ones I was strongest, the presenter made crystal-clear that that was not going to work. The only acceptable answer was a 5, or maybe you could get away with one or possibly two self-ratings of 4. And that's *not* selecting for *competency*. It is selecting for *overconfidence*, and for *gaming the system*. For someone who is genuinely *competent*, and is not aware of how and why to game the

system here, giving a sincere and well-thought-out self-evaluation is a recipe for elimination even if that employee's past five supervisors would mark the person as a clear 5 across the board.

The title I've been mulling over, *The Twitter Job Search Guide*, is part of the cohort of books where branding is bedrock. It also suggests that Twitter competencies expand outside of Twitter, so that a cover letter is composed of a few tweets and a resume is composed of a few more tweets. Now that's an idea I'd be cautious about dismissing; communicating value concisely is a valuable skill, and in some sense Twitter might be seen as a Toastmasters of written communication. Toastmasters' Competent Communicator course trains people with five to seven minute speeches addressing core competencies in speaking (plus a couple of other details), and the thought is not exactly that participants will only need to give speeches of that length, but rather to lay a foundation that is explicitly intended to be adaptable to longer or shorter speeches. And Twitter is not always 140 characters of nothing; there are profound contributions made, and it is a valuable skill, and one quite often present among the most ~~competent~~ gifted, to make a significant point clearly and concisely. For a business world that just wants the time, not the whole process of a watch being built, it may be good discipline and skill to be able to write a six tweet cover letter and twelve tweet resume. But I am concerned when this all falls under the aegis of branding. And in *The Twitter Job Search Guide*, the tweets for a cover letter and resume all fall under the heading of communicating a brand. Though there is (for instance) discussion of what constitutes a good ratio between professional and personal tweets, I've read two thirds of the text and I haven't yet seen advice to tweet or communicate something that does not fall under the aegis of your personal brand. The beginning, middle, and end of what you are advised to communicate is *brand*. There is no other way to relate to others, it seems, and this is a plastic form of life.

Now before going further, there is one point I would like to clarify about boundaries (a topic that I believe is ill-framed, but that is not my interest here). One professor, addressing graduate students who were or probably would be teaching assistants, talked about "being the same on the outside and on the inside." She went on very directly to state that this did *not* mean "letting it all hang out"; that was precisely what it was *not*.

Normal social interactions embody both what is anthropologically called “positive politeness” and “negative politeness”, and on this point I would recall another professor talking about appropriate communication in crossing cultures. He gave some examples of positive politeness, things like saying “Hello!” to a friend (the sort of examples of politeness that jump to mind). Then he said that when strangers approach each other and look down at the sidewalk when they’re a few meters apart, that’s *politeness*. It is a refusal to wantonly intrude; it says, “You have not invited me in and I will not presume where I am not invited and I do not belong.” And that is *politeness*. He mentioned, to drive the point a little bit further, that he had one good friend he visited, and though he did not do so at this visit, he would have thought *nothing* of opening his friend’s refrigerator and helping himself to anything inside. The principle of negative politeness is that you do not do things without invitation; one may surmise that some point along the way the professor’s friend gave one or several invitations to rummage through the fridge without asking specific permission, and I would be almost certain that the professor had not *asked* permission to arbitrarily rummage his friend’s fridge; he had presumably been *given* that permission as the friendship developed. And outside of a few exceptions like this, it is a significant violation of negative politeness to rummage through someone’s fridge without asking.

Socially appropriate relations, or boundaries, or negative politeness, or whatever you want to call it, applies; that can and should mediate our interactions, and brands that have any sense to them will stay within these boundaries. However, while I believe we need the mediation of negative (and positive) politeness, there is something plastic about the mediation of brands. It’s good not to give TMI, but a personal brand is neither the only nor the best way to communicate within positive and negative politeness that respects boundaries.

I’m not sure this addresses all of branding; I’d expect that someone who knew branding well could point to currents within branding that survive this critique. I’ve picked examples that struck me as silly; I haven’t discussed the silliness I see about corporations picking three identifying values, and in much more mainstream and professional venues than a book in a career center offering a list of positive adjectives and an invitation to pick three as defining your personal brand. But for what I’d like to see instead, I don’t have a big program to offer, just

appropriate social interaction: social interaction that is appropriate to degree of relationships and the roles of the participants. Others have written [The Clue Train Manifesto](#); I have not examined that manifesto in depth but its opening words about a human voice suggest I'm not the only person, nor the first person, concerned with human communication.

## My personal unbrand

I wanted to give a bit on my personal brand, or rather unbrand, or, if you prefer, ersatz brand. You're welcome to say, if you like, that it is in *fact* just a personal brand, only a personal brand that embodies at least one classic and cardinal mistake. Or at least two mistakes, apart from the easily digested simplicity of an effective brand, the bulk of my effort is growing in terms of both who I am as a person, and how I can achieve deeper competence. Some attention is given to appearance, but a brand works primarily on image management. Skills one acquires, for instance, are there because of their usefulness to a branded image. But let's return to the other basic attribute in what makes sense in a brand.

One of the parameters that is desired in a brand is doing one thing well, simplicity. There may be contours to the brand's landscape, but if you are a jack of all trades you are assumed to be a master of none. One part of a brand's job description, personal or otherwise, is to present a simple core, perhaps one core feature that offers a value proposition with one core benefit. Or, perhaps, there are a few pieces working together, but if you can't write it on the back of a business card, you have failed. And in fact this is not restricted to branding. [Good to Great](#) talks about good companies that became great companies having and/or discovering a core "hedgehog concept" that they keep returning to, and while such a general title on business has to assume marketing and with it branding as part of the picture, I do not recall the emphatic "hedgehog concept" discussion portraying it as a particular issue for marketing and branding. In [Good to Great](#), the "hedgehog concept" defines a one-trick pony that fundamentally outperforms Renaissance man opponents.

In my own case, what I offer is a profoundly gifted portfolio of interconnected skills. Want to know what reading Latin and Greek has to do with the business world? At a competitive local exchange carrier, we

were working with an upstream provider who did business with us because they were required to by law, even though they didn't want to, because they saw us as cream-skimmers. Nobody else in my group could make sense of their opaque, bureaucratic communication. I could, and there wasn't much of a hiccup when my boss, with my consent, added communication with that provider to my responsibilities. I don't know if any of my bosses have cared that I enjoy writing, but several have cared that I could create and edit clear and high-value documents. I don't know whether any of my bosses have particularly cared that I've received rankings as high as 7th in the nation in math contests, but they do care when I apply that to solo programming that hits the ball out of the park. In the positions I'm focusing on now in User Experience, I don't really expect my prospective bosses to care that I have postgraduate coursework in essentially *all* major User Experience disciplines: anthropology, cognitive science, computer science, linguistics, philosophy, and psychology, with [a distinctive work addressing something at the core of User Experience competency](#). However, once I am hired and running usability tests, I expect they'll care how much that background lets me draw out of a test.

And, to dig a bit deeper, the achievements I value are not because of intelligence, but *communication*. I've calmly spoken to a bawling four-year-old with an extremely painful blood blister under her thumbnail, until she she had stopped completely. I've been asked why I know how to relate to Ukrainians. I've been told, "You are like a white American and like a black African, and closer than an African brother." I've communicated across large gaps with remarkable success.

And, to give one last detail, I've had many projects and there is a common thread running through virtually all the ones I've liked most: I've reduced user pain, or made something a joy to work with. To pick one example from when I had just started a new job, I was given a four-word spec before my boss left for his vacation: "*Get [name of employee] off overtime.*" The employee was a revenue assurance auditor who was trying to keep on top of a provider who was slipping us inappropriate charges, a responsibility that had him on heavy overtime in a company which normally stuck with a 40 hour workweek. And I winced when I saw what he was doing. I respected him and his actions as a team player, but he was cutting a steak with a screwdriver because that was the only game in

town, and I wanted to give a razor-sharp knife, designed for him personally. When he said he was perfectly willing to do drudge work, my unspoken response was, “I appreciate and respect that you’re willing to do drudge work. I still want to get it off your plate.” And I drew on Edward Tufte’s principles and made a carefully chosen greyscale (instead of numbers) system that cut his involvement down to 40 hours a week, then further down so only part of his time was spent keeping on top of this responsibilities, and he was in a position to engage other responsibilities that were out of the question earlier. At a certain point into the process, I told him, “The only reason I *ever* want you to do us the old tools is because you *want* to,” and he very quickly answered, “I don’t want to!” In other words, the new tool completely superseded prior methods, which is a rarity. I don’t remember *exactly* how far along we were when my boss returned from vacation, but the employee told me he was raving to my boss, and in that whole position my boss never really showed much inclination to micro-manage me. (He described me as “nearly self-managing.”)

These and other things could be a basis for a number of personal brands that I could treat as my working contract with the professional world. However, it is my preference not to have my dealings mediated by a constructed personal brand. I’d like to give my friends and employers alike the real “me”, and while I will act differently with friends, family, church, and an employer, I don’t want people dealing with an artificially infused personal brand. *I want them to deal with me.* And while one friend explained that a fellow graduate student in psychology who dealt in measuring psychological traits answered a questionnaire for a job application, she understood exactly how the test worked, answered like the personality profile that the company wanted, and just made sure to act like the profile they wanted while she was at work. I don’t want to judge, but I find something very sad about the story. And it has everything to do with working with a personal brand.

*This is not as crystalline as a normal brand. That’s intended.*

# **Does Augustine return to the interpersonal image of love as representing the Trinity, or does he abandon this in favour of the psychological image?**

## **I. Mindset considerations**

Does Augustine return to the interpersonal image of love as representing the Trinity, or does he abandon this in favour of the psychological image? Behind this question may lurk another question that is both connected and distinct from it: 'Does Augustine have a relational understanding of the image, or is his understanding ultimately solipsistic?' I take Rowan Williams[\[1\]](#) as an example of a scholar writing from a mindset which fails to adequately distinguish the two questions. He opens with quotes that read Augustine as almost Sabellian, and ends

his opening paragraph with a spectacular strawman:

Augustine stands accused of collaborating in the construction of the modern consciousness that has wrought such havoc in the North Atlantic cultural world, and is busy exporting its sickness to the rest of the globe, while occluding the vision of the whole planet's future in its delusions of technocratic mastery — a hugely inflated self-regard, fed by the history of introspection.[\[2\]](#)

Williams is building up to a rescue operation. He offers a careful study which either counterbalances Augustine's apparent meaning or replaces it. He brings up quotations like, 'In the West, especially since the time of Augustine, the unity of the divine being served as the starting point of Trinitarian theology'[\[3\]](#), as examples of the reading he doesn't like. Williams's presentation of Augustine's text does not bring up Augustine's claim that all three persons of the Trinity speak in Old Testament theophanies. This claim is significant because Augustine rejects the Patristic claim that Old Testament theophanies are specially made through the immanent Son.[\[4\]](#) Williams seems to be fighting an obvious reading so he can rescue relationality in Augustine. I would argue that the psychological image is relational from the beginning, and that Augustine's image is psychological.

We're looking for relationality in the wrong place if we look for it in where Augustine stood in the controversies of his day. The deepest relationality does not lie in i.e. his writing against Arianism, but something that was so deeply ingrained in the Church that he would never have thought it necessary to explain. The very individualism he is accused of helping construct had not come together. In the Reformation-era Anabaptist/Zwinglian controversy over infant baptism, the issue was *not* whether faith precedes baptism. Both sides believed that much. The issue was whether that faith was reckoned along proto-individualist lines, or whether the faith of a community could sanctify members too young to embrace faith on terms an individualist would recognise. Augustine lived over a thousand years before that controversy. His tacit theory of boundaries was that of a community's bishop, *not* a counselor imparting the 'value-free' boundaries that flow from atomist individualism. I mention these examples to underscore that Augustine's understanding of

where one person ends and another begins is much less articulate, much less thorough, much less basic, much less sealed, and in the end much less focal than ours. The difference is like the qualitative difference between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the Bible, and what either Arian or a Trinitarian did with what is present in the Bible. One is tacitly present, something you can't explain ('That's just the way things are!'), and the other is articulate, the sort of thing you can at least begin to explain and give reason for. In the end Augustine's understanding of how one person can meet another arises from a very different mindset from a setting where scholars argue that communication is impossible. This means that combining passages with individualist assumptions gives a very different meaning from combining the same passages with Augustine's patristic assumptions. It is the latter which represents Augustine's thought. I believe that Augustine did plant proto-modernist seeds. These seeds became a vital ingredient of modernism with many thinkers' successive modifications. However, the fact that they have become modernism today with the influence of a millenium and a half of change does not make Augustine an early modernist. His beliefs were quite different from atomist individualist modernism.

What is most important in Augustine's thought, and what he believed most deeply, includes some of what would never occur to him to think *needed* saying. These things that leave less obvious traces than his explicit claims. With that in mind, I would like to look more closely at Augustine's interiority:

But it [the mind] is also in the things that it thinks about with love, and it has got used to loving sensible, that is bodily things; so it is unable to be in itself without their images. Hence arises its shameful mistake [*errus dedecus* ], that it cannot make itself out among the images of things it has perceived with the senses, and see itself alone...[\[5\]](#)

What is interesting is what Augustine *doesn't* say here. A materialist would see bodily things as including other people, but Augustine did not think from that starting point. Would he have included people? That's a little less clear-cut. People are equal to oneself, and purely sensible objects are inferior. One is trying to go upwards, and Augustine does not

seem to include equal people with inferior objects. Perhaps he does not raise this question. Augustine does go on to give a primacy to 'Know thyself,' but this is a matter of means, *not* of final end. Augustine is telling us to start with what is near at hand[6]. The distinction between what Augustine called 'interior' and what we would call 'private' is significant. It contains not only phantasms (sense impressions) but the *res ipsa* (the realities themselves) of intelligible things, and is where the soul meets intelligible truth. God is in the interior, and is shared between people. Furthermore, when we unite with God, we are united with others united with God. Where there is privacy, this is darkness caused by the Fall.[7]

## II. Is the psychological image relational?

I would suggest that the psychological image is relational. Furthermore, I would suggest that the deepest relationality comes *before* making God the object of the *vestigia* (divine shadows or traces in Creation) of memory, understanding, and will. Augustine comments:

Even in this case [I Cor. 8:2], you notice, he [Paul] did not say "knows him", which would be a dangerous piece of presumption, but "is known by him." It is like another place where as soon as he said, *But now knowing God*, he corrected himself and said, *Or rather being known by God...*[\[8\]](#)

Before we worry if God is the object of our love, he must be the Subject behind it. And that does not mean we need to worry about orienting the *vestigia* (traces of God imprinted in Creation) so we add relationality as something external; relationality is there in the beginning, as God knowing us.

Is remembering, understanding, and willing oneself a relational activity? If it's sought on the right terms, it is. That means that it is not the pre-eminent *goal*, but a *means*, the bridge that must be crossed to gain access to other places.[\[9\]](#) That means that remembering, understanding, and willing have God as their *goal* even before he is their *object*. Augustine comments in another draft of the psychological image:

This word is conceived in love of either the creature or the creator, that is of changeable nature or unchangeable truth; which means either in covetousness or in charity. Not that the creature is not to be loved, but if that love is related to the creator it will no

longer be covetousness but charity. It is only covetousness when the creature is loved on its own account.[\[10\]](#)

Augustine's discussion of use and enjoyment forbids the psyche to enjoy itself: regardless of immediate object, God is the goal or *goal* of 'Know thyself.'

In regard to the rest of Creation, it is much easier to read a psychological image as non-relational. His enjoyment/use distinction is not utilitarian but helped make utilitarianism[\[11\]](#). Whilst he chose Christianity over Manicheanism and Platonism, these other beliefs left a lasting imprint[\[12\]](#); Augustine rejected their claims that matter was evil, but his conversion to believing in the goodness of created matter was less thorough than one could desire. At one point Augustine considered sex a major to *reject* marriage; later he acknowledged sex an instrumental good when it propagates the people of God[\[13\]](#). Augustine's much-criticised views on sex were in continuity with his understanding of creation, especially material creation. The created order that is neither called evil nor fully embraced as good, even fallen good: 'Cleansed from all infection of corruption, they are established in tranquil abodes until they get their bodies back—but incorruptible bodies now, which will be their guerdon [beneficial help], not their burden.'[\[14\]](#) This negative view of our (current) bodies is not a view of something one would want to be in relation with, and that is part of who we are created to be. From these, one could argue a continuity, if perhaps not parity, with a mindset that would support an individualistic psychological image. The argument has some plausibility, but I believe it is not ultimately true.

The biggest difference between a person and mere matter is that a person has spirit. Augustine can say, 'Now let us remove from our consideration of this matter all the many other things of which man consists, and to find what we are looking for with as much clarity as possible in these matters, let us only discuss the mind,' and abstract away a person's body to see the mind. I did not find a parallel passage abstracting away a person's mind to see body alone. Even if we assume he remained fully Manichean or fully Platonist, both Manicheanism and Platonism find some people to be above the level of matter. Augustine was free enough of Platonism to forcefully defend the resurrection of the body in *De Civitate Dei*[\[15\]](#) (The City of God). His belief in community is

strong enough to make the interpersonal image important in his discussion. As argued in 'Mindset Considerations', he was quite far from individualism to begin with.

If community is important, why have a psychological image? Let me give one line of speculation. Augustine may be trying to put community on a proper ground. The Trinity turns outwards, not in an attempt to remedy any kind of defect, to try to get the creation to fill some need that it can't fill itself. The Trinity turns outwards out of abundance and fulness. Augustine may not want half persons seeking other half persons to try and create fulness. I believe he wants whole persons turning outwards out of the fulness within. In other words, a psychological image lays the ground for robust interpersonal relationship. Leaving this speculation aside, community was deeply ingrained in the patristic mindset, so that it didn't need saying. A psychological image could be explored without Augustine needing to add constant footnotes saying, 'But I still believe in community.'

### **III. What understanding does Augustine hold in the end?**

Augustine explores a number of possible images of the Trinity before settling on one. He starts with an interpersonal image of lover, beloved, and love representing Father, Son, and Spirit respectively. Then he explores a 'psychological' image of mind, mental word, and will, which he revises into memory, understanding, and will. [16] Besides these images there are others not explored in this essay, such as thing seen, sense impression formed, and will. I would like to show which image Augustine chooses.

I would also like to make a distinction which makes sense of his choosing one image from several candidates. The distinction is the distinction between images that are 'built in' and 'after the fact'. [17] The difference between an image that is 'after the fact' and one that is 'built in' is the difference between a portrait which resembles a person, and a cloud in which a resemblance is found. Is the image something prior to anything observable, something around which other things are shaped, or is the image what we can find when we find things that look like a trinity?

This is arguably latent in Augustine's discussion of enigmas [18], and in remarks like 'It is true of all of his creatures, both spiritual and corporeal, that he does not know them because they are, but that they are because he knows them.' [19] The discussion of enigmas discusses things mysteriously hidden and then brought forth: Augustine mentions the story of Hagar and Sarah and then Paul drawing out their hidden symbolism. He wrote, 'As far as I can see then, by the word "mirror" he wanted us to understand an image, and by the word "enigma" he was indicating that although it is a likeness, it is an obscure one and difficult to penetrate.' [20] Augustine has looked through any number of images

'after the fact.' Now Augustine is trying to find out which of these plausible 'after the fact' candidates holds its plausibility precisely because it is the image 'built in'. He wants to know which of the resemblances to the Trinity is there precisely because the Trinity created it to be 'after our likeness'.[\[21\]](#)

What, at heart, is the distance between an image 'built in' and 'after the fact'? An 'after the fact' image is an 'after the fact image' because the behaviour and properties it shows, whilst a 'built in' image is such by its internal logic. An early draft of the psychological image compares the mind to the Father, its word to the Son, and the will joining them together to the Holy Spirit. Augustine, conscious of Arianism, says that a human mental word is equal to the mind that begot it. Even if he did not say this, and the word was described as inferior to the mind, there would be reason to see the mind/word/will psychological image as a 'built in' image. A person looking for an 'after the fact' image would look for the property that word and mind are equal because Father and Son are equal; if we look at 'built in' logic it is possible that uncreated God can beget a Word equal to himself, but a creaturely mind lacks the stature to beget a word that is its equal. Then the image would lack the property of equality, but it would have the internal logic of begetting what word one can beget, and reflect the Trinity at a deeper level.[\[22\]](#) This is like the difference between a literal translation and a dynamic equivalent. A literal translation tries to faithfully represent the text word for word; a dynamic equivalent tries to faithfully represent the text's impact, and it may give the text much more breathing room than a literal translator feels is respectful. A literal translation preserves details, but only a dynamic equivalent can render a poem into something that breathes as poetry. This may be part of why Williams writes, 'Growing into the image of God, then, is not a matter of perfecting our possession of certain qualities held in common with God... It is for us to be at home with our created selves...'[\[23\]](#) Growing into the image of God is not to look as if we had not been created, a literal rendering of God's attributes, but a creaturely dynamic equivalent in which a glimpse of the Trinity is rendered in creaturely idiom. This is inadequate; the creaturely idiom isn't powerful enough to capture the divine original, regardless of how it is rendered. Yet Augustine does settle on one image, one translation, not just as bearing 'after the fact' resemblance, but as having been constructed to

have a 'built in' resemblance.

At the end of XV.3, Augustine quotes [Wisdom 13:1-5](#) on recognising creation as the work of the Creator, and comments:

I quote this passage from the book of Wisdom in case any of the faithful should reckon I have been wasting time for nothing in first searching creation for signs of that supreme trinity we are looking for when we are looking for God, going step by step through various trinities of different sorts until we arrive at the mind of man.

This sets the programme for much of book XV. This program has subtleties of various sorts, and Augustine says far more than merely settling on the psychological image. The mind is the genuine image of the Trinity in that God has projected his own likeness downwards, but if we try to project anything in creation upwards—even the image God himself has fashioned—it must fall immeasurably short. The most faithful photograph captures at best a glimpse of the living person it portrays. So while Augustine settles with the psychological image, he is careful to portray its fundamental incompleteness. The psychological image may hold a unique privilege. Of all the 'after the fact' images surveyed, it alone bears apparent 'after the fact' resemblance because it was built to be image. In the end, this privilege of place underscores the book's apophasis all the more powerfully. Not only do the various apparent 'after the fact' images which we see fail to accurately convey the Trinity, but the image which the Trinity itself has built into us, itself falls fundamentally short of God's transcendence. This is a far greater testimony to the divine transcendence: if an 'after the fact' image breaks down on closer observation, that only says that one specific 'after the fact' image breaks down on closer inspection. When the one 'built in' image, created by the Trinity itself, *also* breaks down, this says that the Trinity utterly transcends anything the creation can contain. The bigger it is, the immeasurably harder it falls, and the more we can learn from its failure.

But is this a failure of the created image?

Let's look more specifically at Augustine settling on the psychological image. In book X, Augustine writes:

These three, then, memory, understanding, and will, are not three lives but one life, not three minds but one mind.... Are we already

then in a position to rise with all our powers of concentration to that supreme and most high being of which *the human mind is the unequal image, but image nonetheless?*[\[24\]](#) [emphasis added]

This is an important distinction. Augustine is not looking for a perfect and uncreated image of the Trinity, as the Son is the perfect and uncreated image of the Father. This is stated here, but I am not sure that this is a basic insight which informed his thought. He writes,

Again, there is this enormous difference, that whether we talk about mind in man and its knowledge and love, or whether about memory, understanding, and will, we remember nothing of the mind except through memory, and understand nothing except through understanding, and love nothing except through will. But who would presume to say that the Father does not understand either himself or the Son or the Holy Spirit except through the Son...[\[25\]](#)

This is an observation that the 'built in' image he has chosen does not have what one would seek in a 'after the fact' image. In the surrounding text[\[26\]](#), Augustine doesn't explicitly state that the differences are failings. However the long discussion of how much of the Trinity is not captured in this image does not seem a verbose way of saying that this image functions along 'built in' rather than 'after the fact' lines. It seems to be criticising the 'built in' image for failing to demonstrate 'after the fact' properties. If so, Augustine made something like a category error. This would suggest that the meticulous Augustine, so careful in accounting for the details of Bible verses, didn't conceive this as something to be meticulous about. The impression I receive from reading Augustine is that Augustine probably had thoughts like the 'built in'/'after the fact' distinction I drew, but they were probably tacit, much less developed and much less prominent, and in particular not an organising principle or winnowing tool Augustine used in deciding which of many trinities he would rest with.

And there are other texts which show a psychological image:

So the trinity as a thing in itself is quite different from the image of the trinity in another thing. It is on account of this image that the thing in which these three [memory, understanding, and love] are

found is simultaneously called image...[\[27\]](#)

## **IV. Directions for further enquiry**

The distinction between 'built in' and 'after the fact' appears to be significant. It would be interesting to study more specifically what is the relation between Augustine and this concept. There are quotations one could piece together to argue that Augustine thought in these terms, but other passages make this somewhat less clear. I have raised a question, but I believe more work needs to be done. My comments about that distinction in regard to Augustine's choice of image may be treated more as a question than an answer.

People who read Augustine as overly unitarian seem to find a psychological image, and people who read him as a balanced Trinitarian seem to find an interpersonal image. Reading the psychological image as relational may suggest an alternative placement with regard to these basic positions.

## **V. Conclusion**

The earliest Church Fathers, writing more or less systematic theological treatises, generally didn't write about the Church. Was this because it was not important or not believed? To the contrary, it was air they breathed so deeply that they would never have thought of that as needing saying. Augustine was a Church Father and had the mindset of a Church Father. He chose a psychological image and did not try too hard to make it relational because he never thought it was the sort of thing that needed to have relationship added.

I have chosen an obvious reading which people may give people pause because it appears individualistic and not relational; this reading is that Augustine chose memory, understanding, and will as the 'built in' image

of the Trinity. Of things raised in this essay that could merit further study, the most interesting is probably the concept of 'built in' images as contrasted with 'after the fact' images.

# Does God Suffer?

I had the privilege of reading [A Foot in Two Worlds](#) recently, and posting the following five star review titled, "REAL Theology":

I'm Orthodox where Vince is old-style UMC, and one of the things valued in theology is that it's not some sort of game you play in your head; it is what you work out, what you live. In that sense real theology is more like a wrestling class than a math class.

This is a book of real theology. The pastor who wrote it met a terrible pain, the abrupt news that his son, the kind of child who has it rough and who is especially dear to a parent's loving heart, without warning collapsed in death. One day there, the next gone.

And in the midst of a pain no man should have to suffer, Pastor Vince dug down, deep down, and found that the bottom was solid, and built his house on rock. This is real theology. I don't agree with every detail of what he says; if I were responsible for sorting out his ideas, a duty no one has appointed me to, I might try to convince him that all he says about the people who he calls sparrows in life is true, but the God who loves sparrows with an infinite and everlasting love, and sees every sparrow fall, is beyond suffering. No one can force him to suffer: but he chooses to enter into the suffering of his Creation. Even the formula "One of the Trinity has suffered" has been considered and roundly rejected. And the point is important; it is wrestling and not mental chess, but it is not one I would force upon the book. The theology in the book is real, and I would not try to argue him out of his belief that the God who loves the suffering ones, is compelled to Himself suffer. It would be less real theology if we entered a debate and he acknowledged I scored that point.

I mention theology because that is of cardinal interest to me. But that is, perhaps, not the biggest point to be made. He has taken pain, again a pain no parent should know, and crafted a work that is human and beautiful. It is painful, but it is beautiful, and if I were at my young age to keel over dead this instant, as abruptly as Vince's son Gabe collapsed having no pulse, and leave my parents to sort out what would be left behind, I would scarcely have a better final message to give them than to leave my computer open to "[A Foot in Two Worlds](#)."

Disclosure: I am a poet, of sorts, and Pastor Vincent Homan asked permission to quote my poem "Open", taken from the volume [The Best of Jonathan's Corner: An Anthology of Orthodox Christian Theology](#). Permission was gladly granted, and I am glad to have provided one of the many beautiful quotes Vince wove into this book.

I stand by every accolade I gave in that review, not to mention that the book represents superb writing. And if I were to pass away at my young age, I would want my parents to read [A Foot in Two Worlds](#). But the more time passes, the less the question of whether God suffers looks purely academic. It is a question of doctrine of God, of theology proper, and it has more than meets the eye. And I am grateful to Pastor Vince because in writing his book he gave me the possibility of writing this work. In a real sense I owe the possibility of writing it to him.

There is a quote, "I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity." My point is that God does not suffer in the sense of being a God too small to avoid suffering. My point is that "on the other side of complexity", a God whom no one can constrain to suffer, a God utterly beyond anything we can imagine, has chosen to suffer.

I will look at several authors, some of them Eastern and some of them Western, and try to unfold the grandeur of a God who is beyond suffering, yet chooses to suffer in us, closing with why a God who is not bound to suffer is better news to us who suffer than a God who suffers would be.

The first stop I wish to make is with Anselm of Canterbury. His *Monologion* makes different arguments about God and is a bit of a hodge-podge that Anselm seemed to want to simplify on second thought.

So he wrote the [Proslogion](#). In it he presents the following argument:

*God, whether or not he exists, is by definition **that than which nothing greater can be thought**. Now either he exists a real God in actuality, or only as a concept in people's minds. But it is greater to be a God who exists in actuality than to exist only in people's minds, so God must exist, or else reality is based on contradiction.*

Most people on hearing this think the argument has slipped something past them, and atheists respond to this backward argument from the Middle Ages by saying, "But if that is true, by the same logic there must be some ultimate exotic paradise where it rains Champagne, and *filet mignon* and lobster grow on trees!" And in fact this argument has a quite venerable precedent; a man named Gaunilo published this argument soon after Anselm and Anselm offered a rebuttal arguing, "Yes, but not in the case of God." Anselm expressed a wish that Gaunilo's objection, and Anselm's own response, be published together with the original piece, and so far that wish has been honored; [my link to the Proslogion is actually to a translation that contains the Proslogion, Gaunilo's objection, and Anselm's reply](#). And I have never heard an atheist show knowledge of Gaunilo's having anticipated their objection centuries ago, or of Anselm's attempt to respond to it.

I am not asking that you accept this argument; it has been called the most controversial argument in the history of philosophy, and I'm not completely sure what to make of it. Something said of Bishop Berkeley's strange arguments might be said of this "ontological argument": "*They admit no answer and produce no conviction.*" My own reasons relate to why Thomas Aquinas said that the peasant who does not murder because the law of God is so deep in his bones is greater than the theologian who can reason, "Do not murder" from first principles. I have seen the argument compel a grudging head; I have never known the argument to directly compel a heart. And for that reason I hold it with tongs.

But I bring this up because whatever the status of the argument as a whole, it hits the nail on the head in terms of nature of God. God is greater than anything else that can be thought; Anselm rightly goes further in saying that God is greater than *can* be thought. God is the

Greatest God That Could Possibly Be.

Editors often have the right aesthetic distance to pick out a title for a work, and are sometimes much better than authors about picking an appropriate title to a work that the author has deeply burrowed into. One editor described to me the title "Maximum Christology" to an article on the Christological Councils: the Councils met the various debates of their day by affirming that Christ is maximally God, maximally Man, and the Divine and human natures are both maximally united and maximally unconfused. This is the essence of what is called Chalcedonian Christology.

Humans suffer, and human parents suffer when their children suffer. But it is my thesis, which I will argue below, that God does not suffer in himself, as creatures do. He chooses to suffer in others, in Christ and in mankind: in the *communicatio idiomatum*, God "without change became Man," as the Liturgy says, and Christ transcended his own state beyond suffering so that the Son of God suffered in the Son of Man everything Jesus suffered as a man. In fact the God whom no external force could compel to suffer, but chooses to suffer in Christ and in Creation, has something to offer suffering men that a God that could be forced to suffer would not. *Perhaps the greatest God that we can think of is one bound to suffer.* But there is a God who is greater than we can think of, and nothing can make him suffer against his will.

Let me try to explain.

Rudolf Bultmann is perhaps known for "de-mythologizing:" stripping out the mythological elements of Scripture to get at the truths behind them. What is perhaps less well known is that well over a millenium before, [St. Dionysius, also called Pseudo-Dionysius](#), had done a much better and more interesting job of the de-mythologizing project.

Some hint of this project came up, as all theological issues came up, on a Sunday where the Gospel message had two Apostles, James and John (or, perhaps more embarrassingly, their mother) ask to sit on the right and left hand of Christ in glory. He said, "This is a strange request. What could it possibly mean?" I pointed out that the Creed, chanted in church every Liturgy, says that Christ "[sits to] the right hand of the Father," and this "cannot be taken literally", which he corrected to, "cannot literally be true." This is an example of de-mythologizing: the Nicene Creed says things that cannot literally be true, and we say and mean them without crossing our fingers. Some people know that the

mean them, without crossing our fingers. Some people know that the words are "best approximations", and try to mean what the words are intended to approximate. Other people with less education may mean that Christ "came down from Heaven" literally speaking. But this is a little more a distinction of erudition than a distinction of faith itself; hence, as one person said, there are "grandmothers who don't know the Creed, but are all ready for Heaven." The story is told of a saint who went off in a boat to educate hermits, and spoke with three old hermits who were about as thick students as he could ask for. After an exhausting teaching visit when it seemed that no theology could get through to these thick-headed students, he started to row away, when the three men came out running on the water as if it were dry land, apologizing that they had forgotten even the first line of the "Our Father" and asking him to teach it to them again.

Something like this is why I inwardly winced at someone saying that, in [Genesis 1](#), God spoke with a voice, lips, and a tongue—I think I challenged it in some form, but it was not a failure of faith. And if Orthodoxy admits a form of de-mythologization, it is not the center of gravity. De-mythologization isn't worth much if it does not lead to a deeper participation in God.

[We do not live in the best of all possible worlds, but we have the best of all possible Gods.](#) And we have the best of all possible Gods regardless of how much right de-mythologization we undergo.

Children can be fond of asking, "Can God make a rock so heavy that he cannot lift it?", on hearing that God can do anything. But the Bible, especially in places like [Job](#), portray not exactly a picture of omnipotence, as such, but of absolute authority that extends beyond omnipotence. God cannot be tempted. He cannot change, nor can he lie. His nature is beyond suffering and cannot suffer directly. In the West, Thomas Aquinas said that nothing contradictory falls under the divine omnipotence.

Divine omnipotence does not mean that anything we can conceive or put into words must be something God can do.

*It may be closer to the truth to say that what God can do is not anything we can conceive or put into words.*

If we are to understand the divine omnipotence, the divine authority, we must let questions like "Could God create a rock so heavy he couldn't lift it?" to fall away, like a booster rocket.

Some things we think are in God are in our relationship to God. And no, this relationship doesn't have to be quasi-romantic in nature; it can be filial. By relationship here I mean how we are connected with God and not a second romance in our lives. We read, [Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.](#) The saved and the damned shall alike bow their knees and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord; but their relationships make it entirely different. To the saved, this will be a seal of ultimate victory; to the damned, a crushing blow of ultimate defeat. Here at least, the difference between our absolute victory and absolute defeat lies entirely in our relationship to God.

The difference between victory and defeat is not in what God does here. The difference is in us.

While I was studying as an undergraduate at Calvin, in one of the oldest pieces on my website, I wrote, [The Way of the Way](#),

What does Heaven look like?

He who is proud will see that every man present is present, not because of, but despite what he merits.

He who is rebellious will see people serve an absolute King.

He who desires self-sufficiency will see that joy is offered in community.

He who seeks wealth, prestige, power, and other ways to dominate others, will find his effort in Heaven to be like buying a gun in a grocery store.

He who strives will see that there is no one to strive with.

He who despises the physical will see a bodily resurrection.

He who desires his own interpretation and his own set of beliefs, will see absolute truth in crystalline clarity.

To those who will not let God change their character to virtue and love, even Heaven would be Hell.

A friend advised me, "It almost sounds like you are saying that Heaven and Hell are the same thing." At that point, out of what healthy instincts I had, I pulled back and said that Heaven and Hell are two different things. But among the images in Orthodoxy is one image, the

River of Fire, in which the Light of God shines on all, and the saints embrace the Light as ultimate bliss, and the damned fight the Light and experience it through their rejection of Him: and to them, the Light of Heaven is experienced as the fire of Hell. The choice Adam made in Eden can be repeated:

Adam reigned as an immortal king and lord over the whole world. He had a wife like nothing else in all Creation, paradise for a home, and harmony with nature such as we could not dream of. *And*, he was like a little boy with a whole room full of toys who is miserable because he wants another toy and his parents said "No."

God cannot but love. He cannot but shine. He cannot but resurrect. And regardless of how far that image should be taken—or de-mythologized—this much is clear: he resurrects the saved and the damned alike.

And something like this image is known in the West: I have not exactly seen the claim, "[God does not send people to Hell, but the fires of Hell are nothing other than the light of Heaven experienced through the rejection of Christ](#)" in Western sources, but C.S. Lewis says, "Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to." He does not go so far as to say that mercenary souls will also see God, but the implication is that the experience of seeing God is in no way welcome or desirable to a mercenary soul. And it is possible—even if the point should not be pressed too far—that *all* will see God, and the pure in heart will delight in it, while mercenary souls will be beyond squirming; they will be scorched by it. And Lewis may press the point further in [The Great Divorce](#):

Hell is a state of mind - ye never said a truer word. And every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind - is, in the end, Hell. But Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is Heavenly.

The formula, "Unus ex Trinitate passus est." ("One of the Trinity has suffered.") is one of few formulas from my education that I remember

first in Latin, then in other languages. It was a debated formula that was considered, rejected by the same Church that rejected Nestorius for dividing the Christ, and ultimately accepted. If you will, it was decided that God is utterly beyond suffering, and then that God transcends this so that the Son of God was crucified. The Chalcedonian affirmation is that Christ is maximally God, maximally man, and the natures are maximally unconfused and maximally united. And suffering belongs to the human nature, not the Divine nature. But there is a distinction between I would speak of suffering in oneself and suffering in another: Not One of the Trinity has suffered in himself, but the Son of God suffered in the man with which he was maximally united, and suffers in the human race he became a member of. But something of this again exists in the creature's relationship to God. Christ has ascended into Heaven, into the glory that we will also participate if we take up God's offer of salvation. Then is there a possibly a way we can describe him as hungering or thirsting, sick or in prison?

The apocalyptic buildup in St. Matthew assures us there is:

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungred and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty

angels. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

This passage is not for Christ's benefit; it's for ours. If we cannot properly love Christ when he comes to us in the person of a beggar, how will we see him in the last day when he brings us to him face to face? The ascended Christ, enthroned in Heaven, is not thirsty *in himself*. However, each person is made in the image of God, is built according to the presence of God, and if we see beggars as a nuisance rather than an icon of Christ, and an icon in whom Christ suffers, what are we practicing for Judgment Day?

My music teacher in gradeschool emphatically stated, "Practice does not make *perfect*. Practice makes *permanent*," the point being that we should not just log time practicing, but log time practicing as well as we could. Each person we meet is one for whom God ordained that we should cross paths, and with each of these are *practicing* how we will meet Christ in his *own* person on Judgment Day. And one day, the results of our *practicing* will be made irrevocably *permanent*.

But what about the question of whether God suffers? Pastor Vince in [A Foot in Two Worlds](#) talks at length about "sparrows", a point just nicked on in my review. Literal sparrows, in the Bible, were sold for offerings, two for a penny or five for two pennies: the fifth one thrown in because it wasn't really worth much of anything. Metaphorical sparrows, infinitely dear to a parent's heart, were those who suffer in life: those who lost at sports, or were clumsy, or got lousy grades, or were social outcasts, or didn't look the prettiest. The person who was low man on the totem pole, who had it rough: these were the children dearest to a parent's heart. Vince gives thicker description than the parable of the Last Judgment quoted above, but it is quite a similar roster of usual suspects. And a parent's heart goes out to sparrows, and suffers with them. The greatest virtue the book paints of parental love is that it goes out to sparrows, and

suffers with them. Suffering is not an option: the constitution of love demands it. If a child suffers, and a parent loves the child, the parent suffers the child's suffering; and the parent suffers more than the child suffers. This is behind a statement that seems ludicrous sophistry to a child receiving punishment: "This hurts me more than it hurts you." But it is not ludicrous sophistry: it is quite literally true.

And what can God be if he does not share in his children's sufferings? And, of course, all of the people considered to be God's children really are what the book says they are.

Something of the same thinking undergirds some of the texts for my classes: a Radical "Orthodoxy" essay stated that God was masculine, and feminine, and supramasculine, and suprafeminine, and I think neuter may have been thrown in there somewhere. What is going on is the same as texts one would expect Radical Orthodoxy, on the surface of it, to oppose: seeing that men and women exist equally on earth, an identical measure or kind of man-ness and woman-ness must be ascribed to God, and not a God who is masculine beyond any sense of femininity, because if that's the case, then the good of woman is impaired. And scholars won't see things any other way, and the possibility that the good of women could be advanced by [the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven and earth is named](#), is inconceivable.

(But to those few who do glimpse what the alternative to the politically correct canon may be, there is a freedom and a fittingness that is like a lifelong experience of falling off a cliff.)

Charles Darwin buried a child, and his theory of evolution was a product of his grieving. Almost a triumph of it. Darwin could not believe that a good God, and one who intervened with miracles, could choose not to

I cannot fully engage the question of the good of women here, and what on earth that could be besides the fulfillment of feminist prescriptions, but I have engaged it in multiple other pieces including:

- [Where Is the Good of Women? Feminism Is Called "The Women's Movement." But Is It?](#)
- [The Patriarchy We Object To](#)
- [The Fulfillment of Feminism](#)
- [Knights and Ladies](#)

For here, let it

save his son. And so he developed a theory where God had not intervened with miracles, not only in the time of Christ, but at any time. Even before humans, the origin of species was to be without miracles. God was like a Watchmaker who carefully built a watch, wound it, set it in motion, and then never needed to touch it again. And so Darwin, in his efforts to save his belief in God, proposed a mechanism, evolution via natural selection, whereby species could appear without miracles. God, a good and honorable God if necessarily a distant one, could thus remain a good God even if Darwin's son had died, because such a God was necessarily absolved of any guilt for failing to answer prayers. To rescue the goodness of God, Darwin found an ingenious way to cut God down so that the divine goodness would fit into his head. Later, Darwinian and neo-Darwinian evolution would be taken up by some religious faithful, and by many naturalists who want to avoid the conclusion that life is the creation of a Creator God. The consequences are impressive. But the core is that in pain and grief, Charles Darwin cut down God until he would fit inside of his head.

I hesitate very much to lump Pastor Vince in with Darwin; it would be a brutal blow, and in poor taste. But consider this: parents, as a rule, love children. Love for children is part of the landscape even in abortion, where whatever the rhetoric of "my body, my choice" may be, women who have abortions grieve the loss of a child. No competent and honest post-abortion counselor will say that psychologically an abortion is just the removal of an unwanted parasite; the love of mother for child is real and a deeply engraved portion of the landscape, and this is true even when people cut against the grain by setting things up so women believe they are better off with an abortion. In other words, the love of parent for child is a major landmark even when the parent chooses a separation.

If this much is true, what is to be said for a man who has had years to learn to love his son, whose heart goes out to sparrows, who out of love for his neighbor has become a pastor, who

suffice to say that I am a conservative Orthodox Christian, and I care *deeply* about the good of women.

Something like this may be why one feminist, early on in the movement, called abortion the ultimate violation of a woman.

I would like to look at one important concept a little more deeply.

pours out his love, his regrets, his sorrow, and his hope into a masterpiece, who still suffers in the suffering of his son and remains in regret even when his pain has come to be coupled by hope so he has one foot in suffering and one foot in hope? And if he believes that God as a parent must be a suffering God? The words, "Do not judge" come to mind. None the less, God does not suffer as earthly parents do. No external force pushes him into grief he did not choose. He is beyond all such constraint.

I have been speaking of the transcendence of God, although I have not used that term much. Words about Christ "[sits to] the right hand of the Father" as words that cannot literally be true, underscore his transcendence. Words about the Greatest God That Could Possibly Be underscore his transcendence. Words about the maximum Christology of the Maximum Christ underscore his transcendence. The entire thrust of the argument in this article has been to underscore that God infinitely transcends anything we could possibly ask or imagine. And this brings me to one last point:

*God transcends his own transcendence.*

St. Dionysius, in the height of what may be the height of the Orthodox Church's works of theology on the transcendence of God, wrote:

The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more our words are confined to the ideas we are capable of forming; so that now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing...

Properly speaking, there is a dual aspect to suffering. One is to endure sorrow; another is to be pushed from without and moved. But both are present in Vince's story; he is pushed out to where he would not go. He never so far as I remember quotes King David in the Absalomic bereavement, "[O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!](#)" But unless one is to do extreme violence to the spirit of Homan's writing, it is clear that he would have willingly died in place of his son in a heartbeat. And his suffering has both aspects; he would not have endured sorrow unless he were pushed out as he was.

I will not treat here the dimension of enduring sorrow, but suffering in the sense of compulsion from

So this is what we say. The Cause of all is above all and is not inexistent, lifeless, speechless, mindless. It is not a material body, and hence has neither shape nor form, quality, quantity, or weight. It is not in any place and can neither be seen nor be touched. It is neither perceived nor is he perceptible. It suffers neither disorder nor disturbance and is overwhelmed by no earthly passion. It is not powerless and subject to the disturbances caused by sense perception. It endures no deprivation of light. It passes through no change, decay, division, loss, no ebb and flow, nothing of which the senses may be aware. None of all this can either be identified with it nor attributed to it.

of compulsion from outside cannot belong to God. If the infinite God may suffer, and he does suffer, it is something other, something deeper, than being pushed around as a finite creature is pushed around.

Again, as we climb higher we say this. It is not soul or mind, nor does It possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is It speech per se, understanding per se. It cannot be spoken of and It cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, It is not power, nor is It light. It does not live nor is It life. It is not a substance, nor is It eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since It is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is It a spirit, in the sense in which we understand that term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and It is nothing known to us or to any other being. It falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being. Existing beings do not know It as It actually is and It does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of It, nor name nor knowledge of It. Darkness and light, error and truth—It is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to It, but never of It, for It is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of his preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; It is also beyond every denial.

And yet there is one point further: God transcends his own transcendence.

*God is love.*

[In him we live, and move, and have our being.](#)

The same God who is beyond the farthest stars is infinitesimally near.

We live by feeding off of the energies of God. It may be mediated by food and drink, but it is simply and ultimately God who sustains us.

The fact that God is Father *and not Mother* matters less than you think. Or rather, it does not hurt things. It is transcended.

Again to return to C.S. Lewis, "Prayer does not change God. Prayer changes me." But the divine Transcendence of God is so great that *the fact that prayer does not change God, matters less than you might think.* Or rather, it does not hurt things. It is transcended. God is Transcendent, and prayer is powerful; it is among the most powerful things we can do. And the fact that we cannot change God's mind detracts **nothing** from the power of prayer. Indeed, it is better for us that we cannot change God's mind, as it is better for us that The Greatest God That Can Possibly Be is untouched by how we would solve problems.

And the fact that God cannot suffer in himself matters less than you think. Or rather, it does not hurt things. It is transcended. Every earthly suffering borne out of love for another who suffers is a shadow of the God who is beyond suffering and yet transcends this to choose to suffer in his Creation.

In his book, Vince spoke of a wound rubbed raw, in people telling him, "I know just how you feel." Now a tangent might speak of genderlects and explain that this is a helpful assurance when speaking to a woman but not to a man; here the Golden Rule needs a little adjustment in that it is wiser not to give a member of the opposite sex the exact same form of encouragement you would best respond to. But this sensitivity was not present, and people assured him that because of some bereavement they'd experienced, "I know just how you feel." (The most offensive example was the loss of a pet.) I've lost both grandparents on my mother's side, and while there was grief—my grandmother's death came as a shock even as it was expected—it's not just sensitivity of "He's said he doesn't like being told others know just how you feel" that stops me from saying that I know just how he feels. I've experienced bereavements that cause pain that fades after time. Some of them hurt much worse than my

grandmother's death. But the death of a child can cause lifelong pain, and his experience has been one of unending pain that in one sense improves by being accompanied by hope as time goes on, but in another sense never stops stinging. Thanks be to God, my pains have not been like that. But I would say this: "God knows just how you feel. He understands you perfectly. He understands your sorrows, and every nook and cranny of your grief. Every regret you feel, he sees from the inside. And he is at work. *Suffering is God's workshop*. And he is working on you with eternal intentions. Perhaps he does not suffer in himself. He has chosen to enter your sufferings. He understands and loves you better than if he did." And I would hesitate to say this, because the greatest insensitivity to his nerves has been to calmly say, "I know just how you feel," and speaking personally as a cancer survivor, when I met with my Uncle Mark who had travelled for cancer treatment, he voiced pain at people saying, "I know just how you feel." I didn't offer him any such assurance, even though I possibly did know something like what he felt. But someone who knows just how you feel may connect without saying, "I know just how you feel;" if I did understand my uncle's experience, he picked it up without my making the claim. But with all due respect to a wound rubbed raw, God knows just how the pastor feels, and does this no less because he does not suffer himself.

And here is where the God who is beyond suffering, who suffers because he transcends his own transcendence, has most to give us. In Isaiah, we are told, [For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.](#) We are dealing, with so to speak, the ultimate benevolent alien Intelligence. (No, not crop circles. Crop circles are toxic and something to turn your back on if you want any spiritual or mental health.) The alien Intelligence, as it were, speaks our language, but is beyond the "abstractions of half a million years of wildly alien culture" found in [Robert A. Heinlein's \*Stranger in a Strange Land\*](#), a perennially interesting cult classic that has never gone out of print. The premise of the book is that a rocket ship travels to Mars, a baby boy is born before all adults die or are killed, and the boy is raised in the wisdom and spiritual discipline of Martian culture, and then brought "back" as a young "man" to earth. ("Smith... is... not... a... *man*." - "Huh? Explain yourself,

Captain." - "Smith is an intelligent creature with the ancestry of a man, but he is more Martian than man. Until we came along he had never laid eyes on a man."...) Amidst unfolding space opera political drama, Michael struggles to adapt to survive, has to struggle terribly to adjust to human culture and human language, then becomes adept in both human culture and language, which he fuses with the treasure of Martian culture and becomes a Messiah-figure, bringing to mankind the wisdom and spiritual disciplines of Martian culture, making a quite literal "best of both worlds" that offers a profound improvement to human life. (At least that's a sanitized summary of the story.)

I mention [Stranger](#) because something like this happens in the Bible and God's drama with the world, and I wrote, [Looking at Stranger in a Strange Land as a Modern Christological Heresy](#), basically because its attraction is a theme more interestingly engaged in the Bible itself. Not, specifically, that [Stranger](#) is a Christological heresy in the sense of being a flawed attempt at Christology someone worked out; Charles Taylor's [Sources of the Self](#) comments that one scholar had made a *perceptive* study of Martin Luther's momentous crisis of faith in light of the psychological literature of modern midlife identity crises, even though Martin Luther probably would not have understood the comparison and probably would have found it reprehensible if he *had* understood it. In like fashion, Heinlein cannot properly be considered someone who was trying to get Christology right and failed, but his book can be studied in light of the various Christologies of which the Church has said, "This is inadequate to the Maximum Christ... That is inadequate to the Maximum Christ... That one, too, is inadequate to the Maximum Christ..."

I would like to close with the letter I wrote Vince after a bit of time to recoil from the force and power of [A Foot in Two Worlds](#). I didn't mention that he had placed my quotation in the most honoring place it could have been, even though I was deeply grateful. I believe it shows something of the Alien Intelligence Who Loves Us, The Greatest God That Could Be, the God Who Cannot Suffer In Himself But Suffers In Us, Embracing Our Suffering, the God Who Is Greater Than Can Be Thought:

Vince, I am in awe of your work of honesty and practical theology. It's been a while since I have read something of this caliber in what I read.

I was wondering if I could give an appropriate response and I

I was wondering if I could give an appropriate response, and I think I will send you an email today. The book you wrote was of unexpected pain; this is of unexpected joy. I don't want to say this is as good as your son's death was bad, when such is manifestly and obviously not the case. But surprises come, and I started reading your book in suffering without hope of release, and to my surprise this is what I have to offer you in my hands in response to what you had to offer from your hands.

I pray that God may bless you.

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One of my doctors referred me to a sleep center, which did some studies that seemed to me at first to be a simple disappointment. They didn't seem to offer hope that I could be more awake, when I had decreasing energy during the day.

Then I met with one of their specialists, and he basically unravelled the puzzle reflected by my habits and medications. There had been an earlier conversation on a list when I mentioned nausea, in light of preceding history.

There had been an ill-advised medication switch by one doctor that resulted in a long-term underdose that almost killed me: I experienced nausea that built over months and led to me going without food or water for two days before I figured out that the approved underdose was making nausea. I asked generalists and specialists for help with nausea and the only thing I found was that if I increased my dosage of some medications [again], I could stave off nausea [for a little longer].

And in light of this conversation, it was singularly helpful that a friend pointed out that ginger is a potent anti-nauseant. This was much more helpful than the doctor's "I dunno", or a pharmacist informing me that non-prescription anti-nauseants boil down to sugar. (I was steered to a chemically engineered concoction of table sugar, [pharmaceutical grade] corn syrup, etc. and decided that if sugar was the only game in town besides a prescription anti-nauseant, which I had been refused, I'd rather have real honey than corn syrup.)

And the specialist I spoke with today explained to me why I felt so tired: the controlled sleep medicine I was given was one that has over 50% still remain in your system 24 hours later, so yes, he saw reason for my trouble escaping sleepiness. He wants to work with me to ratchet down the [prescription] drug complex I have after all my adventures, so I am really at doses that are medically necessary and not at doses that happen to include nausea control.

He wants me to do that, but first I need to make a preliminary adjustment for two weeks: get down to my normal 10 hours of sleep. (I legitimately need more sleep than most people, but not as much as I've been getting.)

I began to try to think about what to do. Jobhunting has had me a little more active, but it has its lulls. Then I remembered that I know little of Dickens, who has been described to me as "the primer for character and plot." Once I finish the piece I'm reading, the humanness of Dickens lies open. And I may ask on social media for reading recommendations, and read and reread the Fathers. Perhaps I will need breaks, but it looks like something to use the time constructively and help me grow as an author and as a man. I want to give my jobhunting first attention, but of all jobhunts this is the one that I would be most happy with my being slow at. I am not in my best state now, and up to a point the longer I wait the better I may be prepared to work. And there are other things I can do; *pro bono* technical work, maybe, and walking.

I feel like I've crossed a threshold. I don't expect any sudden changes of any sort, but vistas lie open. Thanks to Cynthia, the friend mentioned on this mailing list, I have a "nearly side effect free" way of controlling nausea; and now thanks to this I hope for a slow but effective process of waking up from my present state of being medicated to narcosis, and getting back to the Christos Jonathan you knew earlier.

This piece, that you are reading, is the first work of theology I have been able to create in months. [My site's list of recent postings](#) has three items from previous months that were posted out of something older, but this is the first blade of grass showing after a thaw.

# **Dissent: Lessons From Being an Orthodox Theology Student at a Catholic University**

## **Where to take our bearings: A telling starting point**

I enrolled in a Ph.D. program in historical theology at a Catholic university. Part of this program was a seminar with various readings to help us get oriented to what history is and how we should approach it. One of the first readings, possibly the first, was Stafford Poole's [History versus Juan Diego](#) (PDF).

The article had the ring of truth as far as the story it sketched out, but it is quite a grave matter to tell budding historical theologians that this is the sort of thing that should orient their study of history and historical theology.

The article raises grave concerns about the very existence of a major figure in Mexican piety and nationalism; the comparable equivalent as far as U.S. nationalism to go would be to uncover good reasons why we should believe that neither Thomas Jefferson nor Benjamin Franklin ever

existed, and the only "evidence" that anyone believed in either of these men before the Civil War was a complete forgery. The lay faithful and clergy who disagreed with the author come across like the Three Stooges.

The article may have been appropriate in itself, and in this case the historian may have legitimately been a figure like the little boy who saw that the emperor had no clothes. But to enshrine this article in a seminar meant to give an orientation to history is another matter entirely, and paints the inspiring, romantic image of the heroic, noble historian who delves past popular piety and the decisions of clergy up to and including the Pope, heroically rips apart a cherished fixture that neither the faithful nor Church officials are noble or brave enough to question, and his trust is shamefully betrayed by the Vatican.

Making *this* a paradigm example of how a historian should interact with Church hierarchy and popular piety is like holding up, so people can get their bearings, a singularly improbable story about how someone, who was drunk, blindly shot a gun into a building and hit a fire extinguisher, putting out a deadly fire and saving several lives. The problem is not so much the original event, but the fact that the extremely unusual story is being used to give the impression that it is a good idea to get drunk and randomly shoot guns around in a city.

Even aside from classes taught by Catholic dissidents, the question of dissent loomed large in a class on "The Profession of Faith," in which Rome asked some professors to be basically faithful to Catholic teaching. One of the questions was: If a Catholic scholar through research comes to a conclusion that seems to contradict what the Church teaches, *and* further communication and research clarifies that there is an irreconcilable difference between the scholar's findings and the Church officials' position, what should the scholar do? In the context of the class, with the examples and distinctions we had been asked to consider, this almost meant, "If this happens, how much pressure may the scholar appropriately use to bring the Catholic Church to accept his research, and what kinds of pressure are or are not appropriate?" And the professor was very gracious when I offered a different answer to the question of what a scholar should do: "It should be handled pastorally."

My response was received very kindly, and welcomed as a breath of fresh air, but it was completely different from anything I had heard in the class up to that point. In the midst of discussing what scholars should do

if their research collides with the Church, no one seemed to even consider the possibility that the discrepancy could be handled pastorally on the part of the researcher.

## Thinking in terms of "private doubts"

There is a big difference between having a doubt and pressuring the Church to agree with you, and having a doubt which was handled pastorally. I remember one conversation with my godfather, who was complaining about people broadcasting their doubts in the fashion of a dissident theologian, and he saw this as a major problem. But he liked what I suggested about "private doubts," meaning doubts that were handled pastorally and privately, struggled with, and brought to confession.

As far as "private doubt" is concerned, if you need to privately struggle to believe the deity of Christ, or the Church's teaching on some aspect of sexuality, *fine*. It may not exactly be *good*, but people bring all kinds of sin to confession, and if an Orthodox Christian has doubts in light of scholarly study, this is no more unforgivable than any other sin that gets obliterated in confession. Doubts may be unfortunate, but if these doubts are handled as *private* doubts and dealt with pastorally, this is not the world's biggest problem.

This point is why I was somewhat puzzled at journalists making a big to-do over the public announcement that Mother Theresa had painful doubts about God's existence. (Some asked if she was really a crypto-atheist.) I was underwhelmed at the revelation and wanted to ask, "So?!?" We might have sympathy for her difficult spiritual struggle, but she evidently treated her doubts as *private* doubts, brought them to confession, and still served God in love to her neighbor. That is about as much as one can ask.

## **Are scholars' difficulties really *that* different?**

This is related to why I am a bit bothered when someone who reads the Bible devotionally shows respect to a scholar by saying that his own Bible study is just lightweight and insignificant, but the scholar with access to historical sources is doing the real, serious Bible study. It may be great if they can be humble and out of their humility respect the work of scholars, but the Bible is given by God for devotional use and it is backwards to say that the devout layman reading the Bible is making a flimsy and insubstantial study next to the serious work of scholars. I've seen a lot of methodical scholarship that is not nearly as interesting as the devotional reading of common people, and in theology it is simply not true that scholarship is the industrial strength tool to really understand things.

I know that it may appear plausible, even obvious, to place scholarship in a separate category as far as doubt and dissent goes from doubts among the rest of the faithful. But my own experience casts doubt on this. I may have seen liberal Catholics doubting the Vatican's condemnation of contraception. I do not remember if I have ever read a dissident who tried to fairly understand theological and historical sources and come to their dissident position even though they tried very hard to give their Church's official position the benefit of the doubt. The invariable trend is to write something that sounds like people who want contraception for the same reason most moderns want contraception, and then shanghai whatever academic resources they can force to back them up.

## **Catholics do not have a monopoly on wrongful academic dissent**

If you're Orthodox, are you tempted to say, "Duh, you're talking about Catholic dissidents! It is the sworn duty of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition to oppose, and you can count on His Holiness's Disloyal Opposition to at least do *that* much. But Orthodoxy has none of those problems"?

Don't.

Almost every issue described above with Catholic dissidents is also something I've seen in Orthodoxy, perhaps on a smaller scale. The biggest thing I remember about one Orthodox scholar's lecturing is the consistent meta-message, never put in so many words, that the way we should relate to the ancient works of holy Fathers is ultimately with haughtiness and scorn, as *we* could unmask what the texts *really* were like. Nor is it just this one professor. If, in our age, humanities scholars rehabilitate figures like the Marquis de Sade, and some academic theologians rehabilitate Arius and Nestorius, then sure enough, Orthodox scholars, who are not *exactly* free to rehabilitate heretics, at least rehabilitate the much-maligned Augustine. The list goes on.

There may be a place for scholarship. But whatever that place may be, it is not a reason to stop handling difficulties pastorally. I know that I have, in my research, turned up stuff that appeared to be a reason to impose a significant change. This has happened more than once, and sometimes I was wrong. I once heard an Orthodox bishop give advice to a newly-ordained priest that he should not set about agendas for change in his parish-to-be, even for a pure and honorable purpose that is unquestionably right. That is to say that a priest can be right about something with respect to a parish under his care, and it is not his place

to whip it into shape. And if it is not the place of clergy in authority to whip a parish into shape, still less is it the duty of researchers to apply political force to straighten out a benighted hierarchy who don't see things their way.

## But what if you are right?

But what if you're right? And your words are not heeded? Then there may be sin in the picture, but *the sin does not belong to you*. St. Paul, at the end of his life, had greater achievements than one would expect of a Nobel Prize laureate. He could have written to St. Timothy, "*Veni, vidi, vici!*" "I came, I saw, I conquered!" But what he wrote instead was, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my race, I have kept the faith" ([II Tim 4:7](#)): he did not say, "I achieved," but only, "I was faithful," and in our life of faith it is not our responsibility to achieve, but only to be faithful.

**But what if things are really,  
*really* bad?**

There is a profound difference between Dante and Luther, to give a Western example, and it is not really which centuries they lived in: both lived in troubled times where there were major problems in the Roman Church. Dante and Luther alike were absolutely incensed at abuses they knew full well, and one surprise to naive Protestants first reading the *Commedia* is that Dante placed the Pope in Hell and seemed to treat the Pope's very name as an abomination. The difference between Dante and Luther is this: Dante remained to his dying day a loyal son of the Roman Church, but Luther took matters into his own hands—and created problems that are with us to this day.

## True discipleship

What we should aspire to is discipleship: sitting at the feet of the Lord, the Church, the Apostles, the Fathers, the clergy, and the faithful. The academic approach that is called "critical" may be enough to grasp logic, but it utterly fails to grasp the Logos: what makes a theologian and a teacher is not being critical *par excellence* but being a disciple *par excellence*. The paradigm example is not "...the inspiring, romantic image of the heroic, noble historian who delves past popular piety and the decisions of clergy up to and including the Pope, heroically rips apart a cherished fixture that neither the faithful nor Church officials are noble or brave enough to question, and his trust is shamefully betrayed by the Vatican." It is rather everything that such a scholar would seek to push past.

Perhaps I am pushing my own romantic image and ripping up cherished fixtures of my own. But to an interlocutor concerned about irony, I would not deny that I am pushing a romantic image, but rather I would suggest that I am pushing an image that is worth pushing: that of discipleship, that of sitting at the Lord's feet, that of divine sonship, that of being a servant at the Lord's disposal, that of living the divine Life. It is not the knowledge of the Enlightenment's version of Reason, but a knowledge that runs deep as the Song of Songs: the knowing that drinks and the drinking that knows.

## A practical example

Let me give one illustration from my own life. Even from very early on, I remember the local priest telling me that, contrary to the prohibition of contraception I expected, the Orthodox Church holds that it can be allowed or disallowed by a couple's priest after consultation, that it was not permissible to decide not to have children altogether, and the Orthodox Church has never spoken beyond that. I submitted then to Orthodoxy and accepted what he said. Then, later on, I found a really nasty surprise: despite ancient Orthodox condemnations of contraception, a spin-doctoring doozy of an article had apparently been taken simply as a straightforward account Orthodox teaching. And I wrote [Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential and Disturbing Article](#), and apart from showing it to an Orthodox priest or two and some trusted faithful, kept it off the record for a long time. And then, after a long time, I published it on [Jonathan's Corner](#), and later, after publishing it, found that I fit in as part of a quite broad consensus on an excellent online Orthodox forum.

What would I do differently if I had to do it over again? The answer is that I probably published my article too quickly: however important the issue may be, I might have done well to wait until later on. But I do not regret, as I was moving towards Orthodoxy, accepting the priest's word for what Orthodoxy taught, even though something about it seemed wrong at the time. Nor do I regret sitting on my writeup and do nothing with it for a long time, besides bring it up with a few people off the record. I believe it is an important issue (and anything but a matter of correctness for the sake of correctness: [contraception bears some nasty hidden price tags](#)), and that discipleship is more important, so that it is a fundamental error to let My Important Issue trump living and acting as a disciple. Even if I were right and the Church leadership had responded

sinfully and wrongly, the sin would belong to them, not me: my concern and duty is discipleship. It would be sin for me to decide it was my place to whip the Orthodox Church into shape, even if I happened to be right about what I thought of as the only issue!

(And there have been other, more embarrassing instances when I thought I could improve things and guess what? I was wrong.)

**Scholarship may be useful—  
but it *cannot* replace  
discipleship**

Scholarship and discipleship can be found together: some excellent theology has been written by scholars and in an academic context. However, genuine theology is theology because it comes from discipleship rather than scholarly rigor. Even the more academic examples of good theology are good by virtue of discipleship: to ask the scholarly training shared by Christian and anti-Christian scholars alike to power the movement of good theology is like asking a computer with a word processor to be the decisive force in writing a good novel. A word processor is a useful tool and perhaps not wisely ignored: but do not bark up the wrong tree by asking it to make someone a novelist, and do not bark up the wrong tree to ask scholarship to make someone a theologian.

For a theologian to push an agenda to improve the Church makes sense if you think theology falls under the heading of scholarship. But once you understand theology as a flower of discipleship, the picture starts to look quite different.

Theology in its deepest sense cannot be held by books at all: it is contemplation and the flower and the fruit of discipleship. But even for those of us who may never climb so high, the sort of theology one can write down is a flower and a fruit of discipleship. And it seems that academic research is rarely allowed to veto whatever orients a person's life: conservative and liberal alike go to the sources and return with their beliefs confirmed. It takes something fundamentally vaster—living discipleship in the Church—to unlock the heart of theology.

*Let us be disciples!*

# Doxology

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

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

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

Thou art,  
The Hidden Transcendent God who transcendest transcendence itself,  
The One God who transfiguratest Creation

THE ONE GOD WHO TRANSFIGURED CREATION,  
The Son of God became a Man that men might become the sons of God,  
The divine became man that man might become divine.

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

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

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

But thou art beyond all thought,  
All word, all being,  
We may say that thou existest,  
But then we must say,  
Thou art, I am not.

And if we say that we exist,  
It is inadequate to say that thou existest,  
For thou art the source of all being,  
And beyond our being;  
Thou art the source of all mind, wisdom, and reason,  
Yet it is a fundamental error to imagine thee,  
To think and reason in the mode of mankind.  
Thou art not one god because there happeneth not more,  
Thou art The One God because there mighteth not be another beside  
thee.

Thus thou spakest to Moses,  
Thou shalt have no other gods before me.  
Which is to say,  
Thou shalt admit no other gods to my presence.

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

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

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

But thou returnest soon,  
In years, or centuries, or ages untold,  
A day or a thousand years, soon,  
Then a seed no more.  
None shall escape seeing you,  
Not an angel choir to shepherds alone,  
But rank on rank of angel host.  
Every eye shall see thee,  
And they also which pierced thee

And they also which pierced thee,  
Thou camest and a few knees bowed,  
Thou wilt return,  
And every knee shall bow,  
And every tongue shall confess,  
Jesus Christ is Lord,  
To the glory of God the Father,  
As the Father triumphs in the Son.

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

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

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

And today.

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

Αμην,  
So be it. Amen.

# Do We Have Rights?

As we [Paul and Silas] were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. She followed Paul and us, crying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers; and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said, "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one's fetters were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."

And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he

And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, "Men, what must I do to be saved?"

And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God.

#### Acts 16:16-34, RSV

As he [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Silo'am" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is he"; others said, "No, but he is like him." He said, "I am the man."

They said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"

He answered, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Silo'am and wash'; so I went and washed and received my sight."

They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" There was a division among them.

So they again said to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight, and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if any one should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age, ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner."

He answered, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see."

They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too want to become his disciples?"

And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

The man answered, "Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he

said, "Do you believe in the Son of man?"

He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"

Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you."

He said, "Lord, I believe"; and he worshiped him.

### John 9:1-38, RSV

The Gospel today deals with physical blindness, but it is about much more than physical blindness. In this passage, the man who was blind from birth received his physical sight. That is an impressive gift, but there's more. The passage deals with the Pharisees' spiritual blindness, but the Church has chosen to end today's reading with the blind man saying, "Lord, I believe," and worshipping Christ. When he did this, the blind man demonstrated that he had gained something far more valuable than physical sight. He had gained spiritual sight. The Bible actually gives a few more chilling words about the Pharisee's spiritual blindness, but the Church, following the Spirit, is attentive to spiritual sight and ends its reading with the man demonstrating his spiritual sight by adoring Christ in worship.

What is spiritual sight? We see a glimmer of it in the passage from Acts, where we read something astonishing. We read that Paul and Silas were stripped, savagely beaten, and thrown into what was probably a dungeon. And how do they respond to their "reward" for a mighty good deed? Do they say, "Why me?" Do they rail at God and tell him he's doing a lousy job at being God? Do they sink into despair?

In fact none of these happen; they pray and sing to God. Like the man born blind, they turn to God in worship. As should we.

That is advanced spiritual sight. I'm not there yet and you're probably not there either. But let me suggest some basic spiritual sight: Next time someone cuts you off on the road and you almost have an accident, instead of fuming and maybe thinking of evil things to do the other driver, why don't you thank God?

What do you have to be thankful for? Well, for starters, your eyes work and so do your driver's reflexes, you have a car, and your brakes work, and probably your horn. And God just saved you from a nasty scrape that would have caused you trouble. Can't you be thankful for some of that?

SOME OF THAT.

In the West, we think in terms of rights. Almost all of the ancient world worked without our concept of rights. People then, and some people now, believed in things we should or should not do—we should love others and we shouldn't steal, cheat, or murder—but then there was a queer shift to people thinking "I have an entitlement to this." "This is something the universe owes me." Now we tend to have a long list of things that we're entitled to (or we think God, or the universe, or someone "owes me"), and if someone violates our rights, boy do we get mad.

But in fact God owes none of the things we take for granted. Not even our lives. One woman with breast cancer responded to what the women's breast cancer support group was named ("Why me?"), and suggested there should be a Christian support group for women with breast cancer called "Why not me?"

That isn't just a woman with a strong spirit speaking. That is the voice of spiritual sight. Spiritual sight recognizes that we have no right to things we take for granted. We have no right to exist, and God could have created us as rocks or fish, and that would have been generous. We have no right to be free of disease. If most of us see, that is God's generosity at work. He doesn't owe it to us. Those of us who live in the first world, with the first world's luxuries, do not have those luxuries as any sort of right.

I am thinking of one friend out of many who have been a blessing. I stop by his house, and he receives me hospitably. Usually he gives me a good conversation and I can hold his bunny Smudge on my lap and tell Smudge that my shirt is not edible. This is God's generosity and my friend's. Not one of these blessings is anything God owes me, or for that matter my friend owes me. Each visit is a gift.

It isn't just first world luxuries that none of us are entitled to. We have no right to live in a world where a sapphire sky is hung with a million constellations of diamonds. If there is a breathtaking night sky, God chose to create it in his goodness and generosity. Not only do I have no right to be a man instead of a butterfly or a bird (or to exist in the first place), I have no right to be in community with other people with friendships and family. God could have chosen to make me the only human in a lonely world. Instead, in his sovereignty, he chose to place me in a world of other people where his love would often come through them. I have no right to that. I'm not entitled to it. If I have friends and family,

that is because God has given me something better than I have any right to. God isn't concerned with giving me the paltry things I have a right to. He is generous, and gives all of us things that are better than our rights. We have no right to join the seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, powers, authorities, principalities, archangels, and angels—rank upon rank of angels adoring God. Nor do we have any right to live in a world that is both spiritual and material, where God who gives us a house of worship to worship him in, also truly meets us as we work, garden, play, visit with our friends, and go about the business of being human.

Isn't it terrible if we don't have rights? It's not terrible at all. It means that instead of having a long list of things we take for granted as "Here's what God, or the universe, or somebody owes me," we are free not to take it for granted and to rejoice at God's generosity and recognize that everything we could take for granted, from our living bodies to the possessions God has given us to God placing us at a particular point in place in time and choosing a here and now for us, with our own cultures, friendships, languages, homelands, sights and sounds, so that we live as much in a particular here and now as Christ, to a world carpeted with life that includes three hundred and fifty thousand species of beetles, to the possibility of rights. Every single one of these is an opportunity to turn back in praise and worship God. It is an opportunity for joy, as we were created for worship and we find our fullest joy in worshipping God and thanking him. Would you rather live in a world where you only have some of the things that can be taken for granted, or in a world where God has created for you so many more blessings than he or anyone else owes you?

There is, actually, one thing that we have a right to, and it's a strange thing to have a right to. Hell. We have a right to go to Hell; we've earned a ticket to Hell with our sins, and we've earned it so completely that it cost God the death of his Son to let us choose anyone else. But Hell is not only a place that God casts people into; it is also where he leaves people, with infinite reluctance, after he has spent a lifetime telling people, "Let go of Hell. Let go of what you think you have a right to, and let me give you something better." Hell is the place God reluctantly leaves people when they tell him, "You can't take my rights away from me," and the gates of Hell are barred and bolted from the inside by people who will not open their hands to the Lord's grace. The Lord is gracious, and if we allow him, he will give us something infinitely better than our rights. He will give us Heaven itself and God himself and he will give us the real beginnings of

Heaven itself, and God himself, and he will give us the real beginnings of Heaven in this life. The good news of God is not that he gives us what we think we have a right to, but that he will pour out blessings that we will know we have no right to, and one of these blessings is spiritual sight that recognizes this cornucopia as an opportunity for joyful thanksgiving and worship.

When I was preparing this homily, there's one word in the Greek text that stood out to me because I didn't recognize it. When the blind man says that Christ must be from God and have healed him as a "worshiper of God," the word translated "worshiper of God" is *theosebes*, and it's a very rare word in the Orthodox Church's Greek Bible. Another form of the word appears in Acts but this is the only time this word appears in either the Gospels or the books John wrote. It is also rare in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. It occurs only four times: once in IV Maccabees 15:28 where the mother of seven martyred sons sees past even her maternal love "because of faith in God" (15:24) and is called "the daughter of God-fearing [*theosebes*] Abraham," and three times in Job where the blameless Job is called a *theosebes*, or "worshiper of God." In Job, this word occurs once in the book's opening verse, then Job is twice called a "worshiper of God" by God himself. The Maccabees' mother is not even called *theosebes* herself, but "the daughter of *theosebes* Abraham."

What does this mean? I'm not sure what it all means, but John didn't use very many unusual words. Unlike several New Testament authors, he used simple language. In the Greek Old Testament, this word is reserved for special occasions, it seems to be a powerful word, and it always occurs in relation to innocent suffering. Job is the very image of innocent suffering and the Maccabees mother shows monumental resolve in the face of innocent suffering—the text is very clear about what it means for a mother to watch her sons be tortured to death. The Gospel passage is about innocent suffering as well as spiritual sight. When the blind man calls Christ a "worshiper of God," he is speaking about a man who would suffer torture for a miracle, before Paul and Silas, and this little story helps move the Gospel towards the passion. But Christ says that the blind man suffered innocently, and I'm not sure that we recognize all of what that meant.

People believed then, as many people believe now, that sickness is a punishment for sin. The question, "Who sinned? Who caused this man's

blindness?" was an obvious question to ask. And Jesus says explicitly that neither this man nor his parents sinned to bring on his blindness. Jesus, in other words, says that this man's suffering was innocent, and he was saying something shocking.

What does this have to do with spiritual sight?

Spiritual sight is not blind to evil. The Son of God came to destroy the Devil's work, and that includes sin, disease, and death. Sin, disease, and death are the work of the Devil. The woman who survived breast cancer who suggested there should be a Christian support group called "Why not me?" never suggested that cancer is a good thing, and would probably never tell a friend, "I wish you could have the sufferings of cancer." When Paul and Silas were beaten with rods, being spiritual didn't mean that they didn't feel pain. I believe the beatings hurt terribly. Sin is not good. Disease is not good. Death is not good. Spiritual sight neither ignores these things, nor pretends that they are blessings from God. Instead, God transforms them and makes them part of something larger. He transformed the suffering of Paul and Silas into a sharing of the sufferings of Christ, a sharing of the sufferings of Christ that is not only in the Bible but is written in Heaven. I've had sufferings that gave terrifying reality to what had always seemed a trite exaggeration that "Hell is a place you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy." My sufferings are something I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy, and it is terrifying to realize that Hell is worse. So why then is spiritual sight joyful?

C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce* describes a journey. This journey begins in an odd place, and one that is not terribly cheerful. Anyone can have anything physical he wants just by wishing, only it's not very good. The ever-expanding borders of this place are pushed out further and further as people flee from each other and try to get what they want.

A bus Driver takes anyone who wants into his bus, which ascends and ascends into a country that is painfully beautiful to look at, where not only are the colors bright and full but heavy, rich, and deep. It is painful to walk on the ground because the people who got off the bus are barely more than ghosts, devoid of weight and substance, and their feet are not real enough to bend the grass. This is in fact a trip from Hell to Heaven, where Hell is mediocre and insubstantial, and Heaven is real and hefty beyond measure, not only beautiful and good but colorful and rich and deep—and infinitely more real than Hell. One part that really struck me was that when Lewis's Heavenly guide (*George MacDonald*) explains why

was that when Lewis's heavenly guide (George MacDonald) explains why a woman in Heaven, whom MacDonald said had gone down as far as she could, did not go so far as descending to Hell:

"Look," he [MacDonald] said, and with the word he went down on his hands and knees. I did the same (how it hurt my knees!) and presently saw that he had plucked a blade of grass. Using its thin end as a pointer, he made me see, after I had looked very closely, a crack in the soil so small that I could not have identified it without his aid.

"I cannot be certain," he said, "that this is the crack ye came up through. But through a crack no bigger than that ye certainly came."

"But—but" I gasped with a feeling of bewilderment not unlike terror. "I saw an infinite abyss. And cliffs towering up and up. And then this country on top of the cliffs."

"Aye. But the voyage was not mere locomotion. That buss, and all you inside it, were increasing in size."

"Do you mean then that Hell—all that infinite empty town—is down some little crack like this?"

"Yes. All Hell is smaller than one pebble of your earthly world: but it is smaller than one atom of this world, the Real World. Look at yon butterfly. If it swallowed all Hell, Hell would not be big enough to do it any harm or have any taste."

"It seems big enough when you're in it, Sir."

"And yet all loneliness, angers, hatreds, envies and itchings that it contains, if rolled into one single experience and put into the scale against the least moment of the joy that is felt by the least in Heaven, would have no weight that could be registered at all. Bad cannot succeed even in being bad as truly as good is good."

Bad cannot succeed even in being bad as truly as good as good is good, and spiritual sight knows this. To have spiritual sight is not to close your eyes so tight they don't even see evil, but to let God open your eyes wider. Our eyes can never open wide enough to see God as he truly is, but God can open our eyes wide enough to see a lot. Why were Paul and Silas able to turn from being viciously beaten and imprisoned to singing and praying to God? For the same reason a butterfly from Heaven could swallow all of Hell without it even registering. In that image of Heaven, not just the saints but the very birds and butterflies could swallow up Hell. This is just an image; the Real Place, real Heaven, is far more

then. This is just an image, the real place, real heaven, is far more glorious.

Death is swallowed up in victory. Let us let spiritual blindness be swallowed up by spiritual sight that begins to see just how much God's generosity, grace, mercy, kindness, love, and 1001 other gifts we have to be thankful for. Let us worship God.

# A Dream of Light

You pull your arms to your side and glide through the water. On your left is a fountain of bubbles, upside down, beneath a waterfall; the bubbles shoot down and then cascade out and to the surface. To your right swims a school of colorful fish, red and blue with thin black stripes. The water is cool, and you can feel the currents gently pushing and pulling on your body. Ahead of you, seaweed above and long, bright green leaves below wave back and forth, flowing and bending. You pull your arms, again, with a powerful stroke which shoots you forward under the seaweed; your back feels cool in the shade. You kick, and you feel the warmth of the sun again, soaking in and through your skin and muscles. Bands of light dance on the sand beneath you, as the light is bent and turned by the waves.

There is a time of rest and stillness; all is at a deep and serene peace. The slow motion of the waves, the dancing lights below and above, the supple bending of the plants, all form part of a stillness. It is soothing, like the soft, smooth notes of a lullaby.

Your eyes slowly close, and you feel even more the warm sunlight, and the gentle caresses of the sea. And, in your rest, you become more aware of a silent presence. You were not unaware of it before, but you are more aware of it now. It is there:

Being.

Love.

Life.

Healing.

Calm.

Rest.

Reality.

Like a tree with water slowly flowing in through roots hidden deep

Like a tree with water slowly flowing in, through roots hidden deep within the earth, and filling it from the inside out, you abide in the presence. It is a moment spent, not in time, but in eternity.

You look out of the eternity; your eyes are now open because you have eternity in your heart and your heart in eternity. In the distance, you see dolphins; one of them turns to you, and begins to swim. The others are not far off.

It lets you pet its nose, and nestles against you. You grab onto its dorsal fin, and go speeding off together. The water rushes by at an exhilarating speed; the dolphin jumps out of the water, so that you see waves and sky for a brief moment before splashing through the surface.

The dolphins chase each other, and swim hither and thither, in and out from the shore. After they all seem exhausted, they swim more slowly, until at last you come to a lagoon.

In the center, you see a large mass; swimming closer, you see that it is a sunken ship. You find an opening; inside, all is dark, but you find a passageway.

After some turns, you come up in a different place. You come up through a fountain in a public garden; the bushes and ivy are a deep, rich shade of green, and sheets of water cascade down the yellowed marble of the fountain. It is ornately and intricately sculpted, with bas-relief scenes of a voyage.

As you study the pictures, day turns to night, and all that you see is bathed in moonlight. You are looking upon a statue: a delicate, slender, elfin nude, whose long hair cascades over her shoulders and about her body. She is reaching up to the sky, as if to touch the moon and stars. She is carved out of white marble, which looks pale blue, almost luminous, in the moonlight. It looks as if she was taken from the moon, and is rising up to touch it again.

The statue is on a tall pedestal of black marble. In the moonlight, the forest has a very deep color, a green that is almost blue or purple; the dark beauty of the night makes the statue seem almost radiant. Off in the distance, you hear a high, melancholy, lilting song; it is played on a harp and sung by a voice of silver. There is something haunting and yet elusive about the melody; it subtly tells of something wanted and searched for, yet not quite reached. And it is beautiful.

You sit, looking at the statue and listening to the song, for a time. They seem to suggest a riddle, a secret - but you know not what.

You walk along; fireflies begin to appear, and you can hear the sound of crickets chirping. There is a gentle breeze. The sky stands above like a high and faroff crystalline dome; the trees and grass below surround you, like little children who see a beloved elder coming, and run clamoring for a kiss. The grass is smooth and cool beneath your feet. There is a sweet, faint fragrance in the air, as of lilacs.

A round little girl, wandering through the forest, sees you and comes running. She is dark, with olive skin, and her black hair flares out behind her. She is wearing a dark green robe, the color of the forest, and her step is almost that of a dance - as if she is from a people where moving and dancing are not two different things. She is holding, in her hand, a simple bouquet of dandelions. "Look, look!" she says, "I have flowers!"

She jumps into your arms, welcoming you. Her touch is soft, and gentle. It is not near the softness of a grown woman; it has rather a ... simplicity. It is hard to find the right word. Then you recognize what it is. It has something of the carefree play of a child, but there is more than even abandon. She is holding you with complete trust. You do not doubt that she could fall asleep in your arms.

She begins to talk to you about many things. She talks about the forest, about people, about the stars, about God. After a time, you realize that she is not merely talking, but singing, as if the first words she heard were the words of a song. After another time, you realize that you have lost her words completely, and are entranced by the song. Presently she stops, and says, "Spin me! Spin me!"

Little children everywhere like to be held by the arms and swung around; this one is no exception. After you are both very dizzy, she takes you by the hand and begins, leading you along a path, to show you little details of the forest that you had never noticed before. Apart from the little details, there is something else which you begin to slowly see in the forest. The song by which she speaks, the dance by which she moves - and not just her, you do not doubt, but her people - seem to be echoed in the forest... and then you realize that rather they are echoes of the forest. Hearing, seeing, feeling that beauty from another person - you still do not doubt that they come from her, but they also help you to see what was always there but you had not noticed. As you walk along, you are lost in thoughts about the genius of all great artists... and begin to think about visiting an art gallery, not so that you can see what is in the gallery, but so that you can see what is not in the gallery.

that you can see what is not in the gallery.

The path widens out, around a shimmering pool. The golden flames of torches around the pool glimmer when reflected in the pool. There is singing - singing like that of the little girl, but the sound of a whole orchestra as next to the sound of a beginning flute. Men and women together pour fourth a rich harmony. The air is sweet with a delicate fragrance of incense; one of them brings you a cool wooden cup. Inside is a strawberry wine. It is sweet, and sour; the taste brings back memories of earliest childhood.

A circle forms among the people, then another, then another. Soon all of the people are spinning and weaving in a joyful dance. After a time, you realize that you are at the center; they are softly singing, "Welcome, Somebody," and listening intently. Arms and hands reach out, and sweep you into the dance. The dance is ordered, but also free; it draws you in, and, as you move, you feel that you can do no wrong.

How long the dance lasts, you do not know; still filled with its bliss, you find yourself sitting and talking with the people. One of them finds a soft seat of moss for you to sit on; another brings you a plum. Its taste is tart, and it has the texture that only a plum has — and, when you bite into it, you know that it was still on the tree when it was chosen.

The night winds on, and, after a time, you are led into a building woven out of living trees, with a bed of loam. Into it you sink; it is soft and deep...

You find yourself standing at the edge of a forest and a grassy plain. The mouth of a cave descends into the earth, and just before this is an old man sitting on a three-legged wooden stool. He is wearing a coarse grey-green robe, and has a long, flowing white beard. He is staring intently into the forest, with a concentration you have never seen before. It is like a gaze into a lover's eyes — nay, even deeper, a probe into the soul.

He shifts positions a few times, in his sitting, and at last stands up, takes the stool, and begins to walk towards the cavern. When he was looking into the forest, you were absorbed in watching him; now, you notice another man, a young one, approach the former.

"Is it Senex?"

"I am he."

"Senex, the great teacher?"

You see the old man's hand move to cover his mouth, but not quite quickly enough to conceal the faintest crack of a smile. The young man

stands attentively, waiting for words to come.

The old man's frame shakes once. A second passes, and then it shakes again and again. Then sounds the laughter that he had been attempting to conceal. Soon, the old man is convulsed with mirth, and making no attempt to conceal it.

After a while, almost doubled over with laughter, he begins to pull himself up. You can see his face from a different angle, and you see a merry twinkle in his eye. He places his arm over the young man's shoulder.

"Forgive me, brother, but it has been ages since anyone has addressed me as 'teacher' or 'great'. You cannot imagine how funny it sounds to me."

"Are you not Senex, who has traveled the seven seas, who has seen visions and been visited by angels, who has written treatises and instructed many?"

The man chuckles, and says, "Yes, I am all that, and much more. I am the image, likeness, and glory of God. I pray, and in my prayers I touch the stars and shake the foundations of the kingdom of Hell. I am a king and priest. I am a son of God. My name is written in the book of life. I am a god."

"Then why do you find it funny that I address you as 'great', or 'teacher'?"

"Because I am more than a great teacher, as are the children who dance through this field, as are you." Here the old man smiles at the young. "Come, now. Do you doubt that you are God's own son? What teaching, or miracles, or visions, or conquests, or exploits compare with that?"

"But if you are so great, why should you object to being called a great teacher? Surely the title is not false."

"My dear god - and now I am not addressing the Creator, but you yourself - what is wrong with the title is not that it says that I am a great teacher. I am. What is wrong is that the title implies that there are others who are not so great," and here the old man gave a great belly laugh, "when the truth of the matter is that the other people are so much more than a great teacher. I will not mind being called 'teacher' by you, if you agree to address everyone else as 'god' and 'goddess'. But if you will not call them 'god' and 'goddess', then simply call everyone 'brother' or 'sister'."

The young man stands in silent reflection for a time. "I come in search

The young man stands in silent reflection for a time. "I came in search of a man who could share with me profound wisdom; I see now that I have found him. So now I ask you: Give me a profound insight, that I may contemplate it for the rest of my life, and grow wise."

"Do you not know that God is love, that God loves mankind, that we have the new commandment to 'Love one another'?"

"All of this I have believed since I was a little boy."

"Then I give you one more lesson, to contemplate and learn for the rest of your life."

The young man listens, eager with expectation.

The old man bends down, plucks a blade of grass, and holds it in his outstretched hand.

The young man takes it, and waits for an explanation. When, after a time, the old man says nothing, he says, "This blade of grass is like the blade of a sword. Have you given this to me as a sign that I should contemplate spiritual warfare, and be ready with the sword of the Spirit?"

The old man says, "You should, but that is not why."

The young man thinks for a time, then says, "This grass is nourished by the sun, and so tells of it. Grass and sun exist as God's creation, and tell of him. Is this why you have given me the blade of grass?"

The old man says, "What you said is very true, but that is not why, either."

The young man says, "When Christ lived on earth, he lived as a carpenter, and observed and was surrounded by the birds of the air, the grass of the field, the lilies, and ten thousand other things. Have you given me this blade of grass to remind me of Christ's time on earth, or of his humanity, or that this is a place he passed by?"

The old man says, "You are still right, and you are still wrong."

The young man says, "Then what profound truth can you be teaching me? What secret key escapes my grass? I asked if you had given it to me as a symbol of a profound spiritual truth, and you said, 'no'. Then I asked you if you had given it to me that I might deduce by logic what it tells about God, and you still said, 'no'. Then, after that, I asked you if you had given it to me as a historical reminder of what has happened about blades of grass, and your answer is still the everchanging 'no'. What can I possibly be missing? What am I leaving out?"

The old man turns to face the young, and looks deep into his eyes. "This blade of grass I have given you," he said, "because it is a blade of

grass."

There is a look of puzzlement on the young man's face, which slowly melts into dawning comprehension. He steps forward and kisses the old man, with a long, full kiss on the lips, and then steps back and bows deeply - and the old man bows to him - and says, "Thank you." When the old man has responded, "You are very much welcome, brother," the young turns, clutching the blade of grass as if it were a diamond - no, more than that, as if it were a blade of grass - and walks back into the forest. There is a smile on his face.

You walk off in the field, and lie down on the grass. The day is growing warm and sultry; a faint breeze blows.

The breeze carries with it a small, white feather of the softest down. It gently falls on the sole of your foot. The breeze blows this way and that; the feather catches here, rolls there on your foot, brushing ever so lightly, up and down, up and down.

You feel a finger, cool as marble, just barely touching the back of your neck. It tingles; you can feel the sensation radiating up and down your spine. The feather brushes against your foot, and the finger just barely touches the back of your neck. It is a slow, lingering, tingling sensation; as time passes, the sensation becomes more and more real, and just won't go away. It tickles so.

A time passes, and you find yourself walking along a beach. It is almost dusk, and the rainbow colors of sunset are beginning to spill across the sky. It is autumn, and the many-hued leaves of the trees fall about, twirling this way and that in the wind. There is a smell of mist and brine in the air; the waves run and twirl about your toes.

A bird flies off to the right; its flight is light and agile. It flies to and fro, this way and that, until it disappears into the sunset.

There is a feeling of wistfulness, of a presence departed. To the left, you see a grayed swing, rocking back and forth in the wind; its rusty chain squeaks. It is in the yard of a boarded up house, with a garden long overgrown in weeds.

On a whim, you slowly walk up the path into the yard, and sit down on the swing. You rock back and forth; there is a feeling of emptiness. Images form and swirl in your mind.

A tree is felled; from its trunk are taken the staves of a barrel. Fresh and white, the staves are slowly covered with dust; each time the dust is disturbed or brushed off, the wood underneath is darker, grayer, rougher

undisturbed or brushed on, the wood underneath is darker, grayer, rougher.

People are born, walk hither and thither, grow old, and die. Generations come and pass, and the earth grows older. People learn how to live - and then die. Vanity of vanities.

Everything is dreary, desolate, fleeting. The walls of your vision grow narrow and dark; your mind and imagination seem to protest the motion. It grows darker and darker.

After a time, you see a light - a little light. As everything around grows darker and more drab, the light does not grow brighter, but neither does it grow dimmer.

A voice sounds in the shadows - you do not doubt that is the voice of the light - says, "Come closer."

You come closer, and you see that she is a flame. A little flame.

A thousand questions form in your mind. They pour forth from you - Why is it all so meaningless? Why do things wither and decay? Why does evil run rampant?

The flame listens patiently, and then speaks. "Look into me."

You look into the flame, and you see everything you saw before, but it looks different. The boards of the cask are no less grey. But you see that inside the cask is wine - wine which grows rich and well-aged. The people still die - and now you see an even darker death for some. But you also see past the death, past the mourning and grieving, to a birth into life - a richness and a fullness that could not be imagined from before.

"Flame, can I step into you, so that I may be delivered from the unpleasant things?"

"No, dear one. That is not the way of things."

"Then what can you give me?"

"I give you this: that you may always look into me, and that I will never be quenched."

"Flame, what is your name?"

"My name is Hope."

You look into the flame, and again see the outside world. There is still the sadness, but there is an incredible beauty. An ant crawls across your finger; you sit entranced at the wonder as its little body moves. Then you look at a rose bush, quivering in the wind - it is covered with thorns, but at the top of each stem is a flower that is still God's autograph.

You get up and walk further.

You see a little girl on her knees, and standing against her, a man

holding an immense sword. The man raises his sword over his head, and brings it down.

Then you see the sword stop in the middle of the air. There is a clanging sound; the man's powerful muscles ripple in his exertion, but the sword does not move an inch further.

Then you slowly see a shimmer in the air, and there is another sword - a sword that seems to be forged of solid light. A sword that is blocking the first. As you watch, you see an angel beginning to become visible. It is powerful, majestic, and terrifying. The man drops his sword, and runs in blind terror.

You can see the angel's sword here, a hand there, the hem of his luminous robe. But what you see is fleeting, and you cannot see the whole angel.

"Why cannot I see you? I can see the grass, and see the girl. Are you not as real as they?"

You see a little boy, walking on the beach, picking up a pebble here, a shell there, a piece of driftwood every now and then, and putting them into a sack.

Then he comes upon a fallen log. And he grabs one protrusion, and then another, trying to lift it. But it will not budge.

"Some day, you will be able to see God himself. But now, you can not see things that are too real for you to see."

You see a diamond, slowly rotating, in light. One facet after another seems to sparkle.

As you watch, not just what appear to be the facets, but what appears to be the diamond, seems to change form, shift, and sparkle in different ways. The light itself seems to shift color, direction, focus.

Then speaks an almost silent voice: "You are looking upon the one thing which never changes, in a light that has been the same since before the creation of time."

There is a moment of silence, and you feel a surge of power rush about you, and tear through your very being. It is like a blast of wind, throwing you off your feet so violently that wind itself is knocked out of you. It is like the liquid fire that explodes out of a volcano. It is like a flash of light beyond intense, light that is so much light that you cannot see. It bears like an immeasurable weight and presence on your mind and spirit; its might and force fills you with awe - no, more than awe, fear - no, more than fear, terror. It is a reality which lies beyond imagination.

man fear. terror. It is a reality which lies beyond imagination.

A booming, thunderous voice commands, "Fear not!" Then a hand reaches out and touches you, and you are filled with strength. It holds and stills you; you dimly realize that you have been quivering as a leaf. You somehow find the strength to stand, and if anything see a greater glory and majestic power than before. This being before you is like a storm in solid form. His feet press into the earth with the weight of a mountain, and shine like the sun in full glory. He wears a robe woven of solid light, and at his side hangs a sword sheathed in fire and lightning. His hands radiate power; they seem by their energy as if they are about to tear apart the fabric of space. You dare not look upon his face. Suddenly, you find yourself falling at his feet.

Again booms the voice: "Do not worship me! I am not God!"

A hand lifts you up, and sets you on your feet. His touch is more intense even than his appearance - you are sure that it will destroy you - yet somehow it makes you more solid.

It is all you can do not to fall down again. Somehow the words come, "Who are you?"

"I am a spirit, formed before the foundation of the world. I am a star, who sang for joy as the world was created. I am a messenger, who stands in the presence of God himself and then flies out of the heavens to wage war against the darkness. I am your servant. I am an angel."

Suddenly, images flash through your mind, images to which it would be merciful to call surreal and bizarre. You see chubby little boys fluttering about on birds' wings. You see voluptuous women, suspended in mid-air, whose clothing is perennially falling off. It is as if you have all your life seen pictures of Don Quixote wearing a wash-basin as a helmet, holding a dull sword and sitting astride poor, plodding Rozinante - and then, suddenly and out of nowhere, find yourself staring the paladin Roland, with his sword Durendal drawn and the rippling muscles that have torn trees out of the ground, face to face. You find yourself babbling and attempting to explain what you remember, and suddenly see the angel shaking with a booming, resounding laughter.

"What, my dear child, you would wish me tame and safe, like a little pet?"

It would be much easier to face a creature which was safe, which one could predict. It would be a great deal less disquieting, and a great deal less disturbing. Yet, somehow, you feel a feeling deep within you that it

would be an immeasurable loss.

He stretches out his hand. "Come, take my hand. I have something to show you."

You extend your hand, and find it engulfed in a force that is like electricity. Yet somehow, you feel something else as well - a touch. The angel spreads out great, glorious, golden, many-hued wings, and with a mighty jump launches into the air.

You speed along, both of you. Colors and forms speed by. Then, suddenly, you are at a place that is absolutely still, absolutely silent, and pitch black. "Where are we?"

"That is not a question that I can answer in terms that you will understand. Only watch."

You begin to see a pair of hands, They are together, and facing outward. Then they slowly move outward - and behind the hands is left a rainbow, in all its colors. The hands turn, move along, complete a perfect circle. It is the most perfect rainbow you have ever seen.

Then the left hand strikes the rainbow, and it shatters into innumerable miniscule fragments. The right hand takes the shards, and with a single motion scatters them across the blackness. Each piece of the rainbow glows with light, a little reflection of the whole, and then you see a faint, pale, crystalline blue glow. The pieces are scattered irregularly, and one looks almost like - here an insight comes like a flash - a constellation.

There is no horizon, no landscape, no other light. There are stars in every direction and from every view. The view is the most breathtaking view of the sky that you have ever seen.

Then the angel takes your hand again, and says, "Do you understand what you saw?"

"I think I do."

"Good. Then let me show it to you again."

Forms shift and move, and you see a faint, nebulous sea of matter spread about in every direction. It is not still - no, it is moving. You look deeper, and you can see that it is dancing.

Then you see a circle forming, and spinning. And another around it, and another. Soon many circles shift and melt together. The ones on the inside seem to move with more speed, vibrancy, energy. Then you can see a kind of a ball forming.

The swirling matter around it spins inward, more and more tightly

The swirling matter around it spins inward, more and more tightly, until a fire seems to light inside - and fills the new-formed sphere with radiance. Flashes of light, bursts of glowing forms, like water on a pot boiling, seethe and foment. In your silence and stillness watching it, you begin to realize that spheres are forming, coming to light, becoming stars, all around - and, just as the stars formed out of forms dancing, the stars themselves are forms dancing, in a great, glorious, majestic dance.

The strains of a Christmas carol ring in your ears: "Fall on your knees. O hear the angel voices!" Suddenly you realize that you and your host are not still at all, but swept into the great dance - and, about you, you can see shimmers of... you know not what.

After a long, glorious, blissful time, the angel again takes your hand, and again you find yourself swept away. When you find yourself at rest, you are again in pitch black.

"And why am I here?"

"To see what you have seen, for the third time."

You wait with eager expectation, to see what could be next. Inside you, the images foam and mix. The rainbow, containing each piece and found in each piece, the colors, the moving dance, the energy... You try to push it aside, so that you may attentively perceive whatever changes may be happening...

Time passes, with still the forms fermenting in your mind. You feel serene and at rest; the place is a place of profound peace. After a time the images begin to fade, leaving behind a feeling, a wholeness, a satiety. It is like, after a vivacious dance has ended, sitting down, cooling off - and, then, at rest, finding the joy and the intoxication of the dance still in your heart, and your head floating in the air. It is like, after finishing a meal, sitting with its feeling of fullness.

After a time, you break the silence. "Why has nothing happened here? Why have I seen nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing? Am I here to wait?"

"Has nothing really happened here?"

"Nothing that I can perceive. I haven't seen, or heard, or felt anything."

"Really? You have perceived nothing?"

"Perhaps I have perceived something so subtle and ethereal that I can not notice it. I do not doubt that this place holds something wonderful. But I have not noticed anything."

"Really?"

"Why do you answer my questions with other questions, with riddles, instead of telling me anything?"

"Do I?"

After a time, pondering what this could mean, you ask, "Am I here to wait, for something that will happen? If I am, can you tell me when it will happen? Or at least tell me if you can tell me?"

The angel is silent for a moment, and then says, "When you have seen one of these things, you have seen more than one thing. You have seen the shattering of the rainbow; one of its fragments is the one near your home that shines light on your fields and mountains. But the rainbow is also the one, beautiful, perfect language that was before man took upon himself a second time the quest to become gods."

"But did not the sage say that we are gods?"

"Yes, you are gods, and more than gods, and will become more than you even are now. But the man who would exalt himself to godhood, blasphemes. Would that men could learn to be men, without trying to ascend to godhood or even be heroes."

"Should I not learn to be godlike?"

"Learn to be a god, not in the way of the man who wills to be the highest of gods, but in the way of the God who was willing to be the lowest of men."

After a time, the angel continues on.

"In a way, each shattered piece of the rainbow - including the language that you now speak - contains the pattern and image of the whole. But in another way, it has lost some of the colors. There are things that were in the whole rainbow, that are not in the piece.

"So I will answer your question, about waiting, with a word from another language. The word is not a word which answers the question, but rather which un-asks it. So I answer you with this word: Mu."

"But why do you un-ask the question, instead of simply answering it?"

"That I will tell you, if you first tell me, to use an expression from the child's' words of your land, if the elephant in your refrigerator is eating peanut butter. Is the elephant in your refrigerator eating peanut butter? Yes, or no?"

Your mind is quite full; it is slow work, pondering and absorbing all that you have seen and heard. Finally you ask, "Before anything happens, may I wait here and ponder, and digest things?"

may I wait here and ponder, and digest things:

The angel says, "Yes indeed; that is why you were brought here."

A time passes in the silence, the stillness, the darkness. It is the beginning of the slow growth that makes a newborn experience into a full-grown memory, and brings it into who you are. It is the rest which makes every work perfect.

This lasts you know not how long. After a time, you realize that you are in a different place. You are with a man of sorts - if 'man' is the correct word to use. 'Man' is not a wrong word, but there are many others. He seems to be of no particular age. He is fully what every simple child is; he is fully what every ancient sage is.

After a time, you begin to wonder what his age is, and how long you have been there. You see him smile, and then burst out laughing. "Come," he says, "Let me show you what I see." He places his hand on your head, and suddenly you see an image - of a little child, in a magnificent and wondrous cavern full of rubies, and emeralds, and sapphires, and diamonds. He is off in a corner, picking up lumps of coal.

"This place is full of diamonds; come, enjoy, take and carry off as much as you are ready to carry."

Then you begin to look around, and see that you are indeed in a cavern of sorts. It is filled with a brilliant, powerful light; the walls and ceiling, full of irregular bulges and niches, seem to be gilded and encrusted with glowing gems. The space is full of forms magnificent and wonderful - fountains, statues, pedestals, crystalline spheres, animals. Everything in the room seems to have the breath of life.

You begin to gather gems; each one, luminous, seems to have its own particular feel, its own particular energy - you can almost hear a music when you touch them. Their cool, crystalline forms seem to be of congealed light.

After you have gathered a great many, you notice a peculiar phenomenon: the more you carry, the easier it seems to be to pick up even more. The gems embrace each other, and begin to form a vast interlocking structure about you. It forms a great, shining suit of armor - a scintillating armor of adornment, a living form that is as light as thought. As even more time passes, the gems begin to melt into you. As each flows into your body, you feel its energy and light, and soon, a high, subtle, ethereal music courses through your veins.

At last you stand, armored with an armor that is flawless. It gives, you

do not doubt, a protection against blows that a man of iron would envy. Yet the armor is not dark and cumbersome; it is light and energizing. Your skin is as soft and sensitive as ever, and you feel the unfettered lightness of nudity, free as Adam - no, you realize, a greater lightness, for a nude person is only not fettered by clothing, but this armor fills you with the freedom of which fetters are but a crude attempt to oppose. Carrying this armor leaves you more free to move and dance, and fills you with a positive energy.

You revel in the fullness, the intoxicating lightness. After a time, you realize that the man is looking upon you. He is smiling.

You begin to ask how much you owe for this wonderful treasure, and he breaks forth in peals of merry laughter. "These treasures are not for sale. They are a free gift. Come and fill yourself to overflowing with these treasures as often as you wish."

"Then they cost nothing?"

"No, they are very costly. They are more costly than you can ever imagine. But they are given freely, like water and light and breath, and a thousand thousand other treasures that no money can possibly buy."

"Then why are they given freely? Surely such things are worth a price!"

The man laughs again. "You are beginning to grow alive - just beginning. When you are truly alive, you will dance so freely that you will need no one to tell you these things, because the answers will be in you."

After a while, he hands you a chalice. "Here, drink this, that you may remain dreaming." You drink it, and have a flash of insight that waking is not the only aroused state. In a moment, you reach out and touch a star.

You find yourself inside a castle of ice. It is cold, elegant, pure. It is night-time, and the deep blue of the starry sky provides the light. You walk about in a magnificent structure, through halls and archways, around pillars and doorways, all the time in a great silence. The place is majestic and massive.

The coldness of the ice fills the palace with a deep peace. There is a rest here. You cannot see, nor feel the presence of, yet you somehow sense a kinship to the resting dead, sleeping, awaiting the dawn when sleepers shall rise.

As you step, as you breathe, you hear your echoes, and then the echoes of your echoes. The silence has a presence.

It is a timeless place. There is no hurry, no rush, no clutter. The

It is a timeless place. There is no hurry, no rush, no clutter. The sparseness of the architecture is matched only by the stillness of the air. You stand and walk, footfall after footfall penetrating the vastness. For it is vast and large; it is ordered, and yet unknown.

Through the glassy ceiling above you see the stars, and as you look at them, you can begin to hear the faintest tinklings of ethereal music. Your ears listen with a new keenness, flowing from the crystalline armor, and you can hear, not a music breaking the silence, but a music in the silence. It is, like the palace, sparse, and simple. It has an order and structure, and yet not time; it is a music which sounds as if it has always been there.

After a time, you realize that you are singing a song - sparse, simple, crystalline, and beautiful. It would not be quite right to say that you started a song: rather, that you have joined a song - a song that always has been, and always will be - a song which is sung not by you alone, but by angels and archangels, by the living and the dead, by the rocks and stars and trees themselves. And for the tiniest fraction of an instant, you can almost see the song rising, as incense, in the presence of He Who Is.

As you walk through a corridor, a transformation begins. Tendrils of mist curl about your feet as a shroud slowly rises from the ground. The walls become the walls of tall, narrow buildings lining the sides of the road. They are like ancient, cracked vellum, and ivylike bushes of yellow roses climb the sides.

All is still as you walk the streets; the only motion you can see is that of the mist dancing about you. Every now and then, you catch, out of the corner of your eye, what seems to be the form of a person just disappearing around a corner - but you are never sure.

After a time, you come upon a massive, dark Gothic cathedral. It is carved out of black marble. As you pass through the doors, the air becomes very dry; there is a feeling of imminence.

As you step into the sanctuary, the building itself is rocked by a blast of sound. Your body vibrates as you hear the deep, rich sounds of an organ resound all about you. The song is a fugue, turgid and complex. You hear three parts playing, then four, then six - interwoven, turning about, speaking to each other. It is in the key of E minor.

The song continues for almost an hour, woven with a deep sense of mystery. Like the building, like the city, it is filled with a dark majesty. There is a strain you are listening to hear - and you seem almost to have caught it, now here, now there, but then it vanishes. The song comes to a

climax, and then a thunderous resolution. Then the sanctuary becomes as silent as before.

A shaft of light falls, and you see a man walking towards you. He is tall and lean, and wearing a black robe with golden edges. He has black hair, and a thin, close beard. His step is stately and regal, but does not make a single sound. He reaches you, and, bowing deeply, says, "Greetings."

His eyes meet yours, and you see that he has a piercing, probing gaze. It is intense, looking deep into your eyes - no, more, deep into your soul. And there is something else - you can not tell what. You begin to gaze back, and you realize what it is. His gaze is gentle.

He reads the questions on your face, and after a time says, "I cannot tell you everything that you wonder now. If I were to say the answers, answers that I am only beginning to understand, they would sound like trivia, or sound meaningless. And if I could make you understand them all, I would do you a great disservice."

"Why?"

"Because the questions you ask are the right questions, but they are also the wrong questions."

After a time, he begins again.

"But there is something which I can do. I can lead you to the library."

He leads you through a twisted passageway, then down a stairwell. The stairwell alights in a room with shelves upon shelves upon shelves of dust-covered tomes.

"And," the man says, "I can give you this."

He reaches into the folds of his robe, and gives you a black rose.

It is a queer feeling to be alone with that many books. You reach on one of the shelves and pull one out. It is an illuminated manuscript. It tells a story deep, and detailed, and rich, and subtle. What you can read of it is like barely seeing the ripples on the surface of a lake, while untold forms move about below in the depths.

You replace it and look at another. It is a manual of philosophy and theology. It tells something about God - but it is also too subtle and complex to understand. And there is something else... It is like reading a book about arrangements and variations of color - to a man who has been blind from birth.

Then another... You can tell from its form that it has a sort of reason, or structure to it, but you cannot tell what. At first, you find what seem to be logical errors - and it does contradict itself, sharply and in many

be logical errors - and it does contradict itself, sharply and in many ways... and yet... you have the feeling that you are like a man, versed in logic and philosophy but devoid of emotion, poring over a joke, trying to understand it as an argument - and having no idea why others read it and then do something called laughing.

Another book, and another. Each time it seems like you understand something, you find yourself more confused than before. After a time, it becomes words upon words - and the more words are added, the less meaning there seems to be.

You sit down, exhausted and bewildered. After a time, you realize that a woman is standing some distance off. She is wearing a robe that is purple and black, with long sleeves and a long, flowing skirt. Her long hair, which falls behind her to a length you cannot tell, is jet black, and yet her skin is almost luminous.

She steps forward, and, embracing you, gives you three kisses on alternate cheeks. "Have you learned anything yet?"

"Nothing. I can't understand anything in the books."

"Have you thought to see what you can learn?"

"I have thought, and I do not doubt that there is a lesson, but it is seven times over too subtle and too complex for me."

"There is a lesson that you are missing, but not because it is too subtle and too complex. You are missing it because it is too simple and too obvious."

"I have read from two and ninety books, and cannot share with you the least shred of wisdom that is found in them. I do not understand. So in what wise am I to claim that I have learned?"

"Is there not even one thing you can claim to have learned?"

It is with frustration that you say, "Only the littlest thing - that I do not understand."

"That is not so little as you think."

She looks at you for a second, and now you can see, as well as a probing gaze, a hint of a smile. "Come; you are fatigued. Let me take you so that you can eat and rest." She places an arm around you - her touch is soft and responsive - and leads you through other passageways into a room with a table.

The table is set with plates of clear glass; the table is set with bread, fish, and white cheeses, and there are two glasses of white wine. She leads you to a chair, which offers a welcome rest, and then sits down opposite

you.

After you have eaten a couple of pieces of bread, you see her again gently looking upon you. "I can see the question in your eyes. You are wondering, are you not, why you were not simply told that you do not understand."

"Yes."

"Would you have understood that you do not understand? As you do now?" She pauses, and takes a sip of the wine. "A mouse can only drink its fill from a river, and no man can learn what he is not ready to understand."

The rest of the meal is eaten in silence. It is a calm, peaceful, prayerful silence. The bread is flavorful and dense; the cheese is mild; the wine is dry and cool.

After the meal, you both sit in more silence. It is a time of rest... and also of community. There are no words and there is no touch, and yet you can sense a kind of attention, a welcome, from the lady.

When you feel refreshed, she leads you through another passageway, and out to a door to the street. She gently embraces you, and says, "It is time for you to go, and begin to taste some of the other secrets of this city. I do not know if we shall meet again, but I suspect that it will come to pass. Fare Thee well."

The street is different from the one you first saw - it also is enshrouded by a cloak of mist, but it is wider, and there are people passing by. Their clothing varies some, but much of it is variation on a dark grey theme, almost seeming to be mist in solid form. A young woman passes by on the other side of the street; a cascade of ebon hair hides part of her face - yet you can still see, in one corner of her mouth, a hint of a smile.

You come across an open square, with an intricate pattern of stone tiles in the center. Two opposite corners have trees - gnarled, angular, and leafless. One of the corners has a fountain; cascading sheets of water fall between many-leveled pools, in which silvery and golden fish swim about. The opposite corner has a statue.

The statue is on a large pedestal of dark grey marble; the statue itself is of blackened bronze. It is of a man, gaunt and haggard, and clad in rags. His arms are raised up to Heaven, as is also his head, and yet his face bears a look of despair. The pedestal bears the inscription, "I am thirsty. Who will give me something to drink?"

thirsty. Who will give me something to drink?

You find a jug, and, filling it at the fountain, climb up the statue and pour water into the statue's mouth. You hear sounds of water flowing, and then there is a click. It is followed by a whirr of moving clockwork, and, getting down, you see that one of the sides of the pedestal has turned inwards, revealing a shaft descending into the earth.

A lantern is at your feet; you light it, and begin to climb down the ladder at one side. It descends into a passageway; taking one direction, you come to a four way intersection. The left path turns into a circular room, with a domed roof, and a pool in the center. You test its depths - and find it descends below the floor.

Inside, you find an underwater passageway. You swim through it, and surface in a room with rough walls. Climbing upwards, you find the room to narrow into a shaft, which turns into a low passageway, and then opens into another room.

This room is lit by the glow of torches; it is large and rectangular. At the center is a thick, low stone column, about three feet tall, with some protrusions bulging from the top. When you come closer, you see that it is an intricate clockwork device; working with it, you find a pattern in its motions, and work with it until there is a click, and a segment of the far wall slides into the ground.

The passageway is dark, as was the room and passageway which you traversed without your lantern, and it opens shortly into another room. At first you cannot see; then, as you step in, your eyes slowly adjust to the darkness. Inside this room, you see another statue.

This statue is a male nude. It is an iron statue; it is immense, and the figure is powerfully built. It is in the middle of a stride - a long, powerful stride, one which seems almost to shake the ground. His eyes bear an intense gaze, one which seems to almost flash lightning, and one arm is raised, and hand outstretched, in a gesture of authority. The surface of the statue is rough and unfinished. There is something in this statue that seems to almost radiate power and energy and weight and light.

And yet, when you look closer, you notice something different. The eyes seem sad. And then, looking closer, you suddenly realize that the statue is bound by shackles. The shackles are a monstrosity, a violation; they threaten to wear down his energy and burden his strength. You grab at the shackles to see if you can pull them free, and feel a chill and drain run through the body. You drop them in shock.

As you stand in the room, you seem to even more be able to see - not only the forms, but the absurdity and injustice. The man's great strength - it is straining against the binding chains. Your eyes trace the shackles to where they are engulfed by the floor.

Then you realize that there is another set of shackles, empty, open. You shudder to look at them; the touch of one of the chains sapped your soul; breathing felt as if you had been forcefully struck on the chest. You begin to back out of the room... and you see the statue's eyes.

He is not pleading; he is not begging. If anything, his eyes say "Go far away; that these chains imprison me is bad enough, without one more." You do not see pride, of someone unwilling to receive help, or the cowardice of one who dare not ask. It is rather the compassion, of someone who would not wish his worst enemy to feel the misery he feels. You feel a stirring inside your heart. What the man does not ask, conscience and every noble instinct demand. And you walk in.

A chill sweeps through you as you cross the threshold. You can almost see a presence that is unholy. At each step you are jolted. And yet... you have the strength to follow.

You fasten one of the open shackles about your feet; it stings like the sting of a scorpion. The other, and you feel as if you are sinking into the ground. A shackle is fastened around one hand, and it is all you can do not to fall down. You place your other hand in the last, and begin to close it...

The shackles fall from the man's feet, and you see a surge of power ripple through his muscles. He crouches down, and then jumps up with a force that shakes the earth. He raises his hands upward, and there is a blinding flash of light.

Your sight slowly returns, and you find yourself on a grassy knoll bordering a field. A small grove of saplings is to the left, and a field of dandelions is to the right. From somewhere near come the sounds of birds chirping, and a babbling brook.

You see the man who was shackled, standing nearby. He is looking upon you, and smiling. He picks you up and gives you a hug - a crushing, invigorating bear hug that makes you feel very much alive - and a big kiss. Then he sets you down and opens a large leather pouch. He fills two large stone bowls with stew, and draws two draughts of cider from a small barrel. The stew is a piping hot, well-spiced, and hearty beef stew, but the cider is cold and mild - you could drink quite a lot without getting drunk.

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He tells you of how he came to be imprisoned - he let a love of probing mysteries become a love of secrecy, and a love of the beauty in natural darkness become a love of evil, so that what was wholesome and free became perverted and enslaved - and then asks of your story, how you came to rescue him. He listens eagerly and intently.

After a time, he says, "There are many people who knew of my disappearance and do not know that I am free; it is time for me to go and tell them that I am free, and how you rescued me. But before I go, I give you this." He raises one hand to Heaven and places the other on your head, and speaks a blessing. You cannot understand the blessing, but there is something about it that strikes you... and then you see, in an instant, not just one little fragment in the blackness, but the whole radiant rainbow. He is speaking the first language, before it was broken, and - though you cannot understand it - you are moved by its power, its love, its light.

He presses slightly harder on your head, and your spirit surges with joy. Then he runs off into the distance, bounding like a stag.

After a time, you begin to walk along, into the forest. It grows thicker, and the colors richer and deeper. You can feel warmth, and humidity, and wind.

As you walk along, the forest opens into a wide, grassy clearing, with thick, long bluegrass. A few small raindrops sprinkle on your face; thunder rumbles, and soon there is a heavy and torrential rainstorm. The rain is warm, and in it you begin to run and play.

A woman, short and with a full and rounded figure, begins to dance with you, and soon you are swinging around, and dancing in the rain. Sheets and columns of rain fall, and in the lightning flashes you can see the trees, the leaves - the whole forest - dancing and spinning in the wind.

The woman is laughing; you can hear the laughter in her voice and see the laughter in her eyes. On a whim, you reach and pinch her side; she laughs and squirms. She jumps and tackles you - it is half a tackle and half a hug - and knocks you over.

After wrestling around for a few minutes, she turns and walks towards a large, ancient, gnarled oak tree, and sits on a large bulge a little distance above the ground. As she sits, you vaguely realize that the tree's form has almost the shape to welcome a human - your eyes did not pick it out, but she seemed to have walked to it as naturally as if she were breathing. She

is leaning a little to her left; a ledge of wood forms almost a cushion for her to lean on - one might say that her body is curled into the wood.

You begin to look on her, and see how beautiful she really is. Her skin glistens with little drops of water. She is dark, with olive skin and large, soft, welcoming eyes that seem to enfold you, taking you in as the waters of a lagoon take in a swimmer. There is something that draws you about your hands.

Her hands are small, and seem to contain the beauty of her whole body in miniature. They are rounded, curved, and Rubenesque. You can see soft skin gently enfolding the inside of her hands; it has a looseness and ampleness so that you do not see vein and bone, only the rich color of skin. Her fingers are tiny and thin, with very mignonne nails and fingertips. The texture of her hands is subtle, yet gives her hands reality; you can see the strata and shapes in the tiny wrinkles on the back of her hand, the dark, faint hairs, and the many sheets of lines that twist and turn over the inside of her hand. Through her fingernails, you can see a glimpse of white, pink color which contrasts brightly with the rest of her hand.

And yet the shape is only half of the beauty that is in her hands, for they are not still, but in motion. It is a slow, still, lyrical motion, an adagio dance. It does not overpower the senses or make a clamoring demand for your attention, but it is yet deeply moving. Her fingers, palm, and thumb slowly move, in a rich harmony. You can see waves in her fingers as they wend back and forth. The motion is extremely simple, and has a periodicity that comes back to a single thing, yet somehow you do not wish it to be more complex, or do something new - at the moment, you would have difficulty understanding why anybody watching this slow undulation would want to see anyone else. It seems that she is speaking in a language with her hands, and you long to understand what her hands are saying, to put it into words. Then you look deeper, and you realize that you do understand what her hands are saying, and you cannot put it into words because it is a truth different from what words express. You rather feel and sense... peace... rest... stillness... the motion of breath... the beating of a heart... the music that lies in and beyond silence... the ebb and flow of water... day and night and the four seasons turning in cycle... the rhythm of a song that does not pulse, and yet has order... tufts of long, dry grass, resting in a field... the tops of trees, blowing in a wind... a rock, buried deep in the earth, remaining a rock, in the process of not

a rock, buried deep in the earth, remaining a rock, in the process of not-changing... the light at dusk, and yet not the light of dusk for the sunlight at dusk fades, and this, even in its softness, would not rightly be said to fade.

She begins to walk along a path, leading you, and takes you to a small hovel. You step inside, and as your eyes adjust to the light, you see a very old woman. She is emaciated, and in her face are etched lines of pain. She begins to try to get up, and say something, but the sounds are hardly understandable as words, and the young woman gently places her hand over the old woman's mouth and leads her to lie down. Reaching up to the wall, she brings a flask of wine to the old woman's lips, and helps her drink a little. After that, she goes to a chair, and picks up a wooden recorder, and plays it. It is the same song as her hands danced: soft, still, and beautiful. It has a very soft, woody sound, and the notes themselves are... like the color grey, like a gentle light, like a friend's voice. You are lost in the music, carried away by its beauty. Slowly, the song tapers into silence, into a rest allowing the music heard to sink in. You look at the old woman, and see that she is still, absolutely still. Her eyes vacuously point into space.

The young woman gets up, with infinite gentleness, and with her hand slowly closes the old woman's eyes. She turns to you, and, speaking so softly that you can barely hear her, says the first words you have heard from her: "She was my grandmother." You can see the tears forming in her eyes.

It is dusk, and the last rays of the sun ebb into darkness, into a dark and moonless night.

The next day, you begin to build a pyre in the middle of the field. Some people come by from the wood and help; they are bearing little gifts, and each embrace her. There is not what you would understand to be a ceremony; they each come and go. After a time, you realize that the animals also come, and pay their respects in their own ways. Dusk comes again, and she takes a lantern and sets it at the bottom of the fire. Flames begin to lick upwards, and then touch the grandmother's body. Then the young woman screams, a piercing, dissonant, discordant scream of which you would not have thought her capable. She begins to sob uncontrollably, and weeps the whole night long.

The woman stands up to greet the coming of the dawn, the tears still streaming down her face. The first rays begin to break over her face, and

then you notice something... different. Something that you had not noticed before.

You see pain in her face; it is of no effort to see that a great hole has been torn in her soul. And yet there is something else. She is beaten, but not crushed; wounded, but not destroyed. If she is bleeding, it is because there is living blood coursing through her veins. It would not be quite right to say that she is not too badly hurt because she is a deep person; rather, she is very badly hurt because she is a deep person. And yet... you cannot quite tell what it is.

She turns to you, and sees the puzzlement in your face. She reaches, and with one hand touches your eyes; her lips move in silent prayer. Then she takes her hand back, and you slowly see something else. You see angels all around, and feel the Spirit of God. One of the angels - great, mighty, magnificent - has wrapped his arms around her. The angels are still, and... intent. It would be a gross distortion to say that one of them waves a magic wand and makes the pain go away, and yet...

You cannot quite see, and yet in your spirit you sense, prayers, around and under and in her. You cannot understand all of what is going on. The pain is not taken away, and you share the pain as well. And yet... Though you cannot say what, you can sense someone, and something happening, which is infinitely greater than the pain. And you, again, hear singing.

Sister, let me be your servant. Let me be as Christ to you. I will laugh when you are laughing. When you weep, I'll weep with you. Pray that I might have the grace to Let you be my servant, too.

When you feel so weak and burdened, When the world is harsh to you, Know that Christ has gone before you, Felt the pain and shed the tears. As Christ has so giv'n to others, So he will also give to you.

And e'en with Christ you're not alone, For we are Christ's body, too. We are all brother and sister. Your burden is our burden, too. As you have so giv'n to others, So we all shall give to you.

A little boy runs up with something clutched in his hand, and kisses her. He says, "I love you. Sorry you hurt bad. Havva big gift. Look!" He opens his hand.

Inside is a blade of grass.

# The Eighth Sacrament

"Holy" is an important word in the Bible, and there are many holy actions described in the Bible: Communion, prayers, and worship, to pick some of the larger ones. But there is only one act in the Bible that is called holy, and it is one we might not think of. What is it? "Greet one another with a holy kiss," which is repeated four or five times. "Holy" is *not* just another way of saying "appropriate," or rather it means "appropriate" but also something much stranger, much wilder. "Holy" means set apart to God, an element of Heaven here on earth.

The New Testament's main word for a profound display of respect in fact means "kiss", even if our translations hide it. Bowing and kissing have some interesting similarities throughout the Bible, and they mean something similar. Kissing has one meaning in American culture, but it has a very different set of colors in the Bible, and we are missing something of the holy kiss until we can see it as a display of profound reverence for one who is living in the life of Christ and becoming a little Christ. Is giving a kiss to an Orthodox Christian really different from kissing an icon?

The holy kiss is an opportunity to meet others in love. Do you know how someone gives you a greeting, a gift, or *something* and you know it isn't fake, you know another person has put his heart into it? That's what the holy kiss should be, and for many people here, *is*. Why? There was one tenth degree black belt in karate who was asked what he thought our society could learn from his martial art. He didn't give any of the answers we find so obvious: exercise, self-defense, discipline, and the like. What he said, very emphatically, was "to bow," at which point he stood up and

gave a great, courteous, and majestic bow. Bowing was bigger to him than any of the things that draw us, and that is what the holy kiss should be. What's the connection? Bowing and giving a kiss are never very far in the Bible, and once you understand them, you understand that they are a place where quite a lot come together. Furthermore, some of the warmest kisses I've received have been from bishops and other devout Orthodox Christians, and then the kisses have been worthy of that bow. How you give the holy kiss is related to your spiritual state.

The holy kiss is tied to holy communion. It is part of the eucharistic liturgy, and the Fathers draw interesting connections. St. Ambrose of Milan said, "We kiss Christ with the kiss of Communion:" we embrace Christ when we embrace each other, and yet there's something that the holy kiss adds. The kiss is itself an image for the Eucharist: even our prayers before communion say more than that. Yet the holy kiss is not just something indirectly connected to Holy Communion. The holy kiss is an act of communion between persons, and if we pray before Communion, "Neither like Judas will I give thee a kiss," this means not only that love must be in our reception of Holy Communion, but that we must not like Judas kiss our brethren without the love of Communion. There is difference between an embrace to someone who is Orthodox and someone who is not, because as with Holy Communion the kiss does not stand by itself: full communion makes a difference.

There are many other things one could say; the holy kiss takes different forms in different cultures and in my home parish is usually a hug. But the holy kiss is, in its way, the eighth sacrament, and is a window that opens out onto the whole of Orthodoxy. It is well worth living.

# **Eight-Year-Old Boy Diagnosed With Machiavellian Syndrome By Proxy (MSBP)**

Eight-year-old Uriah Hittite is an African-American boy with a disturbing history. He has been found guilty of single-handed, extended, and wasteful manipulations and draining government resources at a scale comparable to a large and coordinated [/b/tard trolling attack](#).

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

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

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

The emergency room staff far too trustingly fell to Hittite's deceit, and

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

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

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

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

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

# **Espiritichus: Cultures of a Fantasy World Not Touched By Evil**

## **Nor'krin**

The Nor'krin are tall and strong, with thick, sandy blonde hair, deep blue eyes, and white skin that turns reddish when they go south from their frost-kissed land; the Janra affectionately refer to them as the Northern giants. They love to run across the snowy plains and up to the peaks, to feel the crispness of the air, and to drink the cold and crystalline waters of the flowing streams.

There are not very many of them; they live nomadic lives, spread out across the snowy North, carrying with them only their clothing, their hunting weapons (a large bow and quiver of arrows, an axe, and a knife), a canteen, and a handful of tools and other miscellanea.

Theirs is a culture of oral tradition and folklore, filled with a richness of symbolic thought. Their thought is expressed by storytelling. Some tell of people and actions full of goodness, love, and wisdom; some are allegories packed with symbolic detail; some are both. The evenings — from the meal onward — are times when the clans gather together, and the oldest member tells tales until long into the night, when the fire has died down to embers and the icy mountain peaks glisten in crystalline blue starlight.

(The language is one which revolves around the oral tradition; its grammar is fairly simple, sufficient for basic expression, but there is an extensive vocabulary fitted to epic poems, great tales, and the transmission of a symbol-filled body of lore)

Their experience of sense is primarily aural, centering around the communication and preservation of their tradition. The other senses all play a part in their knowing about the world around them and its enjoyment, of course, but the ears dominate.

Coming of age is very significant in Nor'krin culture. It is the event upon which a child becomes a full member of Nor'krin community, and appreciates it fully, for it is accomplished in solitude. It is the same for male and female, big and small.

Denuded of all possessions save a hunting knife and the clothing on his back, the child begins a solitary trek, south through the land of the Urvanovestilli and Yedidia, penetrating deep into the thick forests inhabited by the Tuz, until he enters a village, and, coming inside a shop, says, "Blacksmith, blacksmith, find me a task, give me a quest."

There are as many quests as there are questions. Some are easy, some are hard; some are simple, some are complex. Whatever the quest be — be it finding an amethyst in the caves, climbing an immense mountain, answering a riddle, memorizing a book — he leaves the blacksmith shop and does not return until the quest is completed. (It must be said that, though some quests have taken years to complete, recorded history has yet to see a Nor'krin fail. A child leaves the immediate presence of his family, but remains in their prayers; they have great faith, and it is in this faith that they tread securely into the unknown.

Upon the return, the blacksmith begins to ask questions: "What is your name? What is your family? Who are you? What is your story?" — and begins to fashion an iron cross. This cross is at once a cross as any other, and a unique reflection of the person who wears it; no two are alike.

It is with this cross worn about the neck that he returns to his clan, come of age.

Nor'krin greet each other by standing opposite the other, placing the left hand on the other's right shoulder, and lowering the head slightly; the gesture is a sign of respect.

The emotional side of their culture is not as intense or spectacular as many others but is present and offers an important reflection of what

many others, but is present and offers an important reflection of what they value. They know a deep sense of respect and appreciation; when they think of others, the first thought is, "This person is an image of God," and there is a feeling of respect. The mountains, the trees, and the streams all bear a magnificence which they appreciate. Nor'krin worship services are filled with awe at the One whose glory is declared by tales, by lives, and by the created order. They are traditional liturgical services, where the place of the homily is taken by long tales and stories, conducted by the eldest members of the clan.

The Nor'krin homeland is named 'Cryona'.

## Tuz

Many wayfarers go south, early in life, to buy equipment; they need only wait, and a blacksmith will forge a pair of iron boots which will last for life.

The people are dark and strong; their eyes shine with power and lightning. The average Tuz male is short, stout, very broad-shouldered, and built like a brick wall; a thick, straight, jet black moustache and a thick, curly beard push out of leathery skin. Women are equally short and stout, but do not have such broad shoulders, being (relatively) more plump and less muscled, and do not have the moustache and beard (usually).

Their buildings are hewn of solid granite, with iron doors. The villages are small and scattered, joined by worn paths passing through the rich, deep green of the forest. It is this forest, fertile and full of beasts, from which the heart of their meal comes. They are more than fond of spicy meat stews and bear jerky. Their beer is dark, thick, and strong, and every house has at least a little bit of khor, a spiced rum which is occasionally used by the other peoples as a pepper sauce.

The Tuz work hard and play hard. They are often hired for heavy work in the construction of Urvanovestilli palaces, and their work rarely receives complaint. After work is over, they tend towards wrestling and general rowdiness; if they are present, Janra children (and occasionally adults) are tossed about.

For all of their rowdiness, the Tuz do possess a great deal of restraint; even after a couple of beers, they seldom give each other injuries beyond occasional bruises and abrasions, and Janra children do not receive even a scratch. (Most of them rather enjoy being tossed about).

The usual greeting is a crushing bear hug, often accompanied/ followed by a punch in the stomach, some wrestling or

tossing around, etc; it is generally toned down a bit for children and visitors from afar, but there is always at least a spark of rowdy play.

As much as the Nor'krin are at home in the cold, loving everything that is crisp and chilly, the Tuz love heat. Their land is by far the hottest, but that doesn't stop them from munching on peppers and wrestling around. Blacksmiths' shops and fire and sun-hot iron — these are a few of their favorite things.

The Tuz also build obstacle courses of stone and iron and rope, which the Janra have no end of finding new and inventive ways to use; a slack rope which Tuz climb along the underside of will be walked — or occasionally run — atop by the Janra; jumping shortcuts, backwards or inverted travel, and acrobatic ways of avoiding raw strength moves are common. Tuz, by contrast, have very slow and methodical paths.

They are, indeed, probably the most constant and unchanging of peoples; the process of maturing is a process of becoming more who they are. Their sense of order is also great; they value greatly the gift of being well ruled.

A child, at the age of ten, is presented to the village elders and the various guildmasters. They spend a day talking with the child and his parents, in order to determine his talents, interests, and personality; then they spend another day talking and discussing amongst themselves; then, on the third day, his profession is announced, along with the master to whom he will be apprenticed. The results are sometimes surprising, but always embody a great deal of wisdom, and the selection of a vocation is a gift for which the child is grateful.

Children learn a way of life filled with discipline, tradition, and respect for elders. It is quite simple, not at all ornate when compared to some other philosophies, but it has a power, a solidity to it, and love, faith, honor, friendship, and hospitality are things that they truly live by. Their families and communities are very close, and their friendships are loyal until death. They do not pay as much emphasis on verbal articulation of teaching as a way of life. There is thought, but in its expression, words take a second place to actions. That a life of faith involves discipline is declared very loudly by Tuz hands.

They are very aware of the value of solitude and prayer; it is a common practice to simply leave, taking nothing save clothing and a hunting knife or axe, and go up into the mountains for a few days of solitude, allowing time to pray and to be refocused

time to play and to be released.

Their language has, in speech, a very heavy, thick, consonantal feel, full of grated 'h's (which is often present in 'k's, 'r's, 'g's, and 'b's). The speech is terse and concrete.

Their experience of sense is also very concrete, centered somewhere between visual and aural. Sight tells what is around and where, and what is happening and where. Hearing tells what is happening, and where, and what is being said.

The emotional side of their culture knows such things as accomplishment, tradition, exertion, and discipline. There is an emotion that comes from a job well done and a challenge mastered; they value it. To have a heritage and respect elders as well as enjoy children brings a feeling of right order. To wrestle around, run, or laugh heartily has a pleasure. To control oneself has a joy. Things such as these are what they feel.

Tuz worship services are be short and sweet, with worship embodying a great deal of fervor.

The Tuz homeland is named 'Rhog'.

## Urvanovestilli

The first thing to strike a visitor is the devices. In every house and many shops there is a tinkering room; a large workbench is covered with every imaginable sort of gear, spring, hinge, lever, chain, and shaft; the clock is only the beginning of clockwork. Two nearby cabinets — one filled with tools, one filled with parts and working materials — stand neatly closed; at the touch of a button, a drawer springs out, and shelves slowly slide up.

The craftsmanship of clockwork devices is, along with the study of diverse subjects — theology and philosophy, history and literature, science and mathematics — a hobby that symbolizes the culture. Each piece is created not only for utility, but also for artistic effect. Cuckoo clocks and spring loaded umbrellas, Swiss Army Knives and mechanical pencils, player pianos and collapsible telescopes: mechanical objects such as these fill the land.

The ornate complexity of the devices reflects the ornate complexity of thought. The language, quite possibly the most difficult to learn, allows a speaker to express detailed and nuanced thought in exacting specificity. There are twenty four verb tenses, so that there is (for example) a different past tense for a brief, well demarcated action, and one which occurred over a period of time; there are twenty four other verb forms, which are like verb tenses as to conjugation and construction, but express the verb in an atemporal manner. Their language has much room built in for conjunction and logical connectives, nesting and predicates, as well as subtlety, implication, and allusion.

They have a complex and formal system of etiquette, although it must be said to their credit that they take no offense at a wayfarer who is warm and friendly but does not know their rules; they understand how simple the heart of politeness is.

Their speech is clever and witty, and they are fond of abstract strategy games. They enjoy ornate and complex polyphony, and will spend hours exploring theology and philosophy (two disciplines which they have the wisdom not to separate).

Urvanovestilli culture places a very heavy emphasis on a facet of virtue which they call *contrainte*. *Contrainte* is a kind of inner constraint, where order is approached by adjusting conditions inside before conditions outside, and not letting oneself be wrongly controlled by external circumstance. A similar concept is embodied in the words 'moderation' and 'self-control.'

*Contrainte* enables a man to be free and use that freedom responsibly; it enables a man to have access to drink without getting drunk; it enables him to think constantly without becoming rationalistic. The Urvanovestilli homeland has the richest natural resources in the world, and (with centuries of first rate craftsmanship and efficient work) they are by a wide margin the richest nation in the world. Despite this, they keep a very cautious eye on wealth, so as not to be enslaved by it. Theirs is not a culture of consumption; though some of their interests — art, sculpture, board oriented strategy games, tinkering — generally are pursued in a manner that involves wealth, the bulk — discussions, prayer, dance, imagination, thought — do not. Consumption as a status symbol and waste are both seen as vulgar.

In *contrainte* is also balance and complement. There is time in solitude and time in community, freedom and responsibility, private and public property, work and rest.

It is in *contrainte* that an ornate system of etiquette does not obscure love, and elaborate ceremonies do not obscure worship. Just as they do not have their sights set on wealth — they do not look to it for happiness, security, and other things that it can not provide — and are therefore able to enjoy it (among other and greater blessings) without being harmed, so also they set their sights on love and worship, and therefore do not permit rules of etiquette or liturgical forms to make themselves the focus and cause hearts to become cold and dusty.

*Contrainte* likewise allows them to act efficiently without becoming efficient. Off of work, life takes a calm and leisurely pace; nobody fidgets. It allows them to be very judicious in their use of money, and at the same time very generous; their hospitality is lavish, and it is unheard of for anyone — friend or stranger, native or foreigner — to go hungry in their

anyone — friend or stranger, native or foreigner — to go hungry in their land.

The single greatest mark of *contrainte* lies in that, with all of their achievements, they remain open to the gifts of God. *Contrainte* itself — though they work very hard to cultivate it — is not something that they try to achieve on their own power, but ask for in prayer, expecting to receive as a gift from God. Nor is it set up as the supreme context, the *Supra-God* to which God must bow down; they know nothing of religion within the bounds of *contrainte*. *Contrainte* does not "point to" itself as an object of worship, but rather God; it brings, in worship of God, a desire to grow in faith, hope, and love. It is like being reasonable enough not to be rationalistic.

On the surface, the *Urvanovestilli* culture appears to be the antithesis of that of the *Shal*. One is complex, and the other simple; one is rich, and the other poor; in one, people sit and talk for hours; in the other, people sit in silence for hours.

At the very heart, though, they are very much the same; *Urvanovestilli*, when traveling and visiting the *Shal*, feel that they are at home; the *Shal* find the *Urvanovestilli* to be brothers. They see beyond, rest in God's love, and love their neighbors.

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The Urvanovestilli are quiet, patient, temperate, and refined. They are classically educated and cultured; their country is a federation of republics, each one ruled by a senate in a tradition that has remained unchanged for centuries. Tradition is strong, and families remain together; come evening, three or four, sometimes even five generations sit down at one table, eating and drinking, talking and listening, long into the night. There is a great respect for age, but a respect that in no way despises youth; the oldest spend a great deal of time caring for the youngest. Indeed, one of the first sights to greet a visitor who steps inside an Urvanovestilli mansion is often a grandfather or great-grandfather, with a long, flowing white beard, sitting with a child on his knee.

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Urvanovestilli names are long and ornate. The full name is rarely spoken outside of formal ceremonies; even Urvanovestilli do not often pronounce thirty syllables to refer to one entity; all the same, each one is considered important. The names are:

**Family name:** This is the first and foremost of names, and the most cherished; it is the most commonly used.

**Maiden name:** Among married women, this follows.

**Birth name:** This is the name given at birth, and is often used within families and when there are several people of the same family present.

**Reserve name:** This is a very intimate name, which is not always known outside of family and close friends; it is spoken with a great deal of affection and familiarity.

**Baptismal name:** This name is chosen at baptism by people who know the person well, and given a great deal of prayer; it is used especially in religious contexts.

**Regional name:** This tells of the city or village a person comes from, carrying with it connotations of regional flavor and culture. It is used primarily in reference to travelers or (occasionally) people far away.

**Friend names:** These names (some do not have any; a few have ten or eleven; the average is two or three) come according to friends; a friend can bestow a name, and it becomes thereafter formally a part of an Urvanovestilli full name. When such a name is bestowed, it will become the name used primarily by the person who chose it.

The phrases of politeness — those which would correspond to hello, goodbye, please, thank you, you're welcome — are all benedictions; they take innumerable forms and beauties according to the people and situation. Blessing is something which they value; they often speak of good things — friends, virtue, art and music, food and drink — as so many blessings from the heart of the Father.

The traditional greeting is a hand raised, open save that the ring finger bends down to meet the thumb, or (when greeting a child) placed atop the head; the gesture is a symbol of benediction. It is followed by three kisses on alternate cheeks.

In youth, Urvanovestilli are filled with a wanderlust. They voyage to many different places, seeing different nations and lands — as well as the variety of their own cities — and enjoy experiences which provide a lifetime's worth of memories. The wayfaring is never really complete

memories worth of memories. The wayfaring is never really complete, though, until it becomes the voyage home: the Time sometimes comes after two years of travel and sometimes after ten, but the Spirit always makes it clear. When that Time comes, each Urvanovestilli spends a little longer — perhaps a month — with the people he is visiting, and then leaves, with a very passionate and tearful goodbye.

It is Time to return home, to put down roots, to deepen, to mature; Time to wholly enter into the homeland. From this point on, the Urvanovestilli is no longer a wayfarer. The memories of his travels are cherished and very dear, a set of riches that he will always carry with him, and he will still send blessings, gifts, letters, and occasionally visits to friends in far away lands, but it is no longer time to go here and there; it is Time to grow into family, friends, and city.

Urvanovestilli writings and teaching, the means by which theology and philosophy are transmitted, take many forms — poems, riddles, parables and allegories, personal conversations, to name a few — but the predominant form is a systematic and structured logical argument: point one, point two, point three, subpoint three b, conclusion one... The structure carries allusion, nuance, and beauty; it leaves room for the speaker to make a very beautiful craft of words.

They enjoy being absorbed in thought; it is how they spend a good time of each day. They do not look down on sensation — indeed, they have a great appreciation for what is a very highly developed art, music, and cuisine — but it does not fill their world as it does that of many others. Abstraction and complexities of thought are fundamental to their experience of the world: sensation leads into perception, perception leads into concrete thought, and concrete thought leads into abstract thought. Moments of immersion in the senses are rare, Sensation, being the outermost layer, is governed and enjoyed from within. Its form is generally of aural and visual character; the aural side is shaped by words, and then accommodates the other plethora of sounds, and the visual side is shaped by the forms, the spaces, and the interactions of their devices, and sees something of springs and gears in the world around.

Their faces appear at first glance to be almost expressionless — a faint hint of a smile, perhaps — until you look at their eyes, the first window to the fire and intensity within. Urvanovestilli eyes — whether brown, amber, hazel, grey, or blue — bear an intense, probing gaze; in Urvanovestilli culture, eye contact is almost continual, and reflects a fire,

an intensity, a passion, that fills their way of life. It does not take long to be reminded that eye contact is a form of touch; their eyes seem to be looking into your spirit. The gaze, in its intensity, is never cold and calculating, never the chilling, devouring stare of a steel face beyond which lies a heart of ice; at its most intense and most probing, it is the most filled with love, and most easily shows the intense fire within. They can rest — and they know calm and tranquility — but there is a great energy within, an energy that shows itself in their artwork and writings. Those who read their theologians certainly do not fail to notice the depths of wisdom and insight, but what is most striking is their love for God. The passion — of their love for God, for spouse, for family, for their neighbor; of desire to grow in virtue and knowledge, for their work — burns, and their experience of emotion — of discovery, of awe, of appreciation of beauty — is long and intense, complex and multifaceted. This emotion is the other side of contrainte; it is the same virtue that enables them to enjoy wine in temperance, and to be moved to tears by music and theater. It is not a "virtue" of stifling — that would be far too easy, but of control and proper enjoyment. Just as they find abstinence from drink to be too easy, a way of dodging the lesson of moderation, stifling emotion and crushing it would be, to them, a way of dodging the lesson of passions rightly oriented in accordance with holiness and love — not to mention an unconscionable destruction of an integral facet of being human.

Those Urvanovestilli who are the most virtuous, the most filled with contrainte, are nearly always the most passionate.

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Urvanovestilli are usually short, but look like very tall in miniature, with clear white skin and jet black hair. The men have a thin and wiry frame, with sharp and angular features. They have flaring eyebrows coming out of a prominent brow, a thin, hooked nose, and tufts of fine hair flaring away from their ears. Skin holds tightly to bones, muscles, and veins, and arms end in long, thin hands with nimble fingers. Their voices are a very soft, almost silent tenor.

The women are somewhat slender, but a slenderness which is graceful and rounded. Their features, as well as their build, bear this slender, graceful, rounded character, and their movements are light and flowing. (If the men know more of passion, the women know more of calm). Their voices are high and clear, with a sound that is like silver, like cold and crystalline water, like clear, light, dry Alsace blanc.

Urvanovestilli worship services are long and complex, with ornate liturgy and ritual. The language is florid and ornate (like that of the liturgy stemming from St. John Chrysostom) and every sentence of the liturgy would embody theological truth. The homilies (although not the only part of the service which varies (much of the liturgy itself changing according to a traditional pattern dictated by a complex algorithm) from week to week) are themselves not that long. They are of moderate length, and differ from the liturgy — which presented different doctrines sentence by sentence — in being a full and well-developed presentation of one single idea, expressed in unequalled detail and eloquence.

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The Urvanovestilli homeland is named 'Flaristimmo'.

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## Urvanovestilli city — Capitello

Capitello is the capital of the Urvanovestilli land, and the classical Urvanovestilli city.

At the very heart lies a cruciform cathedral. It is an immense domed building, the outside in white marble, covered with statues and spires. Inside, all is dark — or so it seems to a person who first steps in.

Someone who steps in first stands in place, seeing nothing really, perhaps a few points of light in the darkness... and then, very slowly, begins to adjust. It is cool inside, and very still. The silence is a silence that can be heard, a very real and present stillness. As he begins to step into the coolness and the silence, he begins to see light — light that had gone unnoticed at first, but as he steps into it, becomes more and more visible. The light is shining through a thousand candles, each one bringing a little bit of light, a little bit of warmth, to what is around it. Then, after the candles become visible, it is seen what they illuminate — mosaics, worked with colored dyes and gold leaf... and faces.

Outside of the cathedral lies an open garden with fountains and statues. Around the garden lies a circle of seven great halls. In clockwise order, beginning south of the cathedral, they are:

**Library:** This collection, the largest in the world, has at least one copy of all known writings, and a scriptorium in which they are copied and transmitted.

**Device museum:** This is a clockwork building filled with exemplary devices (and copies in various states of disassembly).

**Senate:** This building is decorated with arts and crafts from the cities throughout the land; it is a place where senators (two from each city and one from each village) meet to govern the nation.

**Mayorship:** This is the local senate, the seat from which public affairs are run; the majority of political power is on a local level (the senate being the head of a confederation), vested in the town elders.

**Forum:** This is an immense amphitheater which hosts a variety of speakers, panels, and open talks. Lecture is the predominant medium and presentation, but poetry and storytelling occur not infrequently. The forum, along with the evening worship services in the cathedral, walking in the garden, attending a concert, or looking through the art museum, is appreciated as an enjoyable way to spend a night out.

**Music hall/theater:** This hosts concerts and recitals, theatrical

MUSIC HALL/ THEATER. THIS HOSTS CONCERTS AND RECITALS, THEATRICAL performances, operas, dances, pyrotechnic displays, occasional Janra acrobatic performances, dramatic readings, puppet shows...

Art museum: Half of the space is devoted to permanent exhibits, and half to temporary displays. Most of the finest artwork ever produced by Urvanovestilli, and a good deal of the finest artwork from other cultures, may be seen here.

Outside of the seven halls lies what is called "the mélange"; outside of the mélange lie fields, pastures, and vineyards; outside of the farmland lies forest.

The mélange is a large annulus which contains mansions, shops, roads, paths, public squares, gardens, open lots, little forums and theaters, restaurants, and so on. It is where a great deal of life and culture transpires; in the little nooks and crannies, inside the parlors of the houses, a lot transpires.

The Urvanovestilli enjoy going out, but the enjoyment does not come from despising being at home. The parlors, which have the distinction of being within a person's home and hospitality, are lavishly furnished, with couches, chairs, lanterns, some instruments, a liquor machine, some sculpture or paintings, often a fountain or clock or... and people enjoy sitting around, talking, reading, performing music...

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Urvanovestilli city: Éliré

Éliré is known among the Urvanovestilli as the city of seashells. While most Urvanovestilli cities are built out of white stone, in ornately embellished classical geometric forms, Éliré is built out of sandy yellow stone, in flowing curves; buildings seem like giant seashells. The artwork and jewelry are crafted from seashells and other treasures from the sea — coral and pearls — and the public squares are filled with fountains and pools, where colorful fish swim about.

The people enjoy swimming, and often meet the dolphin population; they enjoy each other.

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### Urvanovestilli city: Mistrelli

Mistrelli lies in the heart of the Fog Valley; a shroud of mist cloaks the ground, out of which rise trees and tall buildings with spires and towers. Inside the buildings are all manner of tunnels of tunnels, secret passages, and trapdoors; there are clockwork devices in each one. Throughout the city are spread a handful of entrances to a vast underground labyrinth, of which the better part is known; there are all manner of doors and puzzles inside.

The city is full of rose bushes, climbing up the sides of the buildings, over and around gates; most are yellow, but there are some of every color.

The people take a long time to get to know, and their personalities always have hidden gems. Their study of theology emphasizes mystery and the incomprehensible nature of God; Connaissance, a theologian from Mistrelli, began and ended his magnum opus with the words, "I do not know."

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### Urvanovestilli city: Fabriqué

Fabriqué is the biggest of Urvanovestilli port cities; it lies on the Tuz border, and is the site where ships — full rigs with multiple masts, many sails, and innumerable ropes — are built. They are polished and ornately carved, well suited for transport and trade as well as a work of art. The crews hired tend to be heavily Tuz — strong and sturdy workers who have no problem tying a rope as thick as a wrist in waves and storm — and set sail to other Urvanovestilli ports and ports around the world, transporting voyagers and cargo to destinations near and far.

## Yedidia

The Yedidia culture is a culture of vibrant life. They live in buildings woven out of living trees and plants; the doorways are filled by hanging curtains of leafy vines which softly part as a person passes through.

Their manner of gardening spins out of a wonderful talent for drawing beauty out of the forest; many visitors come for the first time, do not even realize that they have stepped into a garden; they only notice that the forest's beauty is exceptional there.

The Yedidia are very sensitive to the rest of Creation; they speak in a melodic, lilting tongue of the purest song, but even that language is not the one that is closest to them. The first language of every child is that of rocks and trees and skies and seas. They know how to call birds out of the forest to fly into their hands; they know how to make plants flourish.

They have ears to hear the crystalline song by which the Heavens declare the glory of their Maker. They appreciate the beauty of the created order as it tells of the Uncreate with a power that can not fully be translated into words — and they use the language of Creation to speak of the mysteries of the Creator, whose fingerprints are everywhere in nature.

They look into the great and unfathomable vastness of space; it furnishes the language by which they tell of the great and unfathomable vastness of the Creator. They know the energy, the great fire out of which the sun pours out light and energy; it furnishes the language by which they tell of the energy and great fire in the heart of the Father, offering warmth and light freely and without cost. They dance in the rain, the life giving water poured out from above; it furnishes the language by which they speak of springs of living water come down from Heaven. They admire the beauty of the lilies of the field, which simply rest in the sunlight, rain, and dew showered on them; it furnishes the language by which they speak of resting in the love poured out. Their eyes are not

closed when a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies...

They are sensitive to the silent beauty that is sometimes unnoticed even by the Janra. They enjoy the brilliance of the sun, and the pale blue luminescence of the moon; the gentle warmth of a summer night, and the powerful motion of a pouring rainstorm (and there are few things many Yedidia enjoy more than being thoroughly drenched). They look at the veins of a leaf, the hairs of a caterpillar, the motion of a snail; they listen to the song of birds, the sound of wind whispering amidst the leaves, the splashes of water flowing over rocks; they taste the cold freshness of water, the tartness of lemons, the sweetness of strawberries; they smell the soft fragrance of jasmine, the spice of cinnamon, the freshness after a rain; they feel the velvety softness of a rabbit's fur, the raspiness of a rhubarb leaf, the roughness of bark, the smoothness of a worn stone, the gentle kiss of a summer breeze, the springiness of pete moss, the shimmering heat of fire long into the night, the light tickle of a crawling gecko, the fineness of a child's hair, and the warmth of a friend's face.

They are as intuitive as they are perceptive; the emotions of friends especially, but strangers as well, are quickly understood; be it singing together, a friendly joke, talking, listening, leaving alone, sitting together in silence, holding a hand, giving a hug — they always seem to know.

The Yedidia make wines and incense which even the Urvanovestilli do not come close to. It is, though, the Urvanovestilli who make their garments. Some are short, some are tall; some are slender, some are rounded; they tends towards being fairly short and fairly round, but there is a lot of variety. All, though, have olive skin and dark, shiny black hair; the women wear a long, flowing robe of kelly green, over which cascades of hair fall and spin, sometimes reaching to the waist, sometimes almost touching the ground; the men wear cloaks and tunics of walnut brown. The clothing is soft and light as air; it streams out in the motion and jumps of dance — like their music, smooth, soft, flowing, graceful.

"Dance, then, wherever you may be, for I am the Lord of the Dance, said he." Theirs is a culture full of joy and celebration; it is full of smiles, and always willing to welcome a visitor. Finding something good, they look for someone to share it with.

They are very sensitive to the cycles of nature, of the day, of the phases of the moon, of the seasons in turn. They shape the regular rhythm of their songs, and provide a sense of constancy and regularity, again, which furnishes the language by which they speak of the constancy and

furnishes the language by which they speak of the constancy and regularity of the Creator.

The traditional greeting is a soft and gentle hug, one which often lasts a while (or a butterfly kiss, or...). That touch, as their faces and voices as they speak, bears a great deal of expression: The phrase of greeting used means, literally, "Here is a person in whom I find joy." The words remain the same, but the music of the speech colors it to perfection.

Though each culture has its own drink — even the icy cold water enjoyed by the Nor'krin is appreciated by visiting Janra, who recognize it as a gift given without sowing or reaping — drinks are one of the first things that come to mind when most people hear the word 'Yedidia'.

First of all are their wines. Nearly all of the finest wines are made in their land. Red and white, and a little bit of rose and green, are stored away in caves to age for years, perhaps decades, before being opened to enjoy with friends and memories.

After the wines come cider; it is served hot and well spiced; the spicing is done in many different ways, and gives a wonderful variety to a very soothing drink to warm a cool evening.

There are fruit juices of every color of the rainbow; strawberry, pear, guava, banana, apple, peach, and fig are but the beginning of a very long and flavorful list. There is, though, one strong point of commonality: the fruit is always still attached to the plant a few minutes before it is served.

(the variety of fruit juices is fermented and aged as are grapes to make wine, but that variety of drinks is reserved for very special occasions)

They also enjoy teas and infusions; the trees and herbs provide another spectrum of tastes to sip with friends.

Roots of various plants are sometimes spiced to provide another drink.

Yedidia cuisine varies somewhat from region to region. In some places, it is based on fresh fruit, and in others, on breads, cereals, thick soups and vegetable stews; the latter is spiced, lightly salted, and often has some meat for added flavor. All forms of Yedidia cuisine begin with a small salad (either garden or fruit), have a main course of some form of the local specialties, are followed by a platter with an assortment of breads and fresh fruits, and end with a dessert of cheeses or cured fruit.

Life, to the Yedidia, is one big, long party, and, to the Yedidia, song is the symbol of celebration. They sing in the morning, and sing in the evening; they sing while working, and sing a prayer — hands joined

together — before meals. Thought is expressed in song; the first place to look for an expression of their perspective on theology and philosophy is in the verses of their hymns. There are many cherished songs shared across the nation, but there is also much spontaneity and improvisation; their way of speaking/singing is in metered verse, and a wealth of their wisdom is embodied in the rhythm of hymns, regular and dependable as the cycles of nature. The day, the moon, the year — these different cycles are echoed in the structure of verses.

For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies, For the love which from our birth over and around us lies: Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the beauty of each hour of the day and of the night, Hill and vale and tree and flower, sun and moon and stars of light: Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child, Friends on earth, and friends above; for all gentle thoughts and mild; Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For Thy church, that evermore lifteth holy hands above, Offering up on every shore her pure sacrifice of love: Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

For Thyself, best Gift Divine! To our race so freely given; For that great, great love of Thine, peace on earth, and joy in Heaven: Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.

This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears, All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres. This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas; His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world, the birds their carols raise, The morning light, the lily white, declare their Maker's praise. This is my Father's world: He shines in all that's fair; In the rustling grass I hear him pass, He speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world, O let me ne'er forget That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet. This is my Father's world: the battle is not done; Jesus who died shall be satisfied, and earth and Heaven be one.

The Yedidia are the most alive to sensation; each sense is valued, and each one provides something a little different.

Touch is pre-eminent; it is enjoyed immensely, and they consider it the most informative of senses. Touch tells them of texture and temperature, of moist and dry; by how things respond to pressure, they can feel what is present beneath the surface and what structure it forms; it tells much of emotion. When sensation yields perception, touch provides them with the greatest richness.

Smell is a sense of memories; to walk through an orchard is to remember seasons past. It no less bears a tale of what has happened; each person bears his own distinctive smell, and a place by its smell tells who has passed by. Many different things leave a mark on a placés scent, and to smell is to be told, as if in a far-off memory (indeed, like those that smell mysteriously triggers), what plants are present, what the weather is like and has been, who has passed by, what fruit was picked — though not all of this is perceived all of the time, the fragrance of a place often tells bits and pieces.

Sight is a sense that works by light illuminating all that it shines on (and this is something from which they draw a lesson). It tells of the color, the form, and the beauty of what is around; what is moving and what is still; it tells of what is far away and can not yet be touched. It serves as a guide to what is around, as a guide by which to move and act in an unknown situation, and it bears its own beauty; all of this provides lessons about God and about faith.

The first sound in their mind, and the one they most love, is song. The song of a friend's voice, the song of a bird chirping, the song of a babbling brook, the silent song of silvery blue starlight — all of these are listened to and enjoyed.

The taste of food tells of the time of year and of culture. Drink and food are a kind of art, and its taste tells both of the time of year and how it was prepared.

Yedidia emotions have a fluid character; they are a sensitive people who are easily moved and who show their emotions quickly. Their celebration is filled with smiles and mirth — as is, indeed, much of life. Tears are held to be very precious — in their language, the same word means 'tear' and 'diamond' — and they know tears, not only of sorrow, but also of joy. Tears come to greet both memories and powerful music, and mark as both sign and symbol the most significant events in life.

and mark as both sign and symbol the most significant events in life — farewell and death, yes, but also a loved one regained, and birth, and marriage. Memories and hopes, also, are precious. They know sorrow, but never bitterness; however deep and angst-ridden the sorrow may be, deeper and more healing is the joy. Farewell is always marked by the thought of, "I will be able to enjoy your presence again;" on many a deathbed has been spoken the words, "We will be brought back together again in the heart of the Father. It will not be long."

Yedidia worship services are filled with songs — celebrations in which everybody participates.

The Yedidia homeland is named 'Syllii'.

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Yedidia character: Sylla

Sylla is relatively short and rounded; she has dark, olive skin and soft, brown eyes. Her hair falls down to her waist, and she wears a long, flowing kelly green robe, as is traditional among Yedidia women; more often than not, a chain of flowers rests in her hair. She chooses to go barefoot, so that she can feel the grass, the moss, the earth, and the stones beneath her feet.

The only possession which she carries is a small harp; a slow strum accompanies a soft and gentle song. She also has with her a pet: a milshh: a small, eyeless animal, about two feet long, with brilliant golden fur that is long and soft, two large, pointed ears, eight short, flexible legs ending in large paws, and a shiny black nose which is always sniffing inquisitively. It is both shy and curious, and it is very warm and affectionate; it is usually very calm and sedate, but often becomes very excited when it smells someone familiar.

A quote:

Fair is the sunlight;  
Fairer still the moonlight:  
Fairest of all, is the light of thy face.

## Jec

The Jec life is filled with faith, humility, and simplicity. They live in small rural villages, where farmland — pastures, fields, orchards and vineyards, the village commons — outlies a few houses, some artisan's shops, and a simple church.

They are peasants very much like those chosen to be apostles, and the carpenter who chose them. Farmers, blacksmiths, cobblers — clothed in rough, plainly colored robes, they are the sort of people one could easily overlook in the search for the spectacular. It is calloused hands and dirty fingernails that are lifted up to God in worship, and that continue to worship by placing a yoke on a pair of oxen, gathering firewood, peeling carrots and potatoes, or threshing wheat. There are many who are given great wisdom and knowledge, a faith to move mountains, or who speak in the tongues of men and angels, but they do not bear an otherworldly air or a strange electricity; they appear as men and women like any other, usually harvesting barley or carving wood.

Their thought is expressed in parables, little stories, and proverbs, the first and foremost of which are "Love Yahweh your God with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your mind, and all of your might," and "Love your neighbor as yourself." There is a great sense of community and continuity, carrying the torch passed down by the saints who walked before.

They do not really travel; most are born, live, and die within a few miles of a single point. They do not look down on wayfarers who voyage far and wide to see the height of mountains and the vastness of seas, and enjoy the richness of the visible and invisible artifacts of the variety of cultures, but they pay a lot of attention to what is easy to pass by without noticing. They know their culture, their village, and its people very well.

Jec culture is a culture of the very small. They see the great in the

small; in the Law of Love is seen all of virtue and right action; in a tiny shoot pushing out of the ground they see an immense oak whose branches will someday provide shade; in a simple gift, they see the love that gave it. They are fond of the words, "He who is faithful in little is also faithful in much." Piety is given expression in the tiny details of everyday life, to which careful attention is devoted. They search to love God by seeing to the needs of whoever they are with.

Gift giving occupies an important cultural position; each gift serves as a little symbol, a little morsel, of love. The gifts are very simple — poverty does not permit the spectacular — but are given generously. A flower, an apple, a song, a blessing, a handshake, a prayer, a poem, a cup of cold water wood carved into a statue or a whistle, an oddly shaped pebble, a skin of wine, a walk, a story, a patterned candle — all of these are given.

Sight, sound, touch, smell, taste — there is nothing really special about their use of senses. They notice and enjoy little details; there is not much more to say.

The language has simple rules and few words; it is one of the easiest to learn, and bears well the load of talking about everyday matters, about personality and friendship, and about God.

When two Jec meet, one is usually coming to visit the other, and something of this notion of visit and welcome is embodied in the greeting. The visitor comes with one arm outstretched and hand open, saying, "I give you my love." The host clasps the outstretched hand, bowing slightly, and says, "And I return to you mine." These actions are accompanied by a gentle smile.

They are fairly short, with tan skin, brown eyes, and hair that is usually brown (and sometimes black or sandy blonde).

Their emotions are the emotions of being human, the common points of feeling shared across all culture. They know at least something of laughter and peace and passion and tears and awe; if there is one point that runs strong, it is a sense of tradition, community, continuity, and place; they have a sense of unique importance and a part in the great plan (two concepts which are not really separate in their thought).

Jec worship services are simple, without any real distinguishing remarks — no bells and smells, just a week by week liturgical service presenting the Gospel message and embodying worship. The opening words of each service are, "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh your God is one. You shall love Yahweh your God with all of your heart and with all of your

shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind, and with all of your might. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love one another."

The Jec homeland is named 'Tev'.

## Shal

The language is soft, gentle, simple, and calm. It is spoken slowly, as if it were a lullaby; it has few words: simple, little words with rich and profound connotations; 'Way', 'Tao', and 'Word' are like the nouns which are used.

Even the verbs are rarely verbs which tell of action. Rather, they describe that which is; 'be', 'abide in', 'embody', 'love', 'nourish', 'support', 'is the friend of', 'know', 'receive', 'is from', 'resemble', 'live', are the essential words which a child would learn as one of our children would learn words such as 'walk', 'talk', 'eat'. Just as our language has different words — 'walk', 'run', 'jog', 'sprint', 'mosey', 'trot', for example — which tell of the action of moving by the use of legs, so their language has at least a few different words to tell of being, or understanding, or abiding, or loving. The way of speaking sometimes does not even need verbs; there are more adjectives than adverbs.

The genius of the language is embodied in a flowing prose which is the purest poetry; words with the simplicity of a child. It does not have abruptly ending sentences, but rather slides somewhat like Hebrew; one thought gives form to the next. It has something like the feel of the prologue to John's account of the Gospel, or his first letter; it has something like the feel of a Gregorian chant; there is nothing abrupt in their speech or music. They speak, but even more, they are silent; there is a communion.

The understanding is one which sees beyond, which looks at the surface and sees into the depths. They stand dazzled by the glory of the starry vault, and worship the awesome Creator who called them into being; they look at a friend's face and see the person behind.

Their culture is a place of perfect order. It is ordered by things being placed rightly; by God worshiped by man, the spiritual ahead of the

physical, being beyond doing.

It is of this that God is known in all of his majesty, that spirituality becomes rich and profound, that there is a right state of being. This brings the lesser things to flourish. Men shine as they reflect the glory of God. That which is physical is enjoyed immensely — the warmth and softness of a friend's touch, the sweetness of a freshly picked orange, the fragrance of a garden of flowers, the sound of a bird's song, the colors of a sunset — all of these things are received gratefully. Being, they do; they tend the garden, and create.

The order flows from resting in the Spirit and from love; there is no one who thinks of order. The truthfulness knows nothing of oaths; the order knows nothing of rules, nor even of honor and morality.

The culture is best understood, not by looking at men, but by looking at God. God gives generously, and they receive and rest in his love.

There are many people in modern society who, when waiting in an office or at a traffic light, become agitated and begin to fidget; they are hollowed out by an excess of doing. The Shal are innocent of such hurry. They act, but it is a doing which flows from being.

Food, wine, music, incense, touch, silence, storytelling, dance, drama, puppetry — it is not often that they all get together to have a celebration (they prize greatly time spent alone with one person, and then extended families and tightly knit communities).

Shal culture does not exactly have greetings as such; their way of thought works differently.

To say 'hello' or 'goodbye' is an action of an instant, in two senses. In one sense, it lasts for an instant; no one says 'hello' twenty times or shakes hands for five minutes. In the other sense, it marks an instant, the instant where absence becomes presence or presence becomes absence.

The Shal do not really think in terms of instants; time is measured and perceived — or, rather, not measured and not perceived — by moments. A friend is present, and he is enjoyed, and then he is absent, and then there is solitude. In the place of a greeting, the Shal have a presence. With the Shal, you never get the feeling that you are alone and there is another person nearby who is also alone; you never get the feeling that there is a close group of friends nearby and they are inside and you are outside. If a Shal is nearby, he is present; indeed, the Shal have a very present touch.

Life, to the Shal, is full of moments. There is a meal with friends, and then there is reflection in solitude, and then there is a beautiful song, and

then there is reflection in solitude, and then there is a beautiful song, and then there is time with a friend, and then there is prayer, and then there is sleep, and then there is work tending to the trees... There is not interruption or haste; a moment lasts as long as it is appropriate for a moment to last.

Their moments of community are profound; their moments of solitude are even more profound. 'Withdrawing' is what they call it; it is a time of stillness, and an expression of a love so profound that all other loves appear to be hate. It is a time of finding a secret place, and then withdrawing — from family, friends, and loved ones, from music and the beauty of nature, from cherished activities, from sensation — into the heart of the Father. It is a time of — it is hard to say what. Of being loved, and of loving. Of growing still, and becoming. Of being set in a right state, and realigned in accordance with the ultimate reality. Of purity from the Origin. Of being made who one is to be. Of communion and worship. Of imago dei filled with the light of Deus. Of being pulled out of time and knowing something of the Eternal.

This withdrawing fills them with an abundant love for other people, and gives them a renewed appreciation for nature and music; it fills them with silence, and fills their words and song.

Their perception of the world is quintessentially tactile. Sight, hearing, and smell all work at a distance; touch perceives what is immediately present. The eyes, ears, nose, and tongue are all organs of sense at one place on the body — more sensitive in some places and less in others, to be sure — and feels all of what is immediately present. Touch provides the physical side of the presence which is so greatly valued.

The emotional side of the culture is filled by peace, in which is embedded joy and contentment. It does not change very much or very quickly — though it encompasses affection, or appreciation of beauty, or a special serenity, or absorption in thought.

Their appearances have the peculiar property of not seeming to be any particular age. If you look, age is not very difficult to judge, but somehow the thought doesn't come up. They have a rounded shape, soft eyes, and warm, soft skin.

Shal worship services are different from the others. They are characterized, not by the presence of words, but by the presence of a profound and penetrating silence where God is imminent. There are a few words, but they are not where the essence lies.

The Shal homeland is named 'Liss'.

## Janra

The Janra, unlike any of the other cultures, have no homeland; they voyage among the other lands, where they are generally well-liked and warmly received. Their wayfaring is at once literal and symbolic: literal in the sense that they know that they are passing through this earthly country for a better one. They enjoy all of the lands that they visit — they have an informal character, and always seem to be at home — but they know that none of them is really home.

It must be said that they know how to move. They can walk, skip, and run, of course, but that is only the beginning. Trees, buildings, and cliffs are climbed like ladders. Come oceans, rivers, and lakes, they will happily swim. Be it lightly skipping atop a thin wall, or jumping out of a window to grab a tree branch and swing down, or running at top speed through the twisty passages of the Southern mines and caves, they make acrobatics seem another form of walking. Somehow, even flipping through a window or somersaulting under a table, they have an extraordinary knack for barely missing collisions with hard objects; the Urvanovestilli are still debating whether this is the result of skill or luck.

The dances of the Urvanovestilli have a marvelous complexity, and those of the Yedidia are known for their flowing grace, but there is still nothing like the spinning energy of the Janra. The Janra are very adaptable, pulling bits and pieces from other cultures and setting them together in vital new combinations. In some of the dances can be seen bits and pieces — moves of strength that look like Tuz wrestling, or complexity from the Urvanovestilli — and the result is nothing short of breathtaking.

In their adaptability, they usually speak at least a few words of each language, and usually borrow whatever form of greeting is common in the land they are visiting. They are familiar with the household objects (often

enough to use them in new ways). This, combined with a flair for practical jokes, is occasionally enough to annoy the town guards, but (more often than not) their antics leave people laughing, sometimes to the point of tears.

The Janra have a remarkable talent for not remaking God in their image. Their description of Jesus is anything but boring and respectable — a firebrand with a phenomenal knack for offending religious leaders, in the habit of telling respectable pillars of society things such as, "The prostitutes and tax collectors are entering the Kingdom of Heaven ahead of you." — and they are known for an honesty that can be singularly blunt. They know that he passed over scribes and lawyers to call, as disciples, a motley crew of fishermen, tax collectors, and other peasants — one terrorist thrown in to make matters interesting. They are, however, just as cautious not to water him into only being a social reformer who had nothing to say about sexual purity.

For all of their sharpness, for all of their ability to bring forth the most embarrassing Scriptural teaching at the worst possible moment, it must also be said that the Janra have hearts of pure gold. Love and compassion are constantly in their thought and action; they are the first to share their food with a beggar, say hello to the person who is alone, or ask, "Are you hurting?" The accusations brought against them are accusations of having too many quirks, not of being unloving.

Their language is of a force that is not easily translated into writing; of course it has nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc. and respects masculine and feminine, but intonation, speed, vocal tension, and other factors tell at least as much; they carry connotation and sentiment, express the level of clarity of understanding the speaker believes he has, and many more things. There are also a number of verbal tics, on the order of two or three dozen ('Eh?' is, however, not included, and apparently perceived to be a mark of general silliness); in a sense, they don't do anything, but in a sense, they add a very nice pepper to the speech.

Janra thought involves a kind of sideways logic, which is part of why their ways of speaking are difficult to describe. They take little bits and pieces from different places, and put them together in unexpected ways, making connections that can be very surprising. They are very good at reading between the lines, and sometimes perceive things which were not intentionally meant to be communicated. Sometimes they borrow

intentionally meant to be communicated. Sometimes they borrow manners of speech from other people — conversation, structured argument, metered verse, stories, parables, and so on — but their usual way of speaking has all sorts of sideways jumps and turns, with segues that can be rather odd, and often leaves gaps; these gaps are not a matter of sloppiness, but rather something like a joke or riddle where the hole is intentionally left to be filled in by the listener.

"When it comes to games, never try to understand the Janra mind."

-Oeildubeau, Urvanovestilli philosopher and anthropologist

It is known that Janra sports usually last for at least half an hour, involve a ball, two or more teams, running and acrobatics, and animated discussion. Beyond that, neither the Urvanovestilli's logic nor the Yedidia's intuition are able to make head or tail of them. In general, the teams appear to have unequal numbers of players; the players often switch teams in the course of play; teams are created and dissolved; the nature of the activities makes sudden and radical changes; there is no visible winning or losing. There are occasionally times in the course of play when some intelligible goal appears to be being approached... but then, all players seem to be approaching it in a rather erratic manner (when asked why he didn't do thus and such simple thing and achieve the approached goal by an inexperienced anthropologist, one of the Janra said, "Technically, that would work, but that would be a very boring way to do it," and then bolted back into play: the extent to which game play is comprehensible heightens its incomprehensibility). Late in life, Oeildubeau hinted at having suspicions that, if the Janra believe that they are being watched, they will spontaneously stop whatever sport they are playing, and instead begin a series of activities expressly designed to give any observer a headache.

Janra come in all shapes, sizes, and colors, showing bits and pieces of other races; they tend to be of moderate to tall height and a lithe build. Most are fairly light skinned (although a few are rather dark); a fair number of them have skin spotted with freckles. They have every imaginable color of hair (black, brown, blonde, grey, white, red, tweed, shaven head, etc). and eyes (brown, blue, hazel, grey, amber, purple, etc). They wear loose clothing in a variety of colors, usually quite vivid: red

They wear loose clothing in a variety of colors, usually quite vivid, red, purple, and green are the most common of solid colors, and patches or stripes of some pattern or the whole rainbow appear not infrequently. Therefore, Al is a pud.

Their sensation of the world is primarily visual, and in a way patterned after their thought; visualizing and visual problem solving comes very naturally to them. They see, as well as beauty, a world to interact with, and parts to rearrange and make something new. Sound and touch serve largely to complement and extend visual image; taste and smell are enjoyed, but do not play a terribly large role. The other side of the coin (to problem solving) is observing and enjoying, which is also very much a part of culture.

Their emotional life has several sides. They carry with them, in their emotions, a little bit of every place and people they visit — the passion and control of the Urvanovestilli, the peace of the Shal, the festivities and music of the Yedidia, the respect of the Nor'krin, the enjoyment of exercise of the Tuz, the common factor of the Jec. Perhaps the most prominent side of all is laughter. Janra are immeasurably fond of banter and practical jokes, and have an uncanny knack for guessing who is ticklish. There is an element of what is carefree, spontaneous, and given to pure enjoyment of simple pleasures; there is also a large element of being immersed in sidethink, and they enjoy greatly the flash of insight when everything fits together. They are curious and enjoy discovery.

There is another side to this emotion which seems paradoxical, but fits perfectly. There is a difference between childlike and childish, and not a trace of childishness is to be found among them. They enter the Kingdom of Heaven as little children — in particular, like one little boy who stood up before crowds of thousands and asked, "Why is the Emperor naked?" Of all the skills people learn as a part of growing up, they know perhaps least of all closing their eyes and using intelligence as a tool to make oneself stupid. They are moved by what goes unnoticed, smiling at the beauty in a single blade of grass, and weeping at the death of a beggar who, homeless, friendless, handicapped and burned, explained that he was unable to drop a knife taped to his defunct hand for self-defense, but was still shot and killed outside of the White House by men entrusted with the responsibility of protecting innocent life.

There are two things to said about Janra worship. The first is that they adapt and participate in whatever is the local manner of worship (as do

traveling Urvanovestilli and other wayfarers) — in that regard, they make no distinction between themselves and the peoples that they visit. The second — and this does not stem from any perceived defect in the other forms of worship, but from who they are — is that they hold their own worship services.

These services do not occur at a fixed time and place (though they occur more frequently when Janra are on the road between different locations), but at random intervals and locations, spontaneously. Anyone and everyone is welcome, and children and sometimes adults of other races are usually present.

They are a warm and informal occasions, where anyone can take the lead, and a great many activities are recognized as worship; the Janra have a particularly strong emphasis on the priesthood of the believer and the sacredness of everyday life. People sit in a big circle, and people or groups of people come to the center to present or lead as they wish.

There is no canonical list of activities that are performed at these services, but the following are common.

- \* Songs. The Janra sing their own songs (often improvised) or those of other peoples; those of the Yedidia are especially treasured. While singing, the people are sometimes still, sometimes swaying, sometimes clapping, and sometimes dancing with their arms.

- \* Prayer. One person will lead a prayer, or people will pray popcorn style, or...

- \* Sermons. A theologian or philosopher will preach a sermon.

- \* Sharing. Someone will share an insight or experience from personal life.

- \* Dance. The whole assembly will dance, sometimes in a long, snaking line.

- \* A joke is told. The Janra are fond of laughter.

- \* Drama. One of a few people will present a dramatic presentation, play, or skit.

- \* Group hug, usually in whatever is the common greeting of the land.

- \* Ticklefest. "Blessed are the ticklish, for the touch of a friend will fill them with laughter."

- \* Silence. This is treasured.

- \* Reading from the Scriptures.

- \* Reading or recitation of poetry.

- \* Storytelling.

- \* ~~Inoeling and similar activities~~

~~gugging and similar activities.~~

- \* Acrobatics.
- \* Instrumental music.
- \* Non sequiturs.
- \* Miming.
- \* Mad libs.
- \* Impressions and impersonations of various and sundry people.
- \* Janra-ball. This occurs in a modified form such that members of other races, while still not understanding anything, are capable of participating. (Nobody gets a headache.)
- \* Eucharist. This is the most solemn and important moment, and occurs exactly once in a service — at the end.
- \* None of the above. This category is especially appreciated.

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Janra character: Nimbus

Nimbus is fairly short and wiry; he has light, almost white blonde hair, deep, intense blue eyes which sparkle and blaze, and a rich, laughing smile. He wears a loose, shimmering two-legged robe of midnight blue, from the folds of which he seems to be able to procure innumerable items of Urvanovestilli make (for example: goggles (waterproof), telescope, silk rope and grappling hook with spring-loaded launcher, climbing/rapelling harness and gear/self-contained, spring-loaded belay), lantern, tool kit (large blade, precision blade, compass, wire saw, corkscrew, ruler, reamer, chisel, pliers, scissors, needle, punch, protractor, file, and sharpening stone), paper pad, mechanical pencil, supply kit (string, pencil lead, chalk, flask of oil, wire, miscellaneous device components (gears, springs, shafts, etc.), cloth), meal kit, tinderbox, mechanical puzzle, mirror, whistle...).

During childhood, he spent a lot of time in the land of the Urvanovestilli, and began to take an interest in tinkering. He has very much his own way of tinkering, from an Urvanovestilli perspective; he is fond of all manner of kludges. The resulting devices have caused his Urvanovestilli mentors to conclude that he is mad (the truth of the matter being that he is not mad, but produces and modifies contraptions in such a manner as to drive any honest Urvanovestilli tinkerer mad). When the city unveiled a new fountain in the public square, he added a pyrotechnic spark; when, in a public ceremony, the mayor celebrated his wife's birthday by presenting a specially commissioned music box, the tune somehow changed from "Happy birthday to you" to "The old grey mare ain't what she used to be."

He does, however, possess a sense of what is and is not appropriate; his practical jokes never take on a mean or spiteful character, and he does possess a strong degree of contrainte. He does appreciate the variety of cultures he visits, and enjoys Urvanovestilli philosophical and theological discussions.

He is, in short, as Janra as any — left-handed and colorful, warm and compassionate, and a heart of solid gold.

A quote: "What? You think I would do something like that? I'm hurt." (generally accompanied by a wide grin)

## All

"Not all flesh is the same: men have one kind of flesh, and beasts have another kind of flesh, fish have another, and birds another still. There are also celestial bodies, and terrestrial bodies; the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. The sun has one glory, and the moon another, and the stars still another; star differs from star in glory."

I Cor. 15:39-41

"God does not create two blades of grass alike, let alone two saints, two angels, or two nations."

C.S. Lewis, That Hideous Strength

This world is an exploration of good, a set of musings about cultures not fallen. The variety of cultures exists because of the nature of good.\*

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tell the same Gospel, the same message of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, crucified for the forgiveness of sins and raised from the dead.

They each, however, present this one Gospel with a distinct flavor; it is with a great deal of wisdom and respect for this one Gospel message that Christian tradition has vigorously resisted attempts to reduce the four books to one single, homogenized account. Matthew emphasizes the Kingdom of Heaven and peace; Mark emphasizes action; Luke provides a physician's account of healing and sensitivity towards the despised; John provides a poetic and mystical account of love and intimacy. It is to faithfully represent this one Gospel that the Spirit inspired the writing of multiple accounts.

Faithfulness to a God of color and vibrancy means anything but a dull, monotonous cookie cut-out series of identical believers; just as a person is most faithfully represented, not by multiple copies of one photograph, but by many different photographs from many different angles, so images

of God may faithfully reflect him by being different from each other.

This is why there are different cultures, each with its own emphasis on philosophy and way of life. (Within these cultures, though I have far from described them, should be many different sub-cultures, communities, and individuals. There is a masculine and a feminine side to each culture — or, more properly, each culture recognizes the importance of men who are masculine and women who are feminine). The differences, however, are differences of emphasis, just as the previous analogy spoke of different photographs for the sake of faithfully representing one entity.

It is in this same substance that people of other cultures look at each other and immediately see human beings; the differences are a source of heightened enjoyment between brothers and sisters. It is in this same substance that they love God with their whole being, and love their neighbors as themselves. That there is one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, of all that is, visible and invisible, that God is holy, possessing all authority and all wisdom, that there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, God from God, Light from Light, Love from Love, the Word made flesh, perfect God and perfect man, crucified for the forgiveness of sins and raised from the dead to be the eldest of many brothers and sisters, that there is the Holy Spirit, a fire of love and energy shooting between the Father and the Son, the new structure of obedience, that the fear of the Eternal is the beginning of wisdom, that God created the sky, the earth, the seas, the plants, the animals, and saw that it was good, and then created man in his image, and saw that it was very good, that the order of the universe is spiritual as well as physical, that God loves man and has given him the Law of Love, that man has as facets *cultas* and *culturas*, individual and community, that he created them male and female, faith, hope, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control — things such as these are the reality unequivocally confirmed by all men. Cultural differences provide richness and variety that enhances understanding between brothers and sisters who love one another.

When a character is developed, with a cultural and personal flavor, do not overlook that which is to be common across all cultures and people, the same identity which holds culture and personal uniqueness.

One brief note, in the interest of clarity to avoid unnecessarily offending people: I am a white, male American who has lived in South-East Asia and Western Europe. I find cultures to be objects of great

East Asia and Western Europe. I find cultures to be objects of great beauty, but make no pretense to be well-versed in all of them, nor to have included each of them in this world. The absence of some cultures is not meant as a statement of "My culture exists because of Creation and your culture exists because of the Fall;" I tried to envision a world not fallen, and began to create it with a background that certainly includes my theological knowledge, but also includes my cultural background and my own personality. If some members of other cultures would like to make a similar creation based on their knowledge, go for it; if you send it to me, I'll enjoy reading it. I have not, however, myself gone out of my way to include other cultures; I am not ashamed of this. I am grateful to God for the personal and cultural fingerprints that I have left on this creation, and hope that other people, other images of God to whom it is given a slightly different manner of reflecting God's glory, have been able to read it in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

\* Careful readers will have noticed some things — ergo, meat eating, rebuke, the Cross (a symbol of redemption from sin), which do not correspond to Eden. The cultures exist, not always as what sinless cultures might have been in Eden, but sometimes what sinless Christian culture might be today, were such a thing possible. To state some things more precisely: it is a world in which physical evil exists, but not moral evil. I would request that the reader overlook the indirect marks of sin, as the cultures were designed around other concerns primarily.

# Evangelical Converts Striving to be Orthodox

Anytown, USA. The Parish Council at St. Patrick of Ireland Very Antiochian Very Former Evangelical Orthodox Very Orthodox Very Orthodox Church is working hard to become more Orthodox, in *all* that it means to be Orthodox.

Fr. Joseph explains. "It's part of our Protestant heritage to turn outward in warmth and evangelism. But as an Evangelical Orthodox congregation, we realized that Orthodoxy is the fulness of what we were reaching for, and it's time to free ourselves from our Protestant heritage and become more truly Orthodox. True Orthodox know how to serve and even evangelize—as the monks did in Alaska—while remaining an inward-looking church that extends a rather chilly lack of welcome to visitors. We *can* turn a cold shoulder if we try."

As a result, the Parish Council will be holding a brainstorming session on ways to make the parish less friendly to visitors. The council will be handing out prizes for best ideas, including a thick accent, a long and bushy beard, and a series of motivational tapes on how to have a more lukewarm approach to morals.

Objections were raised in the parish to the effect that there was no Evangelical Orthodox Church in 19th century Russia. 19th century Russia was not available for comment.

# The Evolution of a Perspective on Creation and Origins

*Adapted from a mailing list post. I've still left it as clunky as when it was first written.*

In the interests of providing a fuller picture, and perhaps letting other list members understand *why* I hold a perspective that seems hard to explain in someone who has given thought to the question, I have decided to give an account of how I came to my present position. A serious attempt at representing the cases for and against different perspectives — even the case for my own perspective — is beyond the scope of this letter; I intend to state, without tracing out in detail, my present perspective, but not to give arguments beyond a scant number without which the plot would be diminished. That stated, I *am* attempting, to the best of my ability, to write with the kind of honesty Feynman describes in "Cargo Cult Science" [in his memoirs *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman*]— not a selective account of facts designed to optimize persuasive effect, but (after combing through my memory) as comprehensive an explanation as I can provide without reproducing arguments, one that includes details that will hurt my persuasive impact every bit as much as those that would advance whatever facade I might expect to hold the most compelling influence. I am attempting to place chronological events in chronological order, explicitly noting the exceptions. If there are relevant details ('relevant' from the perspective of any side of the debate, not just my

own) that are not reproduced here, it's because I couldn't find them after looking for them.

My earliest remembered belief, from childhood, was of a six day young-earth creationist view. I read from the Bible, and I think I read some conservative Christian children's material, although I can't remember what; I don't remember it explicitly arguing for a young-earth view so much as assuming it, and warning readers about hostile science teachers when it came to evolution. My father (who holds a doctorate in physics and teaches computer science at Wheaton College) believes in an old earth, but has not (so far as I know) committed to details of theories of the origin of life in a sense that would interest a biologist; in a discussion a year or two ago, I remember him responding to Wheaton's President's perspective that some origins questions are purely exegetical by saying, "Science is a *human* discipline; theology is a *human* discipline." (I would not put things that way exactly, but I am providing it as an example of the situation I grew up in.) I don't specifically remember my mother saying anything about origins questions. The only time during my childhood I can recall a Christian adult trying to influence my thought about origins-related questions was when I looked at my Bible, which had a timeline of different figures and events in the Jewish lineage, with estimated years for different people, and then at the far left had the Creation, the Fall, and some other event (I think the Flood or the Tower of Babel), for which no estimated date was given. Assuming a linear relationship between position on the timeline and time, I extrapolated a date for Creation, and my Sunday School teacher tried to explain to me that I couldn't do that, that that wasn't using the figure properly. I don't know what she believed about origins questions, just that she tried to dissuade me from misreading a timeline. At any rate, my beliefs congealed after I had enough mental maturity to understand the details of the Genesis 1 account, and before I had serious contact with scientific findings or with the Biblical-theological case that the natural order is subject to legitimate exploration and discovery.

Sometime in middle to late childhood — I think before eighth grade, but I'm not positively sure — I read a long *Christianity Today* article about origins questions, following a "four views" format. I remember that theistic evolution was included, and that one of the respondents was Pattle Pun, a biologist at Wheaton; I have vague, inconclusive

rememberances that one perspective was progressive creation, and that one of them might have been six day, young-earth creationism, but I'm not sure on either of the last two accounts. After reading it, my beliefs began to shift. I don't remember exactly what I believed when the process of shifting was going on; to fast forward a bit, I do remember the resting point they came to and stayed for quite a while. It was a theistic evolution account, drawing on quantum uncertainty and chaos theory, and intermittently including a belief in distinctly supernatural punctuations to equilibrium. Ok, end of fast-forward; back to chronological order.

In eighth grade (I was attending Avery Coonley School, a private magnet school for the gifted), the yearlong biology course was taught by Dr. John A. Rhodes, a biologist and the school headmaster, a man for whom I hold fond memories. Early in the course, Dr. Rhodes made a very emphatic point that we should tell people at prospective high schools that we were taught from BSCS Blue, which was widely recognized as *the* best biology text to be taught from (I believe it to have probably been a high school text; math, at least, was broken into one year advanced and two years advanced). I don't have independent confirmation on this claim, and perhaps a teacher who wanted to de-emphasize molecular biology in favor of other branches of biology might have preferred another text, but he was very emphatic that the text was what I would call the biological equivalent of an O'Reilly technical book.

When it came to the beginning of the chapter on evolution, Dr. Rhodes commented that he was always interested in hearing new theories on questions of origins, and I wrote him a letter stating what I believed at the time. He thanked me, and a couple of class periods later told me that he'd enjoyed reading it. I was preparing for a battle of wills, and found nothing of the sort; I doubt if he believed anything similar to what I believed (before or after), but he provided an open atmosphere and encouraged inquiry.

Some time (I have difficulty dating this as well, but it appears to have been after I was first exposed to serious arguments for believing in something besides young-earth creationism, probably after eighth grade biology, and before my beliefs came to a theistic evolution attractor in high school) I was browsing at the library — not looking for anything specific, just trying to find something interesting and stimulating to read. I found a book from the Creation Research Institute, and read with

interest the back cover, which stated that it explained powerful scientific evidence that showed that the world was created in six days, a few thousand years ago. This was *exactly* what I was looking for. I checked it out and started reading it.

I didn't get a quarter of the way through.

I was disgusted by what the book presented as arguments and evidence; however much I might have liked to have something I could claim scientific evidence for my young-earth beliefs, I didn't want it *that* badly. (Reading that book was part of why I had no reservations in putting Creation Science in front of my "If it has 'science' in its name, it probably isn't" list.)

I skipped freshman year, and entered the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy as a sophomore. (For those of you not familiar with IMSA, it's a high-powered magnet school; a master's degree is required to teach, and several times the senior class has gotten the highest average ACT score in the nation. When I went to Wheaton, I was able without difficulty to start off in 300-400 level courses, and I was puzzled as to why so many people had warned me about college being tougher than high school.) There was a lecture by Dr. Pine (staff scientist; didn't teach any classes) on science and pseudo-science, one that was abrasively naturalistic, and began by saying "It's OK not to be a scientist; George Washington wasn't a scientist," but later parts of which would only make sense under an assumption that science has a monopoly on legitimate inquiry into those questions it concerns itself with (or something equivalent for discussion purposes). His name was a symbol of arrogant scientism even among those who weren't familiar with the scientism/science distinction, and I remember (when talking about the lecture with an acquaintance) my friend commenting that there were a lot of people offended by that lecture. The lecture wasn't focally concerned with origins questions, Dr. Pine having focused more of his attack on things like ESP, but I wanted to include this in the record.

Senior year, we had university biology; it wasn't an AP course in that it wasn't geared towards the AP tests, but it was a college-level course. I don't remember the text for this one, but (under the circumstances) I think it was about as competently taught, by people who knew what they were talking about, as one could reasonably guess. (This was after my belief had settled.)

At Wheaton, my Old Testament class covered a few exegetical theories

At Wheaton, my Old Testament class covered a few exegetical theories on interpreting the beginning of Genesis (i.e. the gap theory, which says that the Genesis chronologies are accounts with significant gaps), albeit not in a manner that would be interesting to a biologist; they would be equally compatible (or incompatible) with Darwinian and Lamarckian evolution. I remember in particular the time given to the Ten Plagues in Israel's deliverance from Egypt; massive energy was given to a forced interpretation that would reconcile the Biblical account with an explanation that a materialist could easily swallow (i.e. the water turned to blood was an explosive bloom of some sort of reddish colored micro-organism in the waterways), and I would rather that the teacher have said, "The ten miraculous plagues are too much for me to swallow," than "I will rescue the ten miraculous plagues by explaining how they were ten ordinary disasters that weren't miraculous at all." (Readers may perceive a degree of intellectual dishonesty in my own version of theistic evolution; such an accusation probably has some degree of truth to it, but I will not try to address it here.) This, and the other two classes mentioned below for completeness, did not alter my perspective so far as I remember.

I took an environmental science elective, and the course material made sporadic reference to evolution (for that matter, one video began with a beautiful quotation from a Biblical psalm about the wonder of the natural order), but neither the teacher nor the texts made a serious attempt to address origins questions, being much more concerned with explaining (part of) how the environment works, and how to be a responsible citizen minimizing unnecessary environmental degradation.

The last class I am mentioning for the sake of completeness of record is my philosophy of science class. Evolution was discussed in so far as the history of scientists accepting the theory is interesting to a philosopher of science; there were no arguments made for or against it, apart from a brief comment in a discussion where one student used the acceptance of Darwinian evolution as an example of a good decision on the part of the scientific community.

To wrap up this part of the discussion, I transferred out of Wheaton for reasons of conscience, and finished up my bachelor's at Calvin, and did a master's in applied mathematics at the University of Illinois. I did not have occasion to revise my beliefs concerning origins questions until some time later, and to properly explain exactly what opened up the

question again, I need to give a little more background.

There was one Saturday Night Live where the news announcer said, "Michael Bolton just came out with his new Christmas album. [Pause] Happy birthday, baby Jesus! I hope you like *crap!*"

Being somewhat aloof from pop culture, it took me the longest time to get it through my head that Michael Bolton was *not* a Christian artist. By that point, I had written in my dictionary:

**Christian Contemporary Music**, *n.* A genre of song designed primarily to impart sound teaching, such as the doctrine that we are sanctified by faith and not by good taste in music.

One thing that has distressed me to no end is that much of today's Christian culture (popular sense, not anthropological sense) is garbage. What Dante and Handel produced is cherished on artistic merits by people openly hostile to their beliefs; the same cannot be said for the contents of John's Christian Bookstore. I don't want to analyze historical causes or implications, but it is something I find to be quite embarrassing — and one of the reasons I spend so much time on writing, namely to be one person who produces Christian art that is not trash.

At any rate, there was one point where I was browsing the web, searching for provoking Christian musings — and wading through one banal, syrupy, intellectually juvenile posting after another. I was quite bored, and kept searching long after I should have given up — and then read an article entitled, "Abortion: A Failure to Communicate", and sat there, stunned.

The article made an argument why, from a pro-life perspective, it is not helpful to say "Save the children!", argue that a foetus is a child rather than unwanted tissue, or erect a place called "New Life Adoption Center". The particular argument (or even issue) is not why I was stunned. I was stunned because the article represented an intellectually mature, nuanced, and insightful perspective, and raised points that made sense but which were not at all obvious trivialities. Once I got over being stunned, I poked around and found out a bit more about the site hosting it — an anthology site called Leadership University at [www.leaderu.com](http://www.leaderu.com). In the following days, I looked around and found a number of stimulating articles.

After reading a while — and enjoying it thoroughly — I paid attention

to something I had not previously looked at, that the site had a science section. That seemed somewhat strange; I wasn't surprised at sections for humanities disciplines, as thinking Christianly makes a big difference in the humanities, but why science? My Dad shared both faith and enjoyment of heavily mathematical disciplines (math, computer science, physics) with me, but he had never hinted at what e.g. "Christian physics" would mean — nor had anyone else I knew of — so I clicked on the link to find out what on earth the site listed as a distinctively Christian way to think about science.

My estimation of the site dropped by about ten notches when I saw a list of titles attacking Darwinism. So this otherwise serious and intellectually responsible site had stooped to host Creation Science. I left the computer in disgust.

Some time after that, I began to experience quiet, nagging doubts — doubts that I was not being fair to Leadership University or even to those articles by dismissing them (and assessing penalty points) without consideration. I could see no justification for stooping to Creation Science, for trying to rehash a battle that was decided and over, but at the same time, there was no other point at which I had looked at the site and regretted taking the time to read an article. If a friend (whom I had hitherto known to be trustworthy) were to say something I found hard to believe, wouldn't I consider him to have earned the benefit of the doubt? So I went back to the computer, expecting to read more Creation Research Institute-style materials, and met with yet another surprise.

I expected to see an attack on Darwinism. I hoped (but did not expect) to instead see something that would live up to Leadership University article standards. What I found was an attack on Darwinism that lived up to Leadership University article standards, and it produced a *lot* of cognitive dissonance in me.

Some years before, I might have jumped at an argument that Darwinism was seriously flawed. Not now. Darwinian evolution was a part of my education, and (if I did not go into naturalism) an argument that Darwinism was much more flawed than I had been led to believe, affected me as would an argument that any other major scientific theory was much more flawed than I had been led to believe — it had some very troubling implications. So I looked through several articles, hoping to find a fatal flaw — and the hope waned.

I was not open to resolving the question based on the online articles, but the articles disturbed me enough that I very distinctly believed that there was a question in need of resolution. So, not too much longer, I poked around until I found Philip Johnson's *Darwin on Trial* and, a bit later, Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box*, hoping to find justification to persist in my previous belief, but even more hoping to resolve the inner tension between believing (and wanting to believe) one thing, and seeing evidence that appeared to suggest another.

Reading *Darwin on Trial* fleshed out what was sketched in the articles. (*Darwin on Trial* took me an afternoon to read, and I am probably not a fast reader by Megalist standards; *Darwin's Black Box* took me a day.) The articles, at least at Leadership University, do not provide what I would consider a basis to decide; they outline the argument, but the length restriction makes it hard to make an argument without holes. The book, on the other hand, had the room to argue systematically and carefully. Its arguments were sufficient to dislodge me from the resting place I had found, and the best metaphor I can use to describe the subsequent sifting of thoughts is a loss of faith.

In a conservative Catholic family, perhaps pre-Vatican II, a child grows up to believe that if the priests say it, speaking officially, it is true — perhaps there is room for miscommunication and the like, but there is a basic faith that the mouth of a priest is the mouth of an oracle. In a contemporary scientific schooling context, a student is taught to believe that if the science teachers say it, it is a *bona fide* attempt to convey the truth as best understood by the scientific enterprise. There are any number of basic nuances — miscommunication, error, intentional simplification for any of several obvious reasons, the teacher articulating the views of one position in a controversy — but, as with the Catholic family, there is a basic faith (even if it's not put that way, a mistrust of faith and authority being one of the items on the catechism) that the teacher represents the best science can offer, and so (for instance) if evolution is portrayed as an established theory that explains reasonably well everything one would expect it to explain, then that must be true.

It is that faith which I lost.

There is one example that particularly sticks in my mind. I am not going to call it 'typical', with the accompanying implication that I could easily pull half a dozen other examples that serve my point equally well; there are a number of other examples, and this is the one made the most

there are a number of other examples, and this is the one made the most forceful impression on me.

One example that occurred in both my textbooks — as best I recall, they both had photographs to illustrate camouflage effects — concerns pepper moths in England. Before the Industrial Revolution, the majority of pepper moths were white, with a significant minority that were black. Come the Industrial Revolution, when everything was blackened by soot, the proportions shifted, so that the majority of pepper moths were black, with a significant minority that were white. Then, after the Industrial Revolution had run its course and things were no longer covered with soot, the proportions again shifted, so that the majority of pepper moths were white, with a significant minority of black moths. This is given as a supporting example of "evolution".

Johnson does not treat "evolution" as one amorphous mass; he regards the distinction between microevolution and macroevolution as significant, including that evidence of one is not necessarily evidence of the other. Neither he nor anyone else I've read challenge microevolution (or the existence of natural selection as an influence on what survives — though he suggests that natural selection is a conservative force). What is specifically challenged is macroevolution, and whether natural selection constitutes a generative force that is responsible for the diversity of life now on this planet.

The pepper moth example shows natural selection in action; what it does not show is that natural selection is a creative force that causes new kinds of organisms to appear. If black pepper moths were unknown before the Industrial Revolution, and then (once the smoke started billowing) a mutation (one that hadn't occurred, or at least hadn't survived, before) introduced a black gene into a previously all-white pool, and the new kind of moth started to take over for as long as trees were covered with soot — then this would constitute a small-scale instance of evolution as a generative force. As it is, both kinds of moths existed before, during, and after the Industrial Revolution, in significant numbers — nothing even went extinct (at least in the pepper moth population). This provides evidence of natural selection in some form, but to present it as evidence of "evolution" is presenting evidence of one claim as evidence of two or more distinct claims, at least one of which is not supported by the evidence — a practice that is, at best, sloppy, and at worst, deceitful.

(This one claim, by itself, is not fatal; it would be in principle possible to present a collection of examples so that natural selection, microevolution, and macroevolution all have their corresponding support; I am not presenting it to establish a case so much as to illustrate a picture.)

My disappointment at my teachers' presentation of undue optimism about macroevolution was not nearly as significant as my own disappointment at myself, and my having believed it. Perhaps it would have been easier to merely be angry at my teachers, but I was not angry; my chief disappointment was with myself.

After I had to some extent regained my bearings, I read *Darwin's Black Box*, which provided one major new concept not addressed by *Darwin on Trial*, and several examples of that concept (irreducible complexity), and started talking about it on IMSA alumni notesfile forums.

What I saw there was, for the most part, shock and outrage that anyone dare question Darwin's truth — most ridiculed what I was saying without providing counter-argument; one person, when I discussed the Cambrian explosion, suggested that it could have been caused by mutagen exposure. Mutagen exposure is a hypothesis I'm willing to entertain (stranger things have happened), but when I started doing some Feynman calculations to show how astronomically low the odds are of mutagen exposure producing Cambrian explosion effects, after first saying, "Suppose I claim to be able to predict lottery numbers, and suppose for the sake of argument you can rule out charlatan trickery on my part. After one success, I have your attention. After two successes, you say, 'What a bizarre coincidence!' Is there any number of successful guesses (subject to one guess per minute and an assumption of my death in fifty years) that will lead you to believe that you may not know how I'm doing it, but it's not luck?" — and he said that at most a dozen would suffice, and then I showed how much lower the chances of raw mutagen exposure producing the Cambrian explosion would be than the chance of successfully guessing twelve consecutive lottery numbers — at which point he backed up and said, "There are some things we can never know."

The one exception was a microbiology graduate student. He read the arguments I drew from the other sources, and commented that I seemed well-read and that the arguments seemed plausible. Part of that is being diplomatic, but I don't think it was diplomatic politeness covering

diplomatic, but I don't think it was diplomatic politeness covering disrespect or distaste — he didn't want to commit to a position without first taking an unhurried investigation of the question (which I didn't want to do either — the web articles didn't convince me of any conclusion besides that I should read the unabridged take on them).

What is my present position? Let me list a few things that I presently hold, subject to revision if and when I encounter further evidence or indications that my past analysis is less valid than I thought:

- Old earth/universe.
- Microevolution as a consistent force in our time and probably at ages past, probably a conservative force.
- Sudden appearance and disappearance of species, such as has not been accounted for in evolutionary theory so far as I know (perhaps acknowledged in punctuated equilibrium, but not accounted for — saying that changes happen off camera in 100,000 year geological eyeblinks, without explaining why, doesn't constitute a valid theory).
- Irreducible complexity in living organisms due to intelligent design, and in many cases not explained by any known plausible evolutionary scenario.

This is not a scientific theory so much as a framework, a partial specification; it represents a move away from naturalistic evolution as the complete answer and does not represent a fully detailed alternative — I think other people should work on that; I just haven't invested in it myself. It is like, after having long believed a story about an event, coming to believe that the story is false — another explanatory story does not automatically spring up, although in a scientific community the rejection of one theory as flawed leads to the appearance of other theories to take its place, perhaps involving a shift in framework — witness the ultraviolet catastrophe. If I were a biologist working on a theory of origins, I would try to take this framework and extend it to the point of being a falsifiable theory — *Darwin's Black Box* at the end addresses some issues towards constructing falsifiable theories, suggesting the sort of questions to ask in the process. There might be material to be mined in cryptanalysis; a codebreaker who sees a pattern is constantly asking whether the pattern represents a step towards cracking the code, or is only fool's gold. The concept of p-values may be relevant.

[Remaining specific point, responding to other post, deleted for privacy concerns.]

-Jonathan

***Post Script, May 5, 2003:*** *Since I posted this some time back, I have learned that leading members of the MegaList have become increasingly involved in the Intelligent Design movement.*

*I do not believe I can take more than incidental credit for this; I believe they are persuaded, not by my eloquence in a small number of posts, but because the evidence itself suggests things which a purely Darwinian account has trouble explaining.*

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

## It's exotic, right?

The website for the Ubuntu Linux distribution announced that Ubuntu is "an ancient African word" meaning humanity to others. It announced how it carried forward the torch of a Linux distribution that's designed for regular people to use. And this promotion of "an ancient African word" has bothered a few people: [one South African blogger](#) tried to explain several things: for instance, he mentioned that "ubuntu" had been a quite ordinary Xhosa/Zulu word meaning "humanity," mentioned that it had been made into a political rallying cry in the 20th century, and drew an analogy: saying, "'Ubuntu' is an ancient African word meaning 'humanity'" is as silly as saying, in reverential tones, "'People' is an ancient European word meaning, 'more than one person.'" There is an alternative definition provided in the forums of Gentoo, a technical aficionado's Linux distribution: "Ubuntu. An African word meaning, 'Gentoo is too hard for me.'"

The blogger raised questions of gaffe in the name of the distribution; he did not raise questions about the Linux distribution itself, nor would I.

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

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

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

One American friend of mine, when in Kenya, gave a saying that was not from any of the people groups she was interacting with, but was from a relatively close neighboring people group: "When you are carrying a child in your womb, he only belongs to you. When he is born, he belongs to everyone." The proverb speaks out of an assumption that not only parents but parents' friends, neighbors, elders, shopkeepers, and ultimately all adults, stand *in parentis loco*. All adults are ultimately responsible for all children and are responsible for exercising a personal and parental care to help children grow into mature adulthood. As best I understand, this is probably what a particular community in Africa might mean in saying, "It takes a village to raise a child."

What is a little strange is that, if these words correspond to anything in the U.S., they are conservative, and speak to a conservative desire to believe that not only parents but neighbors, churches, civic and local organizations, businesses and the like, all owe something to the moral upbringing of children: that is to say, there are a great many forces outside the government that owe something to local children. And this is quite the opposite of saying that we need more government programs

because it takes a full complement of government initiatives and programs to raise a child well—because, presumably, more and more bureaucratic initiatives are what the (presumably generic) African sages had in mind when they gave the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom and said, "It takes a village to raise a child." There is some degree of irony in making "It takes a village" a rallying-cry in pushing society *further away* from what, "It takes a village to raise a child," *could* have originally meant—looking for advice on how to build a statist Western-style cohort of bureaucratic government programs would be as inconceivable in many traditional African cultures as looking for instructions on how to build a computer in the New Testament.

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

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

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

people, or any of the elders we meet day to day.

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

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

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

One can almost imagine a dialogue between God and Adam:

**Adam:** I'm not content.

**God:** What do you want me to do?

**Adam:** I want you to make me contented.

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

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

work at all.

**God:** Ok.

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

**God:** Ok.

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

**God:** Ok, as much meat as you want.

**Adam:** And sweet stuff like ice cream.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Have all these things made us content?

Or have we used them to feed a passion?

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

This is not just a point about fantasies in romance. It is also a point that has something to do with technological wonders, secret societies

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

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

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

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

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

further changes. But I let go of writing only to find that I still had things to write. I gave up on trying to be "interesting" and make my own interesting private world and found, by the way, that God and his world are really *quite* interesting.

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

## What we don't want to hear

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

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

Lust benefits no one, and it is not just the married who benefit from beating back roving desire, but the unmarried as well. But when Scripture and the Fathers speak of unnatural vice, they know something we've chosen to forget. And part of what we have forgotten is that "unnatural vice" is not just something that the gay rights movement advocates for. "Unnatural vice" includes several sins with higher pay grades, and one of them is witchcraft.

To people who have heard all the debates about whether, for instance,

same-sex relationships might be unnatural for straight people but natural for gays, it may be a bit of culture shock to hear anything *besides* gay sex called "unnatural vice." But the term is there in the Fathers, and it can mean other things. [It might include contraception.](#) And it definitely includes what we think of as a way to return to nature in witchcraft.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The lesson would seem to be, "If you see a new way to connect with the past and recover past glory, be very careful. Consider it like you might consider a skilled opponent, in a game of chess, leaving a major piece vulnerable. It looks spiritually enticing, but it might be the bait for a spiritual trap, and if so, the consequences of springing for the bait might be a deeper rift with the past and its glory."

## **Not quite as shallow an approach to translate the past into the present...**

Here is what you might do one day to live a bit more like prehistoric Grecians, or ancient Celts, or medieval Gallic peasants, or whatever. Keep in mind that this is at best half-way to its goal, not a full-fledged return to living like an ancient in harmony with nature to a day, but making a rough equivalent by using what is closest from our world:

1. However exotic the setting may seem to you, remember that it is a fundamental confusion to imagine that the setting was exotic *to those inside the experience*. We not only meet new people frequently; we see new technologies invented frequently. In The Historic Setting, people most likely were born, lived, and died within twenty miles, and even meeting another person who was not part of your village was rare. A new invention, or a new idea, would be difficult to imagine, let alone point to. So, for one day, whatever you're doing, if it feels exotic, avoid it like the plague. Stop it immediately. Don't read anything new; turn off your iPod; don't touch Wikipedia. Don't seek excitement; if anything, persevere in things you find boring.
2. Remembering that there was a lot of heavy manual labor, and stuff that was shared, spend your nice Saturday helping a friend move her stuff into her new apartment. Remember that while stairs were rare in antiquity, it would be an anachronism to take the elevator. Be a good manual laborer and do without the anachronism.
3. Remembering how the Sermon on the Mount betrays an assumption that most people were poor enough that houses would only have one room, spend your time at home, as much as possible, in one room of

your house.

4. Remembering that the ancient world had no sense of "Jim's trying to lose weight and is on an old-fashioned low-fat diet, Mary's a vegan, Al's low carb...", but rather there was one diet that everybody day ate, go to McDonald's, order a meal with McDonald's McFries McSoaked in McGrease, and a sugary-sweet, corn-syrup-powered shake. If you just said to yourself, "He didn't say what size; I'll order the smallest I can," order the biggest meal you can.
5. Remembering that in the ancient world the company you kept were not your eclectic pick, spend time with the people around you. Go to your neighbor Ralph who blares bad '80s rock because he thinks it's the best thing in the world, and like a good guest don't criticize what your host has provided—including his music. Spend some time playing board games with your annoying kid sister, and then go over to visit your uncle Wally and pretend to tolerate his sexist jokes.
6. Lastly, when you head home do have a good night's sleep, remember that a bed with sheets covering a smooth mattress was only slightly more common than a Frank Lloyd Wright home is today, go to sleep on a straw pallet in your virtual one room house. (You can use organic straw if you can find any.)

This may seem, to put it politely, a way you would never have thought to live like an age in harmony with nature. But let me ask a perfectly serious question:

What *did* you expect? Did you imagine dressing up as a bard, dancing on hilltops, and reciting poetry about the endless knot while quaffing heather ale?

G.K. Chesterton said that there is more simplicity in eating caviar on impulse than eating granola on principle. In a similar fashion, there is more harmony with nature in instinctively pigging out at McDonald's than making a high and lonely spiritual practice out of knowing all the herbs in a meadow.

The vignette of harmony with nature as dancing on hilltops is an image of a scene where harmony with nature means fulfilling what we desire for ourselves. The image of hauling boxes to help a friend is a scene where harmony with nature means *transcending* mere selfish desire. There is a common thread of faithfulness to unadvertised historical

realities running through the six steps listed above. But there is another common thread:

Humility.

It chafes against a passion that people in ages past knew they needed to beat back.

Living according to nature in the past did not work without humility, and living in harmony with nature today did not work with humility.

There is a great deal of difference between getting help in living for yourself, and getting help in living for something more for yourself, and living for something more than yourself—such as people needed to survive in ancient communities close to nature—is the real treasure. It is spirituality with an ugly pair of work gloves, and it is a much bigger part of those communities that have been in harmony with nature than the superficially obvious candidates like spending more time outside and knowing when to plant different crops. If you clarify, "Actually, I was really more interested in the *spirituality* of a bygone age and its harmony with nature," you are missing something. Every one of those humbling activities is pregnant with spirituality—and is spiritual in a much deeper way than merely feeling the beauty of a ritual.

Perhaps we would be wise to remember the words of the Delphic Oracle, "Know thyself," which does not say what we might imagine today. Those words might have been paraphrased, "Know thy place, O overreaching mortal!"

And, in terms of humility, that has much more to give us than trying to reach down inside and make a sandcastle of an identity, and hope it won't be another sandcastle.

## Should I really be patting myself on the back?

I try to follow a diet that is closer to many traditional diets, has less processing and organic ingredients when possible, and I believe for several reasons that I am right in doing so: medical, animal welfare, and environmental. But before I pat myself on the back too hard for showing the spirit of Orthodoxy in harmony with nature, I would be well advised to remember that there is far more precedent in the Fathers and in the saint's lives for choosing to live on a cup of raw lentils a week or a diet of rancid fish.

Saints may have followed something of a special diet, but that is because they believed and acted out of the conviction that they were unworthy of the good things of the world, including the common fare what most people ate. My diet, like other diets in fashion, is a diet that tells me that the common fare eaten by most people is simply unworthy of *me*. This may well enough be true—I have doubts about how much of today's industrially produced diet is fit for human consumption at all—and I may well enough answer, "But *of course* the Quarter Pounder with 'Cheese' eaten by an inner-city teen is unworthy of me—it's just as unworthy, if not more unworthy, of the inner-city teens who simply accept it as normal to eat." Even so, I have put myself in a difficult position. The saints thought they were unworthy of common fare. I believe that common fare is unworthy of me, and trying to believe that without deadly pride is trying to smoke, but not inhale.

In [the Book of James](#), the Lord's brother says that the poor should exult because of their high position while the rich should be humble because of their low position. The same wisdom might see that the person who eats anything that tastes good is the one in the high position, and the

person who avoids most normal food out of a special diet's discrimination is in a position that is both low and precarious.

The glory of the Eucharist unfurls in a common meal around a table, and this "common" meal is common because it is shared. To pull back from "common" food is to lose something very Eucharistic about the meal, and following one more discriminating diet like mine is a way to heal one breach of harmony with nature by opening up what may be a deeper rift.

## **If evil is necessary, does it stop being evil?**

Orthodoxy in the West inherits something like counterculture, and there is something amiss when Orthodox carry over unquestioned endeavors to build a counterculture or worldview or other such Western fads. If Orthodoxy *in the West* is countercultural, that doesn't mean that counterculture is something to seek out: if Orthodoxy is countercultural, that is a cost it pays. Civil disobedience *can* be the highest expression of a citizen's respect for law. Amputation *can* be the greatest expression of a physician's concern for a patient's life. However, these things are not basically good, and there is fundamental confusion in seeking out occasions to show such measures.

## **Another basis to try and learn from the past**

To someone in the West, Orthodoxy may have a mighty antiquarian appeal. Orthodox saints, for the most part, speak from long ago and far away. However, this isn't the point; it's a side effect of a Church whose family of saints has been growing for millennia. Compare this, for instance, to a listing of great computer scientists—who will all be recent, not because computer science in an opposite fashion needs to be new, but because computer science hasn't been around nearly long enough for there to be a fourth century von Neumann or Knuth.

Some people wanting very hard knife blades—this may horrify an antiquarian—acquire nineteenth century metal files and grind them into knife blades. The reason for this is that metallurgists today simply do not know how to make steel as hard as the hardest Victorian-era metal files. The know-how is lost. And the hobbyists who seek a hard metal file as the starting point for their knife blades do not choose old metalwork because it is old; they choose old metal files because they are the hardest they can get. And there is something like this in the Orthodox Church. The point of a saint's life is not how exotic a time and place the saint is from; the point of a saint's life is holiness, a holiness that is something like a nineteenth century adamantite-hard metal file.

If there are problems in turning back the clock, the Orthodox Church has some very good news. This good news is not exactly a special way to turn back the clock; it is rather the good news that the clock can be lifted up.

There is a crucial difference between trying to restore the past, and hoping that it will lift you into Heaven, and being lifted up into Heaven and finding that a healthy connection with the past comes with it. The Divine Liturgy is a lifting up of the people and their lives up to Heaven: a

life that begins here and now.

The hymn quoted earlier, "Adam, trying to be a god, failed to be god," continues, "Christ became man that he might make Adam god." The saying has rumbled down through the ages, "God (the Son of God) became a Man (the Son of Man) that men (the sons of men) might become gods (the Sons of God)." The bad news, if it is bad news, is that we cannot escape a present into the beauty of Eden. The good news is that the present can itself be lifted up, that the doors to Eden remain open.

In some ways our search for happiness is like that of a grandfather who cannot find his glasses no matter how many places he looks—because they are right on his nose.

## **Men are not from Mars!**

I was once able to visit a Mars Society conference—a conference from an organization whose purpose is to send human colonists to Mars.

To many of the people there, the question of whether we are "a spacefaring race" is much weightier than the question of whether medical research can find a cure for cancer. It's not just that a human colony on Mars would represent a first-class triumph of science and humanity; it is rather that the human race is beyond being a race of complete, unspeakable, and obscene *losers* if we don't come to our senses and colonize Mars so the human race is not just living on this earth and living the kind of life we live now. The question of whether we colonize Mars is, in an ersatz sense, the religious question of whether we as a race have salvation. The John 3:16 of this movement is, "Earth is the cradle of mankind, but one does not remain in a cradle forever."

The Mars Society holds an essay contest to come up with essays about why we should colonize Mars; the title of the contest, and perhaps of the essays, is, "Why Mars?" And, though I never got around to writing it, there was something I wanted to write.

This piece, having a fictional setting, would be written from the perspective of a sixteen year old girl who was the first person to be raised on Mars, and would provide another comparison of life on Mars to life on earth. And the essay would be snarky, sarcastic, angry, and bitter, because of something that people looking with starry eyes at a desired Mars colony miss completely.

What does the Mars Society not get about what they hope for?

When I was a student at Wheaton College, one of my friends told of a first heavy snowfall where students from warmer climates, some of whom had never experienced such a snowfall personally, were outside and had a delightful snowball fight. And they asked my friend, "How can you *not* be

out here playing?" My friend's answer: "Just wait four months. You'll see."

One's first snowball fight is quite the pleasant experience, and presumably one's first time putting on a spacesuit is much better. But what my unattractively cynical friend didn't like about Wheaton's winter weather is a piece of cake compared to needing to put on a spacesuit and go through an airlock on a planet where the sum total of places one can go without a bulky, heavy, clumsy, uncomfortable, and hermetically sealed spacesuit, is dwarfed by a small rural village of a thousand people, and dwarfed by a medium sized jail. If you are the first person to grow up on Mars, the earth will seem a living Eden which almost everyone alive *but you* is privileged to live in. And the title of the snarky, sarcastic, and bitterly miserable essay I wished I could write from the perspective of the first human raised on Mars was, "*Why Earth?*"

I'm used to seeing people wish they could escape the here and now, but the Mars Society took this to a whole new level—so much so that I was thinking, "This is not a job for science and engineering; this is a job for counseling!" People were alienated from the here and now they had on earth, and the oomph of the drive to go to Mars seemed to be because of something else entirely from the (admittedly very interesting) scientific and engineering issues. Having the human race not even try to live on Mars was so completely unacceptable to them because of their woundedness.

If you don't know how to be happy where God has placed you, escape will not solve the problem. In the case of Mars, the interesting issue is not so much whether colonization is possible, but whether it is desirable. Escape may take you out of the frying pan and into the thermite. (What? You didn't know that astronauts do not feel free, but like tightly wedged "spam in a can," with land control micromanaging you more than you would fear in a totalitarian regime, down to every bite of food you take in? Tough; a real opportunity to colonize Mars won't feel like being in an episode of *Star Trek* or *Firefly*.)

This is the playing out of a passion, and what the Mars Society seeks will not make them permanently happy. Success in their goals will not cure such misery any more than enough fuel will soothe a fire.

Confucius said, "When I see a virtuous man, I try to be like him. When I see an evil man, I reflect on my own behavior." Assuming you're not from the Mars Society (and perhaps offended), do you see anything of

from the Mars Society (and perhaps offended), do you see anything of yourself in the Mars Society?

I do.

## A more satisfying kind of drink

I talked with a friend about a cookbook, [Nourishing Traditions](#), which I like for the most part but where there was a bit of a burr: the author ground an axe against alcoholic beverages fermented by yeast. The stated position of the book is a report of a certain type of traditional nutrition, and the author overrode that when it came to traditions that used rum and such.

My friend said that what I said was accurate: certain more alcoholic drinks were traditional, and the principles of [Nourishing Traditions](#) did not support all the ways the author was grinding an axe against yeast-fermented alcohol, just as I thought. However, my friend suggested, the author was right about this. Lacto-fermented beverages, fermented by another ancient process that gives us cheese, sourdough, sauerkraut, corned beef, and the like, which [Nourishing Traditions](#) did promote, satisfy in a way that yeast-fermented beverages do not. People, it seems, use beer, wine, and liquor because they remind them of the satisfaction of the more ancient method of fermentation.

I'm not looking at giving up the occasional drink, but something of that rings true—and parallels a spiritual matter. People turn to a quest for the exotic, and that is illicit. But the Orthodox experience is that if you stay put, in the here and now, and grow spiritually, every year or so something exotic happens that is like falling off a cliff, when you repent. And that may be what people are connecting with in the wrong way in the pursuit of the exotic. If you give up on following the exotic, something beyond exotic may follow you.

## The idiot

There was another piece that I was thinking of writing, but did not come together. The title I was thinking of was, *The Idiot*—no connection to Dostoevsky's work of the same name, nor to what we would usually think of as a lack of intelligence.

I was imagining a Socratic dialogue, along the same lines as [Plato: The Allegory of the... Flickering Screen?](#) in which it unfolds that the person who doesn't get it is someone who has great success in constructing his own private world through technology, introspection, and everything else. Etymologically, the word "idiot" signifies someone who's off on his own—someone who does not participate in the life of civilization—and our civilization offers excellent resources to dodge civilization and create your own private world. And that is a loss.

And being an idiot in this sense is *not* a matter of low IQ. It is not the mentally retarded I have known who need to repent most, if at all. Usually it is the most brilliant I have known who best use their gifts and resources to be, in the classical sense, idiots.

## Some adamantine-hard metal files that may hone us

At the risk of irony after opening by a complaint about words of wisdom from other lands selected for being exotic...

My mother recounted how a friend of hers was visiting one of her friends, a poor woman in Guatemala. She looked around her host's kitchen, and said, "You don't have any food around." Her hostess said, "No, I don't, but I will," and then paused a moment longer, and said, "And if I had the food now, what would I need God for?" That woman is wise. Those of us who live in the West pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," and probably have a 401(k) plan. Which is to say that "Give us today our daily bread" is almost an ornament to us. A very pious ornament, but it is still an ornament.

If we are entering hard times today, is that an end to divine providence?

St. Peter of Damaskos wrote, in [The Philokalia vol. 3](#),

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

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.
- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgment and establish virtue.
- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain

salvation of soul.

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

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

The story is probably apocryphal, but I heard of an African pastor (sorry, I don't know his nationality) who visited the U.S. and said, "It's absolutely amazing what you can do without the Holy Spirit!" That is, perhaps, not what we want to hear as a compliment. But here in the U.S., if we need God, it's been easy to lose sight of the fact. Homeless people usually know where their next meal is coming from, or at least it's been that way, and homeless people have been getting much more appetizing meals than bread alone. Those of us who are not homeless have even more power than that.

An English friend of mine talked about how she was living in a very poor country, and one of her hosts said, "I envy you!" My friend didn't know exactly what was coming next—she thought it might be something that offered no defense, and her hosts said, "You have everything, and you still rely on God. We have *nothing*; we have no real alternative. So we

rely on God. But you have *everything*, and you still rely on God!" The point was not about wealth, but faith. The friend's awe was not of a rich woman's treasures on earth, but a rich woman's treasures in Heaven. The camel really *can* go through the eye of the needle, and we may add to the list of examples by St. Peter of Damaskos, that we may thank God for first world wealth, because it gives us an opportunity to *choose* to rely on God.

Maybe we can add to St. Peter's list. But we would do well to listen to his wisdom before adding to his list. We have been given many blessings in first world economic conditions, and if our economy is in decline—perhaps it will bounce back in a year, perhaps longer, perhaps never—we no less should find where our current condition is on the list above.

To have the words "Give us this day our daily bread" unfortunately be an ornament is rare, and perhaps it is not the most natural condition for us to be in. Whatever golden age you may like, centuries or millenia ago, there was no widespread wealth like we experience. Our natural condition is, in part, to be under economic constraint, to have limits that keep us from doing things, and in some sense the level of wealth we have had is not the most natural condition, like having a sedentary enough job that you only exercise when you choose to, is not the most natural condition. Now I don't like being constrained any more than I have to, and I would not celebrate people losing their homes. However, if we have to be more mindful of what they spend, and don't always get what we want, that may be a very big blessing in disguise.

Dorothy Sayers, speaking of World War II in "The Other Six Deadly Sins" (found in [Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World](#) and other essay collections), discussed what life was like when the economy was enormously productive but as much productivity as possible was being wasted by the war effort. What she pointed out was that when people got used to rationing and scarcity, they found that this didn't really mean that they couldn't enjoy life—far from it. People could enjoy life when most of their economy's productivity was being wasted by war instead of wasted by buying things that people didn't need. She argued that England didn't have a choice about learning to live frugally—but England could choose to apply this lesson once the war got out. England didn't, and neither did the U.S., but the lesson is still good.

A recent news story discussed how adult children moved in with their parents as a measure of frugality, where the family was being frugal to the point of planning meals a month in advance and grinding their own flour

point of planning means a month in advance and grinding their own flour.  
And what they found was that living simply was something of an  
adventure.

## An unlikely cue from science fiction?

Mary Midgley, in [Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning](#), says of science fiction and science fiction writers,

But the best of them have understood, as Wells and Stapleton did, that their main aim was imaginative. They were using 'the future' as a screen on which to project timeless truths for their own age. They were *prophets* primarily in the sense in which serious poets are so — spiritual guides, people with insight about the present and the universal, rather than literal predictors. For this purpose, it no more matters whether these supposedly future events will actually happen than it does for *Hamlet* and *MacBeth* whether what they show us actually happened in the past. The point of *The Time Machine* is not that the machine would work, nor that there might be Morlocks [a powerful, privileged technological elite] somewhere, some day. It is that there are Morlocks here now.

Note the last words. C.S. Lewis may quite directly and literally believe in a literal Heaven and a literal Hell, but Lewis understands Midgley's closing point well, even if he wrote [The Great Divorce](#) decades before. He offers an introduction that ends with, "The last thing I wish is to arouse curiosity about the details of the after-world." He may have no pretensions of knowing the details of the next life, but the reason he writes so compellingly about Heaven and Hell is not that someday, somewhere, we will experience Heaven or Hell. (Even if that is true.) He is able to write with such depth because Heaven and Hell are in us, here and now. And one of the cardinal spiritual factors in [The Great Divorce](#) is a cardinal spiritual factor here now. It is called repentance.

In [The Sign of the Grail](#), Fr. Elijah brings George, a Christian, into the communion of the Orthodox Church. Orthodox speak of this as a conversion, but this means something beyond merely straightening out George's worldview. Fr. Elijah may share wisdom with George, but he is interested in something fundamentally beyond getting George to accept a worldview. He is trying, in all of his various ways, to get George to *wake up*. It is the same as the blessed spirits in [The Great Divorce](#) who are in Heaven and keep saying to visitors from Hell, "*Wake up! Wake up!*" They do often discuss ideas with their visitors, but their goal is never merely to straighten out a tormented worldview; it is to open their visitors' spiritual eyes so they will wake up to the reality of Heaven.

In [The Great Divorce](#), visitors come from Hell, visit Heaven, keep receiving invitations to wake up and live in Heaven, and mostly keep on choosing Hell. If it is put that way, it sounds like a very strange story, but it is believable not primarily because of C.S. Lewis's rhetorical powers, but because of the spiritual realities Lewis knows to write about. I have only heard one person claim to want to go to Hell, and then on the misunderstanding that you could enjoy the company of others in Hell. However, people miss something big about Hell if they think everybody will choose Heaven.

God does not send people to Hell, but the fires of Hell are nothing other than the light of Heaven experienced through the rejection of Christ. Hell appeared as a seed in the misery when, as I wrote earlier:

Adam reigned as an immortal king and lord over the whole world. He had a wife like nothing else in all Creation, paradise for a home, and harmony with nature such as we could not dream of. *And*, he was like a little boy with a whole room full of toys who is miserable because he wants another toy and his parents said "No."

[The Sermon on the Mount](#) says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." But *everyone* will see God. God is love; his love is absolute and will flow absolutely. Because of that love, everybody will see God. And the saved will know this as blessing and as bliss beyond description. But to those who reject Christ, the light of Heaven, the light of seeing God, will be experienced as *Hellfire*. Hell is Heaven experienced through the rejection of the only ultimate joy that exists: Christ.

Repentance is recognizing that you are in a little Hell and choosing to leave by the one way you do not wish to leave. Elsewhere from the quotation from St. Peter, [the Philokalia](#) says, "People hold on to sin because they think it adorns them." The woman addicted to alcohol may be in misery, but she has alcohol to seemingly anaesthetize the pain, and it is incredibly painful to give up the illusion that if you try hard enough and get just a bit of a solace, things will be OK. That's a mighty hard thing to repent of: it's easier to rationalize, decide to give it up by sheer willpower (perhaps tomorrow), or make a bargain to cut back to a more reasonable level—anything but wake up and stop trying to ignore that you're standing barefoot in something really gross, and admit that what you need is not a bigger fan to drive away the stench while you stay where you are, but to step out in a cleaning operation that lasts a lifetime and cuts to your soul.

An alcoholic walking this path craves just a little bit of solace, just for now, and it is only much later that two things happen. First, the cravings are still hard, but they are no longer *quite* so overpowering. Second, she had forgotten what it felt like to be clean—really and truly *clean*—and she had forgotten what it was like to be doing something else with her life than trying to hide in a bottle. She had forgotten what freedom was like. And long after she gave up on her way of escaping life, she found she had forgotten what it was like to experience life, not as something to escape, but as something with joy even in its pain.

The gates of Hell are bolted and barred from the *inside*. This much is true of passion: we think our sins adorn us, and we try to flee from the only place joy is to be found. Fleshly lust disenchantments the entire universe; first everything else becomes dull and uninteresting, and ultimately stronger doses of lust lose even the semblance of being interesting. Spiritual lust, the passion that seeks escape from where God has placed us is, if anything, a sin with a higher pay grade than the fleshly lust that is bad enough, but spiritual lust too is the disenchantment of reality, a set of blinders that deflates all the beauty we are given in nature. Spiritual lust is the big brother of merely fleshly lust. Spiritual lust is something really, really, *really* gross that we need to step out of and get *clean*. We need to realize that the passion does not adorn us, that the sparkle of an exotic escape from a miserable here and now is, on a spiritual plane, spin doctoring for experiencing the here and now with despair. We do not see

that we need not an escape from what God has given us, but gratitude and contentment.

But what if the here and now is not the best here and now? What if it's with an Uncle Wally who tells sexist jokes no matter how you ask him to stop? What if the people you are with have *real* warts? There are a couple of responses. You might also think of what your uncle has done that you might be grateful for. You know, like when he helped you find and buy your first car. Or you could learn the power of choosing to be joyful when others act unpleasantly. Or you might read C.S. Lewis, [The Trouble with X](#), and then look at how you might stand to profit from praying, with the Orthodox Church, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Once, when things went from hard times to easy times, one saint complained, saying that easy times rob the Church of her martyrs and her glory. If we are entering hard times, that does not place us outside of God's reach nor Christ's promise in [the Sermon on the Mount](#): "For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

*I glorify Thee,  
Who hast cast Adam out of Paradise,  
That we might learn by the sweat of our brow  
The joy and the life that Adam scorned  
As King of Paradise.  
Glory be to the Father  
And to the Son and to the Holy Ghost  
Both now and ever and unto the ages of ages.  
Amen.  
Glory forever.  
And glory be to Thee,  
Thou who blessest us  
For better or for worse,  
In sickness and in health,  
In the Eternal Light and Love  
Who illuminest marriage.  
Glory forever.  
Glory be to thee whose blessings are here,*

*Not in an escape,  
But in the place wherein Thou hast placed us.  
Glory forever.  
Glory be to Thee,  
Who offerest Eden,  
To us men who forever dodge our salvation.  
Glory forever.  
Glory be to the Father  
And to the Son and to the Holy Ghost  
Both here and now, and in Eternal Life that beckons us  
The Son of God became a man in his here and now in Bethlehem.  
In your forever honored place,  
From this very moment,  
Become a Son of God.  
Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near,  
Heaven awaits with open arms,  
Step out of Hell.  
Grieve for your sins,  
That grief that holds more in her heart,  
Than discovering that the scintillating escape from Hell  
Scintillates only as a mirage.  
And the repentance you fear,  
So constricted it seems from outside,  
Holds inside a treasure larger than the universe,  
Older than time,  
And more alive than life.  
Glory beyond glory,  
Life beyond life,  
Light beyond life,  
The Bread from Heaven,  
The infinite Living Wine,  
Who alone canst slake our infinite thirst,  
Glory forever.  
    Glory be to God on high.  
Glory forever.  
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,  
Both now and ever and unto the ages of ages,*

*Amen:*  
*Glory forever.*  
**Alleluia!**

# FAQ

## Frequently asked questions (and their answers)

[Could I reprint or redistribute something from this site?](#)  
[Could you tell me a bit about yourself?](#)  
[Do you mind if I email you?](#)  
[How can I navigate this site?](#)  
[How is this site organized?](#)  
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[Why isn't my question answered here?](#)

1. **Could I reprint or redistribute something from this site?**

Please [contact me and ask](#). In the past I've given fairly generous permission to reprint or redistribute my items, but please do ask.

*Special exception:* If you want to use the picture from [Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthane?](#) for a church bulletin, you have my permission to do so. (I suggest using the image from the [printer-friendly version](#) if you want a slightly higher-resolution.)

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2. **Could you tell me a bit about yourself?**

I am an Eastern Orthodox Christian, have degrees in math and theology, have a lot of interests, and have had some pretty interesting experiences (including riding an elephant in Malaysia). I invite you to read [the author biography](#), but most of all to browse [what there is to read](#).

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3. **Do you mind if I email you?**

I love to hear from visitors! [Please contact me.](#)

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4. **How can I navigate this site?**

There are several ways you can find things in this website. You can choose whatever seems easiest.

- **Search.** At the top and bottom of each left hand menu are a search box.
- **Left-hand menu.** At the left of each page, between the search boxes, is a menu listing what the sections of this website and the contents of each section. ([See the next question](#) if you're curious about this site's sections.)
- **Browse descriptions.** Clicking on the name of a section in the left hand menu will take you to a browseable index which describes what is in the section. Some are broken into subsections. If you find one thing you like, you might like others nearby.
- **Site map.** There is a site map for the site, arranged both [alphabetically](#) and [by subject](#).

# Farewell to Gandhi: The Saint and the Activist

## Saying farewell to heroes

C.S. Lewis was one of my youth heroes, and after much quoting of him I have said farewell to him, in [A Pilgrimage from Narnia](#).

The oldest written work on this site, [Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength](#), is one that I owe to Gandhi. It is an apology for the Christian pacifist position, and I as a Christian held tight to the [The Sermon on the Mount](#) and nonviolence as best I could. And I was positive Mohondas K. Gandhi had openly pulled from Christianity in his nonviolence, and part of my debt to him is expressed in that in [Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength](#) I took as my model a chapter called "Ahimse or the Way of Nonviolence" in [All Men Are Brothers: Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi as Told In His Own Words](#). And in fact Gandhi did borrow from Christianity; he says that the three men he holds as his heroes are Jesus, Daniel, and Socrates, all of whom held their lives as nothing next to their souls. Elsewhere he said that Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for the sin of the world, a perfect act. Gandhi in fact wanted to become a Christian, and was soured to Christianity when a missionary turned him away because of the color of his skin. *Absolutely disgusting.*

Yet I am taking leave of Gandhi as the same Orthodox who took leave of C.S. Lewis. I take leave of Gandhi even as it unravels the style of nonviolence I found as a best interpretation of the [The Sermon on the Mount](#). I find in the end not that I was too fixated on the [The Sermon on the Mount](#) and took too much from it, but that I took too little. The Indian style of nonviolence has much to commend it, and I am impressed that Indian nationalism identifies with nonviolence instead of glorified violence that affects nationalism in so many other places. India and others have not let Gandhi be the last of a particular nonviolent alternative to violence. But there is a little bit of a burr under my saddle here. [The Sermon on the Mount](#) does not, in the main, offer an alternative answer to the questions addressed by just war and violence, not even the alternative answer of voluntary suffering that brought India's freedom. *It answers another question altogether.*

## How else could it be?

The rather obvious question to be raised, by just war Christian and by pacifist as well, is "How else could it be?" How does a Sermon on the Mount that says, "Do not resist evil" not call for nonviolent resistance if it is not taken as a hyperbolic statement that for more ordinary mortals means something like, "Be restrained when you must resist evil, and grieve when you must do so."? And on this point I would place my own earlier position, and [Blessed are the Peacemakers](#), in the same category as just war theory. It is an answer to what is the most effective legitimate means to address certain dark situations.

And the answer I would give is that the [The Sermon on the Mount](#) does not say, "Do not resist evil." Or at least it does not stop there. It says in full,

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

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

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

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

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

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

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

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

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

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and

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

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you. That whosoever looketh on a

woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which

is in heaven is perfect.

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye:

Our Father which art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come.  
Thy will be done in earth,  
as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil:  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.  
Amen.

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you. They have their reward. But

thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be

measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine. and doeth

them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

When Christ preached these words, the crowds were astounded.

What is at the heart of this is a Life, a life like the birds of the air and the grass of the field, the Divine life, that is as naked as Adam. One of the greatest idols and transgressions against the [The Sermon on the Mount](#). One particularly illumining footnote in [The Orthodox Study Bible](#) reads:

Luke 12:16-21:

Then [Jesus] spoke a parable to them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many good things laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." ' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night [angels shall require] your soul of you; then whose things be which you have provided?'

"So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

The comment reads:

"Whose will those things be by which you have provided?" is the key to understanding the saving up of material goods. St. John Chrysostom writes that the only barns we need we already have: "the stomachs of the poor." St. Basil the Great taught that the bread in our cupboard belongs to the hungry man; the coat hanging unused belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes rotting in our closet belong to the one who has no shoes, and money we hoard belongs to the poor. St. Ambrose teaches, "The things which we cannot take with us are not ours. Only virtue will be our companion when we die." Even when Joseph stored up grain in Egypt (Gn 41) it was for

etc. Even when Joseph stored up grain in Egypt (Gen 41), it was for the benefit of the whole nation.

Sandwiched between "Do not store up treasure on earth" and "No man can serve two masters" is the strange-sounding, sandwiched "The eye is the lamp of the body." But this is of a piece with the text that surrounds it. Is our eye fixed on providing for ourselves through earthly means, or looking up to God in the trust that he will provide and the realization that he knows our needs better than we do and loves us better than we know how to love? If we are confused here then our eye is not "single", but poisoned. Those of us who are not monastics are permitted some possessions, but better not to create an endowment that provides the illusion that we are not at the hands of the severe mercy of a providing God. And when we begin to loosen our grip on money, God's providence is written in stronger, starker strokes.

And the point of this is not to fetter us, but to free us from what seems necessary and recognize the shackles we were bound to. On this point I am talking about money; but I might as well speak of a gun and self-defense lessons. [The Sermon on the Mount](#)'s motto is not a Boy Scout's *Be prepared*, but a carefree, *Don't be prepared. Be as naked as Adam.*

The Divine Liturgy and its associated readings speak of "He who of old stripped you both naked," meaning "The Devil who of old stripped you, Adam and Eve, both naked." It wasn't just that their flesh in its pure form raised no question of lust. Neither fire nor water nor the elements could touch Adam or Eve until they abdicated, and there are stories of a saint who threw down the gauntlet to a sorceror, walked into a fire and said "I'm unharmed," and when the sorceror was thrown into the flame with him and was burned, healed him and sent him out unharmed. On a more mortal level, monks and nuns can dress almost or exactly the same in terms of layers of clothing between summer and winter, and that includes an American Midwest summer and winter. Paradise is where the saints are; the door may have been closed to Adam and Eve but it is open to the saints.

And all of this is an invitation to freedom, free and absolute, unencumbered and unchained freedom. It is not legalism that bids us, "If someone conscript you to go with him one mile, go with him two;" it is utter freedom even from selfishly stopping with what was asked. Christ the Lily of the Valley is the flower that leaves a fragrant scent on the heel

that crushes it: but what we may find is that those things we expect to crush us, are just the removal of a shackle. And at the end saintly peacemakers are of a piece with the merciful, the pure in heart, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake: there is a unity of the beatitudes and they are rightly sung as a shorthand for the entire [Sermon on the Mount](#) in every Orthodox Liturgy. There is freedom to trust in the Lord's providence, freedom to every kind of generosity, freedom from lust, freedom from anger, every freedom that counts.

**Q: So what's the difference?**  
**A: The Saint and the Activist.**

Some readers may wonder where really I have departed from Gandhi. If he were alive, quite possibly he could say he agreed with most or all of it, not out of diplomatically seeking common ground, but out of a direct candour. But I assert there is a difference.

Military action and nonviolent resistance are two answers to the same question. Between the two, military action has much to commend it, and in fact Gandhi had great respect for soldiers: in [Blessed Are the Peacemakers](#), I wrote:

Once the men of a village came, running, and told Gandhi that they had run away while the police were raping and pillaging. When they told him that this was because of his instruction to be nonviolent, he hung his head in shame. He would not have been angry with them if they had defended their families by the power of a sword. He would have approved had they stood in harm's way, calling all injury to themselves without seeking to strike or to harm, to the point of death. But to run away like that and passively leave those who could not run was an act of great and terrible cowardice, the darkest possible answer to the problem.

From speaking with and listening to soldiers, I recognize military training and life as the cross of St. George, an ascetical framework that is much more disciplined than most life outside the military. Hard work and dedication are good things, and there is much to be praised about the cross of St. George. Nonviolent activism such as Gandhi offered, the practice of satyagraha which I refer to as 'peacemaking', perhaps questionably, has more to commend it. It is also disciplined, and it does

not resist force with force. None the same, it is an alternative in the same orbit as military action. It does not stain its hands with others' blood, but it is a tool you can use to achieve the same kind of end as military resources. India's independence was won with nonviolent resistance. But it is the sort of goal that could have been achieved by warfare, and in fact it stands in stark contrast to other nations as "achieving without bearing the sword what elsewhere has not been gained except by bearing the sword." And this falls infinitely short of resting in the hands of providence, naked as Adam.

I have written elsewhere of the Saint and the Activist: in [The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#), in [The Most Politically Incorrect Sermon in History: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount](#), and principally in [An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism](#). If I may put it in a table:

<b>Question</b>	<b>The Activist</b>	<b>The Saint</b>
<i>What is the chief end of mankind?</i>	To change the world.	To glorify God and enjoy him forever.
<i>What is that in a word?</i>	Change.	Contemplation.
<i>By what means do your pursue that end?</i>	By means an atheist and a religious person could equally recognize as effective.	Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. This means that you work sometimes in ways an atheist would see as foolish.
<i>What is the place of nonviolence?</i>	It is a tool for political influence.	It is a flower of spiritual growth.
<i>What is the place of</i>	If you are disciplined, you are more	Protestants have said, "Mission exists because worship does not:" no one, without exception, exists for the sake of missions. All mankind, without exception, exists for the sake of worshipping God. Some people, however, are deprived of the purpose for which they are created and therefore some

*discipline?* effective at getting things done. ~~which they are created, and therefore some~~ people are missionaries so that more people may enjoy the purpose for which they are made. In like fashion, spiritual discipline exists because contemplation does not. It is a corrective when we have lost touch with the life of contemplation.

*What do you live to become?* A catalyst for a better world. To become by grace what Christ is by nature.

*What is the Bible for?* To push moral authority behind the causes we further. Part of God's work to shape us to grow in faith.

*What is justice?* Equitable redistribution of resources, as conceived by assuming that political reforms included in this goal will do nothing to hinder the economy's ability to do all that is asked of it. One of the four cardinal virtues of classical antiquity, that is at times interchangeable with spiritual righteousness.

*What is the government's* The more important a task is, the more essential it is that it is channeled through the government. Government has a place, but that place is not the place of a messiah. Success is not

<i>role?</i>	government. Success usually includes bringing about governmental reforms.	usually connected to governmental reforms.
<i>Can human nature be improved on?</i>	Yes; we can bring it about in others through political programs.	Yes; if we let God work with us we will be improved in the work.
<i>What attitude brings real success?</i>	Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.	Be it unto me according to thy word.
<i>What is wrong with the world?</i>	A number of issues, most importantly the issues I am fighting and giving the most advocacy for.	<i>Me.</i>

Where does Gandhi stand in all of this?

[There was one document forwarded that listed a bunch of statements like, "If you disapprove of sport utility vehicles and private jets and own a sport utility vehicle and private jet, you might be a liberal."](#) And on that count, Gandhi cannot be called an unadorned Activist. He didn't just say, "The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not everyone's wants;" his gaunt frame attests to the fact that he was attending to the beam in his own eye rather than the speck in his brother's eye. His writing is devout; "God" is not, as with many of today's Activists, a word not to be used in polite company. Gandhi cannot be completely understood except

with reference to Saints, and what I would call the centerpiece of his Activism is drawn out of from Saint terrain. Gandhi's particular genius is to take nonviolent resistance as one of many particular eddies in the flow of holiness in the plane of the Saint, and transform it to be a keystone in the plane of the Activist. That places Gandhi away from being at least a pure saint to being substantially an Activist. It makes him, in fact, more of an Activist than if he had merely used existing Activist tools; he was Activist enough to profoundly contribute to the bedrock of Activism.

Furthermore, I am concerned about the wake that he has left. Not that this is a unique concern about Mr. Gandhi; [I have raised concerns about the wake left by Fr. Seraphim \(Rose\)](#). I have seen one Gandhi quote in the wild that alludes to the [Sermon on the Mount](#), "An eye for an eye only ends by making the whole world blind." But this is an Activist argument; an atheist Activist and a Saint could equally agree that the basic argument is sound or unsound. And that's it for religious quotes. *In [All Men Are Brothers](#), Gandhi unashamedly, frequently, and freely refers to God. But I have never seen a Gandhi quote in the wild that uses the G-word. And when Gandhi's style of nonviolent resistance is imitated today, it is used in a way that is completely detached from the Saint's freedom, that is more removed from the Saint than not protesting.*

## Rivers of living water

By contrast, I would tell the story of St. Photini, the Woman at the Well, or part of it. It was shameful for the Woman at the Well to come alone to draw water; women would come together to draw water in groups. No other woman would be caught dead with a woman of her reputation, and when she evasively answered Jesus's "Go and call your husband," she was dodging her shame. Earlier she had sought to enlist Christ's help in running from her shame; her words, "Give me this water," were not so that she could dodge the manual labor of drawing water, but so that she could run from the shame of having to draw water alone. And Christ did not give her what she wanted; instead, in answering her evasive "I have no husband" with, "You have truly said, 'I have no husband', for you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband," pulled her through her shame and opened her eyes to higher things. The story builds up to her running, free from shame, telling people, "Come and see a man who told me every thing I ever did!" She sought Christ's help in covering up her shame; *instead he made her unashamed as Adam*. And it is in this unashamed woman that the story unfolded of a Great Martyr and Equal to the Apostles.

This is what it means to be naked as Adam. It is not a license for indecency; when she gave Christ an evasive answer, he called a spade a spade. But she did become like the Adam whom fire and water could not harm. The point of this is not that her story goes on to her being tortured and her whole company drinking poison and being unharmed by it, but that everything at the heart of the [Sermon on the Mount](#) was alive in her. [In her later story much is told of miracles](#), but perhaps we should make less of the fact that she went to tortures and was miraculously delivered, and more of the fact that she went to tortures *and was faithful*. She did, in the spirit of giving more than was asked, when Nero decided to bring

her to trial, she went ahead and tried to convert him. She didn't succeed at *that*, but she did seem to convert practically everyone else she came in contact with. But what is significant is not just the results that she brought about. What is significant is that she was faithful, with the overflowing freedom that soars as the birds of the air. Perhaps we are not Saints on the level of St. Photini; perhaps it is not within our reach to be called Equal to the Apostles. But what is in our reach is to be a little more a Saint, a little less of an Activist.

Now, a word on being naked as Adam. St. Photini wore clothes and so should we. It is true that there are some saints who labored without clothing: the pre-eminent example is [St. Mary of Egypt](#), and there have been male Desert Fathers who were naked. But we should wear normal clothes even as St. Photini did. *What is forbidden to those who would be naked as Adam is not literal clothing but metaphorical armor.* What is forbidden is not trusting in God's Providence but trying, in addition to the Lord's Providence, or instead of it (if these are really two different things) to straighten things out for ourselves. The opposite of this is someone like St. Photini who, instead of waiting to be captured, went on her own initiative to Caesar Nero. She trusted in God's Providence in a way that could be seen as blackmailing God. But there is something very like Gandhi's nonviolent resistance, not in how the Saint deals with evil in the world, but how the Saint works with God. If a Saint were told, "You are making no provision to take yourself but it's like you're blackmailing God by your actions," one Saint might respond, giving more than was asked, "Yes, I'm emotionally blackmailing God, and you should emotionally blackmail him too!"

## Deep in our bones

Activism runs deep in our bones today; I surprised one professor who discussed disability and an "autism and advocacy" conference, that the natural way to seek the best interests of the autistic community is by political advocacy. And I tried, perhaps in vain, to show her that of the two assigned articles she gave on dealing with autism and disability, one offered a clear activist agenda for autism and disability, and the other was not political, at least not in an overly narrow understanding of politics, but was the father of an autistic child speaking of limitless love. My professor couldn't see what would benefit the autistic besides rolling out one more theme in political activism.

And so, with activism deep in our bones, if we look for a saint, the kind of figure that so naturally comes to mind is Gandhi, or Martin Luther King if we insist on a Christian. Both admired and sought to imitate Christ; both led nonviolent resistance against laws that were legislated evil. Both sought a response to evils out of the [Sermon on the Mount](#). And both contributed to the Activist outlook that is now non-negotiable in the academy. Not necessarily that Gandhi's style of nonviolence is non-negotiable; Gandhi respected his enemies, while it is perfectly socially acceptable in some queer circles to break in to Catholic churches and vandalize them, and spray paint swastikas to identify Romans with Hitler. But the question in so much of the academy is not, "Are you a Saint or an Activist," but, "On to the real question. What *kind* of Activist are you?" (If they have enough distance to recognize that that is the only *real* question in their eyes.)

## Conclusion: Saints forever!

The Activism we see in the Academy may be [the damned backwing of Gandhi's nonviolent Activist precedent](#). That much will not be investigated here. What I will say is much the same thing I would say to C.S. Lewis, that I in fact did imply to him in [A Pilgrimage from Narnia](#):

You helped me reach where I am now, and I would be much poorer had our conversation been deleted from my past. I have sat at your feet. But now even what I have taken from you summons me to bid you farewell. *If your right eye or your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away.* Holding on to your ecumenism, Mr. Lewis, or—it is a deeper cut—your nonviolence, Mr. Gandhi, is to lose everything you sought for. The journey in faith involves many times when we cut off a right hand or take out a right eye. Perhaps we lose nothing, or only a piece of Hell, when we do so. But God created man to glorify him and become him forever, and I cannot be an Activist: I can only strive to be a Saint.

Thus I bid farewell to heroes of my youth.

# Favorite Haunts

The following, in alphabetical order, are some of my favorite places on the web. (The list is partially gleaned from [Jonathan's Canon](#).) I have a feeling that a list like this should be longer, but I haven't recently spent a lot of time browsing the web, and therefore can't tell of too many times I've found that rare gem buried under mounds of sand.

## Institutional Pages:

### [Alertbox](#) (Jakob Nielsen)

Alertbox is a regular column on how to make computers fit for human consumption. It might only be interesting to technical people, but he says some invaluable things.

### [The Bible Gateway](#)

A powerful and easy to use interface permits visitors to look up passages and perform keyword searches in several Bible translations (in English and other languages).

### [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#)

The [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#), available on CD-ROM, is a collection of numerous classic Christian public domain e-texts, a lifetime's worth of reading. G.K. Chesterton's [Orthodoxy](#) is a good place to start. This site also has links to other sites hosting noteworthy Christian content.

### [First Things: A Journal of Religion and Public Life](#)

After long and frustrated surfing through innumerable web pages looking for serious Christian thought, and finding pages that are among human thought what MacDonald's is among foods, I found a [First Things](#) article entitled *Abortion: A Failure to Communicate* that was a breath of fresh air and then some: it was serious, thought-provoking, and drew attention to facts that were important but not obvious. [First Things](#) is a good place to go if you want to chomp on conceptual meat.

### [Freefind](#)

Free Find is a free search engine, and powers the search functionality on this site.

### [The Gutenberg Project](#)

[The Gutenberg Project](#) makes numerous classic books available

online. It is the place I go if I want to read something on my computer and the [Christian Classics Ethereal Library](#) doesn't have it.

[iTools](#)  
A collection of research tools for searching web, newsgroup, dictionary, encyclopedia, phone directory, biography, quotation, ...

[The Jargon File](#)

[The Jargon File](#) is a massive collection of slang terms from the hacker community. The language it records has problems — it is elitist, and a distressingly high number of the terms are pejorative — but it is also a witty, insightful, and fascinating document, one that gives a feel for the way a subculture thinks.

[java.sun.com](#)

Most people won't need this link, either because they would not benefit from it, or because they already know it and have it bookmarked. For that minority that does not fit either category:

This is the homepage for Java, a very sweet programming language that has come out a few years ago. It has the programs you need to get started, *extensive* documentation (the part I use most is about twenty times the length of the Bible, and very well organized, so that I can usually find what I want in less than a minute), and forums where you can talk with other people. If you want to learn how to program (it's quite possible to teach yourself to program — I did), this is a wonderful place to start.

[Leadership University](#)

[Leadership University](#) is a massive compilation of articles from [First Things](#) and other sites; it's a good place to go and read and think. It was actually the place where I first found *Abortion: A Failure to Communicate*.

[The Onion Dome](#)

The Onion Dome is an online journal about the funnier side of Orthodoxy.

[Orthodox Church in America Saints: The Prologue](#)

The links in the [Prologue](#) are an excellent way to get a daily taste of the Orthodox tradition of biography as theology.

[Orthodox Circle](#)

This is an example of what community portals should be: practical, friendly, and a work of art. This one is for Orthodox Christians

Unusuals.

### [Vote Smart](#)

For reasons elaborated by Neil Postman in *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*, present American political discourse is a matter of show business, sound bites, empty phrases, and hard-hitting images — not rational arguments and positions — to the effect that most of what reaches us from the candidates is not helpful in choosing who to vote for.

When I asked around for websites that would cut through the circus and tell where candidates stand on issues, [Vote Smart](#) was recommended to me. I am mentioning it, not to say that it's better than other sites in the same category, but in hopes that people may use resources like this to get past TV showmanship, and vote based on where the candidates stand on the issues.

## Personal Sites

This category is for personal sites, including those of friends and acquaintances who publish real content, that I like. At the moment, it's small (my best friend Robin's site, for instance, has little besides a resume and some links), but I'm hoping that it will grow over time.

### [How to Make an Annoying Web Page!](#)

Once upon a time, in the University of Illinois's student web pages, there was a web page entitled, "HTM-Hell". HTM-Hell featured, among other lowlights, "The magical world of frames", with a prize offered for clicking a button buried in no fewer than thirty frames, and "Shrine to the Goddess Tracey Ullman" (which, after a number of clicks, revealed a large black-and-white portrait of an old man).

Sadly, the HTM-Hell I knew is no longer available, but in the course of reading up on usability, I found a page that occupies a similar niche. Written by a usability expert, this page should be visited by every web developer who has a terrible web page — and may be enjoyed by visitors who have suffered through bad web pages.

### [Josh Wibberley's Wolfhawke](#)

[Wolfhawke](#) is on this page because it contains fiction and some nonfiction — as well as having a nice look and feel. Josh is an American who grew up in Turkey and has lived in Germany, and we mesh well.

# Fingerprinted Collects

At my congregation, part of the worship liturgy includes a prayer, the 'collect', which varies from service to service. I decided to write my own miniature ensemble; they were written first in French (some corrections courtesy of my good friend Robin Munn), and then translated to English. I wanted to make prayers that would be universal and at the same time bear a personal touch: fingerprints.

Why French? I prayed, thought, and felt, and even though my French is not perfect, there are ways it is closer to my heart than English.

## **français      English**

Éternel, Seigneur Dieu, qui      Lord God, who knows all  
connait toutes les cultures, l'Objet cultures, the object of worship in  
du culte dans les cultures, et qui every culture, and who is at the  
reste quand-même au-delà des same time beyond cultures, even  
cultures, même la culture juive à Jewish culture on which you have  
laquelle tu as donné tant d'amour: bestowed so much love: help us to  
aides-nous a voir grace a nos see through our cultures and yet  
cultures mais néanmoins ne pas not become blind to what culture  
devenir aveugles a ce qui la culture cannot contain. In the name of the  
ne peut contenir. En nom du Père Father who lived before culture,  
qui vivait avant du culture, du Fils and of the Son who went into one  
qui entra dans une culture et a béni culture and has blessed all cultures  
toutes cultures par elle, et du through it, and of the Holy Spirit  
Saint-Esprit qui montre la Lumière who shows the Light of God in all  
de Dieu dans toutes les cultures cultures where it is permitted to  
que l'on permit d'entrer, enter,

Amen. Amen.

Éternel, qui nous as donné des      Lord, who has given us hearts  
coeurs percés de la memoire de pierced by the memory of the  
l'avenir que tu nous prepares: future you have prepared for us:  
    laisses-nous sensibles a ton keep us aware of your absence, our  
absence, l'imperfection de notre imperfect knowledge of your glory,  
    connaissance de ta gloire, et and at the same time give us the  
quand-même avoir la force de vivre strength to live as strangers  
    étrangers hors de notre vrai outside of our home with you. As  
domicile avec toi. Comme Pierre a Peter cried much each day, and  
tant pleuré chaque jour, et quand when asked why, said, "I desire my  
on lui demanda pourquoi, disait, Lord," help us to deeply hope for  
    <<Desirado Domine,>> aides- the time you will welcome us in  
nous de tant espérer que tu nous Heaven. In the name of the Father  
accueille au ciel. Au nom du Père of Glory, of the Son who veiled the  
    de Gloire, du Fils qui voilait la Glory of his Father, and the Holy  
    Gloire de son Pere, et du Saint- Spirit who breathes on the waters,  
Esprit qui souffle sur les eaux, le the earth, and soon Heaven with  
terre, et bientôt le ciel avec nous us in it,  
    en-dedans, Amen.

Amen.

O Éternel, Dieu d'Hénoch: Aides-      O Lord, God of Enoch: Help us  
nous à voir que ce qui se passe to see that the usual patterns  
habituellement autour de nous around us are not necessarily what  
n'est pas forcément ce qui ne peut must be: help us to be open to the  
être différent: aides-nous à être Holy Spirit and the mysteries  
    ouverts au Saint-Esprit et les which you are preparing for us:  
mystères que tu nous prepares: give us the wisdom which can  
donnes-nous la sagesse qui peut ou either build a great boat in the  
    bâtir un grand bateau au fond du middle of the desert, or work hard  
    désert, ou dût travailler, et and silently on obscure tasks that  
    silencieusement, aux oeuvres are ignored by our judges of the  
obscur et a l'insu de tous nos important. In the name of the  
    juges de ce qui est important. Au Father whose ways are not like our  
nom du Père dont les voies ne sont ways, of the Son who is the way,  
    pas comme nos voies, du Fils qui and the Holy Spirit whose holiness  
est la voie, et du Saint-Esprit dont is to be separate,

1. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

la saintete est etre separe, Amen.

Amen.

Dieu, le Don Éternel: aides- God, the Eternal Gift: help us to  
nous à voir que nous avons en nous see that in our hearts there is an  
un vide infini, qui ne peut être infinite void, which can only be  
rempli que par un objet infini et filled by an infinite and immutable  
immuable, c'est-a-dire par toi- object, by you yourself: help us to  
même: aides-nous à chercher en seek in your creations what we  
tes créatures ce que nous devons y should seek among your creation,  
chercher, et d'autant plus chercher and much more to seek in you  
en toi-même ce que nous devons yourself what we should seek in  
chercher en toi. Donnes-nous soif you. Makes us thirsty for you, and  
de toi, et ne nous laisse pas à don't leave us us to seek in your  
chercher en tes créatures ce qui creatures what should draw us to  
doit nous mener a toi-même. Au yourself. In the name of the Father  
nom du Père qui désire nous who wants to welcome us all into  
accueillir tous au fond de son the depths of his heart, of the Son  
coeur, du Fils qui marchait sur who walked on earth and knows  
terre et qui connaît comme c'est how hard it is to be man in a  
tellement d'être homme dans broken world, and of the Holy  
un monde brisé, et du Saint-Esprit Spirit who comes to ease our  
qui vient pour soulager nos sufferings at not being totally  
souffrances de ne pas être reunited with you,  
totalement réunis avec toi, Amen.

Amen.

Éternel, qui nous a créés en ton Lord, who created us in your  
image, laisse-nous à connaître que image, let us know that we are  
nous sommes d'autant plus grands much more than the images we  
que les images que nous créons de make of ourselves: that is, that our  
nous-mêmes: c'est a dire que nos greatest to create (and not just  
plus grands efforts a créer des gens pro-create) people, once by  
(non seulement procréer), jadis en mechanical statues and now by  
statues mécaniques et cognitive science, cannot come to  
aujourd'hui par la science what you have done in us. Let us  
cognitive, ne peuvent arriver a ce know ourselves at once great and  
que tu as fait en nous. Laisse-nous small, and have the humility that  
nous connaître à la fois grands et comes from knowing the truth. In  
petits, et avoir l'humilité qui vient the name of the Creator, Father, of

peut, et avoir l'humaine qui vient the name of the Creator-Father, or  
de connaître la vérité. Au nom du the Son found in the likeness of a  
Père Créateur, du Fils trouvé en creature, and of the Holy Spirit,  
l'image du crée, et du Saint-Esprit, which is still a wind one cannot  
qui reste un vent que l'on ne peut exclude in trying to create a  
exclure en essayant de créer un hermetically sealed world, a wind  
monde hermétiquement scellé, un which blows eternally,  
vent qui souffle éternellement, Amen.

Amen.

O Éternel, qui reste hors du O Lord, who remains outside of  
temps, et qui nous invite à la vie time, and who invites us to eternal  
éternelle, non seulement en life, not only in the future, but in  
l'avenir, mais en cette vie-ci: laisse- this life here: let us spend this life  
nous de passer cette vie en in preparation for living in  
préparation pour la vie au ciel, Heaven, little christs apprenticed  
petits christs apprenticiés au to the Christ, and to have this love,  
Christ, et avoir cet amour, ce this power, this joy, this life, today  
pouvoir, cette joie, cette vie, and in the future. In the heart of  
aujourd'hui et à l'avenir. En le the Father, the Son's eternity  
coeur éternel du Père, l'éternité hidden in time, and the mysterious  
temporellement voilée du Fils, et love of the Holy Spirit,  
l'amour mystérieux du Saint- Amen.

Esprit,

Amen.

Éternel, merci de tout ce que tu Lord, thank you for all you have  
nous a donné: given us:  
Ton Esprit, au-delà meme des Your Spirit, beyond even the  
magies auxquelles tant d'autres magics so many hope in;  
espèrent; The earth, and all that is in it: your  
La terre, et tout ce qu'elle contient, work of art;  
ton oeuvre d'art; Your eternal Church, your  
Ton Église éternelle, ton chef masterpiece, which you are  
d'oeuvre, que tu es en train de perfecting and which will perfect  
perfectionner et qui sera parfaite, and without defect before your  
sans défaut devant ton trône; throne;  
Le petit temps passant que nous The short present which we have  
avons comme l'église militante; as the church militant;  
La gloire sans cesse que nous The endless glory which we will

aurons comme l'église victorieuse; have as the church victorious;  
Ton pardon, qui ne nous laisse pas Your forgiveness, which doesn't  
tomber, même quand nous just let us fall away, even when we  
choisissons de tomber; choose to fall;

L'amitié, de laquelle tu ne nous Friendship, in which you not only  
donne pas seulement l'amour de let us love you in worship, but also  
toi en culte, mais aussi l'amour love other images of you;  
d'autres images de toi; Material details, be they

Les détails matériels, ou des computers, trees, or old toys, by  
ordinateurs, ou des arbres, ou des which you bless us and let the  
anciens jouets, par lesquelles tu material accompany the spiritual;  
nous bénis, le bon material Our souls, which are rooms: not  
accompagnant le bon spirituel; only rooms in which we will live in  
Nos âmes, qui sont des chambres: the future, but today rooms in  
non seulement chambres dans which we can accompany other  
lesquelles nous viverons en people;

l'avenir, mais aujourd'hui des The beauty which pierces us even  
chambres en lesquelles nous and especially in our greatest  
pouvons accueillir d'autres gens; happiness, reminding us that there  
La beauté qui nous perce même et is a much greater happiness which  
surtout pendant les plus grands awaits us;

bonheurs, en nous rappelant qu'il Father eternal, for all that is  
y a un bonheur d'autant plus grand named here, for all that we forget  
qui nous attend; to thank you for, for all we would

Père éternel, de tout ce qui est not dare expect to receive, and all  
nommé ici, de tout que nous we think about and are ashamed to  
oublions de te remercier, de tout thank you for because we believe it  
que nous n'oserons croire recevoir, to small: in your name, and in the  
et de tout dont nous pensons et name of your Son, the perfect gift,  
avons honte de te remercier car and your Spirit, still given today,  
nous le croyons trop petit, au ton Thank you, and let us appreciate  
nom, et au nom de ton Fils, le don your kindness.

parfait, et ton Esprit, donné encore Amen.

aujourd'hui,  
Merci, et laisse-nous d'apprécier ta  
bonté.  
Amen.

# Firestorm 2034

## Acknowledgments

*When I read a book*, I usually skip or maybe skim the acknowledgements; I find a long list of names of people I've never heard of to be deadly dull. There have been two times that I've read a list of acknowledgments that I've actually liked. One was written by a very witty writer who could, and did, make even technical documentation interesting to read. (Making someone want to read a list of names is only slightly more difficult than writing interesting documentation, and I don't consider myself a good enough writer to do either.) The other time was an acknowledgement that personally named and thanked me, and that was my favorite part of the whole work. Apart from that, I don't think that a list of strangers' names is fair to inflict on the reader. So I'm not going to try it.

Of course this is not solely my work; many others paid a role in it. You know who you are. I do wish to explicitly thank one person, though, whom many authors omit from their long lists. I wish to thank *you*, the reader. Of course the people who helped me write this are important, but they are not nearly so important as the people who take the time to sit down and read it, let the story live in their imaginations, and (I hope) tell a friend if they think it's cool. My work is only half done when, I write down my thoughts and put them on the web. It is finished when you breathe life into the story as you read it, and consider its ideas and make them a part of you. Only then can my story be complete. I therefore give my thanks to you, the reader.

# In the Glade

"I still do not understand," Grizelda said, "why you asked your father not to find you a wife, if you are not going into a monastic order. And why he listened to your request."

"As Solomon said, he who finds a wife, finds a good thing," said Taberah, and then paused. A quotation from a written source came quickly to him, but a more substantial reply would take a moment's thought. *I am at home among most all of the people I have visited, Taberah thought, but I am not like any of them. And explaining myself is difficult.*

Grizelda stopped and looked at him; her pale blue eyes bore a gaze that was intense and probing, and yet not piercing. Her hair was pulled back from the sides of her head, and fell darkly onto her blue dress. The people at the castle spoke highly of Grizelda; some said she had a mind like a man. Her husband, Melibée, stood at her side, listening. They were in a forest glade outside the town walls, and were nearing the banks of a river.

Taberah nimbly climbed a tree, and tossed down two large pears. Then he climbed down, an even larger pear in his teeth.

"One good need not be the only good; even God, when he was the only good, chose to become not the only good. That is what creation means. For a man to have a wife is not the only good; there is also good in a man being single."

Melibée spoke up. "But then why not enter a monastery? Surely that is a good place."

Taberah shook his head. "Being celibate is good, a good that monastic life embraces; it does not follow that being celibate requires entering a monastery. I see another option; marriage and monkhood are not the only possibilities."

only possibilities.

Grizelda began walking again, followed by the others. "There is still something in it I question. The different kinds of heretics often see other options, and the Church has condemned them. I know you don't have condemnation from the Church, but I don't see why you don't."

Taberah thought for a moment about whether to explain a logical principle, but decided not to. "All of the monastic orders were also started by people who saw other options; if you will think on the saints' lives, you will see that God led them outside of what everyone else was doing."

Grizelda stopped, and asked, softly, "You claim to be a saint?"

"Hardly," Taberah said. "I try to serve God, but I do not reach that standard. The reason I brought them up is that they are examples of how God wants us to live life. They play by the same rules as us; they just do a better job. I am not married because I am serving God in a way that does not involve marriage, at least not yet; I seek to follow him."

Grizelda began to speak when there was a thunderous boom. The ground shook, and a luminous being stood before them. Around the being was a presence, a reality of terrifying glory, as solid and real as if the weight of a mountain were pressing down on their spirits, and then more real. It was like a storm, like the roaring of a lion. The three friends fell to the ground in fear.

The Presence spoke with a voice like roaring water. "Fear not! Stand up!" As the quaking bodies heard those words, the command gave them the power to rise, and they did rise, and bow low. Again he spoke: "Never!"

As the friends stood in awestruck fear, the being turned towards Taberah and said, "Taberah. Will you go wherever God leads you? I have been sent to call you to come on a voyage, to a land you do not know and have never heard of, a voyage you may never return from. Will you come along?"

Taberah closed his eyes. In an instant, time stopped, and Taberah was thinking, neither in his native Provençale nor erudite Latin nor any of the dozen other languages he had worked with, but beyond words, beyond language. He looked into his own heart, and into God's, and a single word formed on his lips, without effort or volition: "Yes."

There was a tremendous flash of light, and Grizelda and Melibée fainted.

# An Encounter

Taberah looked around. Four immense young men were throwing around a dinner plate — or at least that's what it looked like on first glance. They were brawny, and the plate had something unearthly about it —

One of the men shouted something, and hurled the plate at Taberah. He dodged, and then watched in amazement as it bounced off a tree but did not shatter. It was red, and it had an unearthly symmetry, symmetry like he had never seen before. He went over and picked it up; it was light, and felt vaguely like leather or wood.

One of the men walked over, and said something in a language he did not recognize. Taberah said, "Taberah," and looked at him. The man extended a finger towards him and said, "Taburah," and then took the artifact and tugged on his arm. He was standing on the edge of a forest, and was being led into a clearing with buildings. The architecture was alien, and looked like a slightly grotesque simplification of what he was used to. There was a strange precision to the buildings, and a smell like smoke and roasting flesh — though he could see no firepit, nor any animal.

The man took him out into the open field — the grass was strangely short and uniform in height, lacking the beautiful variety in the fields he was used to seeing. He bent over, and plucked a blade of grass. It had been clipped. Not grazed by animals, but painstakingly clipped.

Looking around, he saw the men tossing the strange plate between each other. It sailed through the air, almost as if it had wings. One of them caught his eye, and tossed it over. Taberah snatched it out of the air with one hand, and then tried to throw it. It fell like a stone.

One of the men came over, and made the motion of throwing it with exaggerated sloppiness. It was different from how one throws daggers, or

exaggerated slowness. It was different from how one threw daggers, or stones, or much of anything else; it vaguely resembled skipping a rock. Taberah took the plate and held it properly; one of the men took it and turned it upside down. Holding it upside down, Taberah tried to imitate the throw he'd seen; the plate wobbled and fell to the ground. The people clapped.

One of the people said something that he didn't understand; seeing Taberah's incomprehension, he repeated his words, only louder. When Taberah didn't understand that, they beckoned him over to where the smoke was coming from. There was some sort of miniature fire, above which geometrically shaped pieces of meat were roasting; one of them gave him a large piece of meat — they were all large — wrapped in bread, with some brightly colored liquids poured over — some sort of decoration? He wondered what the feast was, that they were eating meat, and had such a sumptuous banquet. The meat tasted slightly strange, although fresh, and the bread was finer than anything he had ever tasted. It didn't have any pebbles, and it was softer than cake.

Not knowing the local language, Taberah expressed his gratitude with his eyes; he listened intently to the conversation, trying to see if he could make sense of the language. Every once in a while, he heard a word that sounded vaguely like Latin, and by the end of the conversation he had figured out these people's names. The man standing by the fire was very old, so old that wisps of silver hair were beginning to appear among the black locks of his temple. He looked mature, regal, venerable. He must be a king, owning the small palace nearby and the ones around it; he could look in the windows (fitted with *glass* — and glass so smooth you could barely see it), and see the illumination of a thousand candles. Or was he a servant? He looked mighty, built like a great warrior, and was even taller than the other men. And it was a lordly thing to give food to anyone who came. He was cooking, but the demeanor of the other men treated him as their elder, and not just in years. By the end of the conversation, Taberah had conveyed his name, and knew their names. After the effort of listening to the conversation and trying to see if he could hear any words related to ones he knew, he sat down in one of the chairs — at least he thought it was a chair; it was sturdy, but so light he could lift it with one hand.

Taberah sat down in this chair, happy to sit and think as the others romped on the plain. Where to begin thinking? The language had Latin

words, but it did not sound like any Romance language; that was confusing. And these people owned massive wealth, wealth far beyond anything his lord owned, and different goods than he had seen before. And they were immense. But that was only the surface of what he was sure was there. These people seemed to treat him hospitably, but what struck him wasn't exactly hospitality so much as something like friendship. Why were they treating him as a friend when they had just met him? When he watched them, he was puzzled at seeing respect in the younger men's treatment of the elder, but not etiquette. How could this people have respect without having its form? They did, but how? Or was their etiquette merely strange? They were not accustomed to wayfarers; they didn't look like heathen, but they didn't recognize Latin — or Greek, or even Arabic, for that matter. And what would motivate anyone to cut grass at a uniform, mathematically precise height? What strange symbolic gesture would be manifested in that way? Or was it a symbolic gesture? It seemed more like a rash vow. Or was it something stranger still?

To the eyes around him, Taberah looked lost in thought. And he was — he saw certain things that were human, but there were other parts that he could not understand at all. What did they mean?

# First Clues

Aed looked on the stranger as he gazed. He was unbelievably short and scrawny, not to mention gamy; his clothing looked like a getup from the Middle Ages, a tunic and hose with irregular stitching and any number of holes. He could readily believe it when he walked by and saw lice. He had a thick, scraggly head of hair with a very thin beard. And yet, for all this, Taberah was quite attractive. He had a merry, comely face, with a deep, probing gaze. It was a penetrating gaze; Aed had the feeling that if he stared at a piece of paper too long, it would catch fire. Taberah had been listening intently, and was now off in his own little world.

*I must look up one of those charities that deals with foreigners, Aed thought, as he seems quite lost. For now, he can have the guest bedroom. It's a good time it's summer; I have a little more free time to deal with him. He looks a little older than my children.* Aed began to gather up the food, called his son and daughter to help, and then they went in; it only took the stranger a couple of times to learn the gesture that meant, "C'mon! You're invited over here!"

The stranger looked with some bewilderment over the contents of a room, and then his eyes lit up over a chess table packed in the corner. He started to pull the pieces off and walk over to the table; Aed stopped him, pulled out the table, and arranged a game before them. *The international game, he thought. We don't know a common language, but we have a common game.*

Aed's first thought upon seeing the stranger play was, "He has seen this game before, but does not know how to play." This was revised to, "He does know how to play, but he cheats — making moves that are almost legal and always to his advantage." Then a moment of dawning comprehension came, and he realized that the stranger was not cheating — he just didn't understand that chess was played over a grid. Aed

— he just didn't understand that chess was played over a grid. Aed groaned, and picked up the pieces and arranged them on the table, understanding why Taberah had made such a bizarre action as to take them from what he now understood was taken as a storage place, and decided to play it his way.

Aed was rated at 1975, although on a good day he could give almost any chess player a run for his money. He was therefore stunned after he lost five games in a row. The young stranger was very, very cunning, and saw things that would never occur to him. After the fifth game, he felt quite tired, and he could see that the stranger was tired—

—and was therefore quite stunned as, in the living room and in the presence of his teen-aged son and daughter (his wife was away at a conference), Taberah took off all his clothes and lay down on the floor. He sent his daughter Fiona out of the room, and then covered Taberah with a blanket that lay at hand. Taberah's face told a thousand words; shocked as Aed was, he saw at once that Taberah's action was not sexually provocative, or for that matter done as anything significant; he apparently saw that he had made a social blunder, but was at a loss for what. He did not feel any shame or guilt, but perhaps regret that something he had done had upset his generous host — and gratitude to be given a blanket, and puzzlement at why his host had invited him into his house but not to crawl into his family's bed. Puzzling, but Taberah had enough to think about already, and was sure that tomorrow would have enough puzzles of its own.

Aed, for his part, could see how to send him out, but not how to tell him to put his clothes on first; he went to bed, grumpily thinking, *He may stay tonight because he's here, but tomorrow night he's spending at PADS. What kind of manners is it to strip in front of your host's daughter? ...* He had a feeling of shock, of wrongness, of indignation at a transgression against reality; he told himself that this was culture shock, but that did not make things easy.

He drifted in and out of sleep, and was awakened by the sound of someone vomiting. Habits of a father, habits stronger than the weight of his grogginess, marched him out to the living room, where he stared in horror. Taberah was shaking, shivering in a cold sweat.

What shocked Aed most was not that one side of Taberah's face was wet with his own vomit.

What shocked Aed most was that Taberah looked so miserable that he

didn't seem to even care.

# The Hospital

The hospital was a nightmare. Taberah had no insurance, no paperwork and no legal guardian; it was only because of the dire nature of the emergency that he was admitted at all. In the absence of identification or any ability to speak English, the hospital was by law required to file paperwork with the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services; an embarrassed hospital representative explained that Taberah was in the eyes of the law an illegal immigrant and nothing more; if there was a way for him not to be deported to his country of origin, he didn't see it.

Aed came back each day for a week, during which his whole parish was speaking with him; his conversation with the doctors was alarming.

"I am baffled by this young man's condition. He is sick, but no test has been able to tell what he has. It might be a virus."

"Do you have any ideas of what it is?"

The doctor looked slightly embarrassed.

Aed stood in silence and prayed.

"Uh, have you read Ahmik Marison's *How the West Was Lost From a Medical Point of View?*"

"Never heard of it."

"Off the record, this young man is suffering from one — or several — of the conditions that ravaged the American Native population when European settlers came."

Aed stood in stunned silence. This did not make any sense at all. Or (he had the exacting honesty to admit to himself) it made sense in a way he couldn't believe.

# An Anthropologist's Visit

"Noah, he doesn't speak any English." By now, Dr. Pabst and Dr. Kinsella were at the doorway to Taberah's room; they turned in, and saw him looking with interest at a book. Taberah looked up and said, "Grace and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." His accent was thick, but mostly understandable.

"I'm an anthropologist and not a linguist," Noah said, "but that sounded an awful lot like English to me."

Aed opened his mouth, closed it, and said, "This isn't the first time he's surprised me." He explained about Taberah playing chess, and undressing.

Dr. Pabst turned to the young man. He said, "Do you understand me?" The man scrambled off his bed with remarkable speed, and crouched in front of the anthropologist, and said, "I thou under stand."

Dr. Pabst simplified his language, and spoke slowly, separating his syllables. "How speak English?"

"English, that is what?"

"This language."

"Language, that is what?"

"How we speak now."

Taberah's eyes lit up. "I am in read Bible."

The anthropologist scratched his head. The young man appeared not to be lying, but even for a genius, learning a new language was difficult, and learning from a book written in the language without any people to help, unless—

"What you call Bible in your language?"

"No Bible in language."

NO BIBLE IN LANGUAGE.

Noah scratched his head. Then he said, "Have you read Bible before here?"

"*Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*. I not know not how to say in English."

Aed said, "The lad is tired from concentration, and perhaps he shouldn't have jumped from his bed to —" Dr. Kinsella cleared his throat, "—under stand you. Perhaps we could talk out in the hallway?"

In the hallway, Aed said, "So, what nationality is he?"

Noah said, "I haven't the foggiest idea. He looks Western European, perhaps Mediterranean, by ancestry, Third World by nourishment. His accent is that of a Romance language, but I don't know. Picking up an alien language by studying a text in that language is next to impossible; the Mayans have left behind three codices that we still haven't deciphered for the most part. Or at least, it's almost impossible unless you already know the text in another language. I don't know how to coalesce my observations into a coherent picture. He — is it OK if I change the subject slightly to recommendations?"

"Certainly."

"He's very bright and is picking up English quickly. He probably knows multiple languages, which makes it easier to pick up another; I'd get him three Bibles — one in the Latin he knows, one in a literal rendering in modern English, and a free translation to contemporary English. And continue to visit him. My summer class starts tomorrow, so I won't be able to visit, but in brief: speak slowly; in-it-ial-ly break up the syl-la-bles; pay attention to what words he uses. (And, when he understands it, speak as you would to another American.) Contrary to intuition, he might understand you better if you use big words."

"What?"

"He already knows Latin, or perhaps some other language or languages derived from it; there are a lot of common roots in the bigger words. They came over with the Norman invasion of England; small words change much more quickly, and many of our small words are Germanic in character. And you know the artificial intelligence findings that big words are impossible for a computer to deal with, and small words doubly impossible? What is easy for us and what is easy for him may be two very different matters."

"Yes, I see," Aed said.

"Oh, and one more thing. Keep me posted; if you want, I may be able to send in a grad student. He's a puzzle, and I like puzzles. Maybe something will click about him."

"I'll keep the grad student in mind; maybe later, when I have more to tell. Actually, why don't you give me the net address of a student whom I will be able to talk with? I'll probably have some questions. Or should I ask you?"

"Feel free to ask me. Just keep it down to a few minutes a day."

# Trouble

After a phone conversation with Dr. Pabst, Aed began to understand how the universality of good will he believed in coexisted in an arbitrariness of manners; he restrained himself from knocking on the door before entering, and saw Taberah bright-eyed as he entered.

"Hell!" Taberah said eagerly, jumping up. He had a long tether from his intra-venous tubes, and he was becoming stable on his feet. (He still felt slightly dizzy as he rose.)

"What?" said Aed and the other visitor.

"Hell! Hell!" Then Taberah saw their puzzlement, wondered what was wrong, and then reminded himself of how important pronunciation was. "Hello!" he said.

Aed laughed, and said, "Hello! Taberah, I'd like you to meet my wife, Nathella. She is—"

Taberah grinned, said, "Beautiful!" and jumped up, pressing up against her and kissing her on the lips.

Nathella stood in paralyzed shock for a second, then drew back and ran out of the room, Aed on her heels.

She slowed to a brisk walk after they reached a second corridor, and said, "I don't know why you let him in our house. I don't want to see him again. There are differences between cultures, but that lust is unacceptable in any culture."

Aed said, "I am sorry he did that. I was not expecting that when I brought him in."

They walked on in silence, Nathella setting a fast pace in silent fury.

"You're holding out on me," she said. "You're not telling me something."

"His eyes," Aed said.

"What?" Nathella said

what? Nathella said.

"Did you see his eyes?" Aed asked.

"I assure you, I was quite occupied with his lips!" she snapped.

"What do you think was in his eyes?"

"Lust. Selfishness. A lack of any caring and decency."

"I saw his eyes," Aed said.

They walked on in silence, now a bit more slowly.

"You're waiting for me to ask you what you saw in his eyes. Out with it," Nathella finally said.

"I was watching his eyes, and I didn't see the faintest trace of greed or lewdness. I saw a rambunctious energy, the same rambunctious energy Clancy uses when he's picking on Fiona."

"Are you saying that what that man did to me was right?"

"No; I'm saying that he didn't know what he was doing."

# Confusion

As Aed walked back, he processed through a memory, and realized the look in Taberah's eyes after Nathella had run out of the room. He looked like a hurt puppy. Aed had promised his wife not to have the man back on their property without talking with him and then talking it over with her.

The conversation that ensued between him and Taberah was maddening. It wasn't just the language barrier, even though they got a good half hour into the conversation before Aed realized that Taberah thought Aed was talking about something else entirely. It was rather that Aed was just beginning to see an alien conceptual map, an alien interpretation of the world. After clearing up the initial confusion, Aed managed to paraphrase "You don't have the right to go around kissing women on the lips," in different ways until Taberah appeared to understand, when he got to the second difficulty: "What is a right?" Taberah seemed not to think in terms of rights, to find them an alien philosophical concept; this difficult was not surmounted so much as circumvented, in being told, "It is wrong to go around kissing women on the lips." That was met with a third difficulty: "Why not?"

After a long and involved conversation, Aed pieced together the following observations:

- Taberah regarded his actions as being a very warm greeting, meaning roughly what Aed would have meant in sending someone he'd just met a virtual card. Taberah could envision a concept of "too warm and friendly, to the point of being unpleasant and unwelcome" if Aed led him to see it, but it was not a natural concept, much as "paying too many compliments, to the point that they are an annoyance that occupies too much time" would be an understandable but not natural

concept to Aed — when Aed complimented a friend on her shirt, it never occurred to him to ask "Is she receiving so many compliments that this one would be unwelcome and repetitive?"

- Taberah was saddened to have made a *faux pas*, but bewildered as to what was wrong about what he did. (He initially wondered if she was upset because he had not greeted her with words first.)
- Taberah did not regard the breast as being a body part that especially symbolized sexuality, and would consider a woman not wearing a shirt to be less significant than one of the nurses in long miniskirts — to the extent that he found seeing body parts to be arousing, which was not much.
- If Taberah's reasoning on one line were translated into 21st century concepts, they would not so much be "A man has a right to invade a woman's touch-space," so much as really a non-concept of "There is not enough of a personal touch-space for there to be an invasion necessary to a question of whether a man has a right to do so" — in many regards, like Aed regarded tapping shoulders.
- Taberah had a very different understanding of sexuality and touch; his line of acceptable touch was drawn so that it included a great deal of touchiness in contexts that Aed's culture did not even consider regarding as acceptable.

Taberah looked crestfallen when Aed told him not to touch women without asking permission; Aed revised this to, "Don't touch people in a way you haven't seen," knowing full well that this would lead the door open to further confusion. When Aed told Taberah in an authoritative tone of voice, "Don't kiss anyone you don't know well," and then thought and added, "Don't touch women's breasts," the hurt Taberah cried for a few minutes, and then asked, trembling, why he was not ever to give a woman a hug. Aed was puzzled as to why Taberah would make such a connection, and then when he saw the very straightforward reason why, it seemed that his explanation of why it was OK to touch a woman's breasts with his chest but not his hands caused more confusion than it alleviated.

Aed's head was spinning when he left the room. He was barely able to call his friend Noah and explain what had happened.

Dr. Pabst cursed himself for not coming himself, and had his graduate student teach the first day of class so he could try to provide the young man with hand-aid coaching for at least one cultural land mine

man with pain and coaching for at least one catarrhal and more.

Taberah sat, shaking in sadness. He knew he would make mistakes, but to make such a big mistake so soon, and then not be able to understand why he was wrong — this was the most confusing place he had ever been in. He closed his eyes and cried himself to sleep.

# Immigration and Naturalization Services

Aed had barely slept, and when he returned early the next morning with Dr. Pabst, he found three men in dark suits standing near Taberah. "Good morning. I am Dr. Kinsella, a professor at the University. Who might you be?"

One of the men showed a badge and said, "Salisbury, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services."

A chill ran down Aed's spine. "May I ask what your interest in this young man is?"

"This patient is an illegal alien. We are here to deport him to his country of origin."

*If I thought, I could make enough publicity to hurt the INS badly if they deport this wayfarer, Aed thought, but even then felt a prompting of intuition, that is not the way. Still, he continued thinking, I could say, "I can't stop you from deporting this man, but I can see to it that you will have publicity that hurts you. Do you have authority to stop the deportation? No? Would you rather give me contact information for someone who has such authority now, or have me find out as I create publicity and then contact him and have you fired?" If I think further, I can probably think of something truly Machiavellian...*

Even as he thought, he struggled, and Aed resolved to follow his conscience. "I'll be praying for you; I'm an interested party, and if you need to get in contact with me, the hospital has my net address." He decided it better not to give the INS agents a brain dump of the interactions; a description of a rocky adjustment to American culture was

interactions, a description of a rocky adjustment to American culture was sure to hurt the lad. Dr. Pabst didn't think there was any advantage to staying, so they left. Aed returned home and brooded.

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Taberah was not well; he was mostly over his sickness, but the INS agents had pressured the hospital staff for a release as soon as possible. He left the hospital weak and slightly unsteady on his feet.

His first ride in a moving room, he had been too miserable to notice what was going on. Now, he was able to observe, see what he had to learn. The room was bouncing around, but not nearly as much as a galloping horse — even though it was moving faster. Through an arrangement of squares and a glass window he could see the city and countryside whizzing past; the speed was unpleasant, and it nauseated him. If he hadn't tried hard to control himself, he would probably have thrown up.

The two men were in the compartment with him, along with some men who looked vaguely like Saracens, only with redder skin, who seemed to be ill at ease. The two men looked — not exactly like soldiers; there was a noble bearing and heroic resolve to even commoners who took arms to war with a neighboring city-state, but these men looked more like mercenaries set to guard. He tried to speak with them, but they would not speak to him; even in the hospital, they had spoken with the hospital staff but never addressed him personally.

Two of the red-bronze Saracens began talking, and he found with delight that they spoke with a familiar accent. He could not recognize the language, but he felt that he could learn their language quickly.

He tried to see what else he could grasp — with his mind; there were some kind of thin shackles about his wrists, which set him ill at ease — was he being taken to the torturer's for whatever crime he had committed against Nathella? There was noise about, a strange alien noise; everything about his surroundings was alien. And the bouncing room made it impossible to think.

Taberah realized he was ready to throw up, and he focused his attention on trying not to throw up.

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Aed was sitting in his living room, staring sadly at the chess pieces on the table. Taberah's king had been knocked down, even as the pieces stood to checkmate Aed. Nathella walked into the room, leaned against Aed, and said, "Do you want to talk about Taberah? I've — adjusted; I can deal with his rambunctiousness."

Aed said, "The INS is taking him to be deported. I don't want to talk about it."

Nathella put her hand to her mouth, and then held Aed. "I'll be waiting in the kitchen, when you're ready to talk. I'll be praying," she said, and kissed him.

Aed sat and stared at the dusty bookshelf for a while, and then picked up Taberah's king and set it down. He stared, and realized that he had placed the king in check from one of his knights.

Aed looked at the king and said, "Did you have to leave before I knew you?"

The game gave him no reply. Aed went to the computer room, got in to the computer, and went to a dreamscape where colors and shapes shifted. He watched the forms flow. Maybe that could distract him. No; time dragged, and even the fantasia of images could not fascinate him.

An avatar appeared before him. He looked; the avatar said, "May I speak with you?"

Muttering, "This had better be good" under his breath, Aed said, "Who is it?"

"Salisbury, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services."

Aed winced. He doubted he could go through an interview without hurting both himself and Taberah. "Yes?"

"We have had a number of translators try to talk to the young man, and none of them is able to identify his language beyond something coming from the Romance family. We have run genetic tests on him, and France, Spain, and Romania among other countries have all said not only that he was not born there, but that they do not have any close relations on file. We are therefore unable to identify his country of origin, and are releasing him to your temporary protective custody. Are you at your home?"

Aed caught himself, and said, "Yes, we will be waiting."

After talking about a few technical details, Aed went upstairs. Someone had bumped the table, and tried to get the pieces back up where

someone had bumped the table, and tried to set the pieces back up where they were — Clancy? If he did, he was in a hurry; the pieces were not in a similar state. This looked a little different. Taberah's king was now in check from both the knight and a rook, but he had a few moves left to stave off checkmate. And they were not playing on a grid; there were uncertainties. Could Taberah escape?

# Home Again

Taberah spent a few days in the hospital, regaining his strength, but the staff could see that he was eager to escape its confines. He avidly read the three Bibles, plus a Latin-English dictionary Aed had procured; Aed for his part was reading a book Dr. Pabst had given him on the art of crossing cultures, both for his own sake and to be able to explain things to Taberah. He had never kissed a man on the lips before — not even his own son — but when he saw how delighted Taberah was at Noah giving him a kiss, he set his mind to enter Taberah's world as much as possible. He slowly realized, with certainty, that his willingness to do one thing against his gut reactions was only a shadow of what Taberah was willing to, and had to be willing to, do. He was not surprised when Noah explained to him that culture shock is one of the top causes of suicide, ranking with divorce.

Getting him home from the hospital bore an unexpected surprise. Taberah was happy to be walking out of the hospital, and then stiffened when he saw that they were walking towards Aed's car, a sleek hybrid between a minivan, a sport utility vehicle, and a station wagon. Noah said, "He's had more trauma in the past two weeks than most of us have in a year; is there any way to circumvent a car trip?"

Nathella looked at Aed for a moment, and said, "We can walk."

Aed winced. "It's eighty-five degrees, and we're eight miles from home. It will take two hours to walk home!"

Nathella said, "I'll walk with him. He has a lot of extra energy. Why don't you drive home and make lemonade?"

Aed said, "Um, you want to be alone with him, even in public? I know he hasn't given us his last surprise."

"I'd rather take whatever risks there are than force that child through a car ride. And trusting people can make them worthy of being trusted."

a car ride. And trusting people can make them worthy of being trusted.  
Honey, did he ride in a car with the INS?"

"Uh... I'll walk, too, and we can get the car later."

Noah said, "If you give me your keys, I'll get my son, and we can drop your car off at your house."

Three hours later, the trio arrived at home, hot, sweaty, tired, and parched. They made a gallon of lemonade, and then another; it took two and a half gallons of lemonade to fill them all. Aed expected a conversation of some sort, but Taberah was happy to sit in a chair and smile and fall asleep.

Aed expected it would be an interesting endeavor to teach Taberah to take a shower.

# Logical Rocks

Taberah read avidly; he wished to derive as much benefit from the four books he had been lent (*four!* — the *Vulgate Versio*, the *Revised New American Standard Bible*, *The New Message: Complete Text, Revised*, and *Harrah's New College Latin and English Dictionary, Revised*) before they had to be returned to the patron who owned them. He very much wished to meet the man. It was about a week before he began to see that his hosts wanted him to talk with them from time to time — mostly out good manners; he had never been in the possession of even two books at the same time, and never encouraged to read outside! — and another week before Aed sat down with him to try to explain to him that there was life outside of books.

Then Taberah became a fount of unending questions, questions as startling as those Clancy and Fiona had asked as a child — and yet questions that showed the intellect of a sharp adult. They were, nine times out of ten, questions about things he would never think about, and questions he had no ready answer for. At times Aed thought it would have been easier to answer, "Why do things look smaller when they are farther away?"

One day, Aed was sitting in his chair and thinking about how quickly his children were growing up — and he was beginning to think of Taberah as a child, or a foster child at least — and realizing that things had been silent for too long. This was longer than the silence after Taberah had realized that a screwdriver can unscrew the screws that were holding the blender together...

"Aed!"

"Yes, Taberah, what is it?"

"Aed, what is this?"

The sound of his voice was coming from a specific room, it was

The sound of his voice was coming from a specific room, it was coming from —

*Oh, no!* Aed thought. *Anything but that. I am ready to explain anything but—* but his feet had carried him to the room Taberah was in.

"Aed, what is this?" Taberah repeated.

A dozen replies flitted through his mind: a moving picture, something to think with, a hobbyist's delight, a shortcut in talking with people —

"This is a rock that can do logic."

"What?"

"This is a rock that can do arithmetic and logic very, very quickly."

Taberah said, confused, "How numbers they and logic they make a picture move?"

Aed sighed. "Taberah, can I answer another question? This one's awfully hard to explain."

Taberah slowly said, "Yes. What question to answer?" But his eyes betrayed him.

Aed thought, and asked, "Do you know that clock in the living room?"

Taberah said, "Yes. Why have you a clock? And not you use it to pray? It rings bells, but I not you see not pray."

Aed said, "One question at a time, please. Do you know what it has inside?"

"I have seen opened one clock."

If he'd opened the grandfather clock, he had put it back in working order. Aed respected the lad's abilities, but this seemed too much. Or had he opened another clock? "What did you see inside, child?"

"Springs rods gears moving *beautiful!*" Taberah said, his eyes glowing with excitement.

"Do you know how clocks work?"

Taberah said, "Yes," followed shortly by, "No. What?"

Aed moved his forearms like the hands of a clock. "Know why hands turn?" he said.

"Yes! Fixed hands, stopped turning."

Aed said, "You can do many things with gears and pulleys. You can store numbers, add them, make decisions: if this rod is here, turn. A computer is like that, only it uses things besides gears. It uses pictures on tiny rocks. And it is very fast."

Taberah looked at Aed, and then looked at the computer screen. He was trying to believe him, but just couldn't see a connection.

Aed said, "See this wall? Look very closely. There are arranged pieces of color. They are called *pixels*. Do you see them?"

Taberah squinted, and touched the surface. "I see."

Aed said, "The computer uses numbers and rules to decide what color to make each pixel. All of them together make a picture."

Taberah closed his eyes in concentration. He moved his hands, sorting out concepts. Then —

"Why is the picture moving?"

"Because the computer is making many different pictures, one after another, and together they look like they're moving. The moving picture is made up of still pictures like the still pictures are made up of pixels."

Taberah stared at a small patch of the wall as colors flowed. His face met with a dawning comprehension. Then he said, "The computer very, very intelligent! I want talk with computer."

Aed shook his head. "You can't, son."

"Why not?"

"The computer is not intelligent."

"But you said it can do logic!"

"It can do logic, but it's not intelligent."

Taberah ran out of the room, and returned holding the Latin-English dictionary. He flipped through several the entries, several times, and then looked at Aed in puzzlement. "I don't understand."

Aed said, "Can you write?"

Taberah said, "I can write Latin. I not know not the script of your books."

Aed said, "One moment." He returned, holding a notebook and a pencil.

"Write down, with logical rules, how to talk in a conversation. In your language," he said.

Taberah's jaw dropped in shock. "Write *that* on paper?" Taberah would as soon scratch the surface of a painting as write something that unimportant on precious paper.

Aed scratched his head. He didn't see what could possibly be so offensive about an innocuous attempt to write rules. "Ok, don't write that. But can you think of rules for a conversation?"

Taberah began to translate a Quixotic code of etiquette.

"No, not those rules. Logical rules."

Taberah looked frustrated. "But polite is reasonable!"

Taberah looked frustrated. But point is reasonable:

"Explain to me how to talk using only if-then-else and while-this-is-true rules, and words you decide ahead of time."

Taberah's gaze bore into him. Then, "I can't. That isn't how I talk."

"That isn't how anybody talks. You can't talk that way. But that's the only way a computer can work. Computers can't think."

"Then how create beautiful moving picture?"

"Some people spent a lot of time thinking of clever ways to explain how, using only math and logic. There are a lot of things we can do, but a lot of things we can't do. We have an old phrase, 'silver bullet', which refers to a way to make everything easy with computers and fix all problems. The term is kind of a joke; calling something a silver bullet is a way of saying that it's supposed to do something impossible. And the same thing has happened with the effort to make computers think — it's called artificial intelligence, and people have learned a lot from trying to do it, but they haven't succeeded. A very great mind named Alan Turing proposed the Turing Test: a computer is intelligent if you can't tell it from a human when you talk with it. No computer has been able to make it."

Taberah looked irritated, flipped through memories of conversations, and said, disgustedly, "Bad reason! False reason!"

"What, Taberah?"

"Is bad think. What human is and what human talks like is much different thing. If logic is not whole human reason, talk is not whole human reason." He flipped through the book, and read out, "Confusion, accident, substance." He closed the dictionary. "Is accident confused with substance. And is possible cheat Turing Test."

"Cheat on the Turing Test? How? How can you talk like a human without understanding human reason?"

Taberah closed his eyes, and said, "Moving picture? How? How can you move like world without understanding world?"

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "I see how you can think that. But decades of attempts have failed to produce anything that can even cheat on the Turing Test. Most people don't try."

Taberah looked in the book. "Fifty attempts are not many."

Aed said, "Not fifty. Over fifty years' worth."

"Why number attempts in years? Is not sense."

It took a good two hours more conversation to answer all the questions Taberah came up with, and afterwards Aed padded off to his

bedroom, exhausted, but at least happy to have gotten *that* conversation out of the way. He drifted off to sleep in blissful happiness that tomorrow was Saturday, and he could sleep in until noon.

At 10:00 he was awakened by a voice calling, "Aed! Aed! How to use computer?"

# Thinking About Logical Rocks

"Taberah, can I please get a couple of hours' sleep? This is Saturday, and I'd like to sleep in."

Taberah was puzzled as to why one should sleep in on a particular day, but thought this a poor time to ask. "Okay!" he said, and went to try to memorize parts of the dictionary. He was beginning to feel accustomed to the books — their size, their print, their light weight, their smooth sides — at least, although he was still puzzled about why someone had bothered to make a book for the sole purpose of keeping track of words. Were there not scholars who could be asked about these things?

Aed woke up some time later, and looked at the clock. It was 13:00. Taberah had given him a fair amount of time. He lay in bed, ruminating about how to explain how to use a computer. Taberah knew enough of how a computer worked — explaining memory and parallel computing should not be that much harder — but how to explain how to use it?

Space would be the first major obstacle to overcome. The computer gave a virtual reality environment, with the walls of a room as screens; when you put on a pair of goggles, it was as if the walls were transparent and you could see through them to the world, as if the walls were only a glass box. But space behaved differently than in the real world. Aed thought for a moment about the mathematical abstractions by which the space worked — the classic introduction described taking a tessellation of cubes, and then cutting them apart and connecting the sides arbitrarily. You could take two windows of a bedroom, and attach them so that looking out the North window gave a view as if you were looking in the East window, and vice versa. It was fantastic and dreamlike; it allowed portals between different areas of space, so that there were no difficulties

portals between different areas of space, so that there were no difficulties in taking a room in Chicago and making a doorway open out of a subway closet in Paris. Aed remembered the first time he played a game with a labyrinth connected in this manner; he had been awed when he walked around a pillar again and again and never came to the same place twice.

Space might be the first obstacle, but it wouldn't be the only obstacle. How could he describe the richness of the environment? And how could he describe its weak points?

Aed thought over the many things that contributed to the richness of the environment. There were:

- Jump points. These were like travel locations, but with all manner of portals to interesting places. One was a long hallway full of doors, through which a person could step into other areas. Another was a library full of books which, when opened, would expand into other places. (How would he explain to Taberah that objects were putty-like, able to expand and contract, that you could push a button and have a menu pop out?) Another still was a slide show, where you could jump into the show at any point and be where it portrayed. There were others; there was not yet a standard.
- Programming workshops. Programming constructs behaved like any other object; one could assemble them as objects, algorithms, constructs, patterns. It was also possible to take programmable objects and pull off the skin to reveal the structure underneath, and tinker with it. It had taken Aed a long time to get used to this interface — it was a bigger transition even than moving from text-based languages to graphical development and intentional programming — but even then he objectively realized that it was a simpler environment to use, and now it was second nature. Aed realized another thing to explain to Taberah — that objects were not permanent; they could be modified, extended, simplified, cloned at will, and the many implications — there was nothing that had the status of gold, of being something valuable because it was scarce. Taberah had enough difficulty understanding that paper was cheap; what would he make of this?
- Virtual brothels. Aed winced at the time Taberah would stumble on one of these; the freedom to avoid porn was hard to come by; it was like avoiding advertisements when he was growing up. There were

perennial attempts made to curb porn, but — even when it was widely acknowledged fact that the vast increase in rape since the web's second successor appeared was due to sexual addicts who got their start online, and then ravaged real women because porn could only go so far — they always fell on the rocks of a freedom of speech argument. Aed grumpily muttered to himself that household appliances were in some sense sculpture, in that their designs involved commercial artists, but the banner of freedom of expression did not make for any exemptions from environmental regulations in manufacture; it was recognized for the commercial product that it was. Why wasn't porn recognized as a commercial product? Had the news ever carried a report of a pornographer who lost business because of making an artistic statement that was less arousing? Had there ever been a site where the valerie was glaring in hate at the voyeur? It seemed a funny form of expression that could only express itself in ways that coincided with a calculated commercial product. But the courts had argued that brothels popping up everywhere you wanted them and everywhere you didn't want them was sacrosanct free speech, and 'censorship' (that pejorative term) was tantamount to violating the Constitution. Well, not exactly. The phrase, "The illegal we can do right away, the unconstitutional takes a little longer," was obsolete, because the Constitution was a dead letter. In *Roe v. Wade* in 1974, the Court had made a strained argument finding an unnamed right to privacy to make the question of an unborn child's right to life irrelevant, skirting even the issue of whether that entity was a person or a part of another person. When the decision was reviewed in the late 1990s, the ruling recalcitrantly acknowledged that the 1974 ruling was wrong, but said that it would be wrong to take away the sexual freedom that young people had gotten used to. In *Purdie v. Braverman* in 2024, fifty years after *Roe v. Wade* to the day, the courts had ruled infanticide legal, "up to a reasonable age", and specified neither what a reasonable age was, nor even a contorted lip service argument as to why the Constitution justified infanticide — perhaps because they could find none. It had not surprised Aed two years later when the courts legalized euthanasia, with only the vaguest and most confusing guidelines as to when it was permissible and when consent was even necessary —

he shuddered when he remembered the definition of implied consent. Now, it was 2034, and the date had passed when Aed was no longer surprised by anything the courts did. He — Aed suddenly realized that he was not thinking about computers. He tried to focus his thoughts — what else after brothels?

- Society for Creative Anachronism re-enactment arenas. These places set up an environment to resemble that of a time and date in the past, and then people attempted to live and interact as people of that era and place. Even the avatars looked like people from those times — avatars were another thing to explain to Taberah. An avatar was the moving image which represented a person in the world — like the piece that represented a king in a game of chess. The image was completely customizable and configurable, with the effect that many people looked like a supermodel, although it was not uncommon to encounter unicorns, dragons, mermaids, cybernetic organisms, anthropomorphic robots... but never a person who was fat or ugly. Human-like robots had never materialized, any more than the anti-gravity devices imagined of old; the development of technology had shifted direction towards a primary focus on information technology, but this and all manner of fantasy appeared in the virtual worlds. Aed reflected that there was a good sense and a bad sense to the word 'fantasy', and both of them were amply represented in the virtual worlds.
- Bedrooms. A bedroom was a place with one person's very personal touch; there were elements there that would never surface in an institutionalized setting. There were not exactly bedrooms *per se*, so much as creatively developed spaces that had personal sharing. Because it was possible to let someone in a room without being able to easily do damage, you could go and visit people's bedrooms. There were quite a lot of interesting sites to see.
- Clubhouses. If a bedroom expressed the spirit of a person, a clubhouse expressed the spirit of a group of people. These had both function and decoration to them, and almost always had something of a personal touch.
- Museums. There were museums of almost every sort to visit. Because a painting could be in more than one place, and it was not nearly as expensive to build them, there was a much more vast diversity of

museums, many which were much more specialized. The low expense of creation made for a much greater diversity, with many more excellent things available, but also a much lower average quality. Sturgeon's law applied *a fortiori*: "90% of everything is crap."

- Special museums which had disassemblable and scalable models of human and animal bodies and machines. Aed's children had not dissected animals in school; they went into museums where it was possible to strip off skin, strip off muscle, double the size, half the size, make everything but the skeletal and nervous systems translucent...
- Role play arena. In the 20th century, the basic unit of time-consciousness was the decade; now it was the semi-decade, or semi. Role play was one of the trends that was in this semi, and there were virtual worlds for all kinds of different role playing games.
- Dreamscapes. In these places, there were a number of momentary images, represented by blocks something like the Capsella toys Aed had played with as a child. One put them together in a particular way, and then set the composed dreamscape in his pack. Then nothing happened, until you hadn't done anything with the computer for a while. The computer would then begin "dreaming" — start a random walk that began with one block, and shift, images flowing, to a neighbor, and then a neighbor's neighbor... Aed had seen some truly beautiful artwork that way.

Aed wondered, "What time is it?" Then he looked at the clock. 15:00. Yikes! He got up, got dressed, and looked for Taberah.

Taberah was reading the bilingual dictionary with rapt concentration.

# Using Logical Rocks

Aed walked over to the computer room, grabbing two pair of goggles. He showed Taberah how to put one of them on, and then said, "Sit down and wait here for a moment."

In a few minutes, an avatar appeared before Taberah and said, "Take my hand." Taberah reached for it and grabbed, but felt nothing. He was confused. The scene changed, and he saw that he was inside a sunny field, with forest to the east.

Taberah asked the avatar, "Who are you?"

The avatar said, "I am Aed."

Taberah said, "But you not resemble not Aed. You look — your clothes are different, and skin different, and —"

Aed said, "Never mind that. Do you see my hands?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Aed said, "Move your hands like mine."

Taberah did, and found himself moving rapidly through space. His stomach lurched; he put his hands over his eyes.

Aed said, "Take your hands off your eyes, son."

Taberah did, and saw he was a good fifty hands off of the ground. He braced himself for the fall, and put his hands over his eyes again.

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "We're going to try something different. It takes a little while to get used to moving about, but you'll learn. In the mean time, I'll let you see through my eyes."

Instantly the perspective changed. Taberah looked down, and saw a pair of hands pull a book-shaped object from a pocket, with a picture on front. The hands pulled on the book and expanded it, then pressed buttons, flipping through pictures. Taberah saw a picture of a stag, and said, "Ooh!"

The picture expanded, and they fell through it. They were in a forest

The picture expanded, and they fell through it. They were in a forest glade; a stag was looking at them curiously.

Then Taberah saw himself walking rapidly to a door with a picture over it; he said, "Too much of fastness!" and the pace slowed. He was through, to a dark forest with unfamiliar plants, and a large snake slithering towards them. Afraid, he said, "Snake!" and saw himself walking towards another door with another picture, and he looked around. The landscape was alien; it was rough terrain covered completely by snow, and he saw fat black and white birds walking around, and some big black fish-like animals on the ice.

Taberah looked intently at all that was around him; it was strange, but none of the animals began to threaten him. After a few minutes, he said, "I have sick of sea." He wasn't feeling very good.

There was moment of nothing happening, then a jar of perspective, and then stillness. Taberah closed his eyes to shut out the view. Then he heard Aed calling, and touching his shoulder. He was holding a tiny cup of the thinnest glass, with something that looked like wine. "Drink," he said.

Taberah drank it, and the nausea began to go away. Had he been given a magic potion? He was confused, but pushed this question to the back of his mind. He wasn't sure yet what was magic in this land and what wasn't — that seemed a confusing question here, and the people treated the moving rooms as something as believable as a horse! Aed asked him to step out and sit on the sofa.

Aed was trying to think of how to explain the way space worked. He was expecting a question about why there was a door, all by itself, in the jungle, and the moment you stepped through it, you were in Antarctica. When Taberah remained silent, he asked, "Taberah, was there anything you found confusing about that world?"

"Yes, movement."

"Ok. Anything else?"

"Yes, doors."

Aed went into a long and involved attempted explanation of how different parts of space were connected, and saw the confusion on Taberah's face growing with each step. Finally, he said, "Taberah, why are you confused?"

"What is it that the pictures?"

"Huh?"

"Pictures on doors. Why?"

Aed said, "I don't understand. Could you rephrase that?"

"Pictures. Doors. Top."

Aed said, "One moment," and went over to the computer to look at one of the doors. "Aah," he said, returning. "Those are advertisements."

"What is advertisement?"

"An advertisement is a message from a company telling a customer about one of its products."

"I not understand not. For what is it that advertisement needed? Is it that townspeople not tell not where merchant is?"

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "Advertisements exist to stimulate sales, to help a company sell things to people that otherwise wouldn't buy them."

Taberah looked even more confused, thought for a moment about wording and grammar, and said, "And which of the seven deadly sins is it that this custom embodies?"

In the ensuing discussion, Aed slowly realized that Taberah had not been troubled by the nature of space. He had been able to accept as perfectly natural a portal between two different regions of space, and Aed wondered what kind of conception of space his culture had to let him accept that at least quite placidly. The first time he had entered that kind of virtual environment, Aed had been thrown off by the conception of space. And he had felt nauseated, his head spinning after — suddenly he found Taberah's "sick of sea" more understandable. And he began to see something that he had not thought about, not for a while: that advertisement does not exist for the customer's benefit, but for the company's benefit, so that it can get more money out of the customer; this practice clearly ran contrary to Taberah's way of thinking, and at the end of the discussion, Aed walked away, for once, with his head not spinning, and thinking not only that Taberah's way of thinking was understandable, but that he might have a point.

# A New Friend

The next few days saw animated discussions, a lot of reading on Taberah's part, and a few more minutes using the computer — at Aed's urging; Taberah wanted nothing more to do with it.

Taberah was sitting on the ground outside, drinking a glass of nice, warm water, when he saw a large, black, almost grown Newfoundland puppy come wandering by. And gulped. Such a beast would be a prime candidate for a dog race.

Dog races, in his homeland, occurred when people would gather together stray dogs, tie metal pots to their tails, and then let the dogs go. The dogs would start to walk, then hear the sound of the pots scraping against the stones of the road, get scared, and start running to get away from the noise. When the noise grew louder, the terrified dogs would run, and run, and run, and run — until they dropped dead from exhaustion. The winner was the boy whose dog ran the farthest before dying.

Taberah hated the dog races with a passion. They made him sick; after his protestations, his lord issued a rule that no dog races were to be held while Taberah was around, but that was the best that had happened. He was humored at best; nobody else save Grizelda shared his objections to the races. Most people were so blazé that they didn't see what the big deal was in the first place. Yes, it was his homeland, but it wasn't his homeland. It was the place he was from, and the place where he had spent most of his life, but he wasn't at home there. In a way, he could adjust to almost any place — was adjusting to the kingdom he was in now (what was it called, and who was its king?) — but in a way he was never at home. There was always something about him that didn't fit. Why was he the only one who cared about dogs? Francis of Assisi was venerated, but the people who venerated him did not imitate his treatment of animals. Well, he could try to save at least one dog from the races

well, he could try to save at least one dog from the fates —

Hastily setting down his glass, Taberah sprinted at full speed after the dog, which ran away from him, barking. He continued chasing the dog for a full hour, his toughened feet pounding on the asphalt until they were sore, until he dropped in exhaustion, panting and thirsting. It wasn't until he stopped that he realized the exquisite pain in his feet. He looked down, and realized his feet were cut. Where was he? The buildings looked different; the outside looked more like buildings than outside. He was by a room of sorts with two walls missing, but with a ceiling. It was raining; he crawled over to a puddle, and began to lap at it.

He looked up, and saw the dog drinking from the other side of the puddle. It came over and sniffed at him; Taberah hugged and kissed it. Beginning to feel chilled, Taberah crawled under the shelter, holding the Newfoundland next to him. He could not get to sleep, both because of all the moving rooms passing by, and because he had plenty to think about.

Taberah felt happy and comfortable as he had not felt in a long time. The wealth he had been in was strange to him; it did not seem real. Out, even in a strange, semi-open place (why would someone build two walls and a roof of a room, and then make the inside part of a thoroughfare?), finally next to another warm body (even if only a dog's), Taberah felt happy. He settled into a slumber, thanking God for bringing him to a place that felt a little home-like.

# Midnight Oil

Aed drove around, trying to see if he could find where Taberah had gone. Fiona had run and told him that had seen a dog and bolted; as he drove around, he called the police and summarized what had happened. The dispatcher explained that he could not be classified a missing person until he had been gone for twenty-four hours; that was twenty-four hours in which to brood. The family looked until three in the morning, and then went home because both Aed and Nathella were too tired to continue driving.

At four in the morning he was awakened by a call. Groggy, Aed turned on the videophone and said, "Yes?"

A police officer in a car sent a still shot and said, "Officer Shing, State Sheriff. Is this the man?"

"We found him sleeping under a bridge, along with a dog he refuses to part with. He had lacerations to the soles of his feet; the EMT thinks he ran barefoot over broken glass. We have taken him to Mercy Memorial Hospital; he is presently in the emergency room, waiting for treatment."

Aed said, "Thank you. Why did you take him to Mercy? I don't understand that. Mercy is almost fifty miles away from here."

Shing replied, "Mercy is the closest hospital to where we found him. Is there anything else we can help you out with?"

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "Not now, but I might call you if I think of something else. I'm going to grab a few coffee beans, and then go to pick him up. Is there anything else I need to know?"

The officer said, "No, but you might want to take him shopping for some clothing and shoes. He's wearing a ragged getup, and — the hospital will be able to tell you about his special needs to heal from the lacerations."

Aed said, "Thanks. Over and out."

Aed said, "Thanks. Over and out."

Nathella rolled over and said, "You weren't thinking of getting him without bringing me, were you, honey?"

Aed said, "Get dressed, and come along. I'll get the coffee beans."

Two voices from below said, "Me, too!"

The emergency room was fairly quiet; doctors were removing glass shards from Taberah's foot and stitching up the cuts. Taberah looked confused; there was something in his eyes that even Nathella didn't understand. He was under local rather than general anaesthesia, but he still started nodding off to sleep.

He received some soft "shoes" made of bandages, and the doctor told Aed to keep his feet bandaged and give him high top athletic shoes a couple of sizes too large. When it was time to go, everybody climbed in to their van, the dog brought along as well. Aed tried to ask why this attachment to a dog (it belonged to a neighbor, and periodically ran loose), but could find out nothing beyond that Taberah did not want it to be raced. Aed let that be; he wanted to get back to sleep, and wait until tomorrow to tackle the puzzles. Taberah agreed not to leave the house without having someone else along, and seemed relieved to learn that this kingdom didn't race that type of dog. He was even happier to find out that the dog belonged to someone nearby, and would be taken care of; he wanted to meet the neighbor the next day. "Very well," Aed said, "but we need to get some sleep first." This time, Taberah joined everybody else in sleeping in until the afternoon.

# I Can't Believe...

Nathella and Fiona were working in the kitchen; good smells came upstairs. The Kinsellas (and Taberah) settled down for a late dinner, a family complete, such as it were.

They sat in silence around the table; there was a simple joy in everyone — or almost everyone. After Dr. Kinsella said grace and the food was passed around the table, Taberah broke the silence by saying, "Nathella, would you pass the *I Can't Believe It's Not Better?*"

Nathella smiled and passed the spread, and made a mental note to buy butter the next time she went shopping. As she passed it, she saw something in Taberah's face. "Taberah, are you homesick?"

Taberah looked at her. "What is 'homesick'?"

Nathella thought for a moment and said, "Homesick is when you aren't comfortable in one place, and you miss the place that is your home."

"I don't know if I'm homesick. Maybe. Yes. No. I don't know if I have a home; maybe if I understood the word better..." His voice trailed off, but the others remained silent. "It's just a bunch of little things, like strange foods and too soft bread without any rocks and no touching, not even wrestling, and... Or maybe that's not a little thing." He stared at his food.

Clancy said, "C'mon out back dinner. We can roughhouse in the back. Fiona and I wrestle a lot, only not recently. We've been busy with you, and we didn't know you liked to horse around. Fiona's in the house to be picked on," Fiona made a face at him, "and I'll flip you around. I would pin you, but you need to be soft on your feet."

Taberah's face brightened.

Nathella said, "Is there anything we can do that will bring you a little piece of home?"

Taberah hesitated, and then said, "Have you no wine in this country?"

Taberah hesitated, and then said, "Have you no wine in this country?"  
Nathella smiled gently and looked at him. "Yes, we do, but not in this house. I'm an alcoholic."

Taberah asked, "What's an alcoholic?"

Nathella said, "Do you know the word 'drunkard'?"

Taberah said, "You're not a drunkard! I haven't seen you drunk. I haven't even seen you drink wine."

Nathella said, "Not now, but once my life was given over to alcohol. Escaping alcohol was the hardest thing I ever did, and if I start to drink, I won't be able to control it. It would control me. So I can't have alcohol in the house."

Taberah looked disappointed. He said, "Then it is good of you not to drink."

Nathella said, "Thank you, Taberah. Maybe sometime when I'm visiting with one of my friends, Aed will buy a small bottle of wine for you two to have. He likes a good drink, and he will have a beer when he's out with his friends. But he doesn't drink in the house. He doesn't want to tempt me."

Taberah smiled. He was warmed with a patient assurance that he would have wine, and was in no particular hurry. He looked around, and then his gaze settled on Fiona. "Why are you homesick, Fiona?"

Fiona smiled, and said, "I'm not homesick, at least not for a place. I wish it were Christmas, with the family and gifts and wassail and — ooh! the music. I miss the music."

Taberah said, "What kind of music?"

Fiona said, "One is, O come, O come Emmanuel. Do you know it?"

Taberah thought for a moment, and then thought a little more, and said, "Could you sing it for me?"

Fiona sang, in her thick countertenor,

O come, O come, Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lowly exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Taberah said, "I think I know it. Let me sing it as I know it." He took a

sip of milk, and then stood up on the chair, and began to sing:

*Veni, veni Emmanuel!  
Captivum solve Israel!  
Qui gemit in exilio,  
Privatus Dei Filio.  
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel  
Nascetur pro te, Israel.  
Veni, o Sapientia,  
Quae hic disponis omnia,  
Veni, viam prudentiae  
Ut doceas et gloriae.  
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel  
Nascetur pro te, Israel.  
Veni, veni Adonai!  
Qui populo in Sinai  
Legem dedisti vertice,  
In Majestate gloriae.  
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel  
Nascetur pro te, Israel.  
Veni, o Jesse virgula,  
Ex hostis tuos ungula,  
De specu tuos tartari  
Educ et antro barathri.  
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel  
Nascetur pro te, Israel.  
Veni, Clavis Davidica,  
Regna reclude caelica,  
Fac iter tutum superum,  
Et claude vias inferum.  
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel  
Nascetur pro te, Israel.  
Veni, veni o Oriens!  
Solare nos adveniens,  
Noctis depelle nebulas,  
Dirasque noctis tenebras.  
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel  
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, veni, Rex gentium,  
veni, Redemptor omnium,  
Ut salvos tuos famulos  
Peccati sibi conscios.  
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel  
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

Taberah sat down and was very still. The room was very still — one could hear a pin drop. His singing voice was a tenor, but there was nothing flimsy about it; it was rich and powerful, like silver, like something between a stream and a waterfall, and for the moment he had looked like a bard. It was hard to believe that such a mighty voice, filled with silent strength, could come from such a tiny body — and yet, somehow, after that song, Taberah did not again look tiny to the Kinsellas. Nothing about his physical appearance was changed, but none the less the way he looked to them was different.

Aed finally broke the silence by saying, "I never knew you could sing like that, Taberah, and I should very much like to have you over for Christmas. Is there any way I can thank you for that song?"

Taberah said, "Over for Christmas? All twelve days?"

Aed thought. School resumed classes from winter break on the third of January; getting permission to take time off through the seventh would involve some major administrative headaches. "All twelve days," he said. "I'll make sure of it."

Taberah said, "Then what I would most like for my song is to go out and wrestle."

Clancy bolted out of his chair and had Taberah in a fireman's carry before anyone else knew what was going on; Taberah was out of Clancy's grip and bolting out the door before Clancy knew what was going on. It wasn't until later that Aed wondered how he could run with healing, stitched lacerations in his foot; soon they were all outside, a crazy, happy, moving, squirming bundle of arms and legs with grass stains on its shirts. And Taberah was happy, happy as he could ever remember being.

It was only a few minutes before they were all sitting and panting; Taberah did not understand why they wanted to rest so soon, or why they didn't give him more resistance in the fray, but he basked in the afterglow. The memory of that moment would be a treasure to him as long as he walked the paths of the earth

long as he walked the paths of the earth.

# A Guided Venture

Nathella said, "We need to give him some of Clancy's old clothes so he's decent, and then take him to one of the old-fashioned clothing stores — he won't be able to try stuff on online. Clancy, would you come with to help him with the clothing?"

They arrived at the store, and Nathella said, "Here we are, to get some clothing. You can take anything in the store."

Taberah looked, and bright colors caught his eye. He went over and started to stare at a rack of shirts.

"Not there," Nathella said. "Those are children's clothing."

Taberah thought it strange that there should be special clothing for children, but said, "I am a child. You're a child. Clancy's a child. Want children's clothing."

Nathella, who had felt almost guilty about her age since her thirtieth birthday, said, "That's sweet, honey, but I am not a child. Neither are you. And Clancy's not really a child any more."

("Thanks, Mom!")

("Shut up, dear.")

Taberah looked puzzled. "Are you not born of a woman?" he asked.

Nathella said, "Uh, of course I — ooh, I see. Taberah, we use the word 'child' to mean someone who's younger than Clancy, and 'adult' to mean someone who's older than Clancy. Clancy's — in between."

("Thanks, Mom!")

("Shut up, dear.")

Nathella continued. "And children wear different clothing than adults."

Taberah said, "Why?"

"Because children are different from adults."

"A7h...2"

Why?

"Have you seen a tadpole?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen a frog?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that tadpoles turn into frogs?"

"Yes."

"But tadpoles and frogs are different, right?"

"Yes."

"Children and adults are different in the same way, right?"

"How?"

Nathella did not reply to the question. Clancy, in a particularly mischievous mood, would be able to ask a series of questions like that while keeping a perfectly straight face, and he often managed to catch his father. But she could sense a complete honesty in Taberah's questions; they were as honest as a child's. And as unending. She was beginning to realize that he did not perceive anything approaching a sharp demarcation between childhood and adulthood. "Come over to this section. I want you to pick out a shirt from one of these racks, and a pair of pants from one of these racks."

By the second or third try, Taberah had picked out clothing that would fit him; it seemed a bit loud to her, but she did not want to argue with that. He went into a fitting room, and, with Clancy's help, put the pants on properly and the shirt on backwards. He came out, and said, "I like it. Let's pay for it."

Nathella said, "Hold on, Taberah. I want to pick up a week's worth of clothing."

Taberah said, "This clothing will last for a week, more."

Nathella said, "I want to buy you enough clothing so that you can wear different clothing each day and not have to wear the same clothing for a week."

Taberah's jaw dropped. He had a vague realization that the others' clothing looked different over time, and he knew that some of the people of his home town were wealthy enough to have two sets of clothing — one for summer and one for winter. He had not, in his greediest dreams, ever wanted to wear different clothing each day. He asked, "Why?"

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The trio arrived at home, carrying a large bagful of clothing. Aed asked, "Hi, guys! How was the shopping?"

Clancy asked, "Would somebody stop the room, please? I'd like to get off."

# I Envy...

Taberah asked Aed, "What is your trade?"

Aed recalled a moment in graduate school where one of his colleagues had said, "I envy people in nuclear physics. They can tell other people what they do for a living." He said, "I teach — do you know logic?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Aed asked, "Have you done geometry?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Aed said, "What I do is like geometry and logic; logic and geometry are examples of it."

Taberah said, "Give me an example."

Aed thought of the three rules of a metric space, then thought how little those rules illuminated what he was thinking — as little as a list of chess rules gave any obvious feel for deep strategy. Aed had learned long ago that it was possible to understand the rules of a game completely without having the foggiest idea what its strategy was like — human understanding never included instant sight into logical depths, any more than good eyes enabled you to see infinite detail despite distance and twilight! In the classroom at the university, Aed would have to bow to custom and labor over the basic rules, but Taberah was not a student at school, and — "I am studying collections of objects where you can tell how far apart two objects are."

"Like geometry!" Taberah said.

"Yes, but it includes many things that do not have the structure of a space. Like words. 'Man' is close to 'woman', farther from 'dog', farther from 'tree', and farther still from 'rock', and very far from words like 'move'.

Taberah said, "Yes! That's how to cheat on Turing test!"

Aed winced and said, "Uh, how?"

Aed winced and said, "Oh, how?"

Taberah paced the room in thought. "Can computers record conversations?"

"There are many, many conversations on record. I can download a collection of them now, if you wish."

"Well, first find out how to measure the distance between two words," Taberah said.

Aed nodded. The artificial intelligence literature had found a way to map the distance between words by measuring frequencies of words occurring before and after them in a histogram.

"Then have something that will look through conversations, matching up by words and grammar, and return the closest match!"

Aed looked at Taberah hard, and then said, "Son, how'd you like to learn how to program?"

# Hacking Away

Aed led Taberah into the computer, and then left him; Aed's avatar soon appeared nearby. "Put your hand on that picture on the wall," Aed said, and when Taberah reached out, he was in a large room, with alien artifacts on the walls and shelves.

Aed flew through the room, touching partially assembled objects; they vanished, leaving an open space to work in. "The first thing to do," he said, "is to make a Turing test room. Touch that bin over there."

Taberah touched it; it grew to fill half the room, and then its sides vanished. "See that red thing? Take it out of the bin, and then touch the button on the bottom of the bin; it will shrink back to its normal size. That is a room object; say 'Options.' See that popup menu? That's the thing that looks like a sheet of paper. Turn on the one that says 'Maximum occupants'; set the number to three. Then press the 'recording' button. I'll come back and record messages for the three users; the first user is the tester, and the second and third users are trying to convince the tester that they're human. Initially they'll both be human; later, one will be an avatar for our program. Pick up a dialogue slate; say, 'Record: Which user do you think is human? Now touch choice one, and say: Contestant one. Choice two: Contestant two. Choice three: Can't tell.' Ok; expand the room, and place the dialogue levitating in the center, in front of the tester's door. Wait, put three doors on for the user to enter. Oh, that looks funny because you have a bug. You have the buttons switched. You should —"

After the room was completed, Aed summoned the chancellor of the university and asked him to make an announcement of a Turing game. He recorded the announcement, and, after the chancellor disappeared, said, "This will give us some time to work out the artificial intelligence deceiver. If you give me a moment, I will find the metric for words." "

decoy. If you give me a moment, I will find the metric for words...

It took Aed and Taberah a long time to get to sleep that night; it took them a long time to stop tinkering, but even after that, they were filled with an excitement of discovery, of uncertainty, asking, "Could this be? Have we really discovered what we think?" Their excitement was raised in the morning when Nathella said, "Why don't we go downtown this evening for a Tridentine mass? Taberah, it's in Latin; I think you'll enjoy it."

Taberah was not sure why the Kinsellas went to mass every week; it had not been any special holiday, so far as he could tell, and he could never get out of them a straight answer as to why they went to mass when there was no particular reason to do so. But now he was in such high spirits that he wanted to go.

# Another Era

Nathella walked in to the massive church. It was plain, and all was still. As the liturgy began, the stillness was not broken; the majestic Latin spoken by those up front only augmented the silence. Each step was majestic; she lost herself in its familiar details.

After the service, she put her hand on Taberah's shoulder, and asked him, "So, whatchya think?"

Taberah's eyes were misty. He closed them, then opened them, saying, "I don't understand. I did not see the guest of honor. Was he a theologian?"

Nathella said, "What?"

"Was the guest of honor a theologian?"

Nathella reminded himself that Taberah sometimes approached matters strangely. "I would rather think of him as God who told stories. What do you think?"

Taberah said, "Not Jesus, the person the — now I remember the word — funeral is being held for. Was he a theologian?"

Nathella withdrew, slightly surprised. She said, "Why do you think this was a funeral?"

Taberah said, "It was so mournful. People were silent; they did not say anything, and the person up front was impossible to hear. There weren't any changing songs. And I didn't hear any instrument music, no organ. And this church had its walls stripped — no statues, no color in windows. Does this building have anything besides funerals?"

Nathella accepted that Taberah's perception of the Latin mass was very different from her own. No, that wasn't quite right. He wasn't responding to the Latin, *per se*; it was something else that accompanied the Latin. It — she decided to stop musing and respond to him. "At home

we have a machine that can make organ music; would you like to come home?"

At home, they sat down on a sofa and set the computer to play music. Taberah listened to the sound, the familiar sound of an organ — no, it was not; it had range and voices and a perfection of sound such as he had never heard, and such speed! Then it unfolded, into two voices, three, four. Taberah felt dizzy with the complexity, or more accurately, giddy, drunk; he heard wheels within wheels within wheels within wheels. It was alien in many ways; most of all, he felt that he had never encountered such a mind. He never knew that such music existed. When the moment wound down after several pieces, he said, "I awe," and then, "Who was that?"

Nathella smiled and said, "That was Bach."

"May I speak with Mr. Bach? I would very much like to meet him."

"Honey, Bach has been dead for almost three hundred years."

At this, Taberah was surprised. "If Bach is dead, how did he play that?"

"Bach wrote his music down, then someone else played it on an organ, then the computer kept and transported the sounds so we could hear them."

"How can a rock transport sounds?"

"Aed, would you explain that?"

As Aed explained, Nathella observed Taberah. He no longer seemed so completely homesick; his face bore the excitement of discovery. Taberah was adapting to his new land.

# Angels Dancing

"And all they were doing," Nathella said to Aed, "is endlessly debating 'How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?!'"

"That's the best question," Taberah said. "That's a very good question."

"What?" Nathella and Aed said together.

"'How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?' is a good question."

"Why?" Nathella said.

"Do you know how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" Taberah asked.

"Um, I don't know. Five? Twelve? Seventeen? I have no idea." Nathella said.

Taberah looked displeased. "I don't think you understand the question. Say seventeen angels can dance on the head of a pin, but not eighteen. Why?"

Nathella said, "I don't know. That's why it's a silly question."

Taberah said, "Ok. How many people can dance on the head of a pin?"

Nathella answered, "If the pin was lying on the floor, one."

"Why not two? Why not three? Why not five?"

"Because people have bodies, and they'd bump into each other."

"Do angels have bodies?"

"No; they're spirits."

"Can angels bump into each other?"

"No; there can be as many angels in the same place as want to be, because spirit — ooh! Two, or five, or seventeen, or an infinite number of angels can dance on the head of a pin at once, because they don't take up space the way we do."

Taberah smiled. "Is that a silly question?"

Taberah smiled. Is that a silly question?

Nathella hesitated, and said, "If you are asking an abstract question, why embed it in a concrete and silly-looking facade? Why not ask it abstractly?"

Clancy burst in the door, out of breath, and said, "Hey, Mom! How many field service engineers does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

Nathella was about to say, "I'm in the middle of something, dear," when Clancy said, "Two. One to find a bulb, and one to pound it into the socket."

Nathella giggled for a moment, then her face showed confusion, which slowly turned into dawning comprehension. Clancy watched her, and said, "*Et voila!* It took you long enough this time, Mom!"

Nathella said, "It's not that, honey; I got the joke immediately. It was just that Taberah had asked an abstract question in a way that looked simple and silly, and I had asked why he did that, and now I realized that our light bulb jokes work the same way. The canonical 'How many morons does it take to screw in a light bulb?' 'Five. One to hold the bulb, and four to turn the ladder,' is only incidentally about ladders or even lightbulbs. It's about stupidity trying to do things in an ineffective and unproductive manner, and it provides an illustration. Wouldn't you say so, dear?"

Aed said, "I was just thinking about what impact such a presentation might have on my teaching at school. A concrete capture of an abstract idea is harder to make than an abstract decision, and much more powerful to understand. Whether I have the political strength to get away with a non-standard treatment of content is —"

Clancy cut him off. "What was the question Taberah asked? Was it something like 'How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?'"

# Beyond a New World

Taberah was sitting on the lawn, resting, thinking — when he realized that he had never explored the computer. He had gone to a couple of its rooms when Aed had led him, but he had never set out to see what there was to be seen.

That was strange. When he was little, Taberah had explored every building he was allowed in with a sense of fascination; he still remembered the wonder with which he had imagined a door opening, beams of light showing from behind. He asked Aed if he could explore the computer; Aed would have liked to accompany him, but was thinking about a problem he was researching. So Aed said, "Go ahead. Touch the picture with a gold border."

Taberah went in; he was in a gallery of pictures, and reached out for one of them. He was drawn to it  
was through it.

Taberah looked around. He was in an immense labyrinth; he started to fly around, the walls shifting and changing as he walked. There were statues, and fountains, and shadows lurking; there was something strange about it that felt like home.

Taberah turned a corner, and looked around. He was in a circular room with no doors; after looking around for a moment, he saw a knob at the side of a large black disc in the middle of the floor. He reached for it, and pulled; downwards was a brick tunnel, reaching into fathoms of darkness. After thinking a moment, Taberah left the annulus and tumbled down.

It was dark, or almost dark, around him; it looked like a room with candlelight. As his senses adjusted, Taberah heard crickets chirping, and

canlight. As his senses adjusted, Taberah heard crickets chirping, and realized there was the sound of the ocean; he looked around, and saw starlight. Which reminded him — but he would have to do that later. He started to fly about, and realized that he was in a huge forest. He came to the water's edge and dove down.

It was scary to see the water close above him; Taberah held his breath before reminding himself that he was just surrounded by moving pictures. He went in and down, in and down.

After a little while of pitch darkness, Taberah could see a faint blue light. He flew towards it, and saw color dancing. He saw thin slivers moving by twos and threes — fishes, he thought, and then went closer and saw that the swimming creatures were mermaids and tritons. Then he recognized the light: it was a vast city of sunken stone, an alien ruins. A mermaid swam by; he reached for her hand, and then he realized that he could not touch her. He followed her around, through streets and doorways and tunnels, between walls with runes glowing blue-white. The mermaid swam off; he opened one door, and saw a decorated room which made him forget he was underwater. Then he saw a strange picture on the wall; it puzzled him. He reached for it —

# What is This?

"Aed!" Taberah called. "Aed! What is this?"

Aed came running, muttering under his breath, "This had better be good!"

Aed looked at the screen — a nude female avatar was writhing in sexual ecstasy — and, after staring a moment, turned the video off. "That's a valerie," he said. "I should think that her purpose should be obvious enough."

Aed looked at Taberah, and then realized that he had misjudged the look in Taberah's eyes. Taberah had been staring at the valerie in fascination, but not exactly lust. He had rather been staring in puzzlement, and in the same horrid fascination that he had seen on Clancy's face, looking at a car wreck. Aed began to realize that an off the cuff response was not going to work here. After collecting his thoughts, Aed said, "Well, what do you think the picture was about?"

Taberah said, "I do not understand. She looked on her face like a woman wanting to be bounced, but she had her clothes off, and what a horrid body! Her breasts were enormous; they were ten times as large as beautiful breasts, and the rest of her body looked like a muscular boy's body, or a man's." He paused a moment, and then his face was filled with a flash of insight. "Aed! Was this valerie made for lust by a pedophile who wanted to pretend that he was looking at a woman instead of the boy's body he was looking at? He must have been trying very hard to fool himself, to have put on such huge, ugly breasts! But why make a picture to lust at in the first place?"

Aed mulled over this response, and mentally compared the valerie's body with his wife's — and then looked into his own reactions. "Taberah," he said, "a valerie looks like that because that is what my nation thinks a beautiful woman looks like. I don't know how to explain it, but even

beautiful woman looks like. I don't know how to explain it, but even though I try to love and honor my wife, the trend is strong to me; the valerie looks better to me."

Taberah turned green, and said, "Why? And I still don't understand why to make pictures for that purpose. Do you not think God's way of making women is beautiful?"

Aed thought for a moment and said, "Taberah, the culture we are in is sick. It is dying. This is one of many signs of its sickness."

Taberah said, "Then why not heal it?"

Aed said, "I don't know."

# In the Stars

After taking some time to rest — Taberah was still quite confused — he asked Aed, "When was the day of your birth?"

Aed said, "It's really not that important."

Taberah said, "Why should a man of your age not want to tell when he was born?"

Aed said, "I'm old enough, Taberah. Why do you want to know?"

Taberah was puzzled; Aed had attained a very respectable age, and Taberah could not understand why he looked uncomfortable about it. Maybe to explore later...

"I want to go outside at night," Taberah said, "and gaze upon the stars and the crystalline spheres, and know the influence of the planets when you were born upon your life and at the present day."

Aed took a moment to parse this sentence, and said, "You want to cast my horoscope?"

"Yes."

"I thought you were a Catholic."

"I am."

"Then why do you want to cast my horoscope?"

"In order to understand you better."

"Don't you think there's something wrong with astrology?"

"What?"

"What do you think astrology is?"

"Natural philosophy, exploring the interconnected world in which we live."

"Taberah, astrology is not science. It's magic, or like magic. It belongs to the occult."

Taberah was trying to sift this apart. "Why?"

"It is divination. It does not work according to the basic laws of

IT IS DIVINATION. IT DOES NOT WORK ACCORDING TO THE BASIC LAWS OF science. Astronomy is science; it studies how the heavens go. But it does not believe in influences, any more than looking at the entrails of a chicken will tell the future."

Taberah said, "Aed, what's the difference between science and magic?"

Aed was caught completely off guard. The disowning hostility of science to magic, *The Skeptical Inquirer*, the use of the word 'scientific' to mean 'rational' and 'working' and 'magic' as a pejorative metaphor for technology that did not appear to behave according to rational principles — Taberah might as well have asked him to explain the difference between light and darkness. But his question deserved an answer; science does not include divination — no, that would exclude weather forecasting; science provides theories and laws about how the world works — so does magic; science is about exploring the forces of nature — no, magic claimed to do that as well; science is reductionistic and magic holistic — no, that was, if true, looking at the surface rather than the nature of things, and that wasn't true; it excluded psychology; science produces predictable results according to its theories that — well, that also rules out psychology as science...

"Taberah, what can astrology tell you about a person?"

Aed listened to Taberah's explanation, and slowly stopped fighting a realization that this made more sense than what he was taught in his undergraduate psychology class, particularly behaviorism — he felt he would be much better understood by Taberah's astrology than by a behaviorist account. Astrology at least accounted for the stuff of common sense — emotions, tendencies, thoughts, good and bad timing — while behaviorism reduced him to an unbelievably simplistic account of just a black box that does actions. Listening to Taberah's account sounded goofy here and there, and the idea that the influence of the stars and planets controlled matters was straight-out hogwash, but Taberah's explanation overall gave him the impression of a rational account believed by a rational mind.

Science did experiments rigorously, and its standards did not validate any claims of magic — no, wait, the dice were loaded on that question; in Taberah's explanation, Aed saw a wisdom that just wasn't found in psychology; science did not meet the standards of interesting magic. No, that was not quite right; when did science really begin flourishing? At the same time as magic began flourishing, and often in the same people;

Newton's discovery of physics was almost a vacation from his work in alchemy. The two enterprises were born out of the same desire, to control nature and gain power, and in both people would readily engage in practices that had been hitherto regarded as impious and disgusting, such as digging up and mutilating the dead. Still, there was a difference, a difference which Aed felt if he could not think. They —

Aed came to himself and said, "I can't tell you the difference between science and magic, Taberah. I can't tell you, but I do know it. You shouldn't be doing astrology. You shouldn't be doing divination. If you're not sure of whether something is science or magic, you can ask me." Aed thought about buying him a psychology text, but decided not to, at least not for the moment. The psychology text he'd read, he was beginning to realize, was parochial and in many ways backwards; of course it was written by psychologists at respected schools, but the zeitgeist was — Taberah would encounter enough of it on its own, without having it embedded in something Aed told him to have replace his belief in astrology. Aed felt vaguely guilty about destroying a treasurehouse of lore, but let this go to the back of his mind. Once Aed had explained a simplified version of physics and astronomy, it was with some deflation that Taberah saw why Aed placed astrology among divination, but not weather forecasting.

Taberah stepped out that night, and lay on his back to look at the stars. He could not see many of them, and those badly, because of all the light. It seemed to him that something had departed from their song, but he could almost see something new. It was beautiful that the planets should revolve around the sun and not the earth; just as there were nine orders of angels — the highest six of whom gazed continually on the glory of God, and only three of whom were sent out among men — there corresponded nine planets, six of which were further out in the Heavens, the third of which contained life, and all of which revolved around the Light! His head went dizzy when he realized what it meant that he lived on a planet, and the sun was a star.

# The Trial

A representative from the Turing Society called Aed. "We hear that you have a program that is trying to pass the Turing test. I would like to administer the Turing test to your program at 2:00 PM on Tuesday, with observation. Is that acceptable to you?"

Aed's heart jumped, and he had to force himself to stand still. "Yes. I will look forward to it."

The test room was modified to support an arbitrary number of lurkers, and excitement built around the university. Quite a number of eyes were watching as the tester strode into the room. One of the contestant avatars looked like a unicorn; the other looked like a dragon. The tester managed to conceal her surprise, and said, "Good morning. How are you today?"

The unicorn said, "I am doing quite well. You?"

The dragon said, "I've had a lousy day, but it's getting better. I love playing the Turing game."

The tester said to the dragon, "Have you ever lost the game?"

The dragon said, "I've lost once, to a salesperson. I was really mad when the judge said I was a computer."

The tester repeated to the dragon, "Have you ever lost the game?"

The dragon repeated, "I've lost once, to a salesperson. I was really mad when the judge said I was a computer."

The tester asked the unicorn, "What about you? Have you ever lost the game?"

"Yes, frequently. I guess I don't sound very human."

The tester repeated her question to the unicorn. "What about you? Have you ever lost the game?"

The unicorn hesitated and said, "Um, is there a reason you're repeating the question?"

The tester did not answer. Instead, she said to the unicorn, "Tell me a

The tester did not answer. Instead, she said to the unicorn, "Tell me a bit about yourself."

The unicorn said, "Uh, I like woodworking, and I like to collect things. I've got a roomful of bottle caps, and I have one of the biggest collections of visual textures on the net. And I like fantasy."

The tester turned to the dragon and said, "What about you? How are you like?"

The dragon said, "I'm an optimist. It's too sunny out to be crabby. And I like collecting stamps."

The tester asked the dragon, "What is your philosophy of life?"

The dragon said, "My philosophy is one of many sides. There are many sides to life; there are many sides to being a person. I am many different things as the occasion merits."

The tester turned to the unicorn and asked, "What is your philosophy of life?"

The unicorn said, "Could you ask me another question? I'm kind of nervous now, and I'm having trouble thinking straight."

The tester said, "Ok. What is the one question you most fear me asking you?"

The unicorn shivered, and said, "The one you just asked?"

The conversation continued for two hours, unfolding, unfolding. It was about that time that the tester asked the unicorn, "What was your scariest childhood moment?" and the unicorn told a story about getting lost on a camping trip, and then twisting an ankle. Then the tester turned to the dragon, and said, "How about you?"

The dragon said, "Personally, I'm partial to seltzer water. And you?"

The tester pushed a button and left for the conference room Aed was in. She said, "You have quite an impressive achievement there, but you have a long distance to go before passing the Turing test. I tried to give two hours' testing to be sure, but I knew the dragon was a computer within five minutes of speaking with it. The clues that gave it away were —"

Aed cut her off and said, "Sorry, you guessed wrong."

"*What?*" the tester asked.

"You guessed wrong."

"Can you tell me with a straight face," she asked, "that the dragon was a human? Do I look that gullible?"

Aed gently said, "No, I'm not saying that the dragon was human. I'm

saying that they were both computers. The dragon was merely an old version of the program."

The woman's jaw dropped.

Aed added, "I should also like to say that most of the ideas were my guest Taberah's; I mostly helped out. The achievement is his, not mine."

# Detained

A knock sounded on the front door. "I wonder who that could be at this hour," Nathella said. "A reporter?"

She opened the door. There were several men outside, holding badges. They looked familiar, and smug; one of them said, "Officer Salisbury, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services."

Nathella sank back. Aed said, "What are you doing here?"

Officer Salisbury said, "We have come to detain Taberah, before transporting him to his country of origin."

Aed thought for a moment about an English translation, and said, "What right do you have to do this?"

Salisbury said, "We are enforcing the law. If you —"

Taberah popped his head in the window and said, "What is this?"

Officer Salisbury said, "You need to come with us."

*That shoots any remnants of search-and-seizure concerns,* Aed thought. "Could he have a moment to gather up his possessions, at least?"

"That won't be necessary," the officer said. "We do not transport possessions beyond clothing worn. We are not a shipping service."

Aed, Nathella, Clancy, and Fiona each gave him a hug, their eyes filled with tears. Then Taberah was handcuffed and led away to a car. Nathella could see Taberah steeling himself against the ride.

# Wrong Person

In the middle of the night, the videophone rang. Aed got up, turned off the video, and said, "Yes?"

The voice on the line was unfamiliar. She said, "Hello, is this Aed Kinsella?"

Aed said, "Yes."

The woman said, "I'm calling to tell you that you and Taberah Kinsella have won the 2034 Turing Award for your joint work in artificial intelligence."

Aed blinked, and said, "I'm sorry; I think you have the wrong person."

The woman laughed, and said, "I'm positive I've got the right person. Can you get Taberah?"

"I'm sorry; I can't; Taberah is being 'detained' by the INS."

"What? Who are the INS? Do the police know about them?"

"Yes; the INS are part of the police. They are the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services, and they just took Taberah. He is now en route to a jail, to have his head and his beard shaved, be stripped and put in a de-humanizing uniform, and sit in a cold cell with nothing to do while he waits for the INS to decide what country to deport him to."

The woman was silent for a moment, and said, "What country is he from?"

"I don't know. Dr. Pabst, an anthropologist I know, said that he doesn't seem to be from any culture currently existing. He has learned English, but besides that — why?"

The woman said, "Please wait a moment; I'll get back to you."

Aed had just crawled back into the covers when the phone rang. It was a journalist. And then another. And then another. After the first dozen times trying to explain that it was Taberah's work and not his, and that

times trying to explain that it was Taberah's work and not his, and that Taberah had been taken by the INS, he unplugged the phone.

At four in the morning, the doorbell rang. And then rang again. And again. Aed swore, and fumbled about for Nathella's keychain — a keychain with pepper spray. He threw on a bathrobe, and padded out to the door. "Who is it?" he shouted through the door.

"Officer Salisbury, returning Taberah to your house."

"*What?*"

"When we came last night, we did not realize that he held a United Nations passport. We apologize for the inconvenience."

Aed opened the door. Taberah looked weary, frightened, relieved, and very happy to be back. Aed picked him up, and held him in thanksgiving. Then he said, "Let's both of us get some shuteye; we've got a speech to write."

# A House Abuzz

There was a great deal of excitement around the house; friends and colleagues from church, the university, and other places stopped by, and some of them brought meals. Aed was excited by the activity; Nathella was wearied, and climbed into bed as soon as the last party had left.

One of the things that Aed insisted was that Taberah and all of the Kinsellas would appear through avatars, and that Taberah be referred to by a pen name — John. This was big enough news that Aed did not want strangers on the street recognizing them from a compucast or rebroadcast, nor calling them up. While Aed was in the living room explaining details of the work to his colleagues, and Nathella and Clancy were occupied with the hospitality, Fiona was occupied with Taberah. The two of them were in the computer, talking about what Taberah's avatar should look like.

The question was a bigger question than it seemed at first. The avatar should not be recognizable as him, but it should reveal him, his bearing. "It should be a mask," Fiona said. "It should be like a Halloween costume, changing yourself in such a way that you shine through."

"What's Halloween?"

"Later, Taberah. We don't have time to explore that now, although you'll see in a few months. Now, to start off with, do you want a human-looking avatar, or a fantastic avatar?"

"I — I don't know. Could I look at some of each?"

"Fiona said, "Hmm... There is something alien about you. Would you like to see what aliens look like?"

Taberah looked at several bodies of aliens, and recoiled. "Those aren't aliens," he said. "They're humans made to look grotesque. That's not what being alien is about."

"Ok," Fiona said. "How about fantasy? Do you like fantasy?"

OK, Fiona said. How about fantasy? DO you like fantasy?

They looked through a faun, a centaur, a unicorn, a dragon. "How old do you want to look?" Fiona said. Taberah didn't know. "Not that knight in armor; that would only be for going out to war. Not — *there!*" he said, with excitement.

"You don't want that," Fiona said. "That's a court jester. They acted like fools for other people to laugh at."

"I want that! I was a court jester once!"

Fiona wondered about Taberah's statement, but this was not time for long questions. She looked through colors, and guided Taberah towards a jester's outfit that was darker and had more muted colors. It was unmistakably a jester's outfit, but it had an air of gravity about it — which Taberah liked. "Ok," she said. "Now what do you want to eat?"

"Roast boar," Taberah said.

"Taberah, boar is awfully expensive, and there will be a lot of people there. I —"

"Give me two swords and I will kill one!" Taberah said, grinning.

"No, Taberah. You can't do that."

"Why not?"

"To start with, there aren't any boars here. You'll have to think of something else."

"Roast pig with an apple in its mouth!"

Aed stepped in. "Taberah, would you come out for a minute? There are some people who want to see you."

Fiona said to Taberah, "We can't have pork. There will be a lot of Muslims at that dinner."

"Is this country overrun by worshippers of Mahomet? Is there no one to drive them out?"

Aed stopped in the hallway. "Taberah, a couple of things. First, Muslims are not worshippers of Mahomet, any more than Christians are worshippers of John. They believe Mahomet was the greatest prophet, but not the man-god we believe Jesus was. Second, Muslims are citizens here. They are powerful, and their power is not all to the good — it is awfully hard to do things that Islam disapproves of, and there have been not-so-subtle manipulations against Christian evangelists speaking to Muslims, for one thing — but they are people, citizens of this country like anyone else, and not invaders. It is sad that Christianity has let Islam take its place, but the solution is not to run them off. Third, we may have wine

available at th—"

Taberah interrupted. "Spiced wine, piping hot? And cider?"

Aed said, "Spiced wine, piping hot, and cider, if you want, might be possible, but the food has to be something that Muslims may eat." Aed declined to mention the headache that would be involved in getting alcohol served...

Taberah said, "Do Muslims eat hamburgers?"

Aed threw up his hands and said, "I have guests waiting. Why don't you have *filet mignon*? It's the same kind of animal as hamburger, only much better."

Taberah was tired after the people met. He had not realized the intense energy it takes to connect with people from another land — he and the Kinsellas had gotten used to each other through intense contact. Nathella picked up on his fatigue faster than anyone else; she encouraged him to go to bed and get a good night's rest before the big day. Everything was in place; Aed had finally managed to convince the Turing society that he did not deserve the award, and accepted the privilege of introducing Taberah. Everyone slept lightly — everyone but Taberah; he slept like the dead, and got up to protest the stiff clothes he wore to the banquet.

# Accolades

Taberah was cheered at the meat and drink; the meat reminded him of home. He was equally delighted to sit down and drink wine with Aed, and his spirits did not flag although people asked him questions that struck him as rather odd. At the end of the dinner, Taberah was pleased to have (so far as he could tell) avoided making any *faux pas*. He felt a sense of accomplishment, and felt at home.

The chairman of the Turing Society looked at Aed and pointed to his watch, and Aed nodded. He took a sip of water, and then climbed up the steps to the podium.

Nathella could not see that her husband was nervous, but she knew it. He had thrown out his introduction a dozen times. Neither of them were worried for Taberah, though; Aed and Taberah had worked out a speech, which Taberah memorized with remarkable facility.

"I would like to begin this introduction," Aed said, "by apologizing for giving an introduction not worthy of the occasion. I would very much like to give a traditional introduction, in which one perhaps starts by saying 'The person who is going to speak is a man who needs no introduction,' and then spends five or ten minutes detailing education, awards, and accomplishments. It would perhaps sound grander if I were to say that such an introduction was inadequate to him, but the truth is that I don't know enough about him to give an introduction of that sort. I don't know if he went to school at all; he appeared on my doorstep, became deathly ill, and has since then been turning my world upside down.

"His first surprise for me was in chess. I am rated at 1975, and when I invited him in, him looking dazed and confused, he took my chess pieces to the table (at least after I let him), and began to play his way — at first I thought he didn't understand the game or was cheating, but then I realized he wasn't playing on a grid. He beat me five times in a row.

realized he wasn't playing on a grid. He beat me five times in a row.

"Different members of our family have had conversations with him that left our heads spinning; my wife Nathella is the only one who has not had that experience, and I believe that is because of her ability to understand people. There's only been one time that I've been able to understand Taberah better than her, but I won't detail that here.

"Taberah is brilliant, and approaches life in ways that would never occur to me. Wherever he comes from, and wherever he was educated, he somehow had the intelligence to look at the problem of artificial intelligence in a way nobody else had seen it before. If I cannot vouch for his education or accomplishments, I can vouch for this one accomplishment. Taberah has worked into a special place in my heart, and not only because of his brilliance. Without further ado, here he is."

Taberah strode up to the podium; on the screen behind him, his avatar looked quizzical and dignified at the same time. "I was going to say," he began, "that my discovery has taught us nothing about human intelligence. But I began to reason, and realize that it has.

"Men have always wanted to create other men like themselves. I once wished to make an assemblage of gears that would make a mechanical human, and I saw no reason why not. If gears could make a clock, with continual motion controlled according to its construction, why could the best crafted gears not make a man? Certainly myths came of gods who had made mechanical men. So I do not find it to be at all surprising that, when people found a way to make a machine that could do arithmetic and logic, they thought they had made something that could think.

"Chess is something that is difficult for people to do. So it was thought, 'If we can only make a computer that can beat the best humans at chess, then we will have achieved intelligence.' The day has long past when a human could beat the best computer, but if that achievement has taught us anything about human intelligence, it is that humans do not play chess like a computer. Making better and better computer chess players did not make computers intelligent any more than making more and more realistic-looking statues will make them alive.

"Conversation is something humans do, so Alan Turing, a brilliant mathematician, thought, 'If we can only make a computer that can pass for human in conversation, then we will have achieved intelligence.' Now the day has come when a computer has passed for human in conversation, and if it has taught us anything about intelligence, it is that

intelligence goes beyond conversation as it goes beyond chess. Those are both activities humans can do, but mimicking or even beating human performance does not a person make, any more than a collection of lifelike statues can be improved to the point of achieving life.

"I do not think that this calls for a new test to determine intelligence. I think it calls for a realization that human intelligence is too rich and too deep to reduce to a simple test. When a test has been proposed to measure intelligence, the test gains a life of its own, and suddenly people stop thinking about intelligence, and start thinking about how to pass the test. Chess playing programs became sophisticated with speed and advances that were not even approximated by efforts to understand how humans play chess, let alone how humans think.

"But this is enough. It is bad speaking to cram so much into your audience's heads that things are falling out; I have criticized enough for an award recipient. The field of artificial intelligence is a fertile area of thought which has brought many good things; even if artificial intelligence is never achieved, its failure will have enriched the soil of human endeavor. I thank you for this award and the other assistance the Turing Society has provided me, and, Aed, Nathella, Fiona, and Clancy for their help. God bless, and have a good evening." He returned to his place.

The chairman of the Turing Society stepped up to the microphone and said, "There is one more thing, Mr. Kinsella. The Turing Society has a fund, out of which to give prizes to its award recipients. The funding might buy research equipment, or a sabbatical, or perhaps access to online research libraries. Is there something we can get for you? Do you need a home?"

Taberah said, "I have everything I need now. But if there was one thing I could have — do you have a troubadour's lute?"

There was a moment's pause; the chairman, Dr. Bode, spoke on his cell phone for a moment and then said, "One of the members of the audience has one now, which she will lend you while another is delivered." A small woman walked up; Taberah was puzzled, as she was holding a small black bag, but otherwise empty-handed — there was no room to conceal a lute, even a small one. She reached into the bag, and pulled out a thick black belt and two long black gloves, long enough to cover an elbow. He could see that there were was something else in the bag. She looked at him and said, "Put the belt around your waist, and the

bag. She looked at him and said, "Put the belt around your waist, and the gloves on your hands."

Taberah did so, feeling some puzzlement.

"Now," she said, "play as if you were holding a lute."

Taberah looked at her, confused.

"Like this," she said, moving her hands in a strumming motion.

Taberah moved his hands, as if to play a chord — and jolted in surprise as notes sounded. Then he moved his hands again. There were some sounds of jarring dissonance, like a piano being played by frostbitten fingers losing their numbness, and then a simple, high, pure, aching sound. It pierced by its beauty, and with the music, words, in a voice that filled the room:

*Once there was a little lady,  
Fair and pure and elfin bright.  
Her light skin shone like burnished silver,  
Blazing light throughout the night.  
Her soul it was a filled with music,  
Her body was a filled with dance.  
Her long hair was black like ravens,  
All blazing was her countenance.*

Taberah's otherworldly song filled an hour; in his song, he carried with him a feeling of home, a moment of Heaven, and all of the strangeness of the land about him, of his aching at no place that felt home, vanished. The music he made in his trance brought its listeners into another time, into another world; to those in the room, the song so filled their consciousness that they did not think of anything else. When the song began, the netcast of the awards ceremony was brought into focus, and the avatar who had looked slightly strange speaking about artificial intelligence now fit perfectly into place: a court jester — and more than a jester — holding a lute, telling a tale and weaving a song.

When it was over, even the silence was musical, because it bore the silent echoes of the music's spirit. Taberah walked back to his seat, and asked, "Can we go home?"

With that, the meeting was over.

# Where Do You Come From?

It was the first day of classes; Aed had returned home late, to a house filled with a marvelous scent. It smelled of tomato, and basil, and bacon, and beef. Clancy said grace at Aed's invitation, and they began to pass the pasta.

Fiona looked at Taberah, and said, "Where are you from, Taberah? I don't think you've ever told me that."

Taberah said, "I am from — Provence, or at least half from there. My father is a merchant, and we have travelled to the ends of the world, and beyond — but never to a place so strange as this. I am used to mountains, and seas, and strange people and barbarian tribes — even worshippers of Mahomet —"

Aed said, "*Muslims.*"

"— even Muslims, but there are many things here that are strange to me."

"Like what?" Fiona said.

Taberah thought for a moment, and said, "It is hard for me to think of and harder to say in words."

Nathella said, "Can you think of it in your words in your own language? And then maybe translate?"

Taberah concentrated for a moment and said, "No, I can't. Not even in my own language. I will tell you later. After I think."

Aed said, "Don't worry too much if you can't answer. It was a friendly question, not a probe."

Taberah said, "It is a friendly question, and a probe, and a good question. That is why I want to answer it. Maybe after I research on the computer."

computer.

Fiona said, "Taberah, have you ever been to my Dad's campus? Tomorrow's a half day, and I could take you there. You might see more of the world."

Taberah said, "I would be happy to do that. But ooh! I miss home. I have never had a place that was completely home. Whether riding away hotly pursued, or haggling down the price of salt, or opening an illuminated manuscript — I was at home for a moment, but over time not at home. Even in stealing a relic from a nearby cathedral —"

Fiona said, "You *stole* a *relic* from a *cathedral*?"

Taberah said, "Yes. The saint wanted to move; otherwise, he wouldn't have let his relics be moved. And I can move swiftly and silently —"

Fiona said, "Taberah, would you steal a fork from this house?"

Taberah looked surprised. "Never!"

Fiona said, "Why on earth would you be willing to steal a relic?"

Taberah had no real response to this question. He said, "If another city had a relic, and you needed it, wouldn't you assist it to your place?"

Fiona said, "I can't explain all my reasons why not, because I have to go to bed in four hours. But to start it off, that would be dishonorable."

Taberah thought, and said, "I'll have to think about that. I never met a knight who thought it dishonorable to steal a relic. Ok, I know how to explain. A relic does not belong to a living man or a place; it belongs to God and to the saint. Stealing a relic is a very different matter from stealing corn or grain. The corn really belongs to the person who has it; the relic belongs to the saint, and then to the saint's followers — so if the people here worship a saint and want his relic more than the people where it is kept, then if the saint allows the relic to be moved, it should be moved."

Fiona said, "I can't believe this rationalizing. The bigger a sin, the more rationalizing there is, and you have rationalized an unholy theft on top of starting it in the first place!"

Nathella turned to Fiona and said, "Honey, I don't understand Taberah, but he's not rationalizing. He does not have a defensive air about him. And something tells me that he would not steal anything from this house — nor steal anything from another place and bring it here. Right, Taberah?"

Taberah said, "Yes. I would never steal if it were dishonorable."

Clancy looked around and said, "Taberah, did you hear the joke about

the cathedral that was so blessed that it had two heads of John the Baptist, one as a boy and one as a man?"

Taberah said eagerly, "No. Please tell it to me; it sounds very good!"

Fiona groaned and said, "Mom, would you please explain it?"

Nathella said, "Taberah, did you notice anything funny about there being two heads of John the Baptist?"

Taberah said, "No. It sounds like a great providence indeed, for which God is to be praised."

Nathella said, "What would have had to have happened for a cathedral to have the head of John the Baptist as a boy?"

Taberah said, "I suppose for him to have died as a boy."

Nathella said, "If there was a skull of him as a man, did he live to be a man?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Nathella said, "So there's a logical contradiction for a cathedral to have two heads of John the Baptist, one as a boy and one as a man. Right?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Nathella looked at him. "You still don't get the joke."

Taberah said, "I'm still waiting for the joke to be told. So I don't get it."

Nathella said, "If there's a logical contradiction, then it couldn't have happened, right?"

Taberah said, "If there's a logical contradiction, there's a logical contradiction. It doesn't mean that God can't bless a church with two heads of John the Baptist. God moves, and his ways are beyond our understanding. He has done greater things than bless us with two heads of a saint!"

Fiona said, "Taberah, if we go out for a walk tomorrow, do you promise not to confuse me?"

Taberah said, "Am I confusing you?"

Aed got up, placed his arm around Taberah's shoulders, and said,

"Wild thing!  
You make my head spin!  
I think I love you."

# Music From Another Age

Fiona took Taberah by the hand, eagerly leading him as if she were a small child. The university's square was filled with a noisy, jostling, laughing group of people, chaotic as any bazaar. The excitement was tangible. "Today is the first day of Student Activities Week. All the student organizations are clamoring to find new recruits from among the freshmen, and anybody else who cares to come. It is a lot of fun."

Taberah walked over to one stand where several people were talking. He read the sign overhead, *Humanist Hacker's Guild*, and asked, "What is a hacker?"

One of the men looked up from a portable computer and said, "The first hackers were people in software who like solving problems and believe in freedom and helping each other. They produced a lot of computers and software. We are a special kind of hacker, hackers in the humanities. We produce artwork, music, and literature, and share it with other people. In a way, there have been humanist hackers for ages, but interaction with computer hackers has brought an awareness and a fertile field for sharing. Would you like to have a copy of one of my poems?"

Taberah said, "If I am here, why would you give me a copy? Why not just recite it?"

The hacker said, "Um, because I don't have it memorized?"

Taberah said, "I'm puzzled."

The hacker said, "Why?"

Taberah said, "How could you compose a poem, even writing it down, and then forget it?"

"Quite easily, I assure you."

Fiona put her hand on Taberah's arm and said, "Taberah, please. We

Fiona put her hand on Taberah's arm and said, "Taberah, please. We are his guests."

The hacker took a sheet of paper and said, "Here. I'll read it to you."

"The Unicorn's Horn," by Elron Ellingswood

I walked out into the deep, dark, forest,  
and there, in a clearing, it stood.

Oak was behind it, ferns below,  
and atop its head, stood a blazing white horn.

It walked to a shimmering pool,  
Its hooves not making a sound.

Around, the silence was broken  
by the calling of a hawk.

The wind stirred the tree leaves  
and danced softly over the grass.

The Lady of the Lake stirred,  
softly,  
invisibly.

Taberah looked both impressed and puzzled. He said, "You show the forest as an object of beauty. Why?"

Fiona grabbed his wrist, and tugged on him, saying, "Look over there! Karate!"

An instructor smiled and said, "Not Karate. Kuk Sool Won. Karate is a single martial art that focuses on punching, kicking, and blocking; Kuk Sool is a comprehensive martial arts system that includes joint locks, weapons, and escapes as well as many kinds of punching, kicking, and blocking."

Taberah said, "What's a joint lock?"

The instructor said, "Throw a slow punch at me."

Taberah said, "What?"

The instructor said, "Do this."

Taberah made the motion and his hand was caught, his wrist twisted.

"But what if I punch you with my other hand?"

"Why don't you try to do that? Slowly?"

Taberah did, and his puzzlement was exceeded by the instructor's, who said, after a second, "Stop. I've never seen someone who could resist a joint lock like that. You must have a tremendously high tolerance for

pain."

Taberah said, "I don't understand. I didn't feel pain. I don't understand what you were trying to do."

The color of Fiona's face was beginning to match her long, wavy red hair. She said, "Taberah, come on. Let's find something else."

Taberah began to wander, and then saw — or rather, *heard* — something so positively medieval in spirit that it drew his attention so completely he was aware of nothing else. Up until this point, he had been thrown off balance by a hurry in the people around him — or, at least, that would be a deficient way of putting it. A more accurate way of putting it would be that he was aware of time in the sense of an awareness of something around him, but not in any sense that would let him grasp rushing to get something done, or guilt at sitting at doing nothing. He vaguely perceived such a quality in those about him, and he was baffled and troubled by it, in the same way as if he were surrounded by people who were constantly thinking about air and in a frenzied haste to try to find some space that had enough air to breathe.

It was the near total absence of this quality in the music before him that beckoned him. It was as if he had stepped into a room of people breathing normally and attending more important concerns and only then come to realize that he had been surrounded by people fretting over whether they had enough air to breathe.

Taberah stood in silence, drinking it in. Then he stepped forward, picked up an instrument, and joined in the song.

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At dinner, Aed asked Taberah, "So what did you see today?"

Taberah said, "Today was a happy day. Today I discovered New Age."

Aed suppressed a groan. How was he to begin an explanation? The phenomenon that was called New Age in its current incarnation had occurred many times in the past, and would doubtless occur many times in the future, each time under a different name; it was in spirituality what a logical fallacy is in reasoning. It was heresy — perhaps he was safe in using that word with Taberah. In the word, 'heresy' carried a curious inversion of "a good and original idea which some benighted tradition condemns", the word being a condemnation of the tradition rather than the idea. What a diabolical trick that was! Heresies were neither good nor original ideas; they were propositions that had been weighed in the balance and found lacking, "New" Age being a manifestation of an error that had first occurred two millennia ago and had rotted every time since then. It promised freedom, and was one of the most confining and constricting prisons he had known — a prison like being left all alone in an empty wasteland. You could go as far and wide as you wanted, and still find nothing good.

Aed hesitantly asked Taberah, "What draws you to New Age?"

"The — music — time — you are hurried. They are not."

Aed nodded. New Age music was soothing music. But as to the time — "Taberah, it's a busy time of year for me. What is this about time?"

Taberah tried to explain, and at first failed completely. Then, on the second time through, there was a look of dawning comprehension on Fiona's face, and she said, "I will try to enter your time, Taberah. But it will be difficult; we have been taught to hurry for a long time. I won't be able to do it very quickly, if I can."

Taberah kissed her cheek, and said, "I not in hurry — ooh, did I do right in touch?"

Aed wondered what Taberah was talking about, and then recalled him sternly telling Taberah not to touch others in ways that he had not seen them touching. "It's OK, Taberah. You may give a kiss on the cheek to people in this family."

Taberah walked over, and kissed Aed on the cheek.

# The Phoenix

Taberah spent most of the day running through New Age music in his head, and seeing how it would sound on his lute; Fiona had to knock on the door several times before he noticed she was there.

The square was less crowded than before; on the way in, Taberah looked and saw a place where several people were moving their fingertips about on a ridged surface, their hands dancing with energy; on a wall behind them, colors swirled and spun, vibrating with energy. "What's that?" he said.

Fiona said, "Those are visual musicians. They play instruments that do not produce sound, but color. Do you like it?"

Taberah said, "I like it, but why are they spinning so quickly? Why —" he pointed to another booth and said, "What's that?"

A man in the booth next to them said, "Hey, a southpaw! Greetings!"

Taberah said, "What?"

"You're left-handed."

"What's that?"

"It's when someone uses the left side instead of the right?"

Taberah made the sign against evil and said, "Why would someone do that?"

"You did."

"I might have pointed with my left hand, but I do everything else with my right hand."

The student tossed a pen up, and said, "Catch!"

Taberah looked, and realized he had caught it with his left hand. "I am sorry. I have sins I did not know."

The student now no longer looked so merry, and said, "You're left-handed, but you're ashamed to admit it."

Taberah hung his head

Taberah hung his head.

The student said, "You aren't part of the solution. You're part of the problem. We have a right-handed society, with right-handed machinery and right-handed rules. Even the words are prejudiced — 'right' means correct, acceptable, and good, and 'sinister' and 'gauche' are words meaning 'left', which comes from a word meaning 'weak' or 'broken'. For years, lefthanders have been an invisible and maltreated minority, and now that some of us are speaking out and demanding that society improve, there are people like you who — a gay who was like you would be said to have internalized homophobia. You are —"

Taberah cut him off. "Why are you so angry?"

Taberah listened with horrid fascination to the rant. He began to realize that using the left hand, like turning a wheel the wrong direction or walking backwards, was only a symbol of evil and not its substance, and began (despite all internal resistance to external pressure) to see that the student's conclusions were right, that the world was a right-handed world with subtle and invisible slights to its left-handed members — or at least he tried to accept these things. He still felt guilt over catching the pen with his left hand, and he knew it would take time for him to shift his spirit to what he saw. But all this aside, he also saw an anger that brought far greater misery than any right-handed technology — not confusing pencil sharpeners, not painful scissors — could possibly cause. He narrowed his eyes, and said, "You are angry."

The student swore, and said, "I'm furious. Why do you need to point that out?"

Taberah said, "Are you happier with your pit of rage than I am with my right-handed society?"

The student was speechless. Another student, who had been listening, said, "I would like to cordially request the honor of your absence at our booth."

Taberah felt anger rising in the pit of his stomach; he felt it, but did not let it master him. He turned, and walked away, taking a long walk around the square before slowing down, and finally stopping at one place. He looked at a group of students who were standing around, talking, laughing; each of them had a necklace with a fiery bird. Taberah asked, "Who are you?"

A young woman with long, curly auburn hair said, "My name is Emerant, and we are the Phoenix Society. The Phoenix Society is a group

of brothers and sisters devoted to living in the abundant life that Jesus offers, and extending that life to others. The Phoenix, the bird that ever rises anew out of its own ashes, was a holy symbol in the ancient Christian Church, and in wearing it we recall the ancient church and its life among a pagan world, and allow God to create in us the same life in a pagan world today. We have worship services every Wednesday night. Would you like to come and join us?"

Taberah felt something in the back of his mind, but he could not put his finger on it — but it was something good, he was sure.

A young man with ebon skin placed his arm over Emerant's shoulder, and said, "What's your name?"

Taberah said, "My name is Taberah."

"How can we serve you? Do you have stuff to move in? Do you have a story to tell?"

Taberah realized what he had felt but could not describe. There was an energy about these people, an invisible love so thick it could almost be felt. The young man was looking at him as if he were a king. The students in the group were all wearing distinctive necklaces, but their air did not treat him as an outside you, not even an outside you that they wanted to bring in. The man's eyes were dark as night, and they glittered like stars; there was something about his face that said 'I' and 'you', but even more said 'we'. Taberah smiled and said, "I should very much like to hear mass with you."

Emerant smiled a crooked smile, and said, "There is something else you want, Taberah."

Taberah closed his eyes for a second and said, "Emerant, I know your name. You, what is your name?"

The young man said, "My name is Abanu."

Taberah said, "Emerant and Abanu, I should very much like to play a song for you."

Immediately, a space appeared among the students. Taberah calmly, without any self-consciousness, walked over to the center and began to sing.

It was a noisy day, but it seemed silent inside that circle. Taberah could fill a room if he wanted to, but he was not singing loudly; still, all the students were aware of nothing else. When the song finished, Emerant looked around and saw that there were some people standing around and staring; she began to talk with him as the students asked

around and staring, she began to talk with him as the students asked Taberah questions.

It was not until seven that Aed found them, and told them that dinner was getting cold; Fiona had lost all track of time, and Taberah never had track of time to begin with. He slept well that night, and awoke in the morning knowing the answer to a question the Kinsellas had asked him.

# In Spirit and in Truth

Taberah spent the day reading the Bible and researching on the computer; at dinner, he said, "Nathella, do you remember when you asked me a question about my place and this place, and I said it was harder to think of and harder to explain in words?"

Nathella said, "Yes."

Taberah said, "I was able to find words. In Bible, Jesus was talking with a woman at a well. She asked him what mountain to worship on. He said not to worship on this mountain or that mountain, but in Spirit and in truth. This land knows not how to worship in Spirit and in truth."

Aed's eyes narrowed. Aed and Nathella said together, "How so?"

Taberah said, "I have just begun to see how religion is, and it is not religion. It is private. It is an interest. It is a hobby. It is tame. Where I come from, religion is public because it pervades your whole being; it is who you are, and never has a pagan invader told a Catholic, 'You may be Christian, but make it a small thing. It is —'"

Aed nodded and said, "That criticism has been made before, and it is not to be lightly dismissed. Is there anything else you see?"

Taberah said, "I slowly began to notice, when navigating on the computer — where I am from, when people build a cathedral, they carve the backs of statues. I was shocked when I saw that people here do not do this. When an artist carves a statue in my land, he is not just working on a statue; he is making an offering to God, and his carving is a prayer. He carves the back as well as the front, working on a place whose fullness he may never see, because he is not making something for himself or other men, as much as making a prayer to God, who sees the back of the statue as easily as the front. Here, on the web, people do not do that. They think

as easily as the front. Here, on the web, people do not do that. They think in terms of making a creation for other people. They do not try for completeness; they want — I do not know the words."

"Good enough for government work?" Clancy said.

"Yes. Except that making something that is 'good enough' does not mean making something that is good. God is only in the compartment called religion; he is not big enough to make virtual reality for — only other people who will not take the site very seriously is that important for."

*I cannot make complete sense of Taberah's tangled wording,* Nathella thought, *but I do not need to. Taberah has difficulties with language when he is concentrating most intensely.* She understood the meaning, if the words sometimes eluded her.

Aed said, "Anything else?"

Taberah said, "I hesitate..."

The room was silent.

Taberah continued, "I hesitate, but there is something strange about clothing and nudity. In my land, people wear clothing for custom and for decoration; being without clothing is not much. Here, clothing is for decency (a polite way to put it); there are chaste people and there are nude people, but there are not chaste, nude people. When a woman wears no shirt in an advertisement, her no-shirt means 'Look at me in lust!' She does not have a no-shirt that doesn't mean anything besides 'I don't want to have a shirt now.' There are people who say that we don't need to say clothes, and most of them say that not wearing clothes is not sexual, but few of them are chaste, or even acknowledge chastity.

"That is a symbol of something deeper. You need to cover your bodies, but even more you need to cover God, because you are ashamed of other people seeing them. And so you produce arguments to justify the existence of God, and God does or does not exist depending on whether or not he's covered.

"One of the theologians I know of, Thomas Aquinas, began his great work with five arguments for the existence of God. But these arguments have a very different meaning than yours; they were for adornment, and not for shame. Aquinas was not trying to give a needed proof of God, as your theologians do; certainly he did not think that if he failed to prove God's existence he was not able to believe in God. You speak of justifying belief, as if it needed justification, as if it were shameful if it were not

covered by an argument.

"About clothing literally, I will not argue. Your way of looking seems to me a silly limitation that causes a lot of lust, but chaste nudity is not important. It is not one of the great things in life. But about clothing symbolically, I will argue much. You need in your minds to have an unblushing nudity, that can say, 'I believe in God and I accept his providence,' and not have a guilt about it for believing more than matter. You — I am sorry, I should be able to produce more examples. But there are many ways where you do not know how to worship in Spirit and in truth."

Aed was stunned. After a while, and after nobody else said anything, he said, "Son, you've got a brilliant mind. I have a feeling of being held under a microscope. I don't know how to respond, beyond saying that you see things I would never see, and I hope you keep thinking."

Nathella said, "You almost seem like someone from another era."

Taberah said, "What's an era?"

Aed said, "Later, Taberah. Later."

# Which Era?

As Aed sat down, Taberah asked him, "So, what is an era?"

Aed thought. He said, "I would better answer that question after looking at an encyclopedia; I've thought about how to explain it, and I realized I knew less than I thought I did. But here's a rough sketch of what I can explain:

"The ancient world was the world that gave birth to Christianity. It is everything before the Middle Ages, or medieval period. It gave us the apex of paganism, and philosophy, and writing.

"The Middle Ages were a thousand years of Christian faith and culture. They saw monasteries, cathedrals, castles, monks, clergy, knights in shining armor, lords and vassals and fealty, chivalry, peasants and feudalism, illuminated manuscripts...

"After that came the Renaissance and Reformation period. There was a rebirth of art and learning from classical, that is ancient, times, and the monk Martin Luther nailed theses for reform to the door of Wittenburg Cathedral, and chaos broke loose. Let's see...

"The Elizabethan time was the time of the great playwright Shakespeare, and vernacular translations of the Bible. The Baroque time saw a flowering of complexity in art and music; aah!

"Modern times began with the Elizabethan era, and started a new secularism in philosophy. It reached its climax in the Enlightenment, with people worshiping the mind and reason, and the bloodbath that followed. Then came Romanticism and Victorianism, one of them a following of emotional sensitivity that often included libertinism, the other managing to be morbidly prudish. After that, came postmodernism, the era that we are in. People have given up the quest for truth, and there has been an increase in fragmentation — Taberah, I just saw a light go on in your eyes. What clicked?"

in your eyes. What clicked?

Taberah said, "I am medieval! What era are you from? Can you tell me how to get to the Middle Ages?"

Aed slapped his palm to his forehead and said, "Taberah, just forget this conversation and let's start over. There are some things about you that are like the Middle Ages, but the Middle Ages are a period of time in the past."

Taberah asked, "What is a period of time?"

Aed said, "It is a time when people have a certain way of living."

Taberah said, "I am from the Middle Ages period of time. And I think you might be as well. You belong to an age of faith, and you are a lord."

Aed said, "It is impossible to go back to another age. It is past. It has already happened."

Taberah would have normally backed off by this point, but there was something inside him that made him certain. He said, "Will you get out of bed tomorrow?"

Aed said, "Yes."

Taberah said, "But you have gotten out of bed in the past?"

Aed said, "Yes."

Taberah said, "Does that stop you from getting out of bed tomorrow?"

Aed saw where Taberah was going, and said, "But with history, it's different. You cannot bring back the past any more than you can make your self younger." As soon as the words escaped Aed's mouth, he remembered the difficulty Taberah had in distinguishing between childhood and adulthood. And he expected Taberah's reply:

"What is the past?"

Aed said, "Everything that has happened so far."

Taberah said, "So, the beginning of our conversation is in the past?"

Aed said, "Yes. No. Not in the sense you're speaking of. It is before the moment now, but it still belongs to the time we are a part of."

Taberah said, "I do not understand. What's the difference?"

Aed said, "Could we just forget this conversation? I know what the difference is between the present and the past, I just can't explain it..." his voice trailed off, and he said, more to himself than to Taberah, "or do I?" For a moment he began to see how someone could not perceive a difference between present and past, and not understand how, if there had been medieval people before, there could not be medieval people now. Aed remembered how, in school, when he read about different

times, there was something he could identify with in a great many of them. Then the moment lapsed; Aed suddenly realized the intense concentration it took him to see into Taberah's world, and began to wonder how difficult it might be for Taberah to look into his world. To his surprise, Aed found himself saying, "I don't know, Taberah. Maybe there isn't one. Maybe we could talk about this later? I thought I was going to explain something to you; I wasn't counting on changing the way I think myself. I'm sure you know it's difficult work, changing how you think, and I am at the end of my concentration. Why don't you practice your music? Maybe you can play something for us after supper?"

Taberah looked at Aed and relaxed; it was only then that Aed realized how intently Taberah had been listening. Taberah said, "Sure!" and bounded outside like a puppy.

# A Possibility Reopened

"Stop pacing the floor, dear," Nathella said. "You're making me nervous."

Taberah stopped and looked up. "May I walk around in the street outside? I need to think."

"Ok. Don't walk in the street; walk on the sidewalks. And don't get lost. Maybe you can take one of the trails in the forest."

*If there is a word-space, Taberah thought, a space in which words exist and can be mapped out into closer and farther words, then there may be a thought-space, one in which thoughts can be mapped out.*

Outside, it was dazzlingly bright; Taberah's eyes adjusted, and he saw some little boys throwing a ball around. As he passed by, one of them dropped it, and the children started arguing.

*If there is a thought-space, his thoughts continued, then thoughts may be mapped out as paths in that space. Some thoughts can be mapped out from existing classics, and then new paths can be forged like old ones. If this can be done, then it may be possible for a computer to think.*

Taberah entered the forest, although he was not aware of it. He felt almost dizzy; he was excited, and so intent in concentration that he lost all awareness of his surroundings.

*The core idea for a computer to think is to construct a space of units of thought, measured by a metric arising from that for words — or perhaps similar; words can be sorted out by comparing histograms of words that appear before and after; a self-refining measure might compare thoughts that come before and after. A space can have trails*

*worn in it by existing classics, as a forest develops paths from many people walking through it; the thought-space is then navigable by starting at one point and randomly picking from among the paths that lead out from it. This is how a computer can think.*

*How can I implement this?*

*I need to find Aed.*

# Exploration

Aed was quite doubtful that Taberah had found a way for computers to think; none the less, he regarded Taberah's ideas as interesting, and so set to work on implementing them. He used one of the methods from his own research to take a given metric space and put points into a vector space, so that a position could be described by a list of numbers: put springs between each two points in the metric space, as long as the distance between them, then put the points at random locations in the vector space and let the springs do their work. The actual method used was more complex, taking shortcuts so as to run more quickly, but the core idea was simple. A model of a car made of springs would find its shape as soon as you took your foot off it.

Aed expected it possible to make much more sophisticated measures, but to start off with he used a parser to diagram sentences, trim the sentences to subject, verb, and object, and strung together the lists of numbers to make a vector space with more dimensions. Aed realized that philosophy would probably be easier material for a computer to think about than something concrete; there was less opportunity to bump into the oddities of sense data and the external world. He the program through the philosophical classics online, and then waited to see what its first output would be:

I think, therefore I am. From this may be deduced any number of things. It is clear that the gods are dead. There is nothing but the gods. You, me, everything are the gods. This godlike character is unto the likeness of God. Each of the gods is a facet of God. God is, and because he is he thinks. Reason is the ordering principle of the universe. I say this because reason gives us what other times sought in God

III 300.

The output went on for some length, and Taberah was crestfallen. "Cheer up!" he said. "With computers, nothing works on the first try. It takes time to get all the bugs out."

Taberah said, "I thought computers were logical."

Aed said, "Yes, Taberah, they are logical, and that's the problem. We are not logical; we hear what a person says, and know what they mean. But a computer does not know what we mean; it only knows what we say, and there are all sorts of subtle errors that a human wouldn't even notice, that a computer does not have the ability to correct. That monologue is quite good for a first run; if you aren't listening carefully, it sounds like a philosopher. You should be proud of yourself. How'd you like to have Chinese food for dinner?"

# Fortune Cookies

There was a rule in the Kinsella's house against bringing up subjects at dinner that were not understandable to everyone in the house; this rule was bent a bit to allow Taberah to explain his discovery. Dinner was over before they realized it; Taberah unwrapped his cookie, put it in his mouth before anyone could stop him, started chewing, stopped, and then spat out a piece of paper. He said, "What is this?"

Fiona and Clancy were both laughing too hard to explain; Aed said, "It's a fortune. You're supposed to take it out of the cookie before you eat the cookie. Look at it."

Taberah wiped off the piece of paper and read, "Exciting prospects come. Don't miss the opportunity."

He looked at the paper in disgust and said, "Why do you have this in the house?"

Nathella said, "It's a prediction or a piece of advice. It's just for fun."

Taberah looked at Aed and said, "Aed, you told me not to do astrology because divination is sin. This is divination. It is sin."

Aed said, "Taberah, it's not serious. Or at least we don't do them seriously; nobody believes that a fortune cookie will tell the future."

Taberah said, "If you cast a spell just for fun, is it less of a sin?"

Aed said, "I would never cast a spell."

Taberah said, "But you got fortune cookies."

Nathella said, "We didn't ask for them. They come with Chinese food."

Fiona said, "We are studying China in school now, and the Chinese do not eat fortune cookies, but fortune telling is very big in Chinese culture. People will not enter a building if a Feng Shui practitioner was not consulted about where to lay its foundations."

Clancy was looking at his fortune. The expression on his face was slowly turning to disgust. "Taberah is right. Mom, you've talked about

slowly turning to disgust. Taberah is right. Mom, you've talked about how we let sin into our lives without challenging it; this is sin."

Fiona said, "The fortune in a Chinese cookie certainly comes out of fortune telling — and when fortune telling is done, it varies from serious to lighthearted — like we take fortune cookies."

Nathella said, "If you would rather, we can throw the fortune cookies away when we get Chinese, or ask them not to provide fortune cookies."

Aed didn't say anything. He had expected Taberah to know things about whatever culture he was from that Aed didn't — but not to be able to see things in American culture that Aed couldn't. He had shifted, in his mind, from wondering why Taberah objected to fortune cookies, to wondering why he hadn't objected to fortune cookies.

What else would Taberah show him?

# Miracles

Taberah had been thinking throughout the day, although not about computers. When Aed got home from work, Taberah said, "This land is very different from any of the other ones I've known. Are even the miracles different? What are miracles like here?"

Aed said, "Beg pardon?"

"What miracles have you seen? What miracles have you been given?"

"Taberah, I've prayed for many miracles in my day, and I have had some prayer requests answered, but I have never been given a miracle — or seen one."

"Why not? Do you not know God?"

"Taberah, I speak to God, and he is with me. But I have never seen a miracle. I'm one of few people who believes they happen at all. Most people believe that miracles don't happen — some Christians believe that miracles stopped after the age of the Apostles."

"What? Why? Do they believe God does not love his children?"

"Of course Christians believe God loves his children."

"Then why do they not believe in miracles?"

Aed was beginning to see another difference between Taberah's culture — might as well call it 'medieval', not having any better words to describe it — between medieval culture and his culture. One side of Aed's realization was that Taberah's culture breathed the supernatural, might (for all Aed knew) find nothing unbelievable about a mountain being uprooted and thrown into the sea — and the other side was that Aed's culture had fought tooth and nail to exclude any consideration of the supernatural, had struggled to make it alien. There were hints of it in ten thousand places — in words like 'superstitious', which did not simply denote a particular kind of belief (a supernatural equivalent to practical

observations such as "A pin will more easily slide into a pole if it is greased"), but a propagandistic condemnation of that kind of belief and supernatural belief in general. 'Rational' was taken to mean 'materialistic', and — the manifestations were legion, too many for Aed to concentrate on one. He recalled with a chill the words of the Gospel, where some manuscripts said that Jesus did not, and others that he *could* not do many miracles in one town, and was amazed at their lack of faith. Aed had a queer feeling that —

"Taberah, I would like to take you someplace tomorrow, and show you something. It is my loss that I have not seen any miracles, that they do not happen when I pray. But I would like for you to see the forces that shape my culture, and are why I have never seen a miracle."

Taberah slept lightly that night; he felt both puzzlement and expectation, wondering what manner of strange sight Aed would show him.

# Even if They See

The lecture hall was nearly filled; the speaker walked up to the microphone and said, "Good evening, and welcome to the Campus Skeptics' first meeting this year. My name is Nabal, and this first meeting usually draws a large crowd — usually from hecklers who believe that what we are saying is false, but somehow never manage to prove it. I claim that there are no supernatural forces and never have been, that all of the interaction of nature can be explained by science, and that there is nothing that science can't explain. To prove it —"

Taberah was aghast. He elbowed Aed and said, "Aren't you going to say anything?"

The speaker reached into his backpack, and drew out a pair of pliers, a sheet of paper, and a cigarette lighter. He continued, "I have a sheet of paper and a lighter, and I am going to light this paper on fire. If there is anyone among you who has any kind of faith or magic, let him stop it from burning."

Taberah elbowed Aed again, and said, "Well?"

The speaker held the paper up, silent.

Aed found himself saying, "Nabal."

The speaker said, "Yes? Are you going to stop this paper from burning?"

Aed ignored the question. He said, "Do you know physics?"

The speaker said, "Yes. I am a senior with a double major in physics and mathematics."

Aed said, "If you know physics, then you know that physics says that the electrical charges in that piece of paper, if separated an inch together and released, would create a spark over a hundred times as powerful as a lightning bolt. Is that correct?"

The speaker said, "Yes. Actually, it's a bit more than a hundred."

THE SPEAKER SAID, "YES. ACTUALLY, IT'S A BIT MORE THAN A HUNDRED."

Aed said, "Very well. If you know physics, separate the particles and let's see that spark."

The speaker did not reply to this comment. He said, "Are there any other comments or distracting rhetoric — perhaps to conceal that the supernatural is not real?"

A young woman said, "I don't know if God will grant my prayer, but I am praying that that paper won't burn — as you would fight in a battle you would rather lose than not fight at all."

Nabal said, "Any other comments?"

Taberah was trying to think of something to say, but he was at a loss for words. The speaker tried to ignite the paper; the lighter sparked several times, but produced no flame.

The speaker walked over to the table and said, "My apologies for the coincidence. Does anyone have other lighters?"

A young man with a large Afro flamboyantly tossed a golden Zippo to the front of the room and said, "Try this, brother."

Nabal took the lighter and struck it. It produced sparks, but no flame.

He adjusted the lighter, and struck it again. A large yellow flame shot out, and began to lick up the side of the paper, to turn orange, to grow stronger, hotter. Nabal turned away from the flame and looked at the eyes around him — some smug, some saddened. The flame died out, became a thin stream of smoke, vanished. Nabal grinned and asked, "And now, where is your God?"

He continued to look, puzzled by the expressions he saw on the gathered faces. Then he looked down, and dropped the pliers in shock. The paper was not burnt to ashes. It wasn't even singed.

Aed looked at Taberah, and saw the one face in the room that was not speechless. He grabbed Taberah's arm, and said, "We need to go. Now." They slid out, leaving behind them sputters of "Chemicals and charlatanism can do a lot."

Taberah said, "Why did you leave? They were about to acknowledge something supernatural."

Aed said, "Taberah, I don't know how you did that, or what was going on, and I don't need to know. But do you remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus? Do you remember how it ended?"

Taberah said, "'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not listen even if a man rises from the dead.' Yes, but —"

Aed said, "Taberah, a man *did* rise from the dead, and those who killed him still did not believe. C.S. Lewis wrote that he knew of only one person who had seen a ghost, and she was positive it was a hallucination. The wind of the Spirit cannot blow where the cracks have been sealed; this age has exerted monumental effort to seal the cracks. You heard them speaking as you left. They are positive it was somebody's sleight of hand. George MacDonald, before Lewis, said, "Seeing is not believing. It is only seeing." Even I, who believe in a supernatural God, am filled with doubts over what I just saw — half of my mind is saying that it was an illusionist stunt. Even in the Bible, seeing miracles did not make people believe."

Taberah said, "I don't understand."

Aed said, "I don't understand either. Maybe you'll figure something out — oh! I just remembered a joke."

Taberah said, "Yes?"

Aed said, "The wars in the Middle East will only be solved by a political solution or by a miracle — by people working out an agreement, or by God telling people to get along with each other. The political solution would be God telling people to get along with each other, and the miracle would be people working out an agreement."

Taberah listened and laughed. "So you're saying it would take a different kind of miracle, a greater kind of miracle, for people to believe."

Aed said, "Yes. And a kind of miracle that doesn't just happen, even in the Bible. A kind that God only gives, if ever, as a blessing on hard human work. Prayer does not annihilate human roles. Maybe God only chooses to work the greater miracles through humans."

# Below the Surface

Aed said, "Taberah, there's something I've been meaning to talk with you about."

Taberah said, "Yes?"

Aed said, "What exactly draws you to New Age?"

Taberah said, "Music and time. Or rather, lack of awareness of time. There is something more than hurried time."

Aed said, "And New Age as a religion?"

Taberah said, "New Age is a religion? It seems much more like a people to me."

Aed said, "It's both. It is people who are drawn to a resurfacing of Gnosticism. Whether it is ancient Gnostics, or contemporary New Age, or medieval Knights of Cathare, it — what is on your face, Taberah?"

Taberah said, "I know the Knights of Cathare. It is so sad. Is New Age the same heresy?"

Aed said, "The mask ever varies, but it is the same heresy. The same mistake. The same attempt that has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. It's OK if you listen to their music, but try to stop there —"

Nathella walked in, looked at Aed, looked at Taberah, and said, "What is it that I see in your eyes, Taberah?"

Taberah said, "New Age music will never sound the same to me again."

Nathella looked into Taberah's eyes, listening, searching. She saw a homesickness and wistfulness, and suddenly thought of the Little Mermaid in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, before Disney left its mark on the classic. The witch had exacted a terrible price from the mermaid — she would have legs, lovely legs, but she would never be quite like the humans around her. Every step she took would be on sharp knives. In a flash of intuition she saw that the knives never left Taberah

KNIVES. IN A FLASH OF INTUITION SHE SAW THAT THE KNIVES NEVER HURT TABERAH. He would always walk on sharp knives.

Nathella walked up, put an arm around Taberah's waist, and said, "Honey, will you come to my room? I want to show you something."

Taberah looked, and saw on the wall a yellowed plaque. He read:

Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen. It is for their faith that our ancestors are acknowledged.

It is by faith that we understand that the ages were created by a word from God, so that from the invisible the visible world came to be.

It was because of his faith that Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain, and for that he was acknowledged as upright when God himself made acknowledgment of his offerings. Though he is dead, he still speaks by faith.

It was because of his faith that Enoch was taken up and did not experience death: he was no more, because God took him; because before his assumption he was acknowledged to have pleased God. Now it is impossible to please God without faith, since anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and rewards those who seek him.

It was through his faith that Noah, when he had been warned by God of something that had never been seen before, took care to build an ark to save his family. His faith was a judgement on the world, and he was able to claim the uprightness which comes from faith.

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the Promised Land as though it were not his, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. He looked forward to the well-founded city, designed and built by God.

It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise was faithful to it. Because of this, there came from one man, and one who already had the mark of death on him, descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of

sand on the seashore which cannot be counted.

All these died in faith, before receiving any of the things that had been promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them, recognizing that they were only strangers and nomads on earth. People who use such terms about themselves make it quite plain that they are in search of a homeland. If they had meant the country they came from, they would have had the opportunity to return to it, but in fact they were longing for a better homeland, their heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, since he has founded the city for them.

It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though he had yet to receive what had been promised, and he had been told: Isaac is the one through whom your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power to raise the dead, and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead.

It was by faith that this same Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob and Esau for the still distant future. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, bowed in reverence, as he leant on his staff. It was by faith that, when he was about to die, Joseph mentioned the Exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his own remains.

It was by faith that Moses, when he was born, was kept hidden by his parents for three months; because they saw that he was a fine child, they were not afraid of the royal edict. It was by faith that, when he was grown up, Moses refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose to be ill-treated in company with God's people rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin. He considered that the humiliations offered to the Anointed were something more precious than all the treasures of Egypt, because he had his eyes fixed on the reward. It was by faith that he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood to prevent the Destroyer from touching any of their first-born sons. It was by faith that they crossed the Red Sea as easily as dry land, while the Egyptians, trying to do the same, were drowned.

It was through faith that the walls of Jericho fell down when the people had marched round them for seven days. It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies and so was not killed with

...and the prostitute welcomed the spies and so was not killed with the unbelievers.

What more shall I say? There is not time for me to give an account of Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, or of David, Samuel and the prophets. These were men who through faith conquered kingdoms, did what was upright and earned the promises. They could keep a lion's mouth shut, put out blazing fires and emerge unscathed from battle. They were weak people who were given strength to be brave in war and drive back foreign invaders. Some others submitted to torture, refusing release so that they would rise again to a better life. Some had to bear being pilloried and flogged, or even chained up in prison. They were stoned, or sawn in half, or killed by the sword; they were homeless, and wore only the skins of sheep and goats; they were in want and hardship, and maltreated. They were too good for the world and they wandered in desert and mountains and in caves and ravines. These all won acknowledgement through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, since God had made provision for us to have something better, and they were not to reach perfection except with us.

Nathella waited until Taberah had finished reading, and said, "Nowhere on earth is home to us. Heaven is home, and you have less of a temporary home than most people do. It hurts to have an earthly home taken away, but the healing of the hurt is not in finding another earthly home, but in finding a heavenly home — and once you have let Heaven be your home, you may find pieces of it on earth.

"That plaque was given to me by my mother; she had it for some time, and it was one of the last things she gave me. Now she's in Heaven.

"Inside your heart — and mine, and Aed's — is a God-shaped void. Only God can fill it. New Age music may bring a moment's relief, but the thirst is one only God can wholly slake." She beckoned to Aed, and the two of them gave Taberah a sandwich hug. "But we will try to make a place where you can be at home."

Taberah said, "Where's Fiona? I want to show her my time."

# Taberah's Time

Fiona said, "So, Taberah, how about your time?"

Taberah said, "Why don't we take a walk in the forest, and I'll think about how to explain it?"

They began to walk along the path, Taberah stopping and thinking every so often, but saying nothing. This continued for five minutes, fifteen, thirty, an hour — and Fiona began tapping her toes. Taberah stopped, and Fiona sat down on a log and began drumming her fingers.

"What are you doing?" Taberah asked.

"Nothing," Fiona said. "I'm just waiting for you to start explaining your time already."

"What about your hands and feet? What are you doing with them?"

"I'm just tapping them, because I'm getting impatient waiting for — ooh... Taberah, are you walking around and not saying anything on purpose?"

"No; I'm thinking about how to explain time to you."

"Do you understand why I'm drumming my fingers?"

"No. Why?"

Fiona began to realize something. She decided to try not to drum her fingers, or pace, or tap her foot, but just sit. It turned out to be harder than it sounded. Fiona kept noticing herself fidgeting; even when she thought to herself, "It's been a while and I'm not fidgeting," somehow she realized that her fingers were drumming on her legs.

"Fiona!" Taberah spoke, and Fiona suddenly realized that she had lost track of time — and was not fidgeting. "I do not have a different time awareness, so much as not having an awareness of time. There are moments for me, times with other people, times doing a task, and times waiting — watches are fascinating to me, but even when I watch them, I watch the rhythmic motion, and more often than not forget that the

watch the rhythmic motion, and more often than not forget that the motion is measuring something that's supposed to be time. That time is fickle; it seems to speed up and slow down. The first lesson in medieval time is to let go of it."

Taberah walked a bit further, stopping a few times, and Fiona still caught herself fidgeting — but she began to catch herself completely relaxed at times. Fiona wondered when he would finally speak, and then was surprised when he broke the silence — was he done thinking already? Taberah said, "There are moments — I do not know how to say it in your language — when you are totally absorbed, rapt in concentration, when you lose track of time because you are so completely filled. It is not so much time as a foretaste of eternity. These moments cannot be commanded or controlled, although there is a cooperation with them; they are a gift from God. Those moments are my 'time', if time is the appropriate word. 'Timelessness' is better. That is the apex of the time I live in, and I am sorry not to see you live in that time more."

"So how do I enter this time? You've told me what time you live in, but not how to get in it."

Taberah thought briefly and said, "I can't tell you that. Pray, and God may grant it. But I don't know how to enter it."

# Worship

A couple of Wednesdays had passed since Taberah had first asked to worship with the Phoenix Society; something had come up, and Taberah had not been aware that time had passed. This time around, Fiona was free, and they entered the room to be warmly greeted.

The service began with hugs and lively music. Taberah was caught up in the singing; Nathella wondered if one of the moments Taberah described would descend. Or had she always had them and not been aware of them? The music gave way to prayer, Scripture, sermon; as communion came, Fiona could see that Taberah was almost in a trance, but she was not. The worship was followed by a meal; Taberah felt a tap on his shoulder, and wondered why someone would tap his shoulder. He looked up.

The young woman who had spoken up at the skeptics' meeting studied his face closely and said, "You were at that meeting and left right after the paper burned weirdly. What did you do?"

Taberah looked at her and said, "Nothing. I prayed. Same as you. God heard our prayer."

She said, "That's not the whole story."

Taberah said, "It's as much of the story as you'll believe."

She said, "What part of the story won't I believe?"

"That I am medieval."

"You mean that you try to be like a medieval, even growing out a beard?"

"No, I mean that I am medieval."

The student's gaze rested on Taberah. After a while, she said, "I don't know what to make of the claim. You're not lying, you don't seem mistaken, and I can't believe what you say." She paused, and said, "And I didn't believe the paper when I saw it. I prayed for it, but I didn't believe

didn't believe the paper when I saw it. I prayed for it, but I didn't believe it." Then she blushed slightly, and said, "I've forgotten my manners. My name is Ceinwyn. What is your name?" She reached out her arms to embrace him.

Taberah enjoyed the hug; she was soft, and in her touch he could feel a spirit that was alive. He said, "My name is Taberah. I'm staying with Aed."

"Who? Is he a student here?"

Fiona said, "He means Dr. Kinsella."

Ceinwyn said, "Dr. Kinsella. You mean —" A look of dread crossed her face, and Fiona said, "Yes, he's teaching this young man his corrupt ways." Ceinwyn smiled, and said, "I have respect for anybody who can do that."

Taberah said, "Do what?"

Fiona said, "You know. What you did to win the Turing Award."

Fiona covered her mouth; as soon as the words left her mouth, she realized she shouldn't have said them. Half the room was staring, and the other half soon joined. Then she said, "Um, I would like if you could kind of forget what I said; my Dad's done a lot to try to ensure the privacy of my friend."

A young man said, "He won the Turing Award?"

Another man stood up and said, "I have a strong temptation to ask this brother for his autograph, and I would like to ask you to join me in resisting it. We need to treat him as an honored guest but nothing special beyond that, and treat his award as a matter among brothers. It has to have the highest level of confidence."

Ceinwyn looked at Taberah and said, "I am sorely tempted to ask you something more about the paper, but..." her voice trailed off.

Fiona said, "I think he may be right about being medieval. Or almost right. But there are some things about him that just don't fit. He makes my head spin, and he says the queerest things."

Another student said, "Like what?"

"Like saying that he stole a relic from a cathedral."

The student said, "Hmm... I'm a history major as well as an English major, and medieval culture was very different from ours. My name's Tala, by the way. Stealing relics was actually fairly common. Taberah, did you hear about the conversation between Saint Peter and Saint Augustine?"

Taberah said, "No, what did they say?"

Fiona said, "And that's the other thing. He gets the queerest things wrong. It's not just that he doesn't understand why people who lived in different centuries can't have talked with each other. He didn't understand why a cathedral couldn't have had two heads of John the Baptist, one as a boy and one as a man. He saw the logical contradiction, but didn't deduce an impossibility. Plus, he's so short and scrawny — not at all like the bulk you'd expect of someone from the age of knights in shining armor."

Tala said, "I don't want to explain all of why, at least not right now, but a medieval would be quite likely to make those errors. And medievals *were* that short and scrawny — their diets stunted their growth. It's only in the past couple of centuries that people started to look as tall as you are me — and (I won't name names) some people today still haven't caught up." He winked.

A short, bearded student said, "I'll have you know that I represent that remark."

Fiona said, "Ooh!" and then, "Diet. He talked as if he had grown up eating mostly bread, bread with pebbles in it."

Tala said, "I think he's about as good of a mockup of a medieval as you could ask for. How and why, I don't know — there've been a lot of queer things that have happened, most of which have an uninteresting explanation. Even with what I've seen, it would take a lot to convince me that he had — Taberah, if you are a medieval, why are you in the twenty-first century?"

Taberah said, "What is the twenty-first century?"

Tala said, "Never mind that. How did you come to be here?"

Taberah said, "I was walking with two of my friends, when an angel called me. I took his hand, and I was in the forest outside Aed's house. Then —" and he started telling the story. It was after midnight when he finished; Ceinwyn said, "Taberah, I have many questions to ask you, but some of us need to get to bed. Would you consider visiting us again?"

Taberah said, "Certainly."

That night, as Tala lay in bed, waiting to fall asleep, strange images flitted through his mind. He saw a doorway between the medieval world and his, shimmering, the door beginning to open. A burst of light flashed around; Tala looked around and saw no one, and then looked to the doorway

u001 way.

The door had been blasted off its hinges.

## Second Birth

Taberah said, "Remember how we were talking about medieval time, and how we left things not finished? I have thought more about your becoming medieval."

Aed said, "Yes. Do you want to can turn back the clock?"

Taberah said, "What does 'turn back the clock' mean?"

"It means reverse the flow of time, undo the changes that have happened."

Taberah looked puzzled. "Why would anyone do that?"

Aed said, "My culture was once, a long time ago, medieval. Now it is not. We have cars, computers, and clocks. Do you want to turn that back to swords and armor? Do you want to un-invent electronics?"

Taberah said, "It is funny that you think of medieval in terms of things. Wealth is not medieval. Wealth is only an avatar; it is not the true person. Medieval is not knights on horseback."

Aed said, "Then what is medieval?"

Taberah said, "Medieval is faith. Medieval is rationality. Medieval is carving the back of a statue. Medieval is a way of life."

Aed said, "But the medieval era is gone. How can people in the four hundred and seventh semi be medieval?"

"What is a semi?"

"I'll explain it later. How can people today be medieval? We can't just automatically be medieval the way the medievals were."

Taberah closed his eyes in concentration; it took him a long time to get the point. Aed was asking him for the answer to a difficulty that simply didn't exist for him, and Taberah was trying hard to see the matter through Aed's eyes — and at last he did.

"Aed, do you know Jesus talking with Nicodemus?"

"Yes."

IES.

"What was the question Nicodemus asked Jesus?"

"'How can someone old be born? Can a man enter his mother's womb to be born again?' I know this question well. It has been ridiculed, but it is a serious question, even profound. Can a man turn back the clock and —"

There was a look of dawning comprehension on Aed's face, and suddenly he was grasping what was *medieval* — not lords and vassals, not illuminated manuscripts, not unending quirks and questions from a visitor whom he still could not wholly believe was medieval — not any of these things, but Aed grasped what was medieval. He saw the force behind cathedrals, the abstraction that showed itself in the question about dancing angels, the community shared between the people and, in all of these things, he saw a little piece of his heart.

Aed saw equally why Taberah had asked the question: that turning back the clock was neither possible nor necessary, that the second birth was of a different type than the first one, and one that could still happen with much water under the bridge, that the passage of time in itself had almost nothing to do with being medieval. He saw that the fundamental beauty of the Middle Ages was one that people from his age could share — not in exactly the same way, but it didn't need to be. People could be medieval today just as they could still be Christian today — it involved swimming upstream, but it was worth it.

Aed looked at Taberah gently and said, "Taberah, you said that you were medieval, and asked what time I was from. I am medieval, too."

# Questions

It seemed but an eyeblink and another week had passed; Fiona and Taberah were once again in the crowded worship room, and there was an audible excitement. The service was merry and passed quickly, and at the meal afterwards, Ceinwyn came up to Taberah and said, "I know what the wrong questions are to ask you, Taberah, or at least questions it is not good to ask. What are the right questions to ask you? What do you wish others understood about you?"

Taberah closed his eyes and rocked back and forth on his chair. Tears began to appear. When, after a long time, he did not answer, someone told Ceinwyn, "Ask him another question." Taberah, without opening his eyes, said, "That's the best question. That is a very good question to ask of anyone.

"I have had many people try to understand me, but most of them don't. I don't know why not. Maybe I'm just hard to understand. Some of you think of me as medieval, and I am medieval, but I'm as different from other medievals as they are from you. Even how I am talking — it is a means of talking that I learned from your time. I have seen different peoples, and the way in which I am different is not the way one people varies from each other. Maybe there is something wrong with me. I don't fit in anywhere. I can adapt some — I've lived in many places — but I'm never completely — I don't know the word. I'm not making sense. I'm not saying anything. Never mind. I can't think like other people. You asked a good question, but I don't have a good answer for it."

Emerant was pierced by the look on his face. Emerant was intelligent, if not exceptionally so, but she was a psychology major in the middle of a senior thesis studying of the psychology of extraordinary intelligence; she followed all three major schools: traditional Stanford-Binet intelligence, multiple intelligences (there were now twenty-three agreed upon

multiple intelligences (there were now twenty-three agreed upon intelligences among most multiple intelligence theorists), and the interactionist school, which studied its intelligence as an emergent property arising from the interaction of the basic aptitudes studied by multiple intelligence theorists. Being familiar with all three schools, Emerant regarded the traditional school as unfairly neglected, and it was that school that she thought of now. The pain Taberah voiced was not at all unique; it was part of why the gifted had joined the ranks of activist minorities filled with anger and seeking redress for grievances that were always perceived to be getting worse. There was more to it than just a taboo (now being effaced) on divulging a high level of intelligence, or a stereotype that for a long time was not realized to exist — a stereotype embedded in words such as 'geek' and 'nerd' that only now were becoming as socially unacceptable as racial slurs. The more gifted a person was, the more differently he thought, and that is why there had been posited a range of optimal intelligence, with IQ between 125 and 145 — beyond the upper limit of that range, a person thought differently, so that his giftedness became a mixed blessing. People with IQs over 170 tended to feel like they didn't fit anywhere. From psychological, emotional and social cues, and the Turing Award, Emerant had no doubt that Taberah's IQ was over 170, probably over 180 — how much further, she did not bother to speculate. Above, at any rate, the point at which IQ tests cease to effectively measure, and well beyond the point that pain would begin to — Emerant wondered what a boy of normal intelligence would think and feel growing up in a society of people who were severely mentally retarded. He would definitely perceive that he was somehow different from the others, and attribute it to either "Something's wrong with them," or "Something's wrong with me." Taberah had evidently taken the latter route, and — where to begin to explain all this to him?

She walked up, placed an arm around Taberah's shoulder, and said, "Taberah, Taberah. I have a number of things to explain to you, but the way you think is not worse than anyone else's — just different and special. You haven't met anybody who thinks like you (nor have I, apart from you), because God has only made a few people that way. I understand your feelings, and I would feel the same way if I were like you. I love you and I am glad you're here — so does everyone in this room. May we sing a healing song for you?"

"What's a healing song?" Taberah asked.

"It's a song we sing to God, as a prayer for you that you may have healing."

"Yes, please." Taberah had been touched by Emerant's words, but it was her eyes most of all which caught him. Her eyes bore the embrace of a warm, generous heart, and silently spoke the message, "My heart has room for you." And Taberah realized that he had a foster family who cared about him deeply — he decided to thank them for it. A song began, and he realized that the people had gathered around him, placing their hands on him. The music seemed to Taberah to rise like incense:

*Lord God of Heaven,  
Hold this child in your arms.  
Fill him with your love.  
Creator of Heaven and earth,  
Fill his heart with your peace.  
Let this peace flow through him.  
Spirit of light and love,  
Lift from him all darkness.  
Lift him up to Heaven.  
Let us be his brothers and sisters,  
Your love made manifest.  
Fill him with your love.*

As the song ended, Taberah looked at the faces around him and wondered, "Is this what Heaven's like?"

# Mysticism

"Fiona, I was thinking, and I realized a better answer to Ceinwyn's question. The answer is this: I am a mystic."

"Oh, Taberah," Fiona said, "We already knew that. Dad mentioned that you had done some astrology, and now there's that piece of paper."

Taberah said, "Huh? What does mysticism have to do with that?"

Fiona said, "Huh? Isn't the connection obvious?"

Taberah said, "No. I have stopped astrology because I trust Aed, but astrology was not any strange mysticism; it was to me like what you do in reading a weather forecast. And the paper — I never thought of that as mystical. I just prayed as others were praying, and God gave what we asked for. That is hardly mysticism."

Fiona had difficulty believing that all that was going on was that Taberah had asked God, but she mentally waved this aside. She asked, "Then what is mysticism?"

Taberah said, "Mysticism is living in the fire of God. It is contemplating and gazing on his glory, and for me it is action in that glory. You are concerned with getting things done, with practicality, with results; I happen to get things done, but it is not what I am concerned with. Few things are needed, really only one; I occupy myself with that one thing. That is the heart of mysticism, not astrology or saving a piece of paper."

Fiona said, "But what does your mysticism *do*? What mystic powers are you striving to develop?"

Taberah said, "What a funny idea, mystic powers! Which is greater — getting something done, or the reason getting something done is desirable in the first place?"

Fiona said, "I suppose, what made it worth getting it done."

Taberah said, "Correct. Mysticism is not a way to get things done; it is

Taberah said, "Correct. Mysticism is not a way to get things done, it is a 'why' that is greater than getting things done. Mysticism is not a way to do something else. Mysticism is worthy in itself."

Fiona asked, "Then how are you a mystic? You say that you are the son of a merchant, that you have travelled to many places and had adventures. How does mysticism fit into that? You haven't retreated into a monastery to spend six hours a day praying; you've already managed to cause a stir. Is that more important than mysticism? Or are you a superman who can do one on top of the other?"

Taberah said, "I find your question confusing. My actions are not more important than mysticism; they are the shape that part of my mysticism takes. I do not see action as something added to mysticism; it is an expression. I am seeking God's glory by talking with you now. I have heard a saying, 'Too Heavenly minded to be of any earthly good,' and I think it embodies a mistake. You cannot be too Heavenly minded to be of any earthly good. You can quite easily be too earthly minded to be of any earthly good. Being heavenly minded is itself of earthly good, whether or not it does things in an obvious manner; that is one of many reasons why, of the nine orders of angels, the highest six gaze only on the glory of God — it is but the lowest three who are ever sent to earth. It is a right ordering. Mysticism is sharing in the truth that the angels share in, and for me that truth takes an active form."

Fiona said, "Does this mysticism relate to your time?"

Taberah said, "My time relates to this mysticism."

"How can I enter it?"

"Seek God, and ask him how you are to enter it. He will show you."

# Heaven

Taberah walked out of the computer room, thinking loudly. Aed looked at him, and simply waited for him to start explaining.

"Aed, I was doing some reading today on embryology; what your philosophers have thought of is fascinating. Something in my mind was speaking, and I realized another deep difference in belief. Medieval people believe that they're going to Heaven."

Aed cleared his throat and said, "All Christians believe that, Taberah. It's a basic doctrine."

Taberah said, "Then why does your people not act like they believe they're going to Heaven?"

"How does someone act like he believes he's going to go to Heaven? Does he kill himself to get there faster? You should know better than that."

Taberah paused in thought for a moment and said, "How can you believe you're going to Heaven and not know a change in your actions? That's like believing food nourishes you, but not knowing what eating is like."

Aed had no immediate reply to this. He asked, "How does belief in Heaven change your actions, Taberah?"

Taberah said, "In embryology, one studies how a person is becoming ready to be born and live outside the uterus. That is the whole purpose of being an unborn child — why do the texts leave the word untranslated as *foetus*? Did the English translators of your texts not know how to render that word from Latin?"

"Later, Taberah. You're getting side tracked."

"Some of the unborn child's motions are useful there — such as blood pulsing about the body. There are others that have no use in the uterus, such as sucking and kicking. The question is not how to arrange things to

such as sucking and kicking. The question is not how to arrange things to most pleasurably remain an unborn child, but to best prepare for birth and the world beyond that.

"Your people does not understand how this symbol reveals Heaven. They think that the point of living on earth is to make as much change on earth, and make earth as comfortable a place as possible, and — I was a long time in coming to understand political ideology. Authority is necessary, and there are questions about how to best govern, to praise good and punish evil. But political ideology is not just about this — it is about how to use government to turn earth into Heaven."

Aed said, "I do not understand. Do you mean it is wrong to try to make earth better?"

Taberah said, "All of the saints made earth better. Good deeds are an important part of how a soul is made ready for Heaven. But a centeredness, a focus on making earth better is not possible. Or it is possible, but leaves people more poorly prepared for Heaven, and more poorly equipped for earth. It is — I do not know how to say it. My father told me, 'Drink wine to live. Do not live to drink wine.' If I were to live to drink wine, I would be disordered. The wine would ensnare me. Trying to live on technology is trying to make technology something it cannot be. It can pacify a spoiled child; it cannot make him well-raised. Your people is concerned with how to pamper and pacify a spoiled child — and it took me the longest time to understand that not simply did I stumble on a very rich man's house, but that so many people in your society have wealth not only to have as much bread as you need, but as much meat as you want, and you do not even think of it as costly — while mine is concerned with how to raise him well to grow into a man. In the Great Chain of Being, man lives between the beasts and the angels; it is the beasts who have this life on earth and its pleasures as all they own, and the angels who eternally gaze on the glory of God. Believing in Heaven means becoming more like an angel; here, I have seen heroic efforts to live the life of a beast."

Aed sorted this through. It had been a while since he had thought of the Great Chain of Being, and his thoughts about it moved sluggishly. Apart from that, he began to see — and more than see, he began to believe and know — why Taberah would look around and be convinced that Aed's culture did not believe in Heaven. With a chill, Aed realized that he could not remember the last time he had thought about how his actions were

preparing him, or failing to prepare him, for the eternity before him. Slightly later, and with an equal chill, Aed realized that he could not remember the last day he had not thought about how to shape the world around him so as to bring pleasure. He slipped too often in thinking of his teaching as a way to prepare his students for the world it would face — which it no doubt was, but if that was *all* it was, then... Aed asked Taberah, "Taberah, how can I do something that will prepare me for the next life? What is one thing I can do?"

Taberah thought for a second, and said, "Close your eyes and grow still, and wait."

Taberah waited a second and said, "You're wanting to get this over with. Stop that. Want to do this."

Time passed. Aed's breathing had stilled. Taberah said, "Now thank God for seven things he has given you."

Aed took another breath and slowly said,

Thank you, God, for my wife Nathella.  
Thank you, God, for my children, Fiona and Clancy.  
Thank you, God, for my professorship.  
Thank you, God, for my broken garage door. It means I have not only a house and a car, but even a building to protect my car from the elements.  
Thank you, God, for the headaches I have after talking with Taberah. They come from a person for whom I am very grateful, and who challenges me in ways I never thought possible.  
Thank you, God, for the hope of Heaven.  
Most of all, thank you, God, for yourself.

Taberah smiled, and said, "You have now done one action to prepare yourself for Heaven."

Aed said, "Is it over already?"

# "Life"

Taberah looked out; there was depth in his gaze, a gaze that was somehow present and remote at the same time. A short time ago, Fiona would have thought he was staring at her; now, she understood that he was looking past her. It relieved the feeling of being under a microscope.

Fiona sat down and said, "What are you thinking of, Taberah?"

"I don't know how to say it — in any language. It is another part of the answer to Emerant's question."

"Can you try? Can you say something similar?"

"I — live. I don't know how to explain. I experience things intensely. Sometimes, when I drink wine, I am not aware of anything else —"

"You get drunk? That is living?"

"I not know how to explain. I do not get drunk. It is when I am drinking it, the taste — it also happens with thinking, and praying, and music."

When Taberah said 'music', Fiona caught a glimpse into what he was saying. She was transported back to his first chant, when the whole family had been lost in his voice — no, that wasn't quite it. They had been lost in the light that was shining through Taberah.

An idea came into Fiona's head, and she said, "Taberah, why don't you get your lute out, and I'll go to my keyboard, and we can play together? I think I'd understand you better."

They went to the practice room, and Fiona set up her keyboard. "What songs do you know?"

"I know many songs from the lands I have travelled in. But I do not know songs here; I haven't played with musicians. Ooh! I know your church songs!"

Fiona played songs in several different styles — ancient songs, classic hymns (meaning the contemporary songs of days past, drinking tunes

hymns (meaning the contemporary songs of days past, drinking tunes such as "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," and so on), "contemporary" music (meaning roughly three groups: music that had been contemporary in the more recent past, music that represented an unsuccessful attempt to imitate the contemporary secular style, and music that combined both attributes), songs of a new musical renaissance that did not attempt to follow either mold, but borrowed from both and brought a new light... After one of the tunes, Taberah said, "That's the one! I want to play with that song."

Fiona slumped and said, "No, Taberah, not that one! It's awful! It was in bad musical taste when it was written, and it's in bad musical taste now. One of my girlfriends said that it sounds better when it's sung off-key."

Taberah said, "I know. You've already told me that. That's why I want to work with it."

Fiona had enough of her mother's perception to realize that arguing with Taberah now would be a losing proposition. So she resigned herself to playing harmony, leaving the Taberah the melody.

The first time through, Fiona was able to shut out the music; she expected a repose after going through once, but Taberah immediately started playing again. She kept up with the melody, but now Fiona was not able to ignore the music. Then Taberah started to improvise slightly; he made a change here and there, and then he started making only musical questions that required her to think of an answer in the accompaniment. This required Fiona to plunge even more deeply into the song. After a time, Fiona was too engaged in the music to think about how bad it was.

Time passed, and Fiona slowly became aware of something else. The music was still terrible, but she saw a luminescence shining through it. Then she realized that they were working together, and a strange beauty was emerging from the music. She played, fascinated, and gradually began to see a beauty like that of a rusty truck in a desert — a (she did not know the word) beauty that can't be found in a place that is polished and perfect — there is no room for it. She was fascinated by the music that was flowing around and through her. More time passed, and then a flash of insight struck and her hands froze on the keyboard; it was as if a juggler tossing seven glass balls stopped, and they fell and shattered. Taberah switched off the keyboard, and relaxed his hands. "What

happened, Fiona?"

"I realized something, Taberah. I had an epiphany."

"What?"

"I had finally entered your time, Taberah. I entered your time."

# Intelligence Emerging

Aed sat and thought about the output of the artificial intelligence program. Trying to decide whether it functioned intelligently was like — no, that wasn't it. Aed couldn't tell what it was like.

Intelligent or not, it was at the same time familiar and alien. He had worked with the algorithm further, so that it stored a history in its state, drawing on the algorithm that had won the Turing Award, and the arguments were coherent — but arguments such as he had never seen before. Any one paragraph of its output could be mistaken for human, but there was something undefinably strange about it; he could tell what the computer was arguing, but not why. Aed slapped his forehead; the arguments were evidently intelligent enough to tempt him to think of the computer as human.

Aed spent a long time trying to think if the computer's rationality was something comparable to human, or even if that were sensible to ask. Dijkstra had said, "Asking whether computers can think is like asking whether submarines can swim." Aed thought for a nuance; he thought it was closer to the question of whether a racecar can swim. Or an oven. Except that the answer was not "No, but it can do something comparable;" an answer of "Yes, but it is not comparable" would have been closer.

Aed thought for a moment, and then went down to the computer computer and navigated. An avatar was shortly before him; it said, "Aed! Still up to the usual trouble?"

"How are things in the philosophy department? I heard you've got a new tenure track position added. I'm actually up to worse trouble, now."

"I'm not surprised. How can I help you?"

I'm not surprised. How can I help you?

"What courses are you teaching this semester?"

"I'm teaching three courses, all of which have a paper due shortly. Get something in the gradebooks for a preliminary report. I'm teaching 101, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 234, *Philosophy and Contemporary Movements*, and 312, *Integrative Metaphysics*. Have you encountered yet another guest lecturer that you want me to cede precious lecture time to?"

"Actually, no. I was wondering if you could give a paper to be graded by your TAs for each of the assignments."

"Uh, OK. May I ask who the paper is by?"

"I'm not telling."

# Role Play

Clancy said, "Taberah, have you been to the pool at all?"

Taberah said, "Pool? Why? To drink?"

"No, to swim, silly!"

Taberah stiffened and said, "I swam once, when I fell from a bridge. I don't like swimming."

Clancy said, "Will you come along? You don't have to go in the water. We can hang out on the deck if you want. The pool will close before too long; it's not so warm."

Taberah was careful not to sit too close to the water's edge; falling in once had been plenty for him. He watched the others with trepidation, and tried to grasp that they were in the water for pleasure's sake, and did not need to be rescued. The swimsuits gave him a shock as well. He had finally gotten adjusted to the fact that these people were not used to being naked, and seeing trunks and bikinis was a bizarre sight to him.

Fiona climbed out of the water and sat down on the chair next to Taberah; Clancy was on the other side, whistling a bird song to the robin on the lines overhead. Fiona told Clancy, "You know, it's been a long time since we role played."

Taberah asked, "What is role play?"

Fiona said, "It's — you'll see. But you'll have to make a character. Role playing is *in* this semi."

Taberah asked, "What is a semi?"

Fiona thought for a moment and said, "Semi-decade. People used to not be conscious of what era they were in, and then they were conscious of the century, and then they thought of what decade they were in, and now it's the 5 year semi-decade."

Taberah wondered why people would be time-conscious in that way, and why the era would be that short, but was beginning to understand

and why the era would be that short, but was beginning to understand that certain things were wiser not to ask. He said, "I want to be a minstrel."

Fiona said, "My character is a Jane-of-all-trades named Deborah. Clancy is GMing, uh, game mastering."

Clancy said, "You are both in a forest; your ship has crashed. There is a spring of water nearby. You hear sounds like footprints nearby."

Fiona said, "Do the footprints sound human or animal?"

Clancy said, "You can't tell for sure, but there is an animal quality about them."

Fiona said, "I'm going to get my laser gun out."

Clancy said, "What are you going to do, Taberah?"

Taberah hesitated and said, "Can I hide and nock an arrow?"

Clancy said, "Yes."

"You see a huge bear on a chain. At the other end of the chain is a massive man in a rags."

Fiona said, "I am going to say 'Hello.'"

Clancy said, "He does not seem to recognize the word, and there is uncertainty on his face."

Taberah said, "I am going to put back my bow and arrow, and take my harp, and begin to sing."

Clancy paused, and said, "The bear sits and listens; the man does, too."

Taberah said, "I am going to take out some of my food and feed it."

Clancy said, "Both bear and man seem pleased at the food. The man looks at you longingly, and starts to walk into the woods."

Taberah said, "I'm going to follow him."

Fiona said, "I'll follow, too."

Clancy said, "He gets to a cave; upon following him in, it takes some time for your eyes to adjust to the twilight. The cave is a crude environment, with assorted items around."

Fiona said, "Such as?"

Clancy said, "Some burnt-out transformers, an oddly shaped granite bowl, a corroded lamp, and some empty containers."

Taberah asked, "Are the containers usable?"

Clancy said, "No; they were disposable containers. They —"

A voice from the pool shouted, "Hey, Kinsella! Want to join us in a game of Marco Polo?"

Clancy shouted, "Not now! I'm entertaining someone."

Fiona said, "What is in his eyes when he looks at us? What is in his eyes when he looks at me?"

Clancy said, "Fear, suspicion, hope, disbelief, a forlorn longing."

Fiona asked, "Does he want to be with our civilization?"

Clancy said, "He wished that at one time. He is now uncertain about what he desires."

Mist came into Taberah's eyes. Fiona turned to him and said, "What is it, Taberah? Is something bothering you?"

Taberah said, "No. There is something about man that —"

Fiona sat silently, waiting.

Taberah said, "Before I left medieval time, that was home. Now, even if I return to it, it is not home. I am part of this time now, and at times I let Heaven be my home, and at times I find Heaven, but other times — I am learning not to be in this state, but it catches me."

Fiona wrapped her arms around Taberah, and said, "Honey, why don't you come home? We can be with you while you heal."

Taberah got up, and joined Clancy in heading for the locker room.

# Rated

Aed received the three copies of the computer's ramblings that had been submitted to the philosophy TAs. The first paper had been submitted to the TA for philosophy 234, *Philosophy and Contemporary Movements*:

Paper is nuanced and addresses many fundamental issues of relevance to contemporary movements. Nonetheless, its reflection of nuance is not matched by any kind of logical order; a logician would grade this paper harshly. B

Aed chuckled. This grade was a mark of success; it was the first time he had seen someone complain that a computer understood nuance but was logically deficient. He turned to the next copy, the one submitted for philosophy 312, *Integrative Metaphysics*:

Paper contains brilliant application of argument from multiple domains of philosophy, combined with the indescribable eccentricity that heralds a new development. Ideas are not fully developed, but even in embryonic form, there is a raw energy to them. I have shown your paper to the professor, and she concurs with my judgments. You should do graduate work in philosophy. A+

Aed said, "This is encouraging. What did the TA for philosophy 101 have to say?"

Paper is arrogant and pretentious, trying to be simultaneously similar to and different from existing philosophies, and combines the worst points of both. Classic example of fake intellectual who strings

together a lot of things that sound philosophical and thereby considers himself a philosopher. F

Aed laughed; the 101 TA had picked up on something that the others hadn't. Very well, then; he was pleased with the results, and he was ready to announce what Taberah and he had done.

# What Would You Like To Be?

The days passed quickly; the leaves on the trees turned bright colors, and Taberah seemed a shade blueish. There was another shopping trip made, in which Taberah received a warmer set of clothing; this trip passed without any remarkable events, and Clancy said he could take Taberah shopping for clothes alone next time; Nathella accepted. In watching Taberah, Nathella was reminded of her roommate freshman year in college. A young Sudanese woman, she found the cooler seasons to be bitterly cold.

A mug of spiced cider found Fiona and Taberah relaxing over a fire; Taberah was watching a leaf fall from its stalk. Fiona looked at Taberah and asked, "What would you like to be for Halloween?"

She was not surprised by his reply, "What's Halloween?", nor his followup, "I think I'd like to be myself. I don't fancy turning into a rock or a bear." She took it as an opportunity to explain a cherished time of year. "Halloween is when you dress up as something fanciful, and pretend to be something different for a day. You can go around from door to door, and knock, and show people your costume, and they give you candy. I want to be a fairy, wearing a shimmering white robe with draping sleeves and a low neckline and a long, flowing skirt, and with translucent, glittery wings."

Taberah said, "I don't know what I want to be. I was already a jester in my avatar. I know! I can dress as a night-man, with shadow-black clothes that melt in the night, and soft shoes that make no sound, and —"

Fiona said, "No. Too many criminals out at night; you'd be mistaken for one. You need to wear bright clothes and not look threatening."

Taberah said, "Euh... I could be a philosopher!"

Taberah said, "Eum... I could be a philosopher."

Fiona said, "And how does one dress as a philosopher? All the philosophers I've met dress like everyone else. No, wait! You could be an ancient Greek philosopher, with toga, and laurel, and — whatever else you think would make the point."

Taberah said, "Where do we buy these outfits? Are they in a section of the store I haven't seen?"

Fiona said, "Well, there are places that sell Halloween costumes, but they aren't very good — a mask and a hat and some very flimsy cloth. There are places that rent them, and some of those are better — but you only have them for a day. In our family, we have a tradition of making them. We buy cloth and patterns, and cut them out, and stitch them together. It's a great deal of fun — almost as much fun as wearing them. I can show you old costumes I have in my closet; I've been a princess, a space ranger, an alien, an ice cube, a —"

Taberah said, "How did you dress as an ice cube?"

Fiona said, "Dad did that one. We got a big cardboard box, painted it blue and white, and got a white shirt and white tights for me to wear underneath. That costume is — let's see, I think it's being used to store shirts in the attic. Or something; we only go up in our attic when we're putting something up there."

Taberah said, "I was up there. It was fun; it was like climbing cliffs. Only this time there weren't brigands chasing me. I think climbing's more fun when brigands chase after you."

Fiona shuddered, and said, "To each, her own. I'd be scared out of my wits."

Taberah said, "I was scared out of my wits. And I was having fun."

Fiona said, "I guess we all have our own eccentricities. Our attic's not nearly as silly as my Dad is at times; you should see him play charades. The last time we played at a family gathering, he was jumping around with a vacuum cleaner, and humming 'Oh, when the saints go marching in!' I always remember what Dad did, never what he was — when I watch him, I get the feeling that the game isn't about really about trying to help other guess what on earth you are."

Taberah said, "Your Dad understands games."

Fiona said, "How's that? He usually diverts games off their course."

Taberah said, "No. He changes their appearance when he gets them on course. A game on one level is about following rules in some sort of

contest — but people would never play games if that was all there was about it. It is a pleasant contest to enjoy other people — and it sounds like your father has found a shortcut to enjoying other people. Most people need the long way about; they can't have fun unless they've carefully earned it. There are a very few people who can take shortcuts, and a very, very few people who can make others feel good about it."

Fiona thought for a moment, and said, "Taberah, I didn't know you were a philosopher."

Taberah said, "I am. You didn't know that? But 'philosophy' means something different here than in my lands. Philosophy in my home means a broad kind of learning, that touches many different places. I gather that your science is derived from natural philosophy, the philosophy that explores the natural order — but there are subtle differences that I don't understand. Maybe that it's separated from the rest of philosophy. I understand that professors at your father's university are called Doctor of Philosophy, and their inquiries are parts of philosophy, but they are not philosophers. 'Philosophy' now means something narrow, dull, not connected with life — some philosophers try to make philosophy relevant, but our philosophers did not need to make philosophy relevant because it already was. Philosophy can be different."

Fiona asked, "Do you think our culture is impoverished?"

Taberah asked, "What is a culture?"

This time Fiona was caught off-guard. Taberah evidently understood what a culture was; he had experienced different cultures and made any number of cultural comparisons. But, when she explained it to him, he was a long time in understanding; Fiona came to appreciate what a non-trivial concept culture was.

As soon as Taberah began to guess what a culture was, a number of possible replies came to his mind about an answer to Fiona's question. To his credit, he spoke only the truth. He said, "Yes. I think your culture is very impoverished."

Fiona asked, "Then what are you going to do about it?"

Taberah leaned back and closed his eyes. He needed and appreciated friends who would ask him questions like that — but didn't want too many. Like the whiskey he had once tried, a little went a long way.

"I don't know," he said. "Let me think about it. Then I'll tell you — or just act."

# Women's Liberation

## I

Taberah was by now taking walks around the town and around the university campus; he had come to tolerate car rides, but never rode in a car by choice, and was shocked when Nathella suggested he learn how to drive a car. He decided to take a long thinking walk, and was weaving in and out among buildings when a voice caught him. "What is your name?" it said.

Taberah looked, and saw a young woman sitting under a tree. She was holding a book, and sipping a strawberry hydrolated beverage.

"My name is Taberah. Why do you ask?"

"You remind me of someone — a friend. Someone I've not seen in a long time."

"What was he like?" Taherah asked.

"What was *she* like, you mean. Don't use exclusive language."

"What is exclusive language?"

"Exclusive language is language that uses the word 'he' to refer to an unknown person. It excludes women."

"Why?" As Taberah asked, he felt a discomfort, a desire to be anywhere else, a feeling of "Not this dance again!" — and at the same time a feeling that there was something significant, a moral pull to be there.

"Using the masculine as the generic reference to a person exists out of sexism because of a man's world, that says by its language that men are all that's important. People tried for a time to make language more inclusive by alternating between 'he' and 'she', but that still had the loaded masculine term. We now use the feminine as a generic term, free from exclusive masculine meanings, as a convenient designation for someone whose gender is unknown."

SOMEONE WHOSE GENDER IS UNKNOWN.

Taberah sensed something off kilter. It was not just with the argument; though he had never heard use of masculine pronouns interpreted to mean what she thought they meant, and was baffled as to why saying 'he' would be prejudicial while saying 'she' served as a neutral term for a person of unspecified sex, he was aware of something more. What he would come to call traditional language had always been a convention to him, no more significant than the use of a pronoun for a person whose name was not known — the argument he was hearing about exclusive language seemed to him as bizarre as an argument about "nameless language," in that persons of unspecified name were thereby meant to have no name. Taberah at least had always been acutely aware of how his thoughts were more than the words he used. He had struggled to represent his thoughts, and accepted conventions as useful in getting on to more important things. A sharp concern over "inclusive language", more to the point accompanied by a correspondingly sharp belief that the traditional use of masculine pronouns was really "exclusive language"... In itself this struck him as merely silly, and Taberah knew he was plenty silly himself. *Let he who is without silliness cast the first stone*, he had often said to himself, and he did not wish to break a tradition.

This is what Taberah sensed and thought on one level. On another level, he thought less but sensed more, and this was that the woman had a sense of anger about her. It wasn't just that her voice had risen; it was rather that in a vague sense he sensed that what he saw was the tip of an iceberg, that whatever concern and upset were caused by her upset at the word 'he' spoken of an unknown person, was only a surface glimmer, a faint shadow, cast by something he could not guess at. He looked at her, and asked, "Sister, what is your name?"

She looked startled, and said, "My name is Lydia."

He asked, "Lydia, why don't we take a long walk in the woods and talk?"

Lydia blanched, and said, "I'm staying right here."

Taberah concentrated hard and tried hard to see what his *faux pas* was this time. When that failed, he looked at her, and said, "I know I'm breaking all sorts of social rules, and that I don't understand this culture very well, but what did I do wrong? Why were you afraid when I asked you to take a walk in the woods?"

Lydia said, "I think that should be obvious enough!"

Then she saw the puzzlement on his face, and said, "You might rape me."

Taberah turned green, and asked, "Do you really think that?"

Lydia snapped, "Don't you try to put me back in place by challenging me. When a woman says something, she means what she says. From language that speaks of sports playing fields to cars that are designed to look appealing to a man but not to a woman to cutting women down to the subordinate role that would be convenient to men to logic and abstraction regarded as the essence of good thinking, you men will..." She stopped, startled by a realization.

"Taberah, why haven't you told me to go to Hell? Most men usually say that when I stop smiling and... Usually, I can put a smile on and look happy, I usually don't talk about how badly women are treated unless I am with other feminists. You, somehow — I don't act like this. Something slipped. Why haven't you told me to go to Hell?"

Taberah looked at her levelly and said, "I am afraid to tell you."

"You are afraid of me lashing out again?"

"No. Do you want to hear anyway?"

"Yes."

"You are in Hell already."

Lydia glared at Taberah and said, "Of course I'm in Hell! With a man's world that puts women down, how can I not be in Hell?"

Taberah said, "No. Wrongs exist, but you are in Hell because you believe the world is hostile to you. You believe that all sorts of actions are slights, and if there is ambiguity, that ambiguity is to be interpreted in a fashion that means women are being oppressed. I — I have known women who were really happy. Something about them..."

Lydia said, "What? Had they managed to create a place without sexism?"

Taberah said, "No. They lived in a broken world, a much harsher world than we have. They lived, in fact, suffering injustices that feminism has now made a big change in. But they refused to let their identity be one of being persecuted. The world their bodies lived in was far more hostile than the world your body lives in, but the world their minds lived in was not nearly as hostile as the world your mind lives in. You, in your mind, suffer unending hostility; I will venture a guess that, no matter what happens, if you choose to accept feminism's interpretation, you will be in Hell. I have seen other things like feminism; they are like fires; the

be in men. I have seen other things like feminism, they are like men. the more they are given, the more unsatisfied they are, the more they want."

Lydia said, "So you would have me just walk with anyone and get raped? One in three women is raped."

Taberah said, "Um..."

Lydia remained silent, and Taberah said, "I know two women who have been raped, and it is a torment I not know how to describe. But I have done some research, and the feminists who did surveys manipulated the numbers to say as many women have been raped as possible, to fuel a political agenda that claims a rape culture. In the first study that had said one in six women had been raped, over half the women who were classified as having been raped explicitly said they hadn't been raped. And —

"Being raped is terrible. It's one of few things worse than believing that you are in constant danger of being raped, and that you are never safe with men. I would not have you walk with anyone and get raped. I would have you use your judgment and intuition and walk with people when it is prudent to do so. We are never safe — not from disease, not from being killed, nor from being wounded, nor from rape. But we can take reasonable risks."

"Ok," Lydia said. "You want to walk in the forest? I —"

"No," Taberah said. "You're not comfortable. It speaks well of you that you are able to trust where you have not trusted before, but I do not want your discomfort. What I would like is for you to think about what we have said, and then come join me at a place where women are at peace."

# Halloween

Halloween came: Fiona a fairy, Taberah a philosopher, Clancy a cybernetic organism, Nathella an elfin lady, and Aed a medieval lord. After talking with Taberah, Aed wished that he could have a table piled high with food, with everyone invited to come and eat and talk — but he could not do so; the gesture would be misunderstood. On Halloween, hosts gave out vouchers for different kinds of candy, which could be redeemed online for a delivery of different candies; it was almost as easy to poison candy as it was to put razor blades in apples. Nathella did have food waiting for the few people who knew their family, but that was all. The rural trick-or-treat Nathella had grown up with was no more.

Aed and Nathella therefore waited, lord and lady at their castle, to meet the year's assortment of ghouls, witches, archers, space cadets, cheerleaders, Romantics, and assorted and sundry other manner of visitors. A file recording of Taberah's music played in the background, and the place had a warm look to it.

Taberah was with Clancy and Fiona; if Fiona most enjoyed making Halloween costumes, Clancy most enjoyed wearing them.

"Trick or treat!" they said at one house. Fiona charmed them most; Taberah looked old to be trick-or-treating, but the costume fit the gravity that was around him. Clancy reached out with his long, metal arm and used the moving hand at the end to take his candy.

While they were out, they encountered Fiona and Clancy's friends: a bumblebee, a Hershey's Hug, a snake, and a bear were among those they saw. Fiona did not quite manage to contain her surprise when one matron gave a discerning look and told Taberah, "You do not quite look ancient, young man. I'd picture you as more medieval." It was with an unsteady step that she hurried on to the next house.

In the night's activities, Taberah saw beauty and ugliness mixed

In the night's activities, Taberah saw beauty and ugliness mixed together so thoroughly that it was hard to tell them apart. People dressed up as something else — but that something else often meant vampires, devils, and succubi. There was a moment when Taberah almost lost his step, because he had an insight. He understood role play, and saw that it was good. He thought that, in the costumes, he could see a little further into other people than in normal clothing — but was disturbed by some of the choices. Fiona explained the historic origin of Halloween, but that did not seem to allay his concern.

It seemed too soon that moonlight and starlight were shining, and Clancy said, "We need to be heading to home now." They reached home, and Taberah had only one question to ask: "When is next Halloween?"

# Women's Liberation

## II

As Lydia walked into the building, and as worship gave way to discussion around a table, she felt a mass of conflicting emotions within her. There were many branches to feminism, but one thing that held them in common was that, whatever the trepidation with which men and male society were viewed, men were not the real enemy. The enemy was traditional women — people who had settled for being housewives, falling into men's shadows. They were disloyal to the cause of womanhood in a way that a man could never be.

The turmoil Lydia felt came when she saw women at the group who were traditional — but who were not the stereotype she came to expect. They were at ease with themselves, genuinely happy, and she came to see that what the feminist movement had interpreted as living in a man's shadow did not mean what she thought it meant.

It is always a painful experience when reality intrudes on your stereotypes and preconceptions, and Lydia did not enjoy the evening. She saw that other women were enjoying it, but she was processing changes. By the end, she began to see ways in which women's interests were not best served by feminism, and she came back, sharing in the joy upon returning.

Taberah, after talking with her, said, "Lydia, I have met few people, and far between, who could change after being shown they were in error. Most just fight, and fight, and fight, and fight. What let you do that?"

Lydia said, "I suppose the same thing that led me to be a feminist. Women are slighted in most societies; I embraced feminism because I intuited that it had a truth. I let go of it because I learned of something else that could serve women's interests better. Part of it is the new

...ise that could serve women's interests better. Part of it is the new feminism that Catholics called for. The other part is just that — I never knew the tradition. I knew the feminist stereotype, but not the reality. The traditional Christian teaching has a much bigger place for women than I thought."

Lydia leaned to one side and asked, winking, "Does this mean I have to wear makeup?"

Taberah said, "Uh... I hope not."

"You don't like women wearing makeup?" Lydia asked, surprised again.

"No. My culture does not have makeup as you understand it. When I first came here, I did not understand why women were damaging their appearance by smearing strange materials across their skin. I have hawk's eye — my mother used to call me 'hawk' — and a face with makeup looked to me like a counter with rubbish strewn over it. It took me a long time to understand that women wear make-up to convince themselves they're beautiful while wearing it — it took me a long time to understand what 'presentable' means. It means that a woman is not beautiful, but if she covers herself in powder and paint to look like something else, that something else is beautiful, and that the woman is OK only if she makes herself into something else."

"Taberah, are you sure that you're not a feminist?"

Taberah said, "I find that not the most helpful question to ask. Some of the truths I take with me are shared by feminism; feminism knows no doubt things that I do not know, and I know things that feminism does not know. Or at least that is what a mature person from your time would say, and it is true. But I want to see good come to all people, including the freedom of well-meaning women from a system that imposes a cure worse than the disease. I want to see women liberated from women's liberation."

# Like an Emerald

A metal keychain knocked on the door. Nathella opened the door, and a young woman asked, "Is Taberah in? I'm Emerant; we've talked a little. I'm a phoenix."

"Come in," Nathella said, "I don't know where Taberah is." She called, "Taberah!" and Taberah came, holding a knife and a half-carved block of wood. The emerging figure was already discernible as a madonna.

Taberah looked sad; his expression brightened when he saw Emerant. Emerant hugged him and said, "Back at that first meeting, there was something I wanted to sit down and talk with you about, but I've been so busy since then! The courses get harder every year, and I've got one that's harder than a darwin. I'm sorry for not calling earlier, but I was wondering if you wouldn't mind going to a coffeeshop. There's this one shop on campus that only sells decaffeinated coffees, but you have to try their carbonated cappucino!"

Taberah set down the knife and statue and said "Sure!" He started to muse about how this people seemed to use big words for little ideas and little words for big ideas — 'darwin' was slang for a course designed to weed out the less suited students from a major, and evoked the substantial philosophical idea captured in a "survival of the fittest" argument — a discredited idea, to be sure, but a magnificent achievement none the less. On the other hand, Taberah did not know what a cappucino was, or why one would carbonate it, but from usage it was clear that the word meant a drink.

They walked along to the coffeeshop, not speaking, the loudest sound being the crunch of leaves under their feet, but they were not speaking for different reasons. Taberah was not speaking because he lived naturally in silence, did not have anything to say, and did not need to fill the time

with sounds; Emerant was not speaking because she had made a conscious and counter-cultural choice to embrace silence and not fill it with noise — the noise that came so easily to a soul raised in a society that was afraid of silence and stillness and slowness. In walking two miles to the coffeeshop, they had their fill of silence, and Taberah took fifteen minutes to decide between a carbonated cappuccino and some hot cocoa. He ended by ordering both, and Emerant, who ordered an herbal mint Italian soda, did not explain to him that this was a *faux pas*.

Emerant sat down with Taberah and said, "How has your day been?"

Taberah said, "A good day. I have not carved for a long time." Then he remembered etiquette and said, "And yours?"

Emerant said, "A day with a lot of thinking. There was something I wanted to explain to you, and I've been trying to think of a good way to explain it, and I haven't found any good ways."

Taberah stiffened, anticipating a rebuke. Better to have it done with than to put it off. He said, "What have I done wrong?"

"It isn't about anything you've done wrong. It's something that I don't think anyone's ever explained to you."

"Is it about being left-handed? Aed has tried to explain about that, and I am at peace with it now. I wasn't earlier; one of my culture's peculiarities."

"It isn't about being left-handed — something I don't know enough about, especially given that I'm ambisinistrous. It's about something else. Taberah, do you know what the word 'genius' means?"

"In Latin it means the angel watching over a person. In English, I have gathered it means something different, but I don't know what. It is a word applied to some persons, but not others."

"'Genius' means someone possessing extraordinary intelligence and giftedness, someone who has a unique potential to shape society."

Taberah drew back. "Shape society? How would someone do that? Why would someone do that? Why would some people be specially qualified to do so? Your wording means that this is desirable. Why?"

In the ensuing discussion, Emerant was challenged; she had come to explain something to Taberah, and was not expecting herself to learn something new. She had thought of medieval time as hierarchical, holding some people to be born superior — and saw her own time as having practically invented egalitarianism. Emerant saw in her reactions to Taberah that she not only believed some people were more intelligent

to Taberah that she not only believed some people were more intelligent than others, but that the highest measure of intelligence was taken to bring a prerogative and duty to shape society as one's naked reason led him to believe was best. Taberah found this to be madness; he would as soon consider himself qualified to redesign the human body from scratch, making surgical alterations so that his beneficiaries would have one less leg and one more arm, as to attempt to redesign human society from scratch. Taberah did not mind the concept of a special word for the most intelligent humans, as the implicit belief that this difference translated to a moral entitlement to do something he found abhorrent.

Emerant said, "Taberah, let's start this discussion again. You know that you are different from other people?"

Taberah hung his head. "Wherever I go, I can't be like other people. I make mistakes — terrible mistakes. I can't connect with other people."

"Taberah, there's a very special kind of intelligence, one that brings the ability to do things very few people can do — but it brings pain and failures. It means that you think very seriously. Classical literature has the image of a blind seer. Do you know this image?"

Taberah nodded his head, and his expression brightened.

"The seer has supernatural vision, but the price of it is the loss of his natural vision. It is a great boon at a great price. Taberah, you're not completely blind — you can and will, with time, be better able to connect with people — but your natural eyes are weak because of the brilliance of your supernatural eyes. You are not a second-rate Abanu. You are not a second-rate Tala. You are not a second-rate Emerant. You are a first rate you, and you are close to God's heart. You have already managed one accomplishment most of us can only dream of."

Taberah looked surprised. "What was that?"

"The Turing Award, Taberah! Don't you know what that means?"

Taberah looked confused. "There was a lord of a city who had me over. There is not a custom like that in my land. I understand I was honored, but — if there is one city that practices that custom, surely there are other cities that practice it! What I did wasn't any big deal."

"Taberah, dear, there is only one city that does that, and they search through the whole world before awarding that prize, once per year. There have only been seventeen other people who have received that award. Taberah, there is probably not one person in a million who is as bright as you. I want to talk with you about how you plan to use your intelligence."

Taberah was silent; he was trying to sift Emerant's words, sort them. The image of the blind seer struck a powerful chord with him; for one of the first times he could remember, he was able to think about his failures without feeling inferior. The Turing Award was still difficult to think about; he was beginning to understand that it was something bigger than a prize at a fair, but he had never begun to guess the true magnitude of his achievement. In his mind it was like the time as a boy when he was summoned to a monastery where Thomas Aquinas was passing through, and the theologian told him that he had chosen a good symbol to illuminate the Trinity — only with more hoopla; it was still not a very big deal, and its chief significance to Taberah was the warmth the people of this land had shown him. It seemed to him a very hospitable land. He was warmed, but it did not occur to him to think that he was fundamentally more intelligent than others — the idea of possessing a superior aptitude ran contrary to medieval culture. Taberah was touched by Emerant's statement that not one person in a million was as bright as him; his culture embraced exaggeration as a means of emphasis, and he was warmed that Emerant would make her point by exaggerating that much.

"Well?" Emerant said. "What do you want to do with your intelligence? Have you given it any thought?"

"I don't know," Taberah said. "I will need to think about what you have said. And your question is not a day's question to answer."

"Well, don't feel hurried. It'll take me some time to process this discussion as well. Taberah, you haven't touched your drinks; they've gotten cold by now. Here, let me microwave them for you. What have you been doing this past week?"

The remainder of the conversation was light and pleasant; it was a kind of conversation which Taberah had only mastered in the past couple of years, had learned did not mean anything in the sense of deep philosophy, but meant a warm personability and sharing — that much translated across cultures. Both of them, for different reasons, learned something of the other's culture — Emerant was enjoying an elective on ethnographic interviewing and even more enjoying an opportunity to apply her learning, and Taberah had crossed cultures from the time he was a little boy, learning something in each case. 'Student' seemed at least as interesting and difficult as any of the other professions he had seen and participated in, and went at a much faster pace with much more difficult material than an apprenticeship. He made a mental note to ask

difficult material than an apprenticeship. He made a mental note to ask Aed if he could arrange for Taberah to work as a student.

Emerant walked Taberah home, again in silence, and then walked back to the dorm. She climbed into her bunk and punched a name on the phone.

"Tala, this is Emerant. You were right; he made my head spin. But I think that was less due to his being medieval than being astronomically intelligent." It was 3:00 in the morning before she hung up and went to bed.

# Confessions

Taberah said to Aed, "I want to be a student! Can you help me be a student? What's necessary to becoming a student?"

Aed thought for a moment and said, "My university will undoubtedly take you, and give you full scholarship; the biggest thing for the moment is picking out which classes to take. That's something Nathella will probably be able to help you out with better than I can; she's very perceptive, and would have a better feel for what classes would help you most." Aed decided not to try to explain the degree programs; he believed in learning for the sake of learning, not learning for the sake of getting a piece of paper — and a degree on top of a Turing Award would be superfluous.

Nathella was out on an errand, and as Taberah waited for her, he began to realize something. The realization was not pleasant. When she walked in, Taberah said, "Nathella, I have a confession to make."

Nathella said, "Ok; I can take you to a father confessor this afternoon."

"Not to a father confessor, Nathella. To you."

"What is it, honey?"

Taberah hesitated, and said, "Nathella, I have been looking past you, but not at you."

Nathella looked at Taberah gently, and then closed her eyes. She was a quiet type, easy to ignore; she was slender, and men seemed not to pay her much notice. Taberah was not the first person to commit this sin, but he was one of the first to admit it. When was the last time someone else had done so? The only prior time had been by Aed. She was sure there were others, but — when she opened her eyes, she saw that Taberah was looking at her.

Taberah said, "Nathella, what are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking about part of my story."

I was thinking about part of my story.

"What is your story?"

"You want the whole thing, or the part I was thinking about?"

"The whole thing."

Nathella thought for a moment and said, "I was born on a farm; as a little girl, I had a wonderful education filled with simple amusement. We had a tight-knit community, and I miss that closeness.

"My father believed in education; he was a welder as well as a farmer, and was committed that his daughter get a college education. I went to school, and it was a wonderful extension and compliment to the rural upbringing I had. I think city kids now miss some of the things going on then; the computerized classroom doesn't teach you how to be perceptive, and I especially miss hunting — my father gave me a hunting rifle and scope on my twelfth birthday, and the day after I killed a bear. No, it wasn't because he wished he had a son; I had two younger brothers, and both of them were given guns on their twelfth birthday as well. I didn't like hunting as much as I liked picking flowers in the field, but there's nothing like giving your Mom a bouquet of wildflowers you picked yourself, and there's nothing like sitting down to eat meat you killed yourself. I don't own a gun, not any more, and I don't want a gun in this house where someone might break in and steal it and kill someone. But I enjoyed those fields, the heat of working in a cornfield in the summer, the fruitful creativity that comes on the other side of boredom — you get bored, and then you get bored silly, and then you think of things to do that never would have occurred if you always had a television — and our family didn't. We had a computer, but both my Mom and my Dad believed that television was a waste of time and a waste of life. I'm better off for growing up without TV.

"Anyways, at school, it was an exciting new world, and I met Aed. That made a difference. That changed things — and it was the only pleasant thing that happened for a while.

"Back home, my father needed to remove a few stumps, and wanted to put a pond in a field that — I can tell you the story for that another time. Anyways, he needed some explosives, so he mixed an oil people used to use with a common farming material, and so far as I know, had the one forgetful moment of his life. He forgot what he was doing, and lit up a fag.

"That was it. On that one day, I lost my father, my mother, and both my brothers. The barn still looked basically like a barn; the house didn't.

There wasn't much of anything of a house left. And I really couldn't go back — the people would have accepted me, but a farming community without my farm and family would have been like a body without a soul: to me, dead.

"I began to notice that I didn't feel so bad after I had some whisky; it took a fair amount — I could drink an elephant under the table. The more I drank, the more empty I felt when I wasn't drunk, and the more empty I felt, the more I drank. This continued for three years; Aed and I both finished our degrees later because of the drain of my drinking.

"There was one day when Aed was in a bad mood, and I got the brunt of everything that had gone wrong that day. I was in a terrible mood — it had just hit me that, even if I went back to visit, there would be this horrible silence about me — I would no longer be Nathella, who knew all the plants and animals and had yellow dandelion rubbed on her cheeks half the summer days from an old joke with two loving and rambunctious brothers; I would be that orphan thing — in a way, not human any more. I didn't at first admit that, and when I did, it hurt, and hurt, and hurt, and hurt. I got myself drunk, so drunk that —

"Taberah, do you know what a BAC is?"

Taberah shook his head.

"BAC is short for blood alcohol concentration. One drink will give you a BAC of .02. When we were at the banquet and you said that you felt funny and that the wine seemed to have more effect than you were used to, you had a BAC of about .05, judging by the amount you drank. At .08, in the eyes of the law, you're too drunk to drive. .20 is very drunk. 1.00 will kill you.

"Taberah, I had a BAC of 1.15, and that was after the hospital pumped my stomach — an experience I never want to live again. Several people at the hospital commented that it was a wonder I was alive at all. It took me over a day to become fully sober, and the first thing I remember when I was sober enough to be coherent, pumped full of chemicals that sober you up but make your mind feel like it's being scraped across asphalt, was Aed sitting down right across from me, looking me straight in the eyes, and saying with a dead serious voice, 'Nathella, I love you, and because I love you, I am not getting up from this chair until you admit you have a problem with alcohol.'

"I was trapped and pressured, and that was the most loving thing Aed ever did to me. Not marring me; that was a close second, and that's the

ever did to me. Not marrying me, that was a close second, and that's the second best thing that's ever happened to me. No, third; coming to know God was a slow thing, not all at once, and it is the best thing I've ever known. But Aed staring at me as I made jokes, tried to cajole him, threatened to break up with him, and tried every other way I could think of to evade and deny him was the best thing that ever happened to me. He did apologize for his treatment of me the day before, by the way; he felt terrible about it, and has never behaved like that again. After five hours, he was hungry, thirsty, weary, and immovable as a rock, and I said the most painful thing I've ever said. I said, 'I'm an alcoholic.'

"Taberah, being an alcoholic is Hell on earth; I believed it when another alcoholic said that in Heaven, you can have as much wine as you want, and in Hell, you can have as much wine as you want. The first steps of recovery are even worse than being an alcoholic; it's like you had a festering wound, and now there's a surgeon going in with a knife to get the bullet out and stitch things up. It hurts, and it has to be done, and there's no anaesthesia. But it heals. Aed and I both needed support; when you're wounded like I was, you wound those close to you, and he's been healed too, even though he never drank more than four drinks in a day, usually not four drinks in a week. I've been dry for — how long has it been? Over twenty years, and I am healed — really and truly healed. I sometimes long for home, and I sometimes long for drink — believe me, there are some days when I ask Fiona to sit me down and distract me and make sure I don't go to a liquor store. But I am now free of that chain — and happier than I ever believed alcohol would make me.

"My faith... My faith is strong like I wouldn't have imagined. There's not much of me on the surface; most people don't pay me much mind. But underneath, God has given me a strength I would have never dreamed of. Childlike faith meets trial and testing that it may become childlike faith. Some people who hear my story ask me how I can have faith after experiences like that. I ask them, how can I *not* have faith after experiences like that? Even when I was dead drunk — especially when I was dead drunk; even when I admitted I was an alcoholic — especially when I admitted I was an alcoholic — God was *with* me. He has never abandoned me. Never."

Taberah sat in silence for a moment, and said, "I'm sorry I asked you for wine."

Nathella smiled and said, "Taberah, there's nothing to apologize

about. You didn't know I was an alcoholic, and asking for wine is a perfectly reasonable thing. Why don't you go out and have a drink with Aed tonight? I can't drink, but I know God blesses other people through the fruit of the vine... Taberah, I know what you're thinking. I see it in your eyes, and I've seen it in other people. I'd like to tell you another story, this one a story that didn't happen to me.

"My best friend in college, Naomi, was the daughter of a competent insurance salesman. Her father was friends with the vice-president of sales, whom he invited over one day for burgers and beer.

"After they arrived from the office, Naomi's father realized that he had beer but not burgers, and drove to the store to buy some food, and the vice president raped her. It was the worst day of her life, and the days after were made worse by the fact that nobody believed her. They merely told her that that was serious business, and she was too old to be telling stories anyway.

"She noticed something peculiar when she began seeing a counselor and sharing this with other people. Many men were afraid to touch her. They knew she had pain, and mistakenly believed that another man touching her body would automatically bring back traumatic memories — at least that's how they thought about it; the way she usually put it was 'They won't even give me a hug!' It's a shame, too; Naomi was one of the touchiest people I've known, not as in easily angered, but as in liked to touch and be touched — she always gave me a kiss when she saw me, and she very much enjoyed a man's touch — rowdy as well as soft — be it in an arm over her shoulder, a crushing bear hug, or in horseplay.

"Some people who've been abused need not to be touched, and it's good to ask what's OK and what's not OK when you find out someone has wounds. But apart from that, people who are hurting need hugs most of all, and not touching a woman because she's been hurt — it's meant well, but sometimes it's just the wrong thing to do. Naomi learned to be very careful, as an adult, who she told about her experience — most people believed her, but some men in particular, with the best of intentions, never treated her the same way again.

"When there's a person in a wheelchair, by nature people will see the wheelchair but not the person. There's nothing to feel guilty about in having to counteract that tendency, but it needs to be counteracted. The standard advice used to be, 'See the person first and the condition second.' Now that has been refined a little bit to 'See an organic whole in

second. NOW that has been termed a little bit to 'see an organic whole in which the condition is part of a person.' Naomi sometimes needed to be treated differently because of her trauma; there were days when she just needed to be left alone — and days when she just needed more hugs and more listening. It would never have helped her for me to forget she was human and treat her as something whose nature was 'wounded'. Pierce us; do we not bleed? Poke us; do we not squeak? Taberah, I am a woman — human — with the full range of human emotions, laughter and silliness and joy as well as pain and worry and trouble. Don't let knowing I'm an alcoholic obscure your knowing that I am a woman. I would much rather you occasionally forget and ask me to buy you a bottle of wine, than think of me as a pit of pain with whom you must always be serious, always careful not to bump me lest I shatter. I'm human, OK?"

Taberah thought for a second and said, "Ok. If you won't buy me a bottle of wine, will you buy me a keg of beer?"

Nathella laughed and tousled Taberah's hair. He had somehow managed to keep a deadpan straight face. "Honey, next time I'm out shopping, I'll buy some root beer, which doesn't have alcohol, and we can each sit down and sip a root beer. Actually, you want to go shopping now? You seemed to enjoy going out for clothing, and maybe you'll see something at the store that you'll like. No, wait; the packaging food comes in is probably not whatever you are used to. Want to come along anyways?"

# Which Classes?

Nathella said, "Aed told me that you want to take some classes."

"Yes, Nathella."

"You seem to find things to do easily; I suggest that you take two classes, three at most; other students take more, but you need a lot of sleep. Come on over to the computer with me; we can look at the catalogue with me."

"Let's see... Here's 'Mathematics as a Humanity', team taught by a mathematician and an artist. When I took it, it was team taught by a mathematician and a philosopher. It was the hardest class I took — and the best."

"In this culture, most people are taught something horrid as lower math, and they avoid it as much as they can. They don't guess what mathematicians really do — an art form guided by intuition. Most people think a mathematician must do more of whatever they suffered through in the math classes they couldn't avoid — more statistics and meaningless formulae. It's really sad; higher math is easier than lower math, and that course did not make me a mathematician, but it helped me appreciate what they do."

"'Modern Mythology: An Exploration of Storytelling in Postmodern Society.' This would also be a good course for you to take; it will help you see some of the good points of our culture — and some of the bad points. I think last year they did an in-depth treatment of a classic interactive — the title escapes me (I'm never in tune with that — I was 20 before I saw *Star Wars*), but — ooh! it was called *net*, and *net* was hard science fiction that somehow managed to be very popular. This class didn't look at technology much, just the timeless elements of the story — and it is timeless. I don't know what they're doing this semester, although I can

find out.

"'Philosophy of Technology'. This is a good class; it's team taught by a humanities Luddite and a technology-worshipping engineer. Aed likes to occasionally go in and sit and watch the sparks fly.

"'Psychology 212: Gift Giving. This class explores how to take basic psychological insights and use them to find a gift that will be meaningful to a friend and loved one.' I wish that one had been available to me when I was in school. Classes have been shifting towards a more practical bent. There's also 'Psychology 312: Synergy. This class explores positive interactions between people, and how to create the circumstances that give it rise.' There are a lot of good classes — hmm.

"'Semiotics 101: A Critical Look at Contemporary Society' — this would be an extremely valuable class to you, but not for the reasons that most people take it. It would show you how people are inculturated into contemporary liberalism, and see things into the plurality that was once a holy trinity of race, class, and gender. Taking a critical look at a course like this would help you understand contemporary academia, and perhaps a little bit of contemporary society as well.

"I know you have an artistic bent; I've seen you carving. This might interest you: 'Fine Arts 212: The Art of Tektrix'. It's a class on how to build with robotic blocks, studied as an art form.

"Here's a fun one: 'Gender Studies 315: The Wisdom of Cats. A humorous look at how our lives can be made better by living out the wisdom that cats embody naturally, and a careful study of why cats are better than dogs.' Department notwithstanding, that looks — oh, wait. You're a dog lover. Never mind."

Taberah did not see why loving dogs would disqualify anyone from taking a course on cats, but he was too busy assimilating information too quickly to ask a question. Nathella continued, "'Communication 275: Are Sacred Cows Edible? An interpretive look at the popular comic strip and exploration of its meaning in society.' *That* looks interesting. I'm not going to try to explain it now, but you should take it. Let's see, what else?"

"There's a dance art — kind of like a martial art, but taking dance rather than combat as its basic medium. In combat between two good martial artists, there is a harmony that arises, a kind of synchronization and attunement between opponents. Neither party walks in knowing what is going to happen — but a masterpiece emerges. A dance art does this with dance — there are differences: in both, you learn to read your

ums with dance — there are differences, in both, you learn to read your partner, but in a dance art, you also want to be readable, instead of hard to predict — and dance art strikes Aed as very interesting. He tried one for a bit, but then left because he wasn't able to handle the structured, monotonous repetitions that low-level training took from martial arts. Maybe that's its weakness, and come to think of it, you probably shouldn't do that either, even though I have a feeling you can dance very well.

"Here we go! 'History 339: Medieval Culture.' I think this would be valuable to you as well; you would learn something about our culture in learning how it portrays your culture. Maybe that wouldn't be such a good idea; the catalogue refers to your culture as belonging to 'the misogynist tradition', and — come to think of it, I know who's teaching that course, and she'd fail you. That professor can tolerate almost anybody whom liberalism now sees as oppressed, but someone who is from medieval society and believes we have something to learn from it — you'd have a hostile learning environment. Let's see: what else?

"'Integrated Science 152: Heavy Boots.' I think this course would be a good one for you to learn from; it is probably the best to teach the culture of science and scientism — as good for its purpose as the semiotics class would have been for understanding the culture of the humanities as we now have it. Another one that you might like is 'Engineering 297: Cross-Disciplinary Commonalities of Repair and Debugging. This course covers the fundamentals of how to think about technology that does not behave as intended, with application to repair of mechanical and electrical devices, and debugging of software.' What do you think, honey? Does that interest you?"

"They all interest me, Nathella. I don't know which ones to choose."

"Then we can wind to a close — ooh! You *have* to take this one, Taberah. At least if you can get in. The professor is a cantankerous, eccentric genius. This course has been taught under a dozen department names, and now the university's simply stopped assigning it a department. You'll like it."

At dinner, Nathella said, "Have you given further thought to what courses you want to take?"

Taberah said, "Yes. I want to take the last class we talked about, the class you recommended, and — oh, yes! Heavy Boots!"

# Christmas

It seemed not very long at all before Taberah found the ground an unsteady traitor beneath his feet, and more often than not beneath his backside; he could keep perfect balance on a ship, but ice was tricky. The wind seemed to blow bitter cold through him as much as around him, and Taberah sometimes shivered even when he was inside and wearing a sweater. Taberah would have much rather been wearing heavy armor and sparring on a blistering hot day than experience *this!*

Even the cold could not damp his spirits as Christmas approached, though. He had thought about gifts for each of his adoptive family and friends for each day, starting with the first. He gave the madonna to Nathella, a riflery simulator to Clancy, pressed flowers to Fiona, and an abstract pattern to Aed. Each phoenix was given an electronic image of a stained glass window from home.

Aed received gifts in turn; he most prized the Pendragon Cycle which Nathella gave him; he would be fascinated by the historically-oriented retelling of the Arthurian legends. He knew those legends well, as well as he knew the legends of Roland and the twelve paladins, and he would be intrigued by the retelling. Seeing an American portrayal of his home gave him a unique insight into the time and place he was living with, and their conception of what is important about a place — it did not seem as strange to him as it might have appeared earlier. The theme of Ynes Avallach, the isle of the Fisher King, struck a chord with Taberah, and he felt that here, now, he was on that isle.

The days were merry days, with much revelry and joking, and there was a relaxed energy about the house. Aed began to wonder why the custom of twelve days of Christmas was not celebrated more; it was a good custom.

Twelve days seemed perfect to grasp the meaning of the Christ child.

Twelve days seemed perfect to grasp the meaning of the Christ child, the Kinsellas had always understood Christmas gifts to be symbolic of God giving mankind his greatest gift ages ago, but celebrating with Taberah gave a new depth of understanding to the symbol. An hour does not merely allow one to communicate twelve things, each of which can be said in five minutes; it allows communication of things that cannot be said in any number of five minute bursts. The twelve days of Christmas were not twelve consecutive Christmas days; they were part of a whole celebration that embraced gift giving but went much farther, a time of worship and enjoyment of God. Clancy wondered at the beginning how one could possibly spend twelve days celebrating Christmas; come the end, he wondered how one could possibly stop after celebrating one day of Christmas. While they were out caroling, Taberah tasted real wassail, and during the celebration Aed took Taberah to a wine bar and introduced him to champagne.

On the eleventh day of Christmas, Taberah asked Nathella, "Can you smell the incense?"

Nathella was confused. "There is no incense in this house. The only smell of incense has been on our clothing, when we came back from the Christ mass. Are you talking about that?"

Taberah said, "Not that, Nathella! The *real* incense! Can you smell that?"

"I don't understand, honey. Why would you be smelling incense?"

"Nathella, what is incense for?"

"It ascends in the presence of God, and some of it is around us at the holiest times we worship. Catholics only use it on special days; the Orthodox use incense at every worship, and believe in bringing Heaven down to earth — ooh. Now I understand. Yes, honey, I do smell the incense."

# First Day of Classes

The first day of classes was delayed by a heavy snowstorm; it was such as only occurs once every ten years, and people were in mixed moods when they finally came inside a warm classroom. The freshmen and sophomores tended to have a spirit of adventure, while the juniors and seniors more tended towards irritation.

Taberah walked into a large lecture hall, crowded with students. A professor cleared his throat and said, "Good morning. My name is Professor Pontiff, and you are in Communication 275: Are Sacred Cows Edible? In this course, we will be studying the strip of that name. If you'll excuse me for one moment..." He fumbled with an overhead projector and turned it on. A comic strip appeared overhead. It had a young man and a young woman in conversation:

Young man: It's a shame when a comic strip becomes the medium for public discourse.

Young woman: You don't like it when conversation is to the point and funny?

Young man: Not that. I don't like that it has to be funny, and that you get ignored if you have a point that you can't cram into five seconds. Most theories that can be put in a nutshell belong there.

Young woman: What if there was a comic strip that made its point but was not particularly funny?

After giving the class a minute to digest the strip, then said, "The term 'sacred cow' is now a bit dated, but it was popular around the turn of the century. The Hindu religion treats cows as sacred animals, and there are cows in India that people will not kill — they would rather starve than kill a sacred cow. In a typically anti-foreign fashion, people who did not

understand or respect this religious tradition took the term 'sacred cow' and made it a metaphor for an absurd belief that benighted people defend and are afraid to abandon, and which one is considered enlightened and courageous to attack.

"Or at least, that's what people who used the term 'sacred cow' understood it to mean. It worked out in practice that 'sacred cow' meant in particular the sacred cows of conservatives, but not the sacred cows of liberals. Even liberals have now come to acknowledge that liberals have just as many sacred cows as conservatives, and even that there are good if inarticulate reasons behind at least some of the norms that are branded as sacred cows. 'Sacred cow' was an anti-conservative weapon, one that could do damage without needing any argument, and it was used in sayings such as 'Sacred cows make the best hamburgers.' It was somewhat of a sacred cow itself.

"There were a number of people who began to question this, but one of the more influential ones was Anonymous. Anonymous preferred not to be known by his name, and kept his anonymity even when running for office as an independent. But that's another story I will not go into here. Anonymous was about equally likely to vote Republican or Democrat, by the way. He was influential because he chose a medium in which one person can reach a number of his people: the comic strip. The very title of the comic strip, 'Are Sacred Cows Edible?' is part of a challenge to what the term 'sacred cow' had been used for.

"On the projector is his first strip. The characters are not named; they are subservient to the idea. Even his basic idea is trying to break out of the frame of the comic strip; it shows no direct humor, but perhaps (if you look higher) some meta-level humor. And, at any rate, it bites the hand that feeds it. Anonymous was very good at that. The question, "What if there was a comic strip that made its point but was not particularly funny?" is in a sense a very pointed joke. Or is it?

"Regular attendance is expected; the class's format will have a strip a day, followed by lecture and discussion. The only textbook is the one comic book you have; I'm sure this didn't influence any of your decisions to join this class. By now, I'm sure that there are a few people in this class so industrious that they've already read the text, or a good chunk of it; I feel safe in asking an opening question that draws on some knowledge of the text: 'How does the comic strip fit among other media? How does this

particular comic strip fit among other media? Are the two related or unrelated?"

Taberah rejoiced in the discussion that followed; it reminded him of medieval reading, an activity so involved that some doctors viewed it as a form of exercise. He himself did not say anything, but paid attention both to what was familiar and what was unfamiliar: the text was viewed in a different manner, he could tell, and not as something authoritative. More of a starting point for tangents. Taberah wished to sit still and watch, come to understand what this culture meant by "having a discussion" — and did so, until the instructor pointed to him and said, "You. What are you thinking about? You're thinking loudly."

Taberah hesitated, and said, "I was just thinking about how this discussion seems to be 'What can we jump off of from the strip?' instead of 'What does the text mean?'"

"You think we can have a discussion about the content of one strip? It's a ten-second strip."

"Maybe. I've known some good, long discussions about a single sentence. One thing which people might say is, 'How do we deal with content that does not fit within a medium's limitations?' How, for instance, do you think about something you can't say in words?"

"If you can't say it in words, you can't think it. The limitations of language are the limitations of thought, right?"

"I think things that I can't express in words. Or, at least, I think things that I can't express, and I've been told I use words well. Saying that the limitations of language are the limitations of thought is like saying that the limitations of painting are the limitations of imagination — that, just because we can't paint something moving or three dimensional, we can't imagine it. It may well be a limit on what we can communicate, but not on what we can think. We can be tempted to this error by the power of painting — color, shading, and perspective. We can make paintings so lifelike that we are capable of thinking they represent anything we can imagine — but we can still imagine things that just can't be painted. My deepest thoughts almost never come in words, and it takes effort and insight to capture some of them in words."

The teacher was impressed. He said, "If you want, come in during my office hours, and maybe we will talk about how we can have a class period discussion in your style. What do the rest of you have to say?"

Taberah sat back in his chair and continued to think. He was going to

like being a student.

The TA stepped forward and said, "Heavy Boots has traditionally been a student-to-student class, taught by people who have freshly learned the material, and this will be the most important class of your discipline. It tells you how to think logically, how to think about science.

"The anecdote from which this class takes its name concerns when a couple of engineering students were in a philosophy class, and the philosophy TA gave as an 'example' the 'fact' that there is no gravity on the moon: if you held a pen out at arm's length and let go, it would just float there. 'No,' one engineer protested. 'It would fall, only more slowly.' The TA calmly explained that it would not fall because there was no gravity. After a couple of things failed, inspiration struck. The engineer said, 'You've seen movies of astronauts walking on the moon, and you saw them fall down. Why is that?' The TA, who had had plenty of courses in logic, said, 'That's because they were wearing heavy boots.'"

A chuckle moved throughout the class. The TA continued, "At this point the other engineer, who was calmer, dragged our friend, who was foaming at the mouth, out of the room. They decided that night to do a telephone survey. They asked people if there was gravity on the moon. Sixty percent said, 'No.' Those sixty percent were asked the follow-up question about astronauts. Of the people who had said there was no gravity on the moon, twenty percent went back and changed their answers, but over sixty percent said that the people on the moon stayed there because they were wearing heavy boots."

There was more laughter, and the TA said, "Science tells us how the world is, and it can be known through experiment. This class will help you learn not to have heavy boots. Are there any questions?"

A young woman raised her hand. "Do you believe in Darwinism?"

The TA said, "Darwinism is bad, but not nearly as bad as creationism, or the masks it wears — intelligent design. It is true that Darwinism cannot explain the question of origins, but that isn't science's job. It's not subject to debate. However the world came to be, it is here, and that is what we study. As to intelligent design — I have another story. There was an engineering professor who came in to find his class talking about heavy boots. He gave a very involved explanation of, among other things, that gravity works on the moon despite the fact that the moon has no air, explaining the whole scientific method, the idea of trying to be skeptical

and open-minded at the same time, and at the end, he asked, 'Any questions?' One young girl raised her hand, and said, 'You seem to be getting very worked up about this. Are you a Scorpio?'"

Another chuckle went through the masses. "There are any number of other stories. Did you hear about the English professor who noticed that his computer was warm, and poured water in it to cool it down? Or the farmer who complained that there were holes in his computer after he played duck hunt? Are there any other questions?"

Taberah thought. Nathella was right; this course *was* going to teach Taberah a lot about the culture of science. He raised his hand and said, "Yes. Why do you regard non-scientists as having intelligence one step above that of a rock?"

The ensuing discussion was both vigorous and heated. Taberah had already begun to piece together that something besides scientific thinking that was being taught — he could not tell exactly what, but by the end of class a good many people came to see that a disrespect for non-scientists was being taught, and some of them even questioned the equation of science with rationality. Taberah was silent for much of the discussion; he was trying to figure out what besides the obvious was being taught in that class.

A professor stepped up to the podium and said, "Good afternoon. Do we have any computer science grad students in class? Good. Any doctoral students? Wonderful. What did the B.S. in software engineering say to the Ph.D. in computer science?"

"I'll have the veggie burger and fries, please.'

"Or do we have anybody from the practical disciplines? A university without colleges of business, engineering, and applied life studies is like a slice of chocolate cake without ketchup, mustard, and tartar sauce.

"Anybody here from the English department? The English department is a special place. If you want to find a Marxist, don't go to the political science department. Nary a Marxist will you find there. Go to the English department. If you want to find a Freudian, don't go to the psychology department. Nary a Freudian will you find there. Go to the English department. If you want to find a Darwinist, don't go to the biology department. Nary a Darwinist will you find there. Go to the English department. The English department is a living graveyard of all the dead and discredited ideologies that have been cast off by other departments.

"Anyways, I'm Dr. Autre, and I would like to welcome you to the first

day of class. You'll be able to remember which room we're meeting in; just remember room 20, same number as your percentage grade. This class will have no discussions, although there will be question and answer. As to discussions — you don't really have to pay anything to hear what your friends think about a matter, but given that you're paying good money to be here — or some of you are; the rest are sponging off your parents — I think you are entitled to hear what a professor thinks. Someone said that diplomacy is the art of letting other people have it your way; I was never good at diplomacy. Too honest for it. Maybe some of you will do a better job at it, when you have a Ph.D. behind your name and the academic world says, 'Aah, here's a Ph.D. Here's someone we can take seriously!'

"Some of you have questions about the syllabus. The answer to those questions is very simple. There is none. I don't mean that I don't have planned material I can fall back on if I need to; I mean that the important stuff in this course is the stuff I can't foresee. The main reason I plan out course material ahead of time is that it provides me with a point of departure from which to do something interesting. As such, I do not wish to confuse you by giving you distracting information."

A young man raised his hand. "But if you have the information on hand, what harm is there in sharing it? Certainly it helps you."

The teacher said, "There was once a professor who thought his class was writing down too much of what he was saying, and thinking about it too little. At one point, he interrupted his lecture to say, 'Stop. I want you to put down your pens and pencils and listen to me. You don't have to write down every word I say. You are here to think, not to produce copies of my lecture notes. You don't have to write down what I say verbatim. Any questions?'

"One young woman frantically said, 'Yes. How do you spell *verbatim*?'

"I'm not going to spell out an answer to your question beyond that, but I am going to say that I won't always say my full meaning outright. I will leave it implied, for you to wrestle out. That requires the same involvement as discussion, but it leaves you free to hear a professor. You are encouraged to talk with your colleagues after the classroom for as much discussion as you want. Class time is for what you can only get in class time — a professor's lecture.

"I've used a different text each time, and the registrar usually won't

print how to get a text in my class. This year, I want you to get a sticky-hand, walk into

<http://www.powells.com/partner/24934/biblio/0684863170> Physical — it's a mile down the street from the college, close your eyes, turn around, and toss the sticky-hand past your back. The book that the hand lands on is yours. Buy it, and study it; see how it relates to our classroom lectures, and tie it in to your discussions. I guarantee you that, after the first month, you will have learned something that I couldn't have possibly coordinated by picking the text myself. I don't just mean learning to read a text at an angle, although that is tremendously important; I mean that you will have learned something directly from the text that I couldn't have picked out. Tonight's reading assignment is pages three through ten, and the first page of the index, if your book has an index. Any questions?"

Taberah leaned back. This class was going to be a lot of fun.

# Baptists

Taberah walked in after the first day of classes, excited, alert. He said to Nathella, "What does the word 'Baptist' mean? I heard someone use it between classes, and I couldn't figure it out from context."

Nathella said, "Um, that's not a five-minute question. First, do you know what 'Protestant' means?"

Taberah said, "No."

"There have been any number of reform movements in the history of the Catholic Church, and there will be any number of such movements in the future. With one of them, a monk named Martin Luther nailed ninety-five theses for reform on the door of a cathedral. The authorities questioned him, and finally asked him, 'Do you believe that the Church has actually been *wrong* in these things for all these years?'

"Luther asked for a couple of days to think about it; that was granted, and at the end of the time the question was put to him again. He said, 'Here I stand. I can do no other.'

"Then all Hell broke loose. Luther was excommunicated, and tried to set up a parallel, reformed church. The church called 'Catholic' was the one that initiated the schism, but they were not the only schismatics. Luther's church splintered and splintered and splintered. There was all manner of invective between the two sides, and they were excluded from each other's communions. It was worse than the split between Latin and Greek — far worse.

"Over time, people began to realize that the schisms were not a good thing. There were some who said, 'The solution to the problem is simple. Everyone come over to my side, and there won't be any division.' There was the problem of communion: especially on the Catholic side, there was an understanding of communion as implying full membership in the

community, which was in turn understood to mean that members not part of a particular schism could not legitimately take part in it — this interpretation was deemed to be more important than the words, 'Take this, *all of you*, and drink from it.' that instituted a feast given to all of Christ's disciples. That's still where things are now; Rome has now interpreted Vatican II to mean that Catholics and Protestants whose consciences command full participation in their brothers' and sisters' worship may be — what's the word, *tolerated*, in taking communion across the schism. It's a step homewards, I suppose, but we are very far off from organizational unity that once was.

"Baptists are, or rather were, one of the Protestant sects, and they added something to American culture. As to what happened —

"In the fifties, the question of abortion, the question of whether a woman has a right to kill the child growing inside her, came up with the Supreme Court. The court protected the child's life. In the seventies, it came up again, and this time the court legalized abortion, and the movement declared the controversy settled. But it wasn't.

"By the nineties... there were laws in place that offered stiff penalties for abortion protests, and RICO, a law meant to deal with organized crime, was used to inflict massive penalties on abortion protesters. There was one minister who led a protest while cautiously distancing any church involvement or statement on the protest. The courts RICOed the congregation, making a multimillion dollar settlement. Also going on were 'physical compliance holds' — meaning pain holds used on demonstrators. Nonviolent protests of abortion received draconian punishment compared to the penalties deemed appropriate for violent protest by environmental or animal rights activists.

"When a pregnant woman walks into an abortion clinic, unsure what to do with an unexpected pregnancy, by the letter of the law she is supposed to receive non-directive counseling to help her decide how to handle the situation. What actually happens is very different. Abortion is big business; insurance companies will readily pay thousands of dollars for an abortion rather than deal with all of the expenses of childbirth and a new life out in the world. Even when there is no insurance, a couple hundred dollars is still lucrative for a ten minute procedure. Never mind that the people who perform abortions have the highest suicide rate in the medical profession; it's money, money, money. What actually happens when a girl walks in is that she receives a five minute sales pitch

happens when a girl walks in is that she receives a five-minute sales pitch that slants abortion as the only live option. Most of the abortions that have happened in this country were abortions that the girl was pressured into, that she never was allowed to say 'no' to — same thing as date rape.

"So there was this big push to have real non-directive counseling at abortion clinics, along with a surgeon general's warning about the emotional scars that abortion can cause — post abortion stress syndrome and all. It wasn't just Christians behind it; some feminists, especially those who had spent some time working at abortion clinics or talking with women who had gone through that trauma, had begun to suspect that they and their movement were being manipulated as pawns by forces less innocent than — anyways, the law was passed September 1, 2012, and struck down October 1.

"The Baptists were the fastest to spearhead an initiative to get every church member into a protest — which they didn't do; it was closer to fifty percent, but there was a massive, peaceful protest, and the police came out — pepper spray, tear gas, pain holds, the works. The jails were filled up overnight, and it was ugly. The ugliest thing about it was that it wasn't two parties fighting each other — it was one party attacking satyagrahi who didn't resist. The courts thought this would be a good time for an unambiguous message, and commanded a settlement of over 1.6 trillion dollars. The church could not begin to pay something like that.

"The courts lost something that day. The president of American Baptists called a press conference and said from his jail cell, 'You can force our bodies and our checkbooks, but you can never break our spirits. The denomination of Baptists in America is hereby declared to be bankrupt and disbanded. Baptists, melt into other bodies of believers. You are the heart of our ministry, not a formal structure that can be sued. Courts, you have won this battle. But *what is it that you have won?*'

"Most other Protestant denominations that participated in the protest did not do much better; Catholics were protected only by the masterful diplomacy of the Papacy. The Pope tried to be an advocate for the Protestants, too, but saving the financial viability of Catholics was making the best of a bad scenario. There were believers who left the Catholic Church — not out of any rejection of Rome, but as a matter of solidarity, saying, 'We would rather be ill-treated alongside these righteous Protestants than be spared because our denomination happens to be powerful.'

"That single court decision galvanized the body of believers as a thousand sermons could never have done. Before then, there had been talk of an emerging post-denominational Christianity; now, people finally realized that they had bigger things to worry about than labels. It was as if two estranged brother generals forgot their dispute in the face of a battle. The Church was driven mostly underground, yes — it had been underground at its beginning, and it will be underground again, no doubt. And people are tortured when they protest abortion, infanticide, or euthanasia — the Constitution prohibits cruel and unusual punishment, but the courts have ruled that 'nondestructive incentives to reform' are not punishment. It is still virtually illegal to witness about your faith — the argument classes it as harassment, and a freedom of religion defense brings a dilemma with it. If you invoke your religion as a defense, the question is which religion, and if you specify whichever area of Christianity you are from, you are slapped with massive penalties for participation in a corporate entity which falls under RICO. All of this is true and more, and the church is healthier than ever before.

"Taberah, in martial arts, I remember hearing something about you and joint locks, but I don't remember what. A joint lock is when someone twists one of your joints so that you will be in pain unless you move in a certain way. This enables a martial artist to take your wrist and bring you down to the ground. What the Supreme Court learned in the ensuing years was that joint locks would no longer work against Christians. You could still figuratively twist a Christian's wrist — break it if you pressed hard enough — but she wouldn't go down to the ground unless you did so much damage to her that she was incapable of standing. And it is bad publicity if nothing else to do that much damage to unresisting people again and again — so things have evolved to an unofficial 'Don't ask, don't tell.'

"Abortion is still of course legal, but now there are a lot of Christian women who can pick up on when another woman is pregnant, sometimes even before she knows it — and tell her, 'You don't have to have an abortion,' and then talk about alternatives. The abortion industry thinks we're worse than termites — individually not a problem, collectively a major problem, and too many to go hunting for — and there's not that much they can do. Yes, they have advertising; yes, they control the literature that goes with pregnancy tests; yes, they do a number of abortions — but we're able to make a sizeable dent. And the legality of

abortions — but we're able to make a sizeable dent. And the legacy of killing is something that's hurting the court politically.

"There's a saying, 'Satan meant it for evil, but God turned it to good,' and the final break in dark power is that we are not angry at the court. We pray for them every night, submit to them in what we can, and go about our lives — for God, not against the court. The court, with the worst of intentions, has created the conditions in America for Christians to deal effectively with problems that we would never have begun to treat.

"Have I answered your question, Taberah?"

Taberah thought, and said, "You have answered it and more. I would like to talk with you more some time, to better understand your form of government. You miss the Baptists, don't you?"

# Deep Waters

Taberah closed his eyes for a while and said, "Nathella, you said there was a story behind your Dad wanting to make a pond. What was the story?"

Nathella said, "When I was little, I had a fantasy, an image — of being surrounded by a gathering of many warm people, of a place where I belonged. One of my brothers, when he was little, imagined exploring a mansion, and had a very vivid image of a doorway opening, light spilling out from behind. My father had a dream like this, too. He envisioned a deep pool of water, a pool he could swim in and dive deep and meet mermaids. He liked to reminisce, and he talked about that dream from time to time. He had a better memory than most.

"One of the things that happens when you get older is that you get practical, and one of the things I accepted after a blunt remark from a young man is that 'practical' is not about getting things done; it's about letting dreams die. It means settling for less — being happy, to be sure, but... I have come to accept my age, but I know I lost something when I gave up the bright energy of being young.

"One of my father's friends asked him, 'Why not make your dream a reality? You may be too old to swim into a pool and meet mermaids, but there are children around town who are not. They don't have a place to swim. To be sure, you'd have to put a fence around it and require parents to be around, buy one of those floating rings, but why not? Why not make a place where children can dive and meet mermaids?' He told me that a spark lit in my father's eyes — my father said, 'I've got some stumps to blast, and I've got a field I don't use any more. I can make a pond as well.' That friend felt very guilty when he found out what happened, but when I look back — I think my father died well. It left on me an impression, and I've managed to keep a little more of my young openness to dreams than I

I've managed to keep a little more of my young openness to dreams than I might have otherwise.

"And I'm glad to have met you. You help me dream, as well. You're Heavenly minded enough to be of earthly good — you've already changed my life for the better."

Taberah said nothing. He felt at the same time honored and slightly uncomfortable — why was she putting him on a pedestal? Taberah now dreamed mostly of Heaven, and he was sure he would receive it. Why — Taberah thought, and he could not think of any appropriate questions to ask. He let the matter rest.

# TMC Metagame Competition

Taberah went down to the computer room, looking for something to do. He found a cool portal, and spent half the day fascinated by looking at different layerings of the human body. He particularly liked looking at a forearm end-on, with only the skeletal and nervous systems visible. It was fun, but something in his mind was still itching.

Then he heard a herald announce:

TMC. TMC is short for TMC Metagame Competition. The objective of this game is to devise the best new computer game; players' work will be judged according to their popularity in testing votes. Points are awarded for originality, quality of game concept, quality of artwork, and another category specified by game designer. Past winners may be seen at...

This had Taberah's undivided attention. He went, sat down, and spent three hours' total playing different winners, and then, after going through the next day's classes (now less interesting to him, although he tried to concentrate), began to think in the morning.

*They want something original. This culture values novelty over repetition; what can I give that is truly original?*

Taberah remembered his time as a court jester, in which his role was to stand on his head, both literally and figuratively — exalt the abased or pull down the exalted. Pleasure filled his mind, as if he were meeting an old friend. *All games that I am aware of are competitive; one wins by defeating others or possibly by gaining a high score in surmounting an*

*obstacle. What of a game in which there is no defeating others and in which the player is not constrained by any predefined goal?*

Taberah left the computer room and began pacing in the forest. He could say those words, but what did they mean? Trying to describe a game without a conflict seemed like trying to describe a statue without a shape.

*There are a great many ideas that might as well be original because of how hard people have worked to forget them. What is the one idea that is now escaping my attention, the one thing that was the air I breathed in the Middle Ages but which people do not understand now? I can't think of it — what is the one symbol of — symbol! — these people live in a world of symbols, but not as I do. It is a world of meager, half-dead symbols that do not have the courage to be. For them nature, the world is stripped of symbolic lore. A lion is not a reminder of courage — or maybe it is the one surviving exception. They see just a yellow mass, a predator — it is like seeing shape without color.*

*How can I make symbolic meanings visible to them? How can I make a text speak to people who are illiterate? What if they could look at the green in a pane of a stained glass window and — they can. I can make an annotated virtual world — a cathedral and forest, full of plants and animals — in which, when the objects are touched, a voice tells what they mean.*

*Aed has shown me enough that I can begin working on this now.*

# Results

The days passed quickly; Taberah spent every spare moment working on his creation. He enjoyed the classes, but he rushed out quickly to be back in the joy of creation. It had been so long before he created something.

He finished just before deadline, and met with mixed results. His creation fascinated any number of people, was very popular — and was disqualified as not meeting the criteria as a game. The metagame judges wanted something original, but interpreted in such a way as to mean something original in the creation of what you have to defeat. Taberah cried; he was hurt by the judgment, and he felt depressed not to have anything else to be working on. Yes, there were classes, and he particularly enjoyed the cartoon that said, "Tolerate this!" and showed a picture of a cross. The teacher went on to explain that liberality and tolerance did not just mean liberality and tolerance of liberal minorities, but tolerance of Christianity. This produced a heated discussion, and Taberah loved it.

The end of semester rolled around. Taberah had passed the cartoon course, aced the other humanities course, and failed the science course. He was not nearly as saddened by that grade as by the leaving of most of the students, particularly the Phoenix Society. The Kinsella's home was desolately quiet — or at least, it was desolately quiet until Taberah received a call telling him that he was the first person to receive two Turing Awards.

Then the household was busy with preparation.

# Gadfly

Taberah walked up slowly, hesitantly, to the microphone. He looked unsure of himself, but there was still a deep confidence in his walk.

He looked at the microphone for a second, and then out at members of the audience, one at a time. It was a minute of silence, and in his eyes a penetrating gaze grew.

"It was a year ago this day," he said, "that I accepted this award, and I accepted it only because it was politic. I did not and do not think that what I did then merited an award of this magnitude. All I did was look at the problem a bit differently, think a little, and see a way to cheat on the Turing test. This is not a very big deal; it was just an accident. Yes, I know that most scientific discoveries are made by accident, but this does not make an accident a scientific discovery. But this time is different. This time, I am happy to accept the Turing Award.

"This time is different. Earlier, I had merely managed to capture the accidental features of intelligence. Now, God has given me the grace to capture some of its substance, and I stand in awe. It is as if, before, I had received an award for making a statue that looked like something alive, and now, I have succeeded in making something that is vaguely alive. The difference is fundamental, and I wish to ask what lessons we have learned in the discovery.

"The first lesson I can see is that abstract thought is easier than concrete thought. Or, to put things differently, that our minds are so wonderfully made that many of us can handle concrete thought even more easily than abstract thought. (Maybe the first lesson should be that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.)" A chuckle moved through the audience. "There is much more to thought, and rationality, than is easily captured, and I've only scratched the surface of it. It took me a long time to understand that computers are logical and can do math as no human

to understand that computers are logical and can do math as no human ever will — excuse me, do arithmetic as no human ever will — and yet that they could not think. Notwithstanding Dijkstra's dictum that the question of whether computers can think is like the question of whether submarines can swim, computers could not think. If I have managed to make a computer think, I have managed only the barest prototype of what could be done — like those cave paintings that we can barely recognize as art, I have just stumbled on how the basic principle works.

"Or, at least, part of the basic principle. All I've discovered how to program is how to think abstractly; I still have no idea of how to tell a computer how to deal with sense input. Nobody knows how to make an artificial dog; making the robotics for a body would be easy, and making an internal chemical laboratory capable of taking in food and water and producing slobber, sweat, and the like is arguably possible, but we have no idea of how to do the intelligence. All of the abstraction in the world can't tell our robot dog how to run through a field of children without getting clobbered. We have captured one of the features of human intelligence; there are a number of features of even animal intelligence that we lack. There are other features of unintelligent life that we have yet to touch, as well. Nobody knows how to make machines that heal after they sustain damage."

"The last lesson I wish to mention concerns accident and substance, and..." Taberah closed his eyes, and said, "Mr. Chairman, I stayed up all night thinking of what to say, and manners in the country I come from are a bit less polished. I really can't think of a polite way to say it, but I really think the discipline of artificial intelligence has been running with an albatross around its neck, and my success is in large part because I somehow got on the racetrack without getting an albatross. Do I have your permission to make some polemic remarks that may sting?"

Dr. Bode said, "Mr. Kinsella, you have our full consent to say whatever you think is best suited to the occasion."

Taberah said, "I know, but I am not much older than a child, and one of the things I've learned the hard way is that people sometimes say that when they don't really mean it. Is it really OK?"

The chairman's face held trepidation for a moment; he paused, and then said, "It's OK."

Taberah said, "Thank you. And I do really mean it."

"I will not begin to attempt a full philosophical analysis of accident

and substance, any more than I would attempt a full mathematical analysis of logic within this speech, were I able, but I will say this. Accident is the outer appearance of an object, what the senses can receive. Substance is what it really is, its essence, if you will. Our discipline, in this area, is the self-made victim of an incredible legacy of bad philosophy, and has many fruitless endeavors which make as much sense to a philosopher as trying to bring a statue to life by painting it and making its features ever more lifelike. We have asked the question of, 'How can we create artificial intelligence?', but misinterpreted it to mean, 'How can we imitate the features of artificial intelligence that are most computer-like?' With all due respect to the brilliant man for which this award was named, I was shocked when I read Turing's explanation of what he thinks thought is. His interpretation of human thought is like interpreting a game of chess as moving little pieces around on a board. Some of what I have seen in this community reminds me of trying to kink a cable to stop the flow of data on a network, and then switching to fiber optic to make your thinking work. But what has happened is not that you make your thinking work; you only make it stop working. The main thing I would attribute this success to is that I came from another culture and missed this bad philosophy, and I believe that the artificial intelligence community will really begin to mine out my insight when they can really escape from this bad philosophy."

Taberah closed his eyes a moment, and said, "Mr. Chairman, may I take thirty seconds for a personal announcement, as well?"

The chairman sat for a moment and said, "What you have said is a difficult thing to hear, but others have said it before, or things similar. Perhaps we just haven't taken them seriously enough. Yes, you are welcome to say whatever else you want."

Taberah looked, gazed out at over a thousand heads in the audience. All eyes were on him. Slowly, distinctly, loudly, he said, "In this whole room, I doubt if there are more than two or three of you who can hear what else I have to say, but it is something significant. I would like if those two or three would come to my hotel room after the night's festivities so we can talk about it. Thank you, and have a good evening." He closed his eyes and walked hurriedly, almost as if embarrassed, back to his seat.

There was a hushed silence, with murmuring. When he got back to his table, after waiting a minute, one of the people from an adjacent table

table, after waiting a minute, one of the people from an adjacent table scooted over to him, and said, "May I join you tonight?" Then another, then another. People began to walk over to him. In minutes, Taberah was at the center of a noisy swarm of people.

Taberah turned to the woman nearest him, looked into her eyes, and asked, "Would you get the chairman for me?"

In a few more minutes, the chairman was next to him.

Taberah hesitated, and then said, "Dr. Bode, there seem to be more people interested in what I have to say than there is space in my room. Would you be so kind as to provide me with a room to speak in, where these people can comfortably be seated?"

The chairman gently laughed, and said, "Mr. Kinsella, why don't you speak here? The whole room is interested in what you have to say."

Taberah picked up his glass, took a long gulp, and said, "Let me take a restroom break first. And would you announce to people that anyone not interested in my tangent shouldn't feel obligated to stay. It'll be a tad long."

When Taberah returned, not a single soul had left. The room was dead silent.

"The discipline of artificial intelligence is about how to impart rationality to computers. This is a question about computers, but it is at least as much a question about rationality. In our endeavor to make computers rational, we have paid scant attention on how to be rational ourselves. I am not saying that we should be Spocks, embodying logic without emotion. A prejudice against emotion, and a belief that rationality and emotion are antithetical, is (thank God) crumbling, but old fallacies die hard. I embrace emotion as much as I embrace being physical and enjoying music and good wine, but I do not wish to deal further with emotion now. What do I wish to deal with?"

"Dick Feynman, in his memoirs *You Must Be Joking, Mr. Feynman*, included a classic speech on cargo cult science. He spoke of aboriginal people who, in World War II, had Allied food and other supplies accidentally airdropped to them, and produce a mockup of an airstrip, designed more and more to look like a real airstrip — but, however much they worked, planes never landed. Never mind that this is very crude anthropology; there is a fundamental insight there about something that looks very much like an airstrip but just doesn't work. And it provides a key to explain something very disagreeable.

"When I came here, I was shocked at what I saw in intellectual life. It is like the shock that might come to a scientist the first time he goes to a creation science institute and discovers exactly what 'science' means in that context. Pseudo-science can incorporate a lot of material from science, and still not be science. What shocked me when I came here was that I looked for reason and found pseudo-reason."

Taberah said, "A full brain dump of what I have seen would take far too long to deliver in a speech, but I wish to give a sampling in three areas: an instance of bad reasoning I see, an instance of a bad way of thinking I see, and an instance of a possible partial remedy.

"The example of bad reasoning I see is in the area of overpopulation. The general, un-questioned belief is that our world's population is growing exponentially, much faster in the poorer areas of the world, and doomsday will come if we don't curb this population explosion. Speaking as a philosopher, I ask, 'Why?'

"The answer that is given is that people in the third world have large families to support themselves. And that's enough of an explanation to be accepted by someone gullible, but it does not stand up to examination.

"If the world's population is growing exponentially, then it has either always been growing exponentially, or it started growing exponentially at some point. If it has always been growing exponentially, then, as certainly as the future holds doomsday population levels, the past holds dwindling population figures. As surely as the future explodes, the past implodes. This would mean that prior to, say, 1700, all non-European continents would be virtually uninhabited. If the third world population is doubling every, say, ten years, then the population of the third world in the year 1700 would be less than ten. This is ridiculous. All accounts I know say that the poorer areas of the world have been inhabited with at least moderate density for quite some time — thousands of years easily. This leaves us with the other option, namely that the population of the third world has been basically stable and has recently begun exponential growth. To this possibility I ask the question: why on earth? The cultures of these people haven't changed at any rapid pace (and if they did, I would still be puzzled as to why *all* of them changed, instead of a handful — a rapid change of unrelated cultures is about as unusual as the formation of a herd of cats); it is true that most of them cherish children and value big families, but that's been a part of most cultures since long

before whenever this population explosion was supposed to have begun. The introduction of new technology to lengthen life and childbearing years? That would certainly account for a population explosion in the *wealthy* nations, but the average African tribesman has never heard of a Western doctor, let alone received enough medical care to possibly increase the number of children he leaves behind.

"Literature describing a population explosion if the third world birth rate is not curbed has been around for several decades; it used to specify a date for when, for instance, people would all be standing because there would not be enough room for anyone to sit down; those dates are long gone, had passed well before the turn of the millennium, and now there are no more predictions for when doomsday will be — merely that it is always 'soon'. There are pieces of evidence garnered to support this — for example, the great poverty by our standards of third world nations; never mind that this is how all nations lived before one civilization happened to stumble on Midas's secret — but it doesn't stand up to rational examination. And there are many claims like this that free thinkers never question, because to question them is to question rationality or to question reality.

"That is one example among many of non-think; I do not presently wish to give others, nor even to ask who or why would perpetuate such a massive and propagandistic illusion. I am trying to keep this talk short. So I would like to move on to my next example, of an instance not simply of an irrational belief, but of a macroscopic way of thinking that is bad. In this area also, I have a number of choices; I choose to elaborate on the discipline of economics."

Several faces in the crowd could be seen to wince.

"The discipline of economics has had tremendous success at providing the right answer to the wrong question. The question which it answers is, 'How can a culture be manipulated to maximize the economic wealth that it produces?' The question which it ought to answer is, 'How can an economy be guided so as to best support the life of a culture?'

"I spoke with an economist about this; he said several things. The first thing he said is that economics takes people's wants to be constant, i.e. that it doesn't try to reshape people's economic desires. But this is nonsense; the whole enterprise of advertising and marketing is designed to manipulate people into buying and spending far more than even natural greed would have them do. People work overtime and go into

natural greed would have them do. People work overtime and go into debt to have things they don't need and wouldn't want enough to buy if there weren't ads pressuring them into it. As to the others — there is a naive assumption that the starting point is a consumer who is both selfish and rational. Both have an element of truth, but even the vilest of men is not completely selfish. There is a motivation to do something beyond meeting animal needs that is not gone even in Hitler. Hitler went to incredible lengths to exterminate Jews; such dedication would be called heroic if it were engaged in a noble cause. It was perverse beyond measure, but it was not selfish. Not by a long shot. And as to rational — anyone who looks at a marketing text, or for that matter pays attention to a few ads — will see that the means of increasing market share has nothing to do with rational appeal. The real questions that economics could address — the meaning of wealth, the right amount of wealth (not the greatest) for people to live with — are brushed aside in the relentless pursuit of more, more, more, more.

"On points like this I could go on — the death of philosophy, the curse of Babel upon academic disciplines so that, for instance, the work of any one mathematician is incomprehensible to the vast majority of his colleagues — but I do not wish to do so here. Instead I wish to turn, on a positive note, to how you can think in a better way.

"Larry Wall's classic *Programming Perl* described the three programmer's virtues: hubris, laziness, and impatience. His points with all three are in one sense tongue in cheek, but in another sense much deeper. The virtue he calls 'laziness' is another facet of the intellectual rigor that takes the one stitch that will in time save nine. It is called 'laziness' because applying that rigor will have the effect of taking less work overall; indeed it is a principle of software engineering that doing something well is easier than doing it sloppily. I wish to focus on that intellectual rigor.

"When you are thinking — be it listening to this speech, or trying to get technology to work, or figuring out why someone is mad at you — *don't slouch*. When you feel a faint intuition in the back of your mind that something is wrong, don't ignore it. Pay attention to it. Try to understand it. Analyze it. Analysis is one tool among a thousand, and you need to be able to let go of it before you can come to the insight Zen offers — that much is clear to me from reading about it, even though I haven't the foggiest idea whether a Zen master would consider me enlightened or

not. You need to also be able to relax, to be able to slide into things, to groove (if I may use an archaic term) — but different things at different times. And a certain kind of intellectual rigor applies across disciplines, in sciences, in humanities, in humanities that think they're sciences. It applies outside of academia to life.

"I have thought a lot about the three areas these insights are taken from, and written them down in a sort of book. It will be available on my home room at midnight; those parties who are interested and not offended, whom I guess are few, are welcome to read it there. Beyond that, I thank you all for coming, and if my speech has succeeded, you all need time to think as much as I need time to sleep. Thank you, and have a good night."

Taberah slipped out the back door, scurried off to the hotel room, locked the door, and used both noise cancelling ear phones and ear plugs (noise rating 35); Aed had to get the hotel to open the room to pick up a cellular computer he'd left in there, and bring along security guards to see that he was the only person to go in. The traffic on Taberah's book was enough to take down a zuni server, but the Kinsellas' ISP had mirrors up in an hour. The next day, as the Kinsellas stepped into the plane to fly back, Aed said, "Taberah, I hope you're ready to be a celebrity. I've spoken with the chairman of the Turing society, and he says he can ensure us a week of peace and quiet with his clout. Beyond that, be ready for a lot of visitors."

Taberah smiled and said, "I'm not worried about it."

# Sojourn

*Ding-dong!*

Aed came to the door, and stifled a wince. This wasn't a week's peace! He saw a short teen-ager in an outlandish role-playing costume: a long, loose, dark robe fell about him, hooded shadows covering his face, and fractal-decorated gloves covered the skin on his arms. "Mister, may I use your bathroom?" he said, his voice cracking, and then shrunk back.

Aed breathed a sigh of relief, and said, "Sure. Come this way." He led him to the bathroom, surprised at a smell of — what? something chemical; he couldn't decide. As the door shut, Aed decided to stay; the kid might get lost, and perhaps something else in his house might get lost. It was a few minutes, and then, coming out, the kid reached around the side of his head and pulled off his hood to reveal a shaven head that looked older than he had seemed at first glance. "So," the teenager? said, his voice again cracking, "d'ja recognize me?"

Aed blinked, and did a double take. It was Taberah. No beard, no hair on his head, not even eyebrows. He looked unfamiliar, just a very short teenager whose eyes twinkled.

"I've decided to do some travelling incognito. Listen, I'm really sorry about all the publicity you'll deal with; I hadn't known how your culture works. No, that's not right; I'd guessed about publicity, but I hadn't cared. Anyways, I have learned a lot about travel and adapting back in the middle ages, and disguise came quickly — I learned a lot at Halloween time. Um..." his voice trailed off, and then added, "You'll eventually have less attention if I disappear."

"Don't feel guilty about the journalists," Aed said. "Their presence is a side effect of making certain kinds of achievements. But Taberah, you will always be welcome here. You don't have to go."

"I know, but I need to go — for me as well as for you. It's been great

I know, but I need to go — for me as well as for you. It's been great here, and I hope to come back — but who knows what tomorrow will bring? I am a wayfarer, and I am not ready to settle down in one place for good."

"You're sure? You're taking an awful big step — can I at least provide you with resources? I've got a fair amount invested, and it's an awfully big world out there."

"No. I can't describe it, it's just — I have a feeling I'll be back, but I need to travel. To think. To work."

"What do you call your creation of artificial intelligence?"

"Aed, do we have to argue?" Aed noticed that there were tears forming in the child's eyes.

"You're making it hard enough for him as it is, honey. Let him go," came Nathella's voice.

Nathella walked over to Taberah, held him in her arms, and kissed him on the lips. "I'll miss you — Taberah, what does your name mean?"

"Burning."

"Similar to my husband's name. I'll miss you, flame. I'll pray for you every day." Then she continued to hold him in silence.

"Where will you be?" Aed said. He walked over and picked Taberah up, holding him. Taberah kissed him, too, on the lips. "I think it would better as regards the media for you not to know," Taberah said. He lingered for a moment, and then disappeared out the side door.

# A Mugging

Taberah walked out. It was good to be under the sky again, with a bent arm for a pillow. It felt honest. Or did it? In the year's time, Taberah realized he had grown more accustomed to luxury than he thought. There was something nagging at the back of his mind — what? This culture was lacking in rationality, but he had to have more than rationality to give. Academic silliness was a symptom, not the problem. But what was it? He went into a store and purchased a pen and notepad; he needed time to write. He wandered about aimlessly, walking the city streets.

Taberah was snapped out of his thoughts at a sudden, jerky motion. A young man had drawn a knife; he said, "Give me your money. Now. And no quick motions — you draw something, you're dead."

Taberah slowly reached into his pockets. "I don't have much money; only fifty bucks, plus a few coins. I know what I can give you. I have a nice, thick Swiss Army knife that my mentor gave me. It's quite useful. Would you like that?" He had fished out a fifty dollar bill, plus four quarters, one dime, and a nickel.

"Drop it on the ground," the robber said.

"Certainly. Why are you afraid?" Taberah asked, dropping his pocketknife on the ground.

"I'm not afraid," the robber said, and saw that his lie would not be believed. It could not. Taberah was relaxed; he carried a peace about him, and there was something about him over which the knife held no power.

"Why are you afraid?" Taberah repeated. "I'm not going to hurt you."

"Why aren't you afraid?" the robber said. "I could kill you right where you stand."

"That is the worst you could do. Then I would be with my friends in Heaven. And there are some saints whom I'd be really happy to see."

"You wouldn't even try to defend yourself?" the robber said, nuzzled

you wouldn't even try to defend yourself?" the robber said, puzzled.

"I love to spar. I —"

"Then defend yourself against this!" The robber swung his knife to slash Taberah across the face. Taberah seemed suddenly distant; the knife flew through the air, and then the robber felt a fist between his eyes — he would be reeling. Then he felt a sledgehammer blow to his stomach, far more powerful than he would have imagined such a scrawny body capable of delivering

struggled to regain his balance  
fell

realized he was in a full Nelson

felt himself retching

felt himself pulled back, so that the vomit didn't touch him.

Taberah released his arms, and then pulled back, crouched. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. I have learned that violence does not accomplish much, but my hands are not in on the knowing. I should not have pretended that I was sparring with my weapons master. I should—"

The robber cursed him out, and said, "Who are you, and where are you from?"

Taberah was very still for a moment, and said, "My name is Taberah. It means 'burning' in Hebrew."

"Are you a Jew?"

"I am a Catholic. That comes from Judaism."

"So where are you from?"

Taberah paused, and then, against his better judgment, said, "I can give you a short answer that won't tell you anything, or I can give you the real answer, which I won't blame you if you find impossible to believe."

"Give me the real answer."

"I'm from the Middle Ages, Provence in Southern France. I've traveled a bit. An angel took me to this place. I —"

The robber said, "Ok; you don't have to tell me if you don't want to." Taberah did not argue; instead, he asked, "What is your name?"

The robber shook, and then began to cry, trying to conceal it. "You really care about me, don't you?"

Taberah said, "Look at me."

The man brushed his arm across his face and looked at him, startled. Taberah's eyes were glistening, too. He said, "It looks as if you've never had anyone who cared about you. I care about you."

The man wiped his mouth, spat, and then sat up, uncertain whether to glare or to quiver. Finally, he said, "My name is Elika. Don't know what it means. Don't have nobody to care about me. Don't understand you."

Taberah said, "Do you want to understand me?"

Elika said, "Maybe. No. Yes. Why? Are you going to talk about Middle Ages stuff?"

Taberah said, "I don't want to talk about the Middle Ages now. Maybe later, if you're interested. Are you confused about why I care about you? Would you like me to explain that?"

Elika said, "How did you know that?"

Taberah did not answer the question. He said, "Let me ask you another question. What do you think religion is about?"

Elika said, "Religion? That's not for me. It's about rules and feeling guilty and memorizing the Bible. It's impossible; it doesn't work for someone like me who has a tough life."

Taberah said, "Would you like to know what religion is for me?"

"Something you're good at?"

"Um, I don't know if I'm good at it, but it's something important to me, and something very different than what you have said. It's not about rules, or feeling guilty, or memorizing the Bible."

"Then what is it about?"

"One thing: love. God loves you. He loves me. We should love God and other people. Everything else is just details. It's about love; that's why I care about you."

"Look, I don't know why you are telling this to me; maybe it's something you can do, but I can't. Here's your money and your knife; I need to go."

Taberah said, "I gave you the money and the knife; they aren't mine any more. They're yours. But if you want to give me something — \$50 is enough to buy some bread, some meat, and a bottle of cider. I'm hungry, and you just threw up. Maybe we could meet and talk — or not. You are free to leave, but I'd like to get to know you better."

This time, Elika made no attempt to conceal his tears, and Taberah softly asked, "May I give you a hug?" It had been ages since anybody had touched Elika, and he listened with interest as Taberah shared what was on his heart. "Why do you dare to keep company with me?" Elika asked. "My Master," Taberah answered, "kept company with all kinds of people, from the most respected to the least. His heart has room for me, for you, I

from the most respected to the least. His heart has room for me, for you. I want you to share in his joy."

They ate in a park, and talked long into the night.

# Kindred

Night had slowly fallen; Taberah and Elika walked past a dark valley, from which a voice said, "I see your dress. Are you one of us? Are you one of the Kindred?"

Taberah gazed, letting his eyes grow accustomed to the darkness. "Who are you? Who are the Kindred?"

The voice answered back, "You already know that. Where were you born? And when?"

"I was born in Provence, in the Middle Ages."

"Welcome, Ancient One. Step closer."

Taberah had an intuition that he couldn't place. In his mind, he raised his guard, but this was too interesting to pass by. "Come with us."

Elika said, "Don't worry; they're just role playing."

The voice said, "One is never 'just' role playing. Role play is never 'just.'"

The intuition in Taberah's mind clarified, solidifying. He was beginning to see that role play meant something different than it had with Fiona and Clancy.

They melted into the shadows, and emerged in a candlelit room. In the center lie a pile of wooden swords, staves, daggers, shields. The voice again said, "It is our custom that Kindred brought into our Clan must fight until all the other members have defeated them. Only then can you Enter. Choose your weapon carefully."

Taberah looked at the pile, picked up a halberd, hefted it. "And if I am not defeated? What happens then?"

"Then you are the new head of the Clan."

Taberah looked, and words began to flow through him, coming partly of his own volition, partly of something else. His senses were more acute; the world seemed to slow down. He said, "Darkness is powerful. Light is

the world seemed to slow down. He said, "Darkness is powerful. Light is more powerful. As a sign to you, I choose to fight you armed only with this."

Taberah stood back, drew himself to a majestic height, and made on his heart the sign of the cross.

# Kindred

There was stunned disbelief in the atmosphere. One of the Kindred slowly stepped forward, hefted a quarterstaff, and swung at Taberah.

Taberah dodged; he swung again, and this time Taberah caught the staff and twisted it so that the Kinsman fell on his back.

Taberah used the staff to create around him an area of space; another person raised a two-handed sword, bringing it down. It broke the staff in two — as had been the Kinsman's intent — and Taberah's.

Taberah was now holding twin longswords.

From the outside, it looked as if a thousand things were going on; from the inside, Taberah was only aware of one thing. He kept dancing until he had struck all but one of the Kindred — all but one. They were locked in a dance, the Kinsman skillful and masterful, possessing far greater power than he appeared to have, Taberah moving in a way that was cunning, alien, brilliant. Erika looked on intently; this was the most magnificent fight he had seen.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, the Kinsman threw down his sword, and opened his arms. Taberah followed suit, and the Kinsman reached out to grab Taberah's testicles.

Taberah, with equal swiftness, struck him on the side of the neck, knocking him out.

Taberah turned around slowly, looking, and once again made the sign of the cross.

One of the Kindred looked at him, and said, "Who are you?"

Taberah said, "I am your new leader, and I have many things to tell you. I wish to tell you about a kind of role play beyond your wildest imaginings, a role play that will give you what you search for in vain in calling yourselves the Kindred. Kindred we will be, bound much more tightly than ever a game designer imagined."

ughtly than ever a game designer imagined.

"And what is that, that will bind us?"

"It is a dirty word among your circles. Love."

There was murmuring, and a voice said, "Love is very nice for some people, but we need something more real. Something that knows pain. Something that knows angst."

"The love that I know was tortured to death."

"What is this love of which you speak?"

Taberah thought of a short answer, and then said, "That is not a little question, and it deserves more than a little answer. We are tired and bruised; let us, each of us, get a good night's sleep, and then I will give you an answer."

# Discovered

The following night, Taberah spoke long, telling a tale that stretched from Eden to the New Jerusalem. The Kindred were spellbound; none of them could begin to imagine that anything so exciting and dynamic could be the ill-spoken Christian faith. He wrapped up by saying, "It means being loved by God, and loving God by four pillars: loving God with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your mind, and all of your might." None of them were, as yet, convinced, but Taberah had their attention.

Taberah stood, teaching in the parks, day and night, and gradually some of the role players came to believe in what he said, and that he had a message worth spreading. Sometimes more than role players stopped by. One of the Kindred raised his hand and said, "Taberah, why don't we make a medieval role play circus to draw people in?"

Taberah thought, and scratched his head, and thought some more. He said, "I would like to draw a distinction between 'medieval from the neck up' and 'medieval from the neck down'. 'Medieval from the neck down' is everything a circus can provide: costumes and castles, swordplay and feasting. Role play notwithstanding, that is gone, and it is not the treasure I wish to restore. I wish to restore what is 'medieval from the neck up' — faith, hope, and love. Maybe there are some people who could be drawn into what is 'medieval from the neck up' after first contacting what is 'medieval from the neck down', but I do not wish to present a false lure."

"You lured us in from role play."

"You're right, except that then I was trying to follow God where I was. I don't feel the same rightness about putting on a show."

The discussion continued until Taberah noticed that a young woman was staring at him; her jaw had dropped. He looked at her and said, "What is it, sister?"

WHAT IS IT, SISTER?

"I know you. I recognized you by the sound of your voice. You're the man who won two Turing Awards."

# Adjustments

Taberah's Corner 9/1/2035:  
Turning Back the Clock

Upon advocating that we reclaim certain things from the Middle Ages, I am invariably met with the question, "Do you think you can turn back the clock?", and it is a question I should like to address now."

There is a belief behind that question; that belief runs roughly as follows: time runs on an irreversible slope, and with that irreversible slope comes a necessary progression of ages that march forward. This belief appears to be only its obvious first part, that time is irreversible, but it is understood to mean the second part: an equally irreversible march of ages. These are almost so equated that asking, "Can we be medieval now?" is equivalent to asking, "Can we set back the physical clock to 1300?" — but the two are not at all the same.

There is a distinction I have made between being medieval above the neck, and medieval below the neck. Medieval below the neck is all of those popular images that are conjured by the term 'medieval' — knights in shining armor, castles, and the like. Medieval above the neck is not concerned with technology; it is concerned with thinking and living in light of the insights of the Middle Ages. Re-enactors spend short time living lives that are at least medieval below the neck, but I don't think that is a particularly important goal. What I do think is important is what I hinted at with my Turing award speech; it concerns rationality, for one thing. I know I'm fighting an uphill battle against stereotypes here; there has been a massive smear campaign, so that 'medieval' connotes obscurantist silliness and 'postmodern' connotes reasonability, but it isn't so. Medieval above the neck has never been obsolete, and never will be — because it can't be obsolete, any more than good food can become obsolete.

As to what exactly this will mean — I will write about different things at different times. I have some things to say about judging by appearances versus judging rightly — but that will come in its due time.

Thank you for reading thus far; I hope you will continue reading

Thank you for reading thus far, I hope you will continue reading.

The young woman's recognition of Taberah brought with it powerful changes; Taberah was for the first time of his life busy, and for the first time of his life had to escape from other people for the restoration of his soul. When he appeared, people asked autographs, and he soon learned to enter and leave restaurants through the kitchen. He had a voice to be heard, but he missed being able to walk through the streets and in the woods with Lydia. There were so many things about Taberah that people couldn't understand — such as why he would sometimes rather sleep in a gutter than in a waterbed. Perhaps he could learn to use cosmetics to alter his appearance — but when would he learn how to do that? He saw his fame as a responsibility, but it was more of a burden than a privilege.

He wrote and communicated all of the things that he had discussed with his friends — and re-iterated that he did not want a circus to be put up. He had influence, but it was an impersonal influence with people he mostly didn't know. And so Taberah prayed earnestly that the burden would be lifted.

# Reckoning

Taberah's Corner 10/1/2035:

### Reckoning

There is a Bible story where God calls Samuel and tells him to find the future king among some brothers. Each time one comes out, Samuel is impressed and says, "Surely this is the one who is to be king!" God tells him, in essence, "I do not judge as you do. I do not judge by outer appearances." It is the last brother who is picked to be king.

I entertain doubts about holding a column at all; I suspect that most readers are reading this column because I have won two Turing Awards. If you are, I would ask you to stop; the Turing Awards merely indicate that I had some success with computers, and do not make me particularly qualified to advise society. If you are reading this column because you think I have good things to say, then go on reading it; if you are only reading it because of the weight of my awards, I would rather you were reading something else, something else that you chose because it is worth reading.

You people are greatly concerned about success. There was someone who said, "I had climbed to the top of the corporate ladder, only to find that the ladder was leaning against the wrong building." I would like to suggest that your understanding of success is like your judgment by appearances. There is something good about being famous as having won two Turing Awards; that something good is that you learn that, whatever success is, that isn't it. Success is being drawn into the heart of God, and it comes more easily when you are about to be deported by the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services than when everybody and his brother wants you to be his honored guest. Success might come in many ways. It might be service of children — and how few adults are willing to play with children? It might be keeping house. It might be running a volunteer shelter. It might be being a judge who has the guts to defend Christianity when it is attacked or challenge Islam when it is hurting our society. It might be any number of things. Perhaps it might even include being a celebrity and using your fever to share

might even include being a celebrity and using your favor to share truth with others who might not have heard it — but it is not defined by having an award attached to your name.

How can you be successful — not at some date in the future, but right now?

On October 2 2035, 3:05 PM, God heard Taberah's prayer. An Islamist assassin, armed with a high-powered hunting rifle, shot at Taberah and hit him twice — once in the right shoulder, and once in the abdomen. Taberah was in surgery for sixteen hours, and spent the next week drugged out. The doctor gave very firm orders that only close friends approved by both her and Aed were to see Taberah — even then, Taberah always had a visitor when he wanted one.

In Taberah's medically enforced absence, the movement he started became independent of him. They were no longer intellectually dependent on him: Taberah was no longer a head, merely the first person to have known something. There were medieval fairs, showing people what was medieval above and below the neck. When, three months later, Taberah left the hospital, he was simply a member.

On March 6, 2036, Taberah was lying in bed, when the Angel of the Lord came to him in a vision, and said, "You have done well, Taberah; you have done what you were sent for. Which would you like: to return to medieval Provence, or to spend the rest of your life here?"

Taberah cried, and said, "I have waited, and waited, and waited, and waited. Can't I go *home*? To my *real* home?"

His funeral was filled with mirth.

# Epilogue

Yes, Eleta, I think you're right, and I think the manuscript will have to stand as it is, but I am still not happy with it. Perhaps no author is ever satisfied with his work, but I am not happy with it. You understand why I presented the events as fiction — the idea is not without merits. Still, a critic could poke any number of holes in it. Someone who regarded it as fiction would no doubt note that good storytelling and good plot are rarely found together, that forty percent of the plot is glossed over in two short chapters, et cetera. I'm not sure that Taberah would share in all those criticisms — he regarded those long days of conversation with the Kinsellas as the best time of his life, and his influential and turbulent time in the limelight as almost an afterthought in which he repeated impersonally what he had shared personally. At any rate, he would have found his message more important than telling a good story — and he took storytelling seriously. Someone who knew this was not fiction and knew the parties involved would have much more serious criticisms to level. I have captured almost nothing of Taberah's sense of humor — cunning, bawdy, subtle, clever, exquisite, and absurd. After hearing about some of the practical jokes he pulled — from now on, Monty Python will taste like flat beer. It pales in comparison. I also did badly in failing to more seriously address the place of Islam. The influence of Islam in shaping the culture, and why it is by nature coercive is something I just barely nicked — probably just enough to make the reader think I suffer from vulgar intolerance. You know better than that, of course; you know that I enjoyed living in a Muslim country, and that I greatly respect their emphasis on honor, friendship, and hospitality. And that it is my considered judgment — as surely as that Christianity is invariably corrupted when it wields direct political power — that Islam in power is

inherently coercive. The role of Islam was one among *many* important elements of the surrounding culture that I failed to capture. And medieval culture, for that matter. And Taberah's "200 ways to use a magnetic paper clip" — I just don't know what to say. It's both silly and serious, and it was one of the things to motivate me to wonder, "What kind of a mind would think of that?" And I have intentionally left out most of the miracles that occurred — not that there were many, but I didn't want to present unnecessary strain on the reader's willing suspension of disbelief. There was plenty of necessary strain already.

The willing suspension of disbelief accompanying fiction is the real reason I chose to write it as fiction. It's not just that saying I know events three decades in the future would label me as a kook — that's understandable enough, and the real explanation was difficult for *me* to believe, even having experienced it. The real reason I recorded this story as fiction is that our time has this terrible stereotype of medievals as backwards, and conception of the past as inferior — and a science fiction/fantasy story is almost the only place where something labelled 'medieval' could be respected. What if I told you that an anti-Semitic campaign had taken the name of Einstein, and smeared Jewry by making his name a symbol of idiocy? The truth is that something equally anti-medieval has taken the name of John Duns Scotus, the medieval genius whom Catholics call the Subtle Doctor, and turned it into the term 'dunce'. That stereotype, and the preconception that we have nothing to learn from the medievals, is a force to be reckoned with, and I don't know how this manuscript will fare in its face.

Once one of Karl Barth's students asked him, "Do you believe there was a serpent in the Garden of Eden?" Barth replied, "The important thing is not 'Was there a serpent?' but 'What did the serpent say?'" In a similar insight, I have presented Taberah's story as fiction and tried to draw attention away from the question of "Was Taberah real?" and instead draw attention to the more fundamental question of "What did Taberah say?" — on which account he has much to tell us. After coming into contact with him, I have come to believe that we can be medievals, too.

What do you think?

-Jonathan

# **Frankincense, Gold, and Myrrh:**

*A look at profound giftedness  
through Orthodox  
anthropology*

## **Thesis Statement**

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh are emblems of Christ's kingship, divinity, and suffering respectively, applying to humans as Christ's image, studied in the profoundly gifted.

## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to look at the features of Christ confessed gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh as features playing out in humans, and exploring what concrete shape this playing out takes in the so-called "profoundly gifted." (Kingship, divinity, and suffering play out in equally significant ways for other populations, but the scope is primarily limited to a segment of the stated population.) "Profound giftedness" is used a standard psychological technical term, if a quite flattering label for a more ambivalent experience.

Profound giftedness is explored as one of many experiences that looks different from the inside and from the outside; paradoxically, what looks different from the inside and outside is in large measure its particular expression of human commonalities. (This could be said for many other populations as well.) Profound giftedness as an expression of being human is explored, in the (royal and) divine image, in particular the rule over Creation through work, alongside a particular expression of suffering, while being attentive to the fact that profoundly gifted people both suffer and cause others to suffer. Suffering is explored in light of Orthodox experience before the essay closes by applying lessons learned in looking at profoundly gifted difference to human difference as such. Profound giftedness experience combines extremes, including both privilege and marginality. This study looks at the profoundly gifted experience of being human, and owes a considerable debt to studies of the human experience of the marginalized, while drawing from other traditions including the Orthodox.

Profound giftedness is not described as exception to the normal human rule but as the univocally applied human rule given further specification that could be given different further specification for other populations.

## Symbols, humans, and Christ

There is an understanding of symbol/image that plays out in this paper's treatment of the image of God and the symbolic character of the magi's gifts. If we look at the question, "Does a symbol represent and embody or represent only?" an Orthodox perspective is that a symbol or image both represents and embodies.<sup>[1]</sup> A proper symbol is neither arbitrary nor detached but connected to what it represents. Hence Kallistos Ware answers the question of whether Orthodox pay undue devotion to wood: "The icon is... a symbol; the veneration shown to the images is directed, not to stone, wood, and paint, but towards the person depicted."<sup>[2]</sup> We shall see in a moment that the person is in turn a symbol of Christ, but the immediate point is the understanding of symbol that undergirds such a position. It is the same understanding of symbol that says that the Gifts of the Magi were not given arbitrary imputed symbolism, representing without embodying. Not only do they both represent and embody, but there are layers of symbolic resonance, and that resonance informs this paper as does the precedent in Ephrem the Syrian, a poet of the first rank,<sup>[3]</sup> treating a fluid rather than inflexible treatment of the symbols' precise meaning.

It is a deceptive understatement to call Christ a norm to humanity. To be human is to be made in the image of God, classically understood as "in the image of the Trinity,"<sup>[4]</sup> as Ware attests, and this image specifically includes the image of Christ. Part of this image plays out in treatment of others: Ware writes "Monastery guests, as St Benedict of Nursia (c.480-c.550) wrote in his Rule, are to be received 'as Christ himself.' In similar terms, the fourth-century Egyptian Abba Apollo insisted, 'We should bow down before those who come to see us, for we are bowing down not before them but before God.'"<sup>[5]</sup> This principle is in no sense unique to monastery guests: in [Mt 25.31-46](#) the righteous are separated from the

wicked in the last judgment according to how they treated Christ through their treatment of the downtrodden, with no distinction being made for religious persuasion. One's treatment of another is one's treatment of Christ tout court. Christ lies at the heart of humanity and his image in every human reaches the point that one cannot do good or ill to another human, Christian or not, as someone detached from Christ because there is no such thing as someone detached from Christ. This is tacitly tied to a norm in a much deeper sense than a norm extrinsically imposed *de jure*, whether or not it fits a person originally independent of that arbitrarily imposed norm. One can have something to do with Christ without encountering Christianity: the relevance of Christ does not enter the picture only in relation to explicit identification with Christianity.

As a limitation of scope, this paper looks at the image of Christ as it is expressed in the profoundly gifted. "[God] doesn't make two blades of grass the same: how much less two saints, two nations, two angels."<sup>[6]</sup> The image of Christ is specified equally but differently in other human populations, and other papers might look at other populations. The scope of this paper is to offer analysis and description for the profoundly gifted and talk about how the image of Christ in the human constitution plays out specifically in this locale. If the profoundly gifted are explored as connected to Christ and the Theotokos or Mother of God, this is intended as an exploration of something common with other populations rather than a specific distinction that applies to the profoundly gifted and not others. Then why focus on the profoundly gifted? Human basics can be further specified in exploring the particularity of their expression in different populations, and this paper is intended to offer specific characterization and thick description for the group in its focus, a methodology one would expect to be able to apply to any number of groups. (Other papers with different focuses might give comparable specification to the human rule through thick description of other populations.)

## Chrism, frankincense, and myrrh

Chrism was not "mere" oil but a sacramental emblem of the Holy Spirit. Cyril of Alexandria compares aromatic holy oil, or chrism, which produces "the advent of deity,"<sup>[7]</sup> to consecrated bread that has become the Body of Christ,<sup>[8]</sup> and Cyril does not mean this as extrinsic and arbitrary symbolism but understands symbol along the lines outlined above. Oil is an emblem of the Holy Spirit so that anointing with oil may be hard to disentangle from anointing with the Spirit,<sup>[9]</sup> and oil carried rich resonances: Susan Ashbrook Harvey writes: "Most important for early Christians were the ideas of priesthood, kingship, and prophecy as offices of sacred activity conferred through an anointing with holy oil. Early Christians applied these concepts to the figure of Christ, *as well as themselves as his followers*. [emphasis added]"<sup>[10]</sup>

Ashbrook Harvey mentions a "universal patristic exegesis"<sup>[11]</sup> of gold as emblematic of Christ's kingship, frankincense of his divinity, and myrrh of his suffering. In patristic sources this exegesis can be tersely stated,<sup>[12]</sup> but at other times there is fluidity and resonance: in Ephrem the Syrian myrrh intercedes for swords used in aggression, gold intercedes for treasures plundered from King Hezekiah, and frankincense appeased divinity.<sup>[13]</sup> The three basic meanings are here cast in a touching light of reparations for the magi's ancestral offenses against Mary's ancestors. This paper's method is informed by how in Ephrem the three gifts were not limited to a single rigid meaning but could be flexibly applied in different ways.

Frankincense was a complement to anointing oil; Ashbrook Harvey writes, "...incense took its base meaning from its identification with sacrifice. Incense served as a medium for human initiative towards the

divine, and its fragrance marked the process of human-divine encounter. Holy oil, by contrast, represented divine initiative towards the human." [14] Incense could signify human approach to divinity, or divinity itself. [15]

Myrrh was associated with suffering and death. Concordance search results for "myrrh," "spices," or "ointment" (in the RSV) reveal an overwhelming number of Gospel references explicitly connected to the passion: the Gospel reference to myrrh, spices, ointment, etc. pave the way for the Fathers to tie myrrh to suffering and death.

Gold is less thoroughly explained in Ashbrook Harvey and seems to be one of those objects of study poised to slip through the cracks of what is considered "doctrinally significant:" prior research to support an argument appears scanty, leaving primary sources the best available resource. Kittel[16] and Fitzgerald[17] lack entries for "chrysos" <http://cjshayward.com/>"gold." This may be a difficulty, but it does not stop one from looking at the other two gifts, and patristic treatments of kingship can presumably illuminate gold as an emblem of kingship.

Chrism is almost a fourth gift besides the three, and in a way is prior: it cuts deeper, and we call Christ "the Christ," meaning anointed Prophet, Priest, and King. The oil and the Holy Spirit are paradigms for each other. [18] Anointing was important in baptism[19] and some sources make baptism more a matter of oil than water.[20] John the Baptist announced one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire,[21] and perhaps oil rather than water explained baptismal anointing, with the Holy Spirit and with fire, to make little Christs. Not only myrrh for suffering, but gold for kingship and frankincense for divinity, are basic to being human and constituted by the image of Christ. The anointing with the literal-and-more-than-literal chrism that makes prophet, priest, and king applies to Christ and Christians. It is not only the pre-eminent gift of chrism that is connected with what it means to be human. The Gifts of the Magi are ultimately gifts to humans who bear Christ's image.

## Gold and frankincense in human work

The gifts have something to say about the human person. It is the Last Adam[22] who received frankincense, gold, and myrrh, and this Last Adam is tied to the First Adam: [Genesis 1.26-8](#) (RSV) reads:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and *let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.*" So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and *fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.*"  
[emphasis added for words relating to human rule]

Genesis 1 ties the divine image to human rule. The language used is of an idol image of a deity that carried the deity's essence and through which the deity's work was accomplished.[23] Furthermore, a good portion of the words in Genesis 1.26-8 are devoted to the relationship between the human and the rest of material Creation. To cite one patristic example, Basil of Caesarea can spiritualize rule over animals by discussing rule over oneself,[24] but alongside an *a fortiori* implied argument, "Let them rule over the fish. We were, in the first instance, given power over animals who live elsewhere. [God] did not say, Let them rule over domestic animals, but over fish:" humans have a powerful authority over the animals that goes beyond domestic animals to even effectively apply to fish.[25] Our relation to the natural world is a relation as royalty made

to rule. Anestis Keselopoulos explains this point: "[St. Symeon] has a strong feeling for the fact that man was created to function as king of creation."[\[26\]](#) Gold and frankincense do not begin to describe humanity in Christ's shadow. They already describe the divine image in Genesis 1.

That the texts above connect to work is foundational to John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens*.[\[27\]](#) He argues, "Man is made to be in the visible universe an image and likeness of God himself, and he is placed in it in order to subdue the earth. From the beginning therefore he is called to work,"[\[28\]](#) making subduing the earth and human rule the bridge between the *imago dei* and work. The royal, divine image expresses itself in work—perhaps not only work, and perhaps "work" needs to be more broadly understood than "remunerated labor," but on the Genesis 1 account the one holy day of rest is only achieved after the six days of the Creator himself working. One can scarcely ask for a higher valuation of work than to say the world was created by God's work (perhaps over billions of years), and as the Father works, so does the Son ([John 5.17](#)). Work is a defining feature of humanity (although not the only important feature). Work is part of human glory, part of the gift of gold and frankincense. The archetypal command to rule Creation is a command to work, and to be king is to rule through work.

Properly understood, work is at the core of what Keselopoulos gives great moral weight, one's "relationship with the things in creation."[\[29\]](#) Work is the outward operation of the image of God, and relating to the world virtuously is partly a matter of loving work. Madeleine l'Engle describes service that is close to the heart of work: "If the work comes to the artist and says, 'Here I am, serve me,' then the job of the artist, great or small, is to serve."[\[30\]](#) The artist does not take first initiative but responds by serving an as yet unformed Creation that needs to be loved into its full being. We will further explore this image later.

## Conceptualization of profound giftedness

I am wary of using the term "genius" for several reasons. Of all the common terms in psychological literature, "genius" is most problematic. It is difficult to say "genius" and only imply a claim of ability; invariably there are half-conscious associations evoked which approach being a morally separate class of creature who has a higher calling and is not bound by the same rules as mere mortals, much like the pathological conceptualization of the "exceptional man" critiqued in *Crime and Punishment*.<sup>[31]</sup> "Genius" comes with a mystique, or, to be more precise, is largely a mystique.

"Profoundly gifted" is not a synonym for "genius," and I will use the imperfect "profoundly gifted" not because it is perfect (it isn't), but to avoid forcing readers to deal with my own invented term when a standard term exists. "Genius," even besides its connotations, denotes someone who leaves behind work of enduring value, and I believe it is possible for profoundly gifted to make no such achievement, and for that matter to do poorly at certain ordinary achievements like economic self-sufficiency. The narrow technical term "profoundly gifted" overlaps the term "genius" (if the latter is stripped of its mystique), but the overlap is incomplete, with one neither necessary nor sufficient to ensure the other. Having considered what amount to limited options, all of which have drawbacks, I will use the term "profoundly gifted" as being the least problematic, even if it is a flattering way of describing an ambivalent condition.

While the language of "giftedness" has Biblical origins,<sup>[32]</sup> I am using technical terms which depart from the Biblical usage and which I treat as having important differences from the Biblical way of framing gifts. Theologically, the quite different Biblical conceptualization is to be

preferred, and I will use psychological terms even if it might be theologically preferable to have another terminology besides that of giftedness to refer to this particularly obscure form of human giftedness. [I Corinthians 12](#) never speaks of "gifted" (as opposed to "non-gifted") people, and in the parable of the talents, [\[33\]](#) the servants admittedly differ in how much they receive, but they do not differ in having at least one substantial "talent" entrusted to them, meaning at least sixty-five pounds [\[34\]](#) of precious metal. [\[35\]](#) It is not only the profoundly gifted who have a place and a quite significant gift for the greater, common good, nor does one need to be psychologically labeled as "gifted" to count as a human being. Furthermore, this discussion is limited in its scope and does not treat other forms of giftedness even if one departs from the Biblical baseline that true talent and giftedness are for all, not a few. Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* [\[36\]](#) is controversial, [\[37\]](#) but Goleman takes a look at one of several of the intelligences treated by multiple intelligence theory, and at very least makes a significant argument of exactly how success may be more a matter of emotional intelligence than the specific type of intelligence treated within the scope of this paper. [\[38\]](#) Even broader would be a serious attempt to treat not only intelligences but the broader category of aptitudes, which seem practically infinite in variety.

## Profoundly gifted work at a young age

Work is a defining feature of humanity and can be neither limited to nor centered on the profoundly gifted, but there is something that shines in the work of the profoundly gifted. But before I go further about that, I need to explain a feature of traditional psychological research in this domain. Leta Stetter Hollingworth, who was highly influential in how psychology subsequently came to approach giftedness and was the founder of gifted education,[\[39\]](#) expressed concerns that Francis Galton's *Hereditary Genius*[\[40\]](#) identified gifted people by established adult reputation, after interventions no longer help much.[\[41\]](#) She suggested that one shift focus to gifted children, which has left a curious lacuna in the psychological research: study of gifted people is first and foremost study of gifted children. Therefore, the research that is available deals primarily with gifted children and I will be looking at children.

Hollingworth describes "child L" in middle school:[\[42\]](#)

He was relatively large, robust, and impressive, and was fondly dubbed "Professor." His attitudes and abilities were appreciated by both pupils and teachers. He was often allowed to lecture (for as long as an hour) on some special topic, such as the history of timepieces, ancient theories of engine construction, mathematics, and history. He constructed out of odds and ends (typewriter ribbon spools, for example) a homemade clock of the pendular type to illustrate some of the principles of chronometry, and this clock was set up before the class during the enrichment unit on "Time and Time Keeping," to demonstrate some of the principles of chronometry.

Coming from a slightly different angle, Martha June Morelock offers

analysis for Michael Kerney:[\[43\]](#)

## **The Plato Phenomenon**

Mr. Kearney reports that since Michael was very young, he has seemed to spontaneously manifest both factual knowledge and conceptual comprehension that no one has taught him. He recalls an incident when Michael was three years old . . .

Mr. K: Michael at three coming up to me—when I came up to me and he said "Dad, Dad! I've got to show you this, got to show you this!" And he showed me the commutative rule of algebra. And I said "Michael! That's great! Where did you learn that?" "I don't know. I just made it up!" And then he goes "Wait, Wait! There's more! There's more!" And then he showed me the associative rule.

In searching for an explanation for this phenomenon, Mr. Kearney has considered a number of possibilities—including an analogy to Platonic philosophy . . .

Mr. K: Just in terms of some of his mathematical ability—some of the cognitive abilities. Some of the fact knowledge that he knew. But we didn't look at those as telepathy or spiritual things. It was more platonic. I think our experience, if anything, would be related to Platonic Forms. He seemed to be able to go in and take things out of another dimension and apply them—things that you wouldn't normally know, he knew. I mean, I don't think the issue was whether or not anyone taught him or not. It was that they were available to him and on occasion, he could dip into a location and bring things up. He has a cognitive ability to see things whole.

There is a sense in which a staggering intelligence is the baseline of being human: the most important sense of intelligence is not any of the intelligences on a multiple intelligence scale and in fact not something that some people have more of,[\[44\]](#) but something like embodiment that is simply part of the baseline of being human: this sense of intelligence forms a necessary context to achievements like the above which, taken out of context, suggest that there is a very occult phenomenon manifest in a very few, showing "ordinary" intelligence to be trivial. That would be a deep misunderstanding of intelligence in all parties. The intelligence

described in the above quotation is in fact something spiritual, along with "ordinary" intelligence, but there is something easier to see in this kind of achievement even if one has grown insensitive to ordinary intelligence as a spiritual feature of the divine image at work. Profound giftedness exists in continuities with broader human intelligence: artwork in a gallery, at its best, need not dazzle in a way that "shows" that nothing outside the gallery is beautiful; one can visit an art gallery and have one's eyes opened not only to the art but the world the art is drawn from.

If the royal, divine image expresses itself in profoundly gifted work, the expression of the image in work is not an ontologically distinct faculty that the profoundly gifted have that not everybody else has. There is, however, a qualitative difference, suitable for thick description. This quality would not be rightly identified in any sense as an exclusive or even primary shadow of the Theotokos in the Annunciation, but among many polarities and many kinds of difference work for the profoundly gifted resembles the Annunciation in one among many ways.

Before identifying the specific contours that might place the work of the profoundly gifted in the shadow of the Annunciation in a particular way, it may help to clarify one Eastern understanding of the Annunciation that I am using as a framework:[\[45\]](#)

The incarnation was not only the work of the Father, by His power and by His spirit, but it was also the work of the will and faith of the Virgin. Without the consent of the Immaculate, without the agreement of her faith, the plan was as unrealizable as it would have been without the intervention of the three divine Persons Themselves. It was only after having instructed her and persuaded her that God took her for His Mother and borrowed from her the flesh, that She so greatly wished to lend Him. Just as He became incarnate voluntarily, so He wished that His Mother should bear Him freely and with her full consent.

The Annunciation of the Theotokos,[\[46\]](#) in the Eastern Tradition, is not understood as a message the angel spoke, but was when the Theotokos gave her full cooperation to the divine initiative, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word."[\[47\]](#) The Theotokos offers the perfect creaturely response to the divine

initiative, and the most enduring works of profound giftedness are in its shadow. (There are many other points on the spectrum of human experience that are in its shadow, too.)

Creative work, and much of the serious work of the profoundly gifted, is a minor incarnation and the fruit of a minor annunciation. Madeleine l'Engle writes, "The artist is a servant who is willing to be a birthgiver. In a very real sense the artist (male or female) should be like Mary who, when the angel told her that she was to bear the Messiah, was obedient to the command."[\[48\]](#) It is the bearing of a Creation that comes to one initially unformed, not yet given concrete shape, and one gives to it out of one's nature, loves and serves it into being; one gives it one's own flesh until it has become enfleshed and ready to meet the world. There are other dimensions to the connection—perichoresis or interpenetration of bearer and gift, and a spiritual discipline l'Engle calls "almost identical with adoring the Master of the Universe in contemplative prayer"[\[49\]](#)—and the process, meditated on throughout Madeleine l'Engle's *Walking on Water*,[\[50\]](#) is not unique to the profoundly gifted, who are not correctly understood if they are viewed simply in terms of differences without attention to human commonalities.

But it is the textured shape taken by the human gold and incense for many profoundly gifted.

## **Myrrh and the suffering of the profoundly gifted**

Suffering is a basic part of human life. It takes different forms, perhaps, but it is constitutive of human experience. Furthermore, there are a great many human experiences that are different from the inside and from the outside. If this is explored with regard to the profoundly gifted, this is not as something that sets the profoundly gifted apart, but exploring further the concrete human form of human universals that are given further specification one way for the profoundly gifted and are given further specification other ways for other populations.

Giftedness as studied in this paper does not automatically include emotional intelligence, but it does not leave emotional life unaffected: for the entire range of giftedness, and not only the profoundly gifted, "giftedness has an emotional as well as a cognitive substructure: cognitive complexity gives rise to emotional depth."[\[51\]](#) This has a marked positive aspect; it makes it easier to have a rich inner life and to experience joy, but "[i]ntensity, in particular, must be understood as a qualitatively distinct characteristic. It is not a matter of degree but of a different quality of experiencing:"[\[52\]](#) it is as if at an age where children of a particular bent are given toy power tools, the range of gifted children are left to contend with real power tools, leaving more positive possibilities but also more ways of getting hurt that for many children simply aren't an issue. This kind of inner life is a mixed blessing when it comes to experiencing difficulties.

What is school like for the profoundly gifted? What is do they experience when they are in a situation which people assume is entirely oriented around them and their interests, where they have life easy and do not need to apply themselves like other people? This is what it meant for two boys:

He would go to school from 8 to 2 and you would think that would be enough. Nope. Cause when he got home at 2 o'clock, he goes "Mom, I want work. They didn't give me any work." It's like "You did all that stuff at school?" "Oh, that's easy stuff.[" He used to complain "Mom, they're making me write "cat" and "dog" and all these three letter words." So I went to the school and I said "He doesn't like to write these things, and why are you having him read cat and dog books? He reads far beyond that level." And they said it was because they wanted his hands—because he was so young and his motor skills had to be developed, that they wanted him to read this little easy book so that he could write. Well, he was like, "Well, let me read the big books and I'll write."[\[53\]](#)

Ian completed Grade 3 in a quiet fury of anger, intellectual frustration and bitterness. His verbal and physical aggressiveness returned in full spate; however, as he was now 2 years older than he had been in Grade 1, he was able to maintain a tighter control on his emotions while at school, and his teachers remained quite unaware of the emotional toll levied on him. *At home, however, he released all of his frustration and resentment and became, in Brock's words, "almost impossible to live with."* In addition, he began to experience severe headaches, bouts of nausea, and stomach pains. [longer emphasis added][\[54\]](#)

This experience is a hint of the dark side of the profoundly gifted experience. Profound giftedness offers real advantages, and no account of it is complete without accounting for what seem almost like magic powers. Giftedness is a privilege, the more the better, or is commonly assumed to be such kind of unqualified privilege so that saying that giftedness is painful comes across like saying that riches are painful. Yet if it is a privilege, it is a privilege that includes an experience that can be painful enough to cause depression, escape through street drugs, and suicide.[\[55\]](#)

The analogy to wealth could be refined: profound giftedness seems to be like wealth in an odd currency that makes it easy to buy luxuries but difficult to acquire some necessities. The characteristics described under "Gold and Frankincense" are quite significant and a source of joy. In

general the profoundly gifted experience is an experience of extremes, where few things are moderate. But there are things some others wouldn't guess at, such what such differences mean for difficulties finding and obtaining steady work, let alone a normal environment experienced as hostile enough to induce nausea in a young boy. Being significantly above average is an advantage, but it must be understood that the "moderately" gifted whom one is tempted to assume are "mediocre gifted" are in fact no such thing: they are almost what giftedness should be like, significantly above average and yet escaping certain problems.[\[56\]](#) "Moderate" giftedness coincides almost entirely with what has elsewhere been called the range of "socially optimum intelligence,"[\[57\]](#) and it resembles the classical image of moderation or a *via media* which not simply avoids two extremes but in its balance has something positive that both extremes lack. This is a different phenomenon from another range where birth trauma and brain damage seem close to a majority phenomenon,[\[58\]](#) is part of why scholars will speak about "the 'syndrome' of profound giftedness."[\[59\]](#) It's still classified as giftedness, but it not just a further enhanced form of the advantages in moderate giftedness. Doreen Freeman suggests of disability, "How often we hear people say they would 'rather be dead than disabled' yet the suicide rates of the disabled do not reflect this pessimistic view."[\[60\]](#) Disability is a different condition viewed from the inside and the outside, and so is giftedness, for which the suicide rates are apparently higher. We are aware that stereotypes can affect a true appreciation of other groups, which includes race and disability, and also include profound giftedness as an experience difficult to judge from the outside. (Not that the profoundly gifted experience is unique in looking different from the inside versus the outside: there are any number of human experiences that are different from the inside and the outside, and this is not a distinction for the profoundly gifted but only how the phenomenon plays out for them.)

Aharon Lichtenstein writes as he concludes an article on suffering as having a profound place within Judaism:[\[61\]](#)

In conclusion, I return to the sinking feeling that much of what has been said here might fall on deaf ears... any attempt to cry up the purgative nature of suffering might be viewed, especially after the Holocaust as trite platitudinous and—what is worst—callous

...sacrifice, as true, practical, and... what is worse... careful...

I can understand such a reaction—and indeed, up to a point, share it. But only up to a point... Response to suffering cannot be divorced from the totality of religious experience...

Suffering, and the use of suffering, have a place within religion.

John Behr's central mystery is "life in death" for his appropriately titled *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death*.<sup>[62]</sup> The cross is central: "This scriptural reflection on the Passion of Christ began by the apostles and evangelists was continued, expanded and deepened in the work of subsequent theologians, shaping every aspect of their theological vision."<sup>[63]</sup> This expands into meaning not only that Christ bore his Cross but we are to bear the Cross: what is normative is for "everything [in our lives to be] encompassed in [Christ's] economy."<sup>[64]</sup> "Life" is used in terms of the divine life,<sup>[65]</sup> and "death" holds far more than a merely biological meaning:<sup>[66]</sup> the mystery of "life in death" is a mystery of "frankincense in myrrh."

There have been people who have found in joy in suffering. Peter and other apostles, after being beaten,<sup>[67]</sup> left the council "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name."<sup>[68]</sup> Ware's closing examples in an article on martyrdom tell of martyrs' joy.<sup>[69]</sup> This puzzling behavior is difficult to understand but plays out what is said in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), in a passage that is part of the Orthodox Church's main liturgy:<sup>[70]</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all manner of evil falsely against you for my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you."<sup>[71]</sup> I cite these not because I expect it to be self-evident how people could respond this way, but precisely to suggest that there's something in their version of suffering that is hard to appreciate today.

Even if it is hard to see how, these texts indicate that there is something that may not be obvious about innocent suffering. Hebrews and I Peter elaborate and clarify: "For it was fitting that [God], for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering,"<sup>[72]</sup> If Christ himself was made perfect through suffering then it would seem incongruous to say that suffering may have perfected Christ but should

not apply to people in his shadow. "For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it you take it patiently? But when you do right and suffer for it and take it patiently, you have God's approval:"[\[73\]](#) God's approval can be on the innocent sufferer even if the suffering is not externally labeled as suffering in the Lord's name.

To say that Christ "the pioneer of their salvation" was made perfect through suffering transforms our understanding of Christ and even more suffering. Elsewhere people learn from Christ, but in Hebrews we read shocking words: "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered."[\[74\]](#) (This is the only New Testament text where the Son is said to learn obedience.) In [Hebrews 11.28](#), suffering is tied to faith, "portrayed as force sustaining God's people in times of opposition and affliction, enabling them to overcome fear and temptation and fulfill his purposes for them,"[\[75\]](#) which is the context to how Moses "considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward."[\[76\]](#) It may seem that such Biblical statements about suffering in the name of Christ only speak to the case of confessors and martyrs narrowly understood, but [I Peter 2.19-20](#) forestalls such a reading and orients our understanding of innocent suffering as such. After describing Christ's voluntary suffering as normative and monastic living as a manifestation of martyrdom, Ware writes, "What has just been said about Christ, about the martyr and the monk, is also true in a certain measure of every Christian without exception,"[\[77\]](#) specifically in the sufferings of life. There are different forms of martyrdom which do not always include violence and death, but to be Christian is to be called to martyrdom.[\[78\]](#)

This is not resignation. Paul uses *paschw* of "his readers, Christians in general,"[\[79\]](#) and can have a very active ring, meaning "'to fight,' perhaps 'to fight an enforced fight,'... not 'to be helplessly exposed or subject to alien pressure,'... 'to prevail'. [emphasis added]"[\[80\]](#) But the understanding that filters into the gift of myrrh is not simply a temporary measure for when the problem cannot be properly addressed yet. Cases of truly difficult suffering are not an exceptional case that this teaching also applies to; they are the central case under this view. This view of suffering applies from relative inconveniences up to major suffering including poverty and hunger, the death of loved ones, illness from cancer to

depression, and many other cases. If the profoundly gifted are no unique center to the Biblical teaching because they are in no sense the only ones to suffer, that does not make their suffering trivial. Suffering increases as one approaches sainthood, and while suffering does not confer any automatic sainthood, Orthodox hagiography details a number of people with unusually difficult lives—the saints who are canonized as unusually good at living a normal human life—and some of their relics are said to miraculously stream, significantly enough, with myrrh.[\[81\]](#) To see profoundly gifted suffering as outside the bounds of normal human life and to try an activist solution to bring it into the bounds of normal human life is to fail to realize that profoundly gifted suffering is a unique opportunity to live the normal Christian life, a life where gold and incense cannot be separated from myrrh.

The reality of myrrh is a reality of suffering made positive in a context where suffering is no longer the last word, and it is not separate from gold for kingship and frankincense for divinity. Those saints who are fragrant with myrrh are fragrant with Heaven's incense. There are some theologians who talk about humanity as the priest of Creation,[\[82\]](#) and the massive repositories of skills acquired by the profoundly gifted can be a legitimate exercise of kingship—humans properly exercise kingship in the image of God's kingship not only, and perhaps not primarily, when kingship is exercised over other people.[\[83\]](#) There is a kind of joy and pleasure to learning and acquiring skills, and this may not always be situated within an explicit ecclesial setting, but then it no less constitutes part of what is normal and the gift of gold for kingship.

## Profound giftedness in its potential to harm others

Profound giftedness is both a gift from God and something whose use is not always good. Without going too far into the word "holy" (Hebr. *qds*, apparent etymological meaning, "separate"),[\[84\]](#) I would like to talk some about what it means, and why we should not make too facile an identification of holiness with moral goodness. Holiness consists less in the creature's relationship to the Creator than the Creator's relationship to the creature.[\[85\]](#) Giftedness is not unique in this regard, but it is giftedness that is not based on merit but is simply given by the Creator. It may not be achieved by being morally good, and it is misunderstood if it is treated as an accidental arrangement of cognitive faculties. And that lends to something paradoxical: the greater the gift, the greater the potential for evil in the use of that gift, even in the attempt to do good.

Where there is untold human suffering, it may well be related to profoundly gifted plans to improve the world. Stfane Courtois's *The Black Book of Communism*[\[86\]](#) tells of millions who starved to death under Marx's plan for a better world.[\[87\]](#) One can name Adam Smith and the fathers of the Industrial Revolution as creating a masculinist vision to improve the world, a vision that on the ground left things worse for a number of people, and in particular women: Bob Goudzwaard's *Aid for the Overdeveloped West*[\[88\]](#) argues that the economic system that some profoundly gifted have helped build in the West is in fact not good for humans *qua* humans. Much of the industrialization that has led from wives working in adult company to housewives working in solitary confinement, destroying conditions that some feminists would like to reclaim, is transformation of society that stems from profoundly gifted people's "good ideas" to make a better world.[\[89\]](#) It is perfectly coherent

to say that a profoundly gifted person will persuasively argue for a vision of a better world that practically results in incalculable human suffering.

## **Thick description of myrrh: interdependent terms of human weal or woe**

There is another feature of human life that gives a shape, allowing thick description, to what myrrh is; and this is not just for the profoundly gifted: this feature is a specific trait of interdependence. How one experiences this specific trait depends greatly on how it is received: if it is approached with joy and acceptance, can be experienced as suffering that is almost Heavenly in how full it is and how deep its grounds for joy,[\[90\]](#) or can be wrongly experienced as vanity, meaningless suffering that approaches *dukkha*.[\[91\]](#) The story is told of someone who saw Hell, in which wretched pandas were surrounded by rice but miserable and starving because their three foot long chopsticks made it impossible for the pandas to feed themselves. Then the visitor was taken to Heaven and saw pandas surrounded by rice, delightedly feeding and being fed by each other with their three foot chopsticks. The difference between Heaven and Hell is a difference that lies in how one is capable of experiencing the realities one is in. It is not just true in the next life that we can experience certain things as joyful or as meaningless *dukkha*. It is also true of this life, and more specifically of certain features of human interdependence, and the impossibility of independence, that are perhaps never completely avoidable but seem harder to even pretend to avoid in the profoundly gifted experience. It appears that some profoundly gifted may have no way to present their gifts in a way that a job recruiter will interpret as believable competence.[\[92\]](#) Paradoxically, an unusually impressive list of achievements may not be accompanied by much opportunity to be self-supporting and perhaps not other "necessities."

In the work of Arthurian criticism *Arthurian Torso*,[\[93\]](#) Lewis

discusses Virgil in Charles Williams' *Taliessin through Logres*:[\[94\]](#)

It is Virgil himself who died without reaching the *patria*, who saw 'Italy' only from a wave before he was engulfed forever. It is Virgil himself who stretches out his hands among the ghosts *ripae ulterioris amore*, longing to pass a river that he cannot pass. This poet from whose work so many Christians have drawn spiritual nourishment was not himself a Christian—did not himself know the full meaning of his own poetry, for (in Keble's fine words) 'thoughts beyond their thought to those high bards were given'. This is exquisite cruelty; he made honey not for himself; he helped to save others, himself he could not save.

...The Atonement was a Substitution, just as Anselm said. But that Substitution, far from being a mere legal fiction irrelevant to the normal workings of the universe, was simply the supreme instance of a universal law. 'He saved others, himself he cannot save' is a *definition* of the Kingdom. All salvation, everywhere and at all times, in great things or in little, is vicarious. The courtesy of the Emperor has absolutely decreed that no man can paddle his own canoe and every man can paddle his fellow's, so that the shy offering and modest acceptance of indispensable aid shall be the very form of the celestial etiquette. [emphasis original]

Lewis is summarizing Williams, and Williams's point has strong theological relevance. Ware introduces one topic of discussion as "what Charles Williams calls 'substituted love', 'coinherence', or 'the way of exchange'," [\[95\]](#) founded precisely on the above "law of the canoe." Profound giftedness is not a help for making honey for oneself but making honey for others, and this is not because the profoundly gifted are any more altruistic: whether one is selfish or generous, profound giftedness helps paddling others' canoes much better than it helps paddling one's own.

Alisdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals* argues that dependence is constitutive of human nature. [\[96\]](#) Self-understanding as being independent requires sweeping acknowledgment of our dependence under the rug: true independence is probably impossible and certainly undesirable. If some people have difficulty achieving even a

more relative independence, that is not an exception to how humanity normally works. It is continuous with large segments of humanity besides the profoundly gifted having more difficulty achieving a measure of independence. A few profoundly gifted experience worldly success—perhaps great—while many more experience surprising struggles.[\[97\]](#)

Lewis calls the law "exquisite cruelty," and it is even crueler if a definition of justice in terms of paddling one's own canoe is applied to the world, and one begins to suspect that even the Lawgiver, God, does not meet that standard of justice. But there is something in that picture that is not cruel, something that hinges on being willing to give up that standard of justice and accept the "law of the canoe" as terms of joy. If the profoundly gifted experience has extremes in its glories and difficulties, this form of interdependence is a difficulty that can and should be a glory, even if profoundly gifted may rarely be able to experience it as a particular form of human blessing.

Comparable remarks could be made for other populations and communities.

## Conclusion

It seems a strained reading of Midas's tale to argue that whatever Midas said, the king consciously thought he would retain the usual human ability to touch things without changing them into anything else, and in addition have the option to turn things to gold by touch when he so desired. Perhaps that would have been a far wiser thing to ask for. Despite this lack of foresight, it appears that when the king said that he wanted everything he touched to turn to gold, the "everything" he envisioned of course did not include his food and wine, and absolutely did not include his only daughter. It seems that Midas's desire was for a fantasy version of a gift, and he was shocked when he received the real thing.

Profound giftedness is not a curse like Midas's. It offers much better prospects of living to old age, not to mention any number of other benefits. But it is, like any number of other human experiences, different from the inside than from the outside.

There is another king associated with gold—in fact, six billion such royalty on one account, and Midas's gold for his greed is in fact a base metal next to that gold that is from the same fountainhead as frankincense and myrrh. Human difference is not a matter of some people being at the human baseline, with everyone else starting from the same baseline but with added modifiers. In that sense everybody is on the baseline: it is mistaken to say that a profoundly gifted person is an "as modified by" representative of the majority, and neither more nor less mistaken than the opposite claim that most people are "as modified by" versions of the profoundly gifted, or comparable pairs of remarks spanning other human differences. Differences can be a chasm—sometimes requiring a great leap to bridge,—but when one can and does bridge the chasm, one may learn not of one more adjustment that can be

made to a baseline centered on one's own group, but a deeper understanding of what the baseline is and is not.

In that sense there is nothing distinctive about profound giftedness being different from the inside and from how one would imagine it from the outside. It is illustrative of the human.

## Partly Annotated Bibliography

(The annotation is geared primarily towards profound giftedness as a theological reader may be expected to understand the theological literature better than the literature on giftedness.)

Ashbrook Harvey, Susan, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2006.

Buttrick, George, *The Interpreter's Bible*, Abingdon Press 1952.

Carson, D.A. et al. (eds.), *New Bible Commentary: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition*, Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 1994.

Clark, Stephen, *Man and Woman in Christ*, Ann Arbor: Servant 1980.

Courtois, Stephane et al., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Boston: Harvard University Press 1999.

If one wishes to take seriously that profound giftedness and good intentions can cause incalculable suffering, this text covers something that is better not ignored.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *Crime and Punishment*, New York: Random House 1956.

L'Engle, Madeleine, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art*, Wheaton: Shaw 1980.

In my argument about gold and kingship, I have talked about a profoundly gifted accent to work. Giftedness as such is incidental at best to Madeleine l'Engle's focus, but this is a perspective on artistic work, a work that is close to contemplation, and if it does not have a profoundly gifted focus it still has a profoundly gifted perspective as the basis to explore artistic work as a whole

CRITICAL WORK AS A WHOLE.

Feldman, David, "A follow-up of subjects scoring above 180 IQ in Terman's 'Genetic Studies of Genius'", in *Exceptional Children*, vol. 50 no. 6 1984, 518-523.

This study makes the briefest passing mention that one of Terman 1925's very few profoundly gifted subjects "took his own life," without the briefest passing suggestion of any way this tragedy might be something to learn from, might be something related to the profoundly gifted experience, or could even be preventable. (Statistical analysis is impossible for a small sample, but if one person in a twenty-nine person sample committed suicide, this is hundreds of times higher than the population at large, or even demographics like those suffering from major depression.) This feature is symptomatic of a broader tendency in Feldman to be a generic summary without insight, and this is part of why I prefer the more qualitative studies such as Hollingworth 1975 or Morelock 1995.

Freeman, Doreen, "A Feminist Theology of Disability", in *Feminist Theology* 29 (2002), 71-85.

Fitzgerald, Allan, *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999.

Galton, Francis, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry Into Its Laws and Consequences*, London: Macmillan 1892 (1869).

From the introductory chapter Galton takes positions offensive even in his own day, and, to pick one example, his stand for intelligence-centered eugenics as a moral duty earns Galton's vile reputation today. His study seems to be less concerned about describing or studying genius in the sense offered by other sources than making a minimal study of his subjects sufficient to move on to his real interest, identifying whether genius is hereditary enough to bolster the eugenics he advocated. On a more positive view of the study of giftedness, Galton can be read as indicating how far the study of giftedness has come since Galton's approach. Too much of Galton's attitude lingers in later literature, but Webb 1980 bases his argument on a completely different footing: when he appeals for reform and cites a statistic that gifted education is part of special education but receives per capita less than three cents

on the dollar compared to other special needs populations,[\[98\]](#) the argument is not that gifted people are entitled to better treatment because they are superior. The argument is that special needs should be treated in proportion to the need. He places giftedness as a greater special need than most people realize.

While acknowledging that the gifted population may be one of few special needs populations which is envied, one may hope that future literature may shift further away from Galton in the direction of recognizing the gifted population as having legitimate if perhaps unanticipated special needs, and given proportionate treatment to the form of special needs.

Goleman, Daniel, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ*, New York: Bantam 1995.

This controversial book treats one of several important aptitudes besides those studied here. The reason this article studies only one type of giftedness out of many is not because it's the only interesting kind of intelligence (emotional intelligence may be more important), but a limitation of what can reasonably be treated in a single paper.

Goudzwaard, Bob, *Aid for the Overdeveloped West*, Oshawa: Wedge 1975.

Gross, Miraca, "The Early Development of Three Profoundly Gifted Children of IQ 200," in Klein, Pnina; Tannenbaum, Abraham (eds.), *To Be Young and Gifted*, Norwood: Ablex 1992, 94-138.

This article is probably the best short sampling that offers a sense of human encounter through thick description of profoundly gifted children, and may serve as an orientation to the terrain of profoundly gifted children before tackling Hollingworth 1975 and Morelock 1995.

Gross, Miraca, "Factors in the Social Adjustment and Social Acceptability of Extremely Gifted Children," Ohio Psychology Press 1994 as seen online at [http://www.gt-cybersource.org/Record.aspx?NavID=2\\_0&rid=10586](http://www.gt-cybersource.org/Record.aspx?NavID=2_0&rid=10586) on 1 January 2007.

Rather than thick description this article provides an analysis of social issues surrounding the profoundly gifted and why their position requires them to deal with social challenges

why their position requires them to deal with social challenges that are not as much of an issue for others.

Hayward, Jonathan, [Artificial Intelligence, AI as an Arena of Magical Thinking for Skeptics: Cognitive Science, and Eastern Orthodox Views on Personhood](#), Master's Thesis (Cambridge University), 2004.

A study of the significance and power of basic human intelligence that can sometimes be overlooked in the study of giftedness.

Hollingworth, Leta, *Children Above 180 IQ: Stanford-Binet Origin and Development*, New York: Arno Press, 1975 (1942).

A classic study offering thick description of profoundly gifted children. Hollingworth has not been superceded.

Honderich, Ted (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995.

Howard, Pierce, *The Owner's Manual for the Brain: Everyday Applications from Mind-Brain Research*, Austin: Bard 2006.

Also readable as "A layperson's introduction to the culture and prejudices of cognitive psychology/cognitive science," but a valuable resource nonetheless, and the only psychological work I know that is not specialized in giftedness but offers an on-target treatment of profound giftedness.

Keselopoulos, Anestis, *Man and the Environment: A Study of St. Symeon the New Theologian*, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001.

Kittel, Gerhard, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1976.

Klein, Ann, "Fitting the School to the Child: The Mission of Leta Stetter Hollingworth, Founder of Gifted Education," in *Roeper Review*, 23 (2), 2000, 97-103.

Kreeft, Peter, *Three Philosophies of Life: Ecclesiastes: Life as Vanity; Job: Life as Suffering; Song of Songs: Life as Love*, San Francisco: Ignatius 1989.

Landy, Frank, "The Long, Frustrating, and Fruitless Search for Social Intelligence: A Cautionary Tale," in Murphy, Kevin (ed.), *A Critique of Emotional Intelligence: What Are the Problems and How Can They Be Fixed?*, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum 2006, 81-123.

An opposing views piece to (Howard) Gardner theory, including Goleman 1995.

Lewis, C.S., *That Hideous Strength*, New York: Scrivener 1996.

Lichtenstein, Aharon, "The Duties of the Heart and Response to Suffering," in *Jewish Perspectives on the Experience of Suffering*, Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1999.

Macintyre, Alisdair, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Chicago: Open Court 1999.

Maloney, George, *Gold, Frankincense & Myrrh: An Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality*, New York: Crossroad 1997.

McVey, Kathleen, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, New York: Mahwah 1989.

Morelock, Martha, *The Profoundly Gifted Child in Family Context*, UMI 1995.

This dissertation studies in depth two profoundly gifted children who represent two forms of profound giftedness, Bethany Marshall (profound giftedness focused in a single area, in this case music performance) and Michael Kerney (profound giftedness spread out over many areas). The latter represents someone who is exceptional even for someone who is profoundly gifted. In some sense Morelock is a complement to Hollingworth 1975, but includes significant analysis alongside its thick description.

O'Brien, David; Shannon, Thomas, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, Maryknoll: Orbis 1992.

Schmemmann, Alexander, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, Crestwood: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press 1973 (1963), 17.

Smets, Alexis; van Esbroeck, Michel (trs. and eds.), *Basil de César: Sur l'Origine de l'Homme*, Paris: Cerf 1970.

Sword, L., "Gifted Children: Emotionally Immature or Emotionally Intense?" Gifted and Creative Services, Australia, as seen online at <http://www.gt-cybersource.org/Record.aspx?rid=12310> on 1 January 2007.

Giftedness is not the same as emotional intelligence but it complexifies emotional life, meaning that gifted sometimes have to work harder to reach what others achieve by less effort to reach emotional maturity. (This article is not limited to

to reach emotional maturity. (This article is not limited to profound giftedness but tries to address the broader gifted population.)

Terman, Lewis et al., *Genetic Studies of Genius*, Stanford: Stanford University Press 1925 (vol. 1), 1926 (vol. 2), 1930 (vol. 3), 1947 (vol. 4), 1959 (vol. 5).

Webb offers reasons why Terman's methods of identifying gifted people may have been unintendedly biased in favor of the members of the gifted population who enjoyed the greatest social advantage.[\[99\]](#) Terman uses the word "genius" in the title for a population that mostly overlaps the range of "socially optimal intelligence," without that much attention to profound giftedness. However, Terman offers a landmark study and almost everybody stands on his shoulders even in criticizing him.

Thunberg, Lars, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, La Salle: Open Court, 1995.

Vasileios (Archimandrite), *Hymn of Entry*, Crestwood: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press 1984.

Walton, John et al., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press 2000.

Ware, Kallistos, *The Orthodox Church*, New York: Penguin 1997 (1963).

Ware, Kallistos, *The Orthodox Way*, Crestwood: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995 (1979).

Ware, Kallistos, "Seek First the Kingdom: Orthodox Monasticism and Its Service to the World," in *Theology Today*, April 2004, 61.1, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdlink?did=623880061&Fmt=7&clientId=9148&RQT=309&VName=PQD> as seen 11/12/06.

Ware, Kallistos, "What is a martyr?" in *Sobornost Incorporating Eastern Churches Review*, London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, V.1 (1983), 7-19.

Webb, James; Meckstroth, Elizabeth; Tolan, Stephanie, *Guiding the Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers*, Columbus: Ohio Psychology Publishing Company, 1982.

Webb ties together a great many things in this overview of

the spectrum of giftedness (including profound giftedness). Where the sources I recommend for profound giftedness (Morelock 1995, Hollingworth 1974) offer qualitative thick description, this source incorporates theory, thick description, and practical advice into a picture that better than anything else I have seen in its insight into the entirety of the gifted experience.

Williams, Charles; Lewis, C.S., *Taliessin through Logres, The Region of the Summer Stars*, and *Arthurian Torso*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1974.

## Footnotes

[1] Vasileos 1984, 81-7.

[2] Ware 1997, 32; cf. Ware 1995, 34.

[3] McVey 1989, 4.

[4] Ware 2004, seen online.

[5] Ware 2004, seen online.

[6] Lewis 1996, 370: a character breaks from description of Arthurian grandeur to discuss how this in no way makes Britain superior because each nation has its own characteristic glory: each nation is distinctive and none is superior. Much the same could be said of various populations that are/might be given thick description through the methods of this paper.

[7] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 73.

[8] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 73.

[9] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 66.

[10] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 66-7.

[11] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 254n138. I cannot here explore the suggestion, mentioned in Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 33, that "gold" may represent an underlying Aramaic term for another herbal aromatic.

[12] Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.9.2.

[13] *Hymns on the Nativity* 19.4 in McVey 1989.

[14] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 74.

[15] *Hymns on the Nativity* 9.15.

[16] Kittel 1976.

[17] Fitzgerald 1999.

[18] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 119-21.

[19] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 67-73.

[20] Ashbrook Harvey 2006, 68.

[21] [Matthew 3.11](#); compare: "There is fire in chrim." (GPh 2.15)

[22] I Corinthians 15.45; cf. [I Corinthians 15](#) and specifically 15.22.

[23] Walton 2000, [Genesis 1.27](#).

[24] *Hexameron*, Homily 10.8.

[25] *Hexameron*, Homily 10.9, my own translation. [Emphasis taken from French translation]

[26] Keselopoulos 2001, 57.

[27] John Paul II, *Laborum Exercens*, 1981.

[28] LE, prologue.

[29] Keselopoulos 2001, 90.

[30] L'Engle 1980, 23.

[31] Dostoevsky 1956, III.5.

[32] Cf. [Matthew 25.14-30](#) and [I Corinthians 12](#).

[33] [Matthew 25.14-30](#).

[34] Balz 1982-3, *talentos*.

[35] Hagner 1995, [Matthew 25.14-5](#).

[36] Goleman 1995.

[37] Landy 2006 provides an opposing view.

[38] On anecdotal evidence, though, consider the case of one young woman with high enough social intelligence that when she enters a room all the conversations start to run more smoothly and everybody seems to want to be her close friend or romantic partner. It appears that a high enough level of social intelligence may come with unwanted side effects. (Personal conversation with her friend Lydia Klingforth c2000.)

[39] Klein 2000, 97.

[40] Galton 1892.

[41] Hollingworth 1942, xiv.

[42] Hollingworth 1942, 217-9.

[43] Morelock 1995, 223-5.

[44] [Hayward 2004](#), 13-16.

[45] Nicolas Cabasilas, in M. Jugie, 'Homélie mariales byzantines,' *Patrologia orientalis*, XIX, fasc/, 3, 1925, p. 463, as quoted in Lossky 1976, 141.

[46] <http://www.holyannunciation.org>, as seen on 22/11/06.

[47] [Luke 1.38](#), RSV.

[48] L'Engle 1980, 18.

[49] L'Engle 1980, 194.

[50] L'Engle 1980.

[51] Sword, online.

- [52] Michael Pichowski as cited in Sword, online.
- [53] Morelock 1995, 161.
- [54] Gross 1992, 103.
- [55] Webb 1982, 191-204: an entire chapter treats this.
- [56] Gross 1992, 97.
- [57] Gross 1994, seen online.
- [58] Morelock 1995, 293-4.
- [59] Morelock 1995, 295.
- [60] Freeman 2002, 73.
- [61] Lichtenstein 1999, 60.
- [62] Behr 2006.
- [63] Behr 2006, 33.
- [64] Behr 2006, 143.
- [65] Behr 2006, 35.
- [66] Behr 2006, 143.
- [67] [Acts 5.40](#).
- [68] [Acts 5.41](#) RSV.
- [69] Ware 1983, 18.
- [70] The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom.
- [71] [Matthew 5.10-2](#).
- [72] [Hebrews 2.10](#) RSV.
- [73] [I Peter 2.19-20](#) RSV.
- [74] [Hebrews 5.8](#) RSV.
- [75] Carson 1994, [Hebrews 11.23-8](#).
- [76] [Hebrews 11.26](#) RSV.
- [77] Ware 1983, 10.
- [78] Ware 1983, 16.
- [79] Kittel 1976, *paschw*.
- [80] Kittel 1976, *paschw*.
- [81] One hagiographical account may be seen at

<http://www.roca.org/OA/25/25d.htm>, "And lo, the Star... St. Simon the Myrrh-gusher," as seen on October 9 2006. Like most hagiography, this is considered part of the Orthodox tradition of "biography as theology," theology given flesh in a person's life.

[82] Schmemmann 1973 (1963), 17; Keselopoulos 2001, 57.

[83] See i.e. Keselopoulos 2001, 57, 64 and comments about Genesis 1:26-8 above.

[84] Botterweck 2003, *qds*.

[85] Kittel 1964, *hagios*.

[86] Courtois 1999.

[87] Courtois 1999, 4.

[88] Goudzwaard 1975, 4-5.

[89] If one is prepared to accept that truly traditional societies are something other than traditional roles attemptedly imposed on post-Industrial Revolution living conditions, then Clark 1980 provides an analysis largely of how women have suffered under certain changes, even if it doesn't focus on who contributed "good ideas" behind the changes.

[90] The Heavenly/Purgatorial suffering found in [Job](#), in Kreeft 1989, 59-96.

[91] The Hellish suffering found in [Ecclesiastes](#), in Kreeft 1989, 13-58.

[92] Personal conversations with different profoundly gifted, 2001.

[93] Lewis 1974.

[94] Lewis 1974, 305,7.

[95] Ware 1983, 11.

[96] MacIntyre 1999, 1ff.

[97] Personal conversations with profoundly gifted, 2001.

[98] Webb 1982, 3.

[99] Webb 1982, 10.

# Friendly, Win-Win Negotiations in Business: Interest- Based Negotiation and [Getting to Yes](#)

## [Getting to Yes: How to Negotiate Agreement Without Giving In](#)

The negotiation classic [Getting to Yes: How to Negotiate Agreement Without Giving In](#) introduces something called "interest-based negotiation" and presents it as the ultimate power tool for adversarial negotiations where the other party has the upper hand. And it may well be that power tool, but some of the best mileage I've seen has been in friendly negotiations, and business world problem solving.

[Getting to Yes](#) opens by discussing two main styles of negotiation that occur to people: hard and soft negotiation. Hard negotiation is a matter of taking a position and insisting on it: playing hardball. Soft negotiation, more characteristic of friendly negotiations, still involves taking a position, but being very flexible.

[Getting to Yes](#) presents a third option, that of interest-based negotiation. Individual positions taken by either side of the table are

ordinarily poorly suited to the interests of the other side; and interest-based negotiation involves uncovering what the basic *interests* of the two sides of the table are, and then problem solving to, as best as possible, satisfy the interests of *both* sides of the table. [Getting to Yes](#) speaks of being *hard* on interests, *soft* on positions.

## Examples from the world of information technology

It's obvious, in the context of a negotiation between bosses and stakeholders on the one hand, and information technology on the other, that a stakeholder or boss has interests involved in negotiating what information technology professionals will do for them. What is less obvious is that information technology professionals *also* have interests. These interests include interests that amount to good engineering concerns, including a realistic solution, avoiding technical ways of painting themselves into a corner, *and* solving the problem in a way that will work well for stakeholders. (If a cobbler makes a shoe that fits comfortably, the customer will make fewer requests for adjustments than if the shoe pinches.)

On this last point, it might be remarked that initial solutions (positions) proposed by stakeholders should be viewed with suspicion. When someone non-technical tries to design a technological solution, there is a real danger of a solution that looks good on paper, but amounts to a shoe that pinches. One time my brother, then a database administrator, commented that on his team there was a system administrator who, when he was asked something that amounted to, "Is there a way to—", would rudely cut the person off and say, "Stop. Tell me what you want to have accomplished." And he gave an excellent example of interest-based negotiation, even if it is a better way to avoid being curt.

The example he gave was, if there was concern about a disk filling up, someone asking, "Is there a way to run [the Unix command] 'df' every five minutes and send it to the system administrator's pager?" And there are several things wrong with that position. First of all, this was a little while ago when there weren't smartphones with high-resolution screens. The Unix 'df' command is designed around a full (text) screen. producing half

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a page or a page of text (probably more given their environment), and decidedly not optimized to quickly give useful information on a pager. It would require scrolling to see if the 'df' output represented a problem or not. And constant messages that require digging to see if they mean anything important amount to spam from the system administrator's view: the fact that one more verbose message was sent to the pager means nothing particularly interesting to a system administrator. And that spam risks a real "boy who cried wolf" syndrome, with the system administrator having no clue when a real problem is occurring.

Not that there is any need for helplessness if disks fill up. There might even be a better solution that would use pagers. For example, there could be some monitoring tools that page a system administrator if a disk reaches some threshold of being too full, or if disk usage is growing too quickly. The basic issue is one that people can take steps to deal with. But the system administrator's blunt "Stop. Just tell me what you want to do," was almost kindness in disguise; it was meant to pursue the *mutual* interest of solving a problem as well as possible, as opposed to a solution that amounts to, "I've solved the problem badly; now you go implement it."

The system administrator's blunt response when he sensed positional negotiation was, "Stop. I don't even want to *hear* your position. Just tell me your interest and let me address that."

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For another, slightly more technical example, there was a system administrator at our company who had written an asset tracking program, and later on I was charged with writing a purchase order system. When the system was shaping up, he said he wished his asset tracking system could simply go away, superceded by the new purchase order system.

The general consensus was that the order tracking system was *tolerable*, and the CTO consulted with some people from other companies and said nobody had really done better than tolerable like our asset tracking. The system administrator wanted me to replace his asset tracking program, and my expectation was that I might be able to do a *little* better than him, but not a *lot* better. And I think he was modest about the solution he had pulled off given what he was dealing with. I told him, at a social meeting, "*The reason my program is crisp and clear and your program is messy, is that the problem my program solves is crisp, clear, and simple, and the problem your program solves is messy and hard.*" And I could see a smile and shining eyes on his wife's face, but my remark was not intended as a merely polite statement. As we did business, the problem of purchase orders was cut and dry, and I didn't have to make any especially hard judgment calls: mostly it was straightforward adaptation as requests came in. By contrast, the tracking system covered assets and components, venturing into territory the purchase order didn't touch, and the territory of assets and components came with genuinely fuzzy and difficult border cases, where you had to draw lines about what was an asset and what was a component and deal with subjective factors that the purchase order system never touched.

Once the two systems were up and running, it looked like that meant duplicate data entry. It would have been an option for me to write a replacement asset tracking system, but I think my co-worker was being genuinely modest about a real achievement, and it did not seem obvious to me that my replacement for a working system would work better. We looked at publishing data from the asset tracking system to purchase orders, and then set things so that entries in the purchase order system were automatically carried over to the asset tracking system. That solution was one that was stuck with: it did not involve, as had originally been suggested, that the asset tracking system would be superceded by

the purchase order system, but it did address the basic interest: *no need for duplicate data entry*. The asset tracking system was made aware of entries in the purchase order system, and the solution addressed the various interests. Including, one might like to add, that the company would lose *none* of the benefits of a respectable, solid existing system, which would now be working better than ever.

## An example from private life

In one family I know, the parents decided that their son could own a pocketknife (he owns a couple), but not carry anything dangerous. That may be a sensible decision, but it was annoying to the son, and I understood his frustration: I know what a [Swiss Army Knife](#) meant to me when I was younger, and still to some extent means to me now. Besides being practical, a [Swiss Army Knife](#) is a nifty device, dipped in coolness. And I could identify with his being frustrated that his parents would not let him carry either pocketknife: not because he specifically wanted something dangerous, but because he wanted coolness.

For Christmas I gave him [a Leatherman multi-tool designed to be useful and cool while still being something you could carry through TSA-approved airport security](#). It only has a few features as far as multitools go, but it has enough, and he greatly appreciates the gift. It satisfied both his desire for something cool, and his parents' concern that what he carry not be dangerous, and so he carries it now.

In a non-work interaction at work, my boss received a copy of [Hello World! Computer Programming for Kids and Other Beginners](#), a book that introduces the powerful language Python with pirates and ninjas, and I asked him if I could borrow the book for a few minutes to copy bibliographic information. His reply was "Let me send you an email," and forwarded me a promotional email with a coupon code worth \$20 off the book's price if you ordered by such-and-such a date. In this friendly negotiation, I took a position and my boss responded in a way that would address my interests better than my initial position.

**Step one: Identify the  
interests**  
**Step two: Problem solving**

All of these negotiations have an element of problem solving. The first step is to identify interests. If someone comes to you with a position, which happens 99.9% of the time, it is a position motivated by interests, and you need to appreciate those interests. Anthropology-style observation, if you know how to do it, helps. Being empathic and trying to see what benefit someone's position will bring them helps. As much as possible, bring interests out into the open so they can be addressed.

A win-win solution may not always be possible; the pie may not be big enough for everyone even if they cooperate. ([Getting to Yes](#) may be of some help here.) But **a win-win outcome will be more often found by trying to address interests than simply starting with positions, *staying* with positions, and only doling out who makes what concession to the opposite position.** And creative problem solving can help address those interests once they have been identified: for my brother's workplace, system administrators can be automatically notified, including by pager, when any of several identified red flags is tripped. Being dangerous is not intrinsic to being a cool multitool: therefore one can search for a safety-friendly multitool. *Is there a hidden opportunity in interests that have been identified?* Check and see.

## Conclusion

Interest-based negotiation is not always easy; [Getting to Yes](#) provides few examples: one of these few has two sisters arguing about an orange, splitting it, and then one sister ate the inside of her half and the other sister used her half of the rind to bake a pie. And the introduction states that stories are hard to find. Part of my effort here has been to provide examples, taken out of my experience because that's what I know, even if it would be best to have third person stories and avoid stories that present me as a hero. But the rewards for at least *trying* for interest-based negotiation are worthwhile. And, as stated at the top, [Getting to Yes](#) may present interest-based negotiation as the central power tool for a hostile negotiation where the other party is more powerful than you, some of the best mileage I've gotten out of it has been in friendly negotiations with other people who share some of the same goals. And this is true inside and outside of the business world.

It's worth recognizing negotiation as negotiation: not all negotiations have a dollar amount. And once a friendly negotiation is recognized, identifying interests can be a powerful tool to obtain win-win results.

**Is there a place where you could use friendly, win-win, interest-based negotiations more?**

# **From Russia, with Love**

## **A Spiritual Guide to Surviving Political and Economic Disaster**

### **Holy Russia and Holy America**

It may be jolting to American Christians, at least, to speak of "Holy Russia". It smacks of a bad kind of patriotism, and it invites the same kind of response that has some devout U.S. Christians answer "God bless America!" by saying, "America, bless God!", or "God bless America... and China... and Guatemala... and Ghana... and..." Why besides the wrong kind of patriotism would some writers speak of "Holy Russia"?

The earliest story among the "founding legends" of U.S. national consciousness were of devout, faith-filled, and profoundly moral pilgrims leaving England to practice their faith on what would become U.S. soil. Before the Boston Tea Party, before the cry of, "No taxation without representation!" or the shot heard round the world, before any other legendary event is the story of *pilgrims* seeking to live their faith as purely as they could. Do the legends give us reason to speak of the U.S. as holy land? The devout American Evangelicals I know wouldn't dream of

it: when they say "holy lands", they very clearly mean, "the lands of Christ and the Bible." It wouldn't occur to them to use the term "holy land" to mean "land of the pilgrims' pride" or the lands of history like the Great Awakening.

But you are missing something about Christ if you think his Incarnation is limited to when his Mother conceived him; the Incarnation of Christ unfurls in his saints, and the purpose of becoming Christian is to become a little Christ, and become by grace what God is by nature. Equally, you are missing something about holy land if you think that Christ by living on land may make it holy, but Christians cannot do anything like this. The prolonged effect of many saints over many years is to lift their land up to God, and the Gospel that reaches out to the whole earth is a Gospel that can raise the whole earth up to God. When you understand that Christ lives in the faithful, then you see why holy land unfurls to be where Christ lives through his saints and does not stop with the list of places Christ visited personally.

Orthodoxy in the U.S. has its own ["patron saints of this blessed land"](#), and this is an excellent start. Russia has had Orthodox saints for over a millennium, and its list of saints is all but innumerable. There are Russian patriots who would agree that the communist government was godless, but the other side of what it showed in its attacks on Russian Orthodox Church was how tough a Church there was to "need" such attacks and still not be killed: National Socialism in the Third Reich killed more than ten million Jews and other unfortunates, and socialism in the U.S.S.R. killed more than a hundred million Orthodox Christians and other unfortunates: socialist persecution in the Soviet Union created more Christian martyrs than in, ultimately, the rest of history put together. And that dearly costly witness means that even the Soviet persecutions left a river of martyrs' blood to sanctify Russian soil. "Holy Russia," made holy by saints living as faithful monks and made holy by saints dying as faithful martyrs. Christ unfurls in their stories.

There are profound differences between Russia and the U.S.; any number of books could explore the differences. But there are also some similarities, and not just the profound similarities of shared humanity. There were some eerie similarities when I read about educated "progress" in Russia that was ever so much more sophisticated and enlightened than the country's backwards religious roots. The similarity to things I had grown up with in the U.S. was almost spooky.

grown up with in the U.S. was almost spooky.

One person surveyed a religion poll and tried to play down the exaggerated claim oddly shared by U.S. militant atheists and militant fundamentalists: "American religious roots are being rapidly abandoned," a drum that has been beating nonstop since the days of the Puritans. Notwithstanding this claim, the person argued from the religion poll that there has never been a nation as Christian as America today: America today, he explicitly argued, is more Christian than Israel is Jewish or Utah is Mormon. Maybe people veer more towards "spirituality" and less towards "religion", and maybe there are twenty things conservative Evangelicals wince at: but to someone who said, "You have a rather, um, inclusive definition of 'Christian'," the author might well respond, "You have a rather inclusive definition of 'not Christian at all'." And, even if Orthodox may wince at this, devout American Evangelicals do have a sense of "Either you're in Special Forces or you're not really a patriot at all." Perhaps no nation ever has satisfied the devout for religious commitment, but if we can call India a Hindu nation, Turkey a Muslim nation, and Italy a Catholic nation even though none of these are theocracies, maybe it's missing the point to say, "America is not a Christian nation, at least not today. It's not a theocracy, for starters, and it's not nearly religious enough to satisfy the religious right." That's not the *point*.

Someone else has said, "If India is the most religious nation on earth, and Sweden is the least religious nation on Earth, then the U.S. is a nation of Indians ruled by Swedes." There is a grain of truth there, and it is a grain of truth reminiscent of Russia as it was engulfed with socialism. Russia, too, was a nation of Indians ruled by Swedes, and it has been a long and difficult struggle for Russia's Indians to start regaining ground.

There are other spiritual similarities; Russia's story does not begin with socialism. To Russians, nineteenth century Russia may be a proverbial golden age, spoken of as some Orthodox theologians speak of the fourth century and its Christological victories, or as Protestants might speak of the days of the Reformation. On the Orthodox humor site [The Onion Dome](#), the loving caricature of Fr. Vasily habitually derides proposals by saying, "Was [*such-and-such proposal*] in nineteenth century Russia?" (The obvious answer was no, and if it wasn't to be found in nineteenth century Russia, the implication was that Orthodox Christians have no need for it.) But some Orthodox in the gulag—I think

in particular of [Fr. Arseny](#)—explained the terrors all about them as a divine chastisement for Russia's arrogance in the nineteenth century. Russia fell when it was struck because it was rotted from within.

We speak today of the global economic crisis. The word *crisis* comes from the Greek word for judgment, and we are in a moral and spiritual crisis that comes from seeking treasures on earth and ignoring treasures in Heaven, a charge I am guilty of too. We believe in a high and rising standard of living, and here in America we will mortgage our future if it will only let us try to keep our standard of living for now. And that is the kind of rottenness from within that leaves us vulnerable to blows. Or one kind; there are others.

## 50 Things You Can Do Even If the Writing Is on the Wall

As I write, some U.S. journalists have started to say, "We really like our President, but we still have big problems as a country."

Expecting socialism to neatly give us we want is, perhaps, naïve: but it is not my main intent to ask people to read the introduction to [The Black Book of Communism](#), or to organize a crusade to straighten out Washington. I would rather talk about what we as people can do if more trouble happens.

Out of the many saints in Russia, God did not stop the concentration camps, but he was at work, in his saints, *in* the concentration camps. It may seem strange to say that Heaven could be present in socialist concentration camps—horrid camps where Hitler sent observers for guidance and inspiration, for the camps planned for Jews—but there were saints sent to those socialist camps, and those saints brought Heaven with them, because Heaven is there wherever God's saints live and die in faithfulness and prayer. Think I'm being a bit too poetic and unreal? [Read about a devout priest who was sent to concentration camps with all manner of painful realities, and brought Heaven with him in the death camps.](#)

The Orthodox Church has great experience living under adverse circumstances, and it is simply not the case that the Church can only function normally in easy times. When St. Constantine ended Roman persecutions against the Church, some saints complained because times had become easy: hard times adorn the Church with martyrs, and what do soft times offer that compares with that? The Church may be stronger under some persecution than when everything goes our way. We may be in for more of a rough ride, and the bad news is that there may be no way

to escape it to live normal life. But the good news is that there is an *alternative* to trying to escape it: we can live normal life *in* the rough ride. Orthodoxy is a way of living normally in a hard world.

What I most want to do in this piece is share some of what the Orthodox Church has lived under socialism. There could be significance in the fact that one of the patron saints of America was born in Russia, came over to America and ministered among some very poor people, and then returned to Russia and became the first priest to be martyred under the socialists: [St. John Kochurov](#). Orthodoxy in Russia has had a lot of opportunity to learn to live under socialism.

Here are **50 things you can do even if the writing is on the wall**:

1. Don't believe spam.

Don't believe spammers (and other advertisers) who offer ads of a classy-looking watch that will make you happy and contented.

Asking a watch to make you *either* of these things is like asking a stone to lay an egg or using gasoline to extinguish a fire. Watches can tell time and maybe do other things, but *no* watch can make you permanently happy.

If you try to buy a watch to make you content, a nice-looking "replica luxury watch" will only feel good for so long; then you'll need the real thing, or think you do, until your discontent grows and you want something you can't get like a watch that is worth as much as your car. But even if you could get it, there would be more standing between you and happiness than not having enough money to keep indulging yourself. You would still be discontent—until you got a watch worth as much as a good house, or maybe a collection of exotic watches, or maybe some super-special watch that ought to be in a museum. But still you won't be content; you'll be less content than when spammers told you you needed a replica watch to live well.

And, for that matter, even if you had the money to indulge that fancy, you will paradoxically be less content with a unique, handmade, multi-million-dollar Swiss watch than you were with that first almost-convincing "replica" watch sold to you by a spammer. Trying to get more and more things that will make you happy doesn't work. As far as the game of being happy by owning a good enough watch

goes, *the only way to win this game is not to play at all.*

2. The Bible says, "In humility consider others better than yourself," and it really would have been a lot easier if it said, "Be grateful to God for making you superior." Or at least *I* would have found it easier, at least if an exception were made for me.

But these offensive words conceal a treasure. When I am full of myself, I find it difficult to enjoy and appreciate others. Nietzsche thought of most others as scum and slime and could not enjoy their company. But humility is more than not being so full of yourself; it is a key to enjoying others.

In terms of difficult co-workers, [Fr. Arseny](#) lived in a concentration camp where the food was rancid (and tasted like kerosene), there was not nearly enough of it, and some of the people assigned to be his co-workers were hardened criminals (one liked card games where the loser paid with his life, and tried to have him killed). And yet reading his story is not a morose pity party, but a tale of a saint's triumph. *And* Fr. Arseny lived with profound respect for his nasty co-workers and the people in charge of the camp, and found some spark of beauty, some reflection of God, in even the most blackened soul. And his tale is profoundly uplifting.

He knew the secret of in humility considering others better than himself. And he lived a joy unlocked by many holy keys, *including* a humility that lived respect for others.

3. Share.

There was one woman who posted a note to a forum I read, saying that after being distressed that she could not find work, she began volunteering and, if she had no money to give, gave her time to others. There is a seed of the Kingdom of Heaven in her response, and also a seed of how people survived the Great Depression.

I do not say that you should share a big gift that will make things all better. It is better to try starting off by giving a dollar or two when you know it is inadequate: if you can easily write a big cheque that will completely solve a problem, God may not really be working through you. Far from feeling a godlike power to put an end to suffering, most doctors feel powerless in the face of real suffering. (Are we more powerful than doctors?) But what about going to church and putting a dollar or two in the collection plate, even or especially if you cannot afford it, or if you do have a job, bring a meal

especially if you cannot afford it, or if you do have a job, bring a meal—nothing fancy, a cheap meal is fine—to a friend or neighbor who cannot find work?

What brought a lot of people through the Great Depression was pulling together: in a situation where people could not live separate lives, dependent on wealth and independent from others, people pulled together and even if they had less, shared the little they had—as some people are doing, and discovering, today.

"He saved others, but he cannot save himself" is a definition of the Kingdom of Heaven, and some people who have been stripped of the treasures of wealth—no one-person cars, no fancy meals in restaurants, no iPhones and consumer electronics—have grown so poor that they have moved on to *real* treasures, the treasures of God, and communities pulling together, of love and service to others. (The best things in life are free!) They have been, perhaps, like children whose parents pulled them away from their beloved mud pies until it dawns on them that the reason their parents took them away from their mud pies wasn't cruelty at *all*—it was a vacation better than Disneyland.

4. Take the worst parking spot.

I remember a poster which encouraged people to "take the worst parking spot," out of a concern for physical health: if you are going to drive rather than walk, a minute or two extra walking is worth it. But taking the worst parking spot can also be excellent for our *spiritual* health. And our survival.

We often take as much luxury as we can have. And we are softened by it: we get new conveniences, and we find that we need them. Part of a good preparation for disaster is to wean ourselves, or at least try to weaken our dependency just a little. We become more independent even if we still use them.

What can we do besides take the worst parking spot? We can wear clothing we don't like, for one day only, or spend a weekend without touching a computer, or use desktop computers but leave our smartphones at home. The Orthodox ways of fasting from certain foods are in part a way to take the worst parking spot: the principle is, "Foods have their place but I want to be more spiritually independent and less ruled by my belly." It may be much more than this, but there is a core principle that is not only good for spiritual

health when times are easy, but good for survival when times are hard.

How could you stretch your spiritual muscles? What could you do to "take the worst parking spot?"

5. Remember that life neither begins at 18 nor ends at 30.

In older Russian tradition (and, for that matter, older American tradition), children are held very dearly, and elders are held dearly too. One hears a lament that the Russian Orthodox Church has seminaries to form priests but no such schooling to make its devout old women. These elders are not looked on as has-beens but as treasurehouses.

One (American) friend has said that one decision that he has *never* regretted was that, for the last two years of his grandmother's life, he wrote her a letter each week. After she passed away, he learned that she kept the stack of his letters close by, in her bedstand.

If hard times strike, we will not be able to afford to segregate ourselves by age and market segment.

6. Live real life in a virtual world.

There are many good uses for technology: perhaps the good uses have no exotic sizzle, but technology has been used to support human life: the letter mentioned above uses the full technology of a postal system, online libraries make classic books available, forums work very well for certain discussions, and cars and watches have their uses.

But using technology to escape basic spiritual discipline—I will elaborate shortly—is like using whisky to chase your blues away.

However attractive it may seem, it will bite you in the end.

Using technology to anaesthetize boredom—to have the chatter of the TV on, or always be texting when you have time to kill—is using technology to avoid feeling uncomfortable and maybe practicing a little spiritual discipline. Something deep in older Russian tradition (but not really foreign to older American tradition) is the discipline of silence, a discipline of life without added distractions. It may be hard to explain what the advantage is of not carrying around distractions to anaesthetize boredom, but we grow in silence, and trying to become a mature and rounded person without working through waiting and silence (sometimes *uncomfortable* waiting and

silence) is like trying to be healthy without cutting back on junk food or making a deliberate attempt to exercise consistently.

Today it is an exotic storybook image to ride a horse or live "in harmony with nature" in an old rural village where you saw peasants and a priest, guildsmen and maybe a knight; not long from now it may be a faroff, exotic storybook image to meet most of your friends face or show the harmony of nature to go in person to a university where people come face-to-face to study, teach, and learn like scholars had since medieval times, or work at a quaint "company" where telecommuting is not yet the norm. The ancient reality of face-to-face community *may* become more exotic than riding horses, but it is profoundly more important.

Growing spiritually has never been easy, but it's harder when technology makes it easier to dodge foundational lessons in the spiritual life. But the solution needs to go beyond what technologies we do and do not use. It is not about not-technology. It is about God; the stories of the saints are not stories about how most of them lived before our cherished technologies, but about how they lived and grew in the divine life. It is about their love for their neighbor, about their prayer, and yes, about their letting go of luxuries: but one hardly walks away impressed with how deprived they were, any more than one learns of the struggles, training and victory of an Olympic gold medalist and says, "Wow, there was one deprived athlete!" Virtual life is always at our fingertips, but the door to real life is and ever shall be open to us, whether our life is easy or hard.

7. Don't be a cowboy.

The U.S., more than most nations in history, has a rebel for its hero: a Western never has a tight-knit band of warriors sharing the limelight, but a lone, solitary cowboy. Its religious roots are Protestant, not really Catholic and far less Orthodox. And it's not just Protestants who may have more than a streak of the Independent Christian: the expression "American Catholic" has connotations of a sort of Burger King "Have it your way!" version of Catholicism where people announce, "Hi. I'll have an order of ritual, hold the guilt and authority, with a side of feeling extra special, and could we make it a bit more progressive?" This mentality is simply not helpful. There may be enough points of contact between, for instance, older Russian tradition and older American tradition, but being a cowboy Christian

tradition and older American tradition, but being a cowboy Christian simply does not cut it.

Finding a good Orthodox parish can be hard, but it's worth it. A great many things about the spiritual walk are hard enough *with* the support of a good parish and priest—but much harder without.

8. Pray the [Psalms](#).

I had read through a couple of Shakespeare plays and simply not connected, and then went to a live performance of a play and was riveted. When I asked a Shakespeare-loving friend for his thoughts, he explained, "With due respect to my friends in the English department, Shakespeare (or at least most Shakespeare; I don't mean his sonnets) is not *literature*." I looked at him in puzzlement until he continued. "It's *drama*." That is, *Romeo and Juliet* is not in its living and dynamic form when it is read like a novel, but when it is performed as live drama. Something like this is true for the Psalms: they are in their living and dynamic form not when they are merely read, but when they are prayed, chanted, or sung. And I know I've made the mistake of merely reading them when I should have been *praying* them.

The Psalms offer up the whole human life to the Lord: everything from exultant glory and thanksgiving to, "[My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?](#)" And I know that I, at least, don't know them well enough. I've done a couple of things; besides reading them, I have created the [Psalm Picker](#), which pulls a random Psalm each time you visit. It's something I made in the first place, not for other people, but first and foremost to help myself. There's also [the whole book of Psalms in the Powered Access Bible](#). And a trusty paper Bible is even better.

I hope to pray the Psalms more.

9. Make peace with death, and remember the fact that you will die.

Unlike Russian culture, either ancient or modern, American culture is in strong denial about death. Our medical system does not just prevent (or, rather, *postpone*) death; it hides it when it happens, and death is more off-camera than in most societies. There is a great, often unspoken, collective effort to avoid unpleasant reminders that (if the Lord tarries) each one of us will die. Denial is rarely a helpful way of coping with life or with death.

There is an alternative, and one can ultimately live one's whole life

preparing to die. This is not morbid: if every moment brings us to death, it is unreal and therefore morbid to try to live as if this were not the case. Dying each day means in part not only realizing that our bodies will not live forever, and even that our bodies are aging day by day, but it also means dying to have our way: as in the Rolling Stones song, "You can't always get what you want." It is a dying that day-by-day gives birth to maturity and spiritual resurrection. And *this* is how we can avoid recoiling from aging and death as horrors we are trying to dodge: death, as well as life, is like a thistle: touch it timidly and it will prick you, but grab it boldly, and its spines will crumble in your grasp. When Christ drank his cup to the dregs, there was no bitterness left in the cup: only resurrection that would trample death by death. Few of us get quite *that* far along while we are alive. Still, an imperfect job of facing death with resolve and acceptance is better than a perfect job of sticking your head in the sand. Whether we will die in gruesome circumstances or pass away peacefully in old age, we are all headed towards the grave that holds beggars and kings alike. Today is a good day to begin dying, to die to our self-will and graspingness, to die to how we would like to run the world, and to make peace with the fact that none of us will live forever and triumph over it in that peace. Our triumph comes by accepting it, not by running away from the thought, and if this is a difficult thing that takes years to accept, we might as well begin making peace with death now.

10. Read **from** the *Philokalia* ([Volume 1](#), [volume 2](#), [volume 3](#), [volume 4](#)).

*The Philokalia* is a classic anthology that has been very influential in Orthodoxy in recent years: the more recent classic [The Way of a Pilgrim](#) shows the place the *Philokalia* holds in the heart of Russian piety.

When I was an Evangelical, some of the biggest excitement we had was when we discovered something about how the spiritual life works, or where we read something that had its finger on the pulse of how spiritual life works. And I would add to both of those, "because both of them were something like the *Philokalia*." The *Philokalia* is not the only Orthodox theology and is not the only kind of spiritual writing out there, but it is, more than anything else I've read, the

"science" of spiritual struggle and spiritual growth towards contemplation.

I don't want to give a heavy reading assignment, or give the sense that you must read the *Philokalia* cover to cover if you're serious. Many people would be better to dip into it now and then—or, even better, have sections suggested by a good priest (which is probably more like how it was first used than simply reading it cover to cover). But a little bit each day can be very valuable, and I would underscore my remark that it is the "science" of spiritual struggle and growth.

11. Say, "Thank you!" But not like they do in *The Secret*.

For people who are not satisfied with their current clunker and wish they had a really nice car, the popular New Age book *The Secret* encourages people to imagine they were wrapping their hands around the leather steering wheel of a top-notch luxury car, and say "Thank you!" for the car they were attracting to themselves.

*The Secret* really does encourage saying "Thank you!" but never does it suggest we might say "Thank you!" for the things we already have: certainly the book never suggests that if we are dissatisfied with a regular car that works quite well, we might say "Thank you!" for the car we already have. And they seem to be pretty safe in their assumption that the reader who is invited to drool over a luxury car will not protest, "But I already have a car that works. Can't I say 'Thank you!' for the car that I have?"

All of us have a habit of being ungrateful. There was one time when I was a graduate student who had to choose between paying for medical care and paying for books, but many people who heard of my salary (a bit below \$15000) would be astonished and wish their village could have some fraction of that much wealth to share. And as the case may be, I *survived*. That's something to be thankful for, along with much bigger things: the love of friends, talents and virtues with which to love and serve, the grace of God, and a Heaven that begins in this life and is perfected in the next. There are any number of graces large and small, from being saved from a nasty situation, to eating for one more day, to that daily comic strip or funny story from a friend, to a pleasant chat with a loved one, to the pile of dirty clothes that belong to someone with more than one change of clothing. It is a profound mistake to think that if we lose our wealth

we lose all that we have to be grateful for. Life may be harder. Indeed, it may be so hard that we start to appreciate how much we still have to be grateful for!

We can thank God by praying aloud through Psalms and liturgical prayers (such those in the [Jordanville prayer book](#)), by keeping our eyes open to what we have to be grateful for and inwardly thanking God when we recognize a blessing, by spending time to "count your blessings," and by sharing with others out of grateful recognition of what we have received as gifts we have not earned.

12. Don't live for activism: live for sonship.

The Renaissance *magus* lived to transform the world, and the *magus* is the grandfather of the Western idea that it is worthy to transform the world. In the *magus's* eyes, society as it exists then and now is just a rather pitiable raw material which gains value when the *magus* starts improving it. The *magus* is also grandfather to statism and grand social programs: the idea that whatever problems a society may have, the solution is for the government to fix it.

The 19th century Russian great Nicolas Federov said, "Our social program is the Trinity." It may take some strained imagining to see the the Trinity as another secular program to improve society, but that's *almost* the point. The insight could also be restated, "If you look at the Trinity and think that a Church with the Trinity additionally needs a social program as well, you don't get it." In that sense Orthodox saying "Our social program is the Trinity." is like Amish saying, "Our medical system is a lifetime of hard exercise and healthy food," or devout Evangelicals saying "Our juvenile correctional system is families applying love and discipline to our children."

There are saints who have transformed the world, but this was a side effect of their seeking a life of sonship before God. To pick a Protestant example, one of the Wesleys believed that there were Christians, and then there were super-Christians, and then they were missionaries. So he crossed land and sea to be a missionary, and failed completely. He finally returned home as a defeated failure, and while he was on the ship there was a tremendous storm. He heard the sound of singing from the deck, and when he asked the Christians on deck why they were singing in this deadly storm, they

simply said that they believed in God. And the terrified Wesley broke down and wept. And after he had hit rock bottom, God used him as a tremendous force in American Christianity, but not before. Even if God did want to make a mark on the world through him, it was not nearly so important as having that Wesley sit at the Lord's feet in sonship. I know it is a tough lesson, but if God is at work with you, he will wait for you to flounder through your plans as an instrument to change the world for however long it takes for you to let go of them and approach him, not as a mere *instrument*, but as a *son*, and work out of sonship.

Sonship is a theme that may or may not be hit on today (not just because it may be seen as politically incorrect), but it is woven through the Bible. The New Testament does not just talk about the Son of God; it also talks about the sons of God, and there is an ancient maxim that the Son of God became a man that men might become the sons of God. Don't live for a secular transformation of the world; live to let God transform you in sonship. Anything else is putting the cart before the horse, and it's hard to be practical and get a horse to keep pushing a cart in a straight line!

13. Empty yourself of noise.

All of the Christian walk is a walk of being emptied; to become of like mind with Christ is to empty yourself ([Philippians 2:5-11 RSV](#)):

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Other things in Orthodoxy involve emptying yourself (humility, for instance, or chastity), but here I would like to talk about emptying oneself of idle noise. The idea that idle chatter is something to avoid

is not obvious because noise is indispensable to our way of life. We have not only noise in conversation and technology, but inner noise. My priest has said more than once that when we are praying, we should not strive to have *good* thoughts, however good, but *no* thoughts. Heaven is silent, without our worrying and plans and schemes to have things our way, and a saint is not someone who has nothing to worry about or who has very good plans and has God's blessing on those plans, but someone in whom the silence of Heaven has taken root.

The place for this silence is not sometime in the future when, maybe, we imagine we will have nothing to worry about: it is now. There will always be something to worry about, but the [Sermon on the Mount](#) with its "Do not worry" does not say, "Here is how you should live life if everything goes your way," but "Here is how to live life now, in the situation you are in here and now."

I write this as a worrier who has just begun to experience the peace and silence of Heaven.

14. Mind more than what you eat.

The U.S. has been called a "toxic environment" for weight: it's not just supersized meals that make it easy, easy, easy to eat more than is good for you.

But what isn't talked about is that the toxic environment is more than oversized food portions: the toxic environment is in us, and if we understand it simply as a battle of willpower, we have *already* lost. Perhaps you have bent over to uproot a weed and pulled until you almost strained yourself because you had not imagined what a root system that tiny-looking weed had. Overeating has a remarkably deep root system.

Do you watch a lot of television, for instance? What I am interested in here is not that the human body burns fewer calories watching television than sleeping; it is that, even if food is never even *mentioned*, watching television feeds the root system of overeating. Or are you big into fantasy? Playing obscure games? Chances are that you aren't a big TV watcher, but this feeds the root of the problem as well. Or are you interested in the occult? Do you read a lot of romance novels? Do you dally around with SecondWife? *Guess what?* You're doing the same thing.

"*Foul!*" I expect to hear: "*It's none of your business!*" And perhaps it isn't my business, personally, but this has every relevance to what we have to do if we are really going to uproot this weed.

The common thread running through all of these things—and more—is that they are different kinds of medication to provide a painkiller for our life. And if we want a painkiller to adjust life, we want it for all of our life: someone who wants a painkiller for constant backaches wants the pain to be continuously medicated away, not just every once in a while. This basic habit is one we can use with different drugs, and one of them is food. If we treat existence as something to medicate, and look for things to medicate it, then we may use food to medicate it—and it's awfully hard to say no to the pleasure of food, and staying in it as long as we can, if life is something we want medicated away.

This is what is missing if you are only told how many calories to take from what food groups and what food to avoid. If you are trying to use food and other things to medicate life, continuing in that basic attitude while trying to cut back is a nasty game: the only way to win that game is not to play at all. Not that it is easy to uproot the whole root system: trying to reject and progressively uproot using things like food to medicate is not an easy game at all. But it is a game that *can* be won, and the prize is much better than a smaller waistline. We're obsessed with waistlines. But the biggest cost of eating too much is *not* what it does to your waistline, but to your immortal spirit: people who indulge too deeply in physical sweetness lose the ability to enjoy or even seek spiritual sweetness. The lie that traps is to think that good is a way of delivering pleasure that happens to nourish the body. The truth that frees is to know that food is a way to nourish the body that happens to deliver pleasure. And there is more than this.

Fasting is good, but eating is a much more powerful good. One Orthodox bishop, in a place where there are many faithful but shockingly few clergy, gave advice to a community that rarely had a priest. He said two things:

- Keep meeting together.
- Eat together.

Family eating around a table is a powerful thing. Friends eating together is a powerful thing. Table fellowship is a powerful good, and

together is a powerful thing. Table fellowship is a powerful good, and we have not progressed because we have moved to individual meals fried in microwaves.

And this is leaving out the greatest meal of all. The Orthodox teaching is clear: Adam and Eve lost paradise by eating, and we are called back to paradise by eating. The Eucharist is the one sacrament from which every other sacrament flows, and it blesses our whole lives.

The ultimate alternative to a life that is medicated away is a life offered to God, and received back, under the brilliant, blazing shadow of the Eucharist. The unspoken command of "Do not escape" is not given to us for misery, but joy, given that we may find the paradise, here where God has put us, rather than in a doomed effort to escape. "Eucharist" comes from the Greek for thanksgiving, and it is a life unlocked by thanksgiving and in touch with the many things it can be thankful. The "bad" news is that you can't escape, but the good news is that you don't need to.

15. Don't live by throwing things away. Or at least cut back a bit. Living in a disposable world is not good for us, and it's definitely not going to help if disaster strikes.

One Ukrainian friend who immigrated to the U.S. wrote about defeating clutter, writing that her more Spartan husband, who is Russian, purchased few things, but then chose good quality items that was built to last. And this relates, perhaps somewhat strangely, to what another friend said about buying clothing: don't buy a shirt at Navy Pier because, however fashionable it may be, the shirt will wear out quickly. Just go to a second-hand store, and find something that may well "work like iron" because the clothing, even if it is second-hand, was made a time when clothing was *not* made to wear out. These two people's attitudes, of "Don't buy much, but buy high quality" and "Don't buy your clothes at Navy Pier: shop at second-hand stores" have a lot more in common than you might think.

The U.S. economy works by having people buy things more often, and part of this is that things are meant to break down (or go out of fashion, or become obsolete, or...). The disposable mindset is deeply enough rooted that even if Orthodox Christians really try to avoid throwing away "prospora" (bread that has been blessed), there is nothing like an Orthodox Jewish seminary practice of burying paper

in a Jewish cemetery if it has the Divine Name or part of the Mosaic Law written on it. When we need to dispose of worn-out icons, we bury them according to canon law, but it is common practice to print bulletins with maybe an icon on the front and some bit of liturgy or Scripture inside, created to be used once and then thrown away. This is a major red flag.

One joke tells of a couple of students who wanted to try out marriage, for as long as they both shall love. And a professor who had warned them about treating marriage as something you can throw away *did* attend the wedding—and gave the gift of paper plates. A lot more is "disposable" in American culture than just paper plates: we have disposable relationships, disposable personal philosophies, disposable jobs and careers. We assign a shelf life to almost everything. It is true that if the economy comes to a grinding halt, a stack of paper plates won't last very long. But we have other problems with disposable relationships, beliefs, and the like if disaster strikes. It's not just that, in a depression, disposable plates are a luxury you cannot afford: disposable relationships are a luxury you cannot afford, too, even more than disposable plates. Disposable relationships aren't exactly good for us even in good times, but then there's at least the illusion we can afford such luxuries. In a disaster we do not have even *that* illusion.

We need places to take root and deepen. Even warts have something to give to us: it is a mistake to think that saying we need to take root with people and communities is the same as saying that they will always be perfect. It has been said that a person knows the meaning of life when he plants a tree with the full knowledge that he will never live to sit in its shadow. That may be beyond most of us, but we can all strive for a little more permanency each day, each week, each month, each year, each decade.

16. Rethink harmony with nature.

In [Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony with Nature](#), I wrote about restoring some bygone age:

Here is what you might do one day to live a bit more like prehistoric Grecians, or ancient Celts, or medieval Gallic peasants, or whatever. Keep in mind that this is at best half-way to its goal not a full-fledged return to living like an ancient in

to his goal, not a full fledged return to living like an ancient in harmony with nature to a day, but making a rough equivalent by using what is closest from our world:

1. However exotic the setting may seem to you, remember that it is a fundamental confusion to imagine that the setting was exotic *to those inside the experience*. We not only meet new people frequently; we see new technologies invented frequently. In The Historic Setting, people most likely were born, lived, and died within twenty miles, and even meeting another person who was not part of your village was rare. A new invention, or a new idea, would be difficult to imagine, let alone point to. So, for one day, whatever you're doing, if it feels exotic, avoid it like the plague. Stop it immediately. Don't read anything new; turn off your iPod; don't touch Wikipedia. Don't seek excitement; if anything, persevere in things you find boring.
2. Remembering that there was a lot of heavy manual labor, and stuff that was shared, spend your nice Saturday helping a friend move her stuff into her new apartment. Remember that while stairs were rare in antiquity, it would be an anachronism to take the elevator. Be a good manual laborer and do without the anachronism.
3. Remembering how the Sermon on the Mount betrays an assumption that most people were poor enough that houses would only have one room, spend your time at home, as much as possible, in one room of your house.
4. Remembering that the ancient world had no sense of "Jim's trying to lose weight and is on an old-fashioned low-fat diet, Mary's a vegan, Al's low carb...", but rather there was one diet that everybody day ate, go to McDonald's, order a meal with McDonald's McFries McSoaked in McGrease, and a sugary-sweet, corn-syrup-powered shake.  
If you just said to yourself, "He didn't say what size; I'll order the smallest I can," order the biggest meal you can.
5. Remembering that in the ancient world the company you kept were not your eclectic pick, spend time with the people around you. Go to your neighbor Ralph who blares bad '80s rock because he thinks it's the best thing in the world, and

like a good guest don't criticize what your host has provided—including his music. Spend some time playing board games with your annoying kid sister, and then go over to visit your uncle Wally and pretend to tolerate his sexist jokes.

6. Lastly, when you head home do have a good night's sleep, remember that a bed with sheets covering a smooth mattress was only slightly more common than a Frank Lloyd Wright home is today, go to sleep on a straw pallet in your virtual one room house. (You can use organic straw if you can find any.)

This may seem, to put it politely, a way you would never have thought to live like an age in harmony with nature. But let me ask a perfectly serious question:

What *did* you expect? Did you imagine dressing up as a bard, dancing on hilltops, and reciting poetry about the endless knot while quaffing heather ale?

When we think of "harmony with nature", we often associate it with some exotic experience: it's like getting out of the office and going camping on vacation. Or maybe something more exotic and special than that. The idea that chores could be a form of harmony with nature—even the chores associated with technology and luxury—is almost inconceivable.

But there is a truer and deeper harmony with nature in a trip to the grocery or hardware store than an adventure vacation. One LinkedIn question was quite perceptive: it noted that in other days people hunted or gathered or farmed their food, and people's relationship to nature was not an extra, but the core of how life itself worked. Now it is an add-on and a special luxury: if we fish for our food on vacation, it is never simply how we can get food. It's almost like Wii warriors meticulously donning period-accurate athletic garb and playing frisbee as a full-fledged historical re-enactment, like a Civil War re-enactment.

There is a reason parents have assigned chores, and not just because the chores needed to get done. Persevering through chores instead of always having your way helps children grow to be mature adults and not be spoiled brats. And it has a connection to the more ancient

not be spoiled stars. And it has a connection to the more ancient understanding of being in accord with nature, a deeper understanding that ultimately reached into virtue. (Not to mention that it's just a little bit more like what living off the land was like when there was no alternative!)

It may be that if something seems hollow about robotic pets (if not vampiric), it has something to do with a pet that needs no chores from you—no feeding when you don't feel like it, no arrangements if you are going to leave town, no cleaning out the litterbox. Your pet is there when you want to give it attention, but you can ignore it whenever you want. It is a pet on your terms, and it is entirely at your disposal. And it doesn't compare to the old-fashioned kind of puppy that whines when you want to leave it alone, misbehaves, and is alive enough to need you to do chores.

Learn to love your chores.

17. Don't have all your experiences made for you.

One of the computer professions that has been on the rise is "user experience", which is not exactly about getting the basics to work or even making things be friendly, but about creating a smooth and enchanting experience. This isn't just a computer thing: music, for instance, or movies have their own user experiences, but this sort of thing has been neglected with computers and is now coming into the limelight.

I've read a fair amount about user experience, but one article today drew my attention to something of a spiritual bad smell. It talked about "user enchantment" as a better way of looking at things than "user experience," and to explain the red flag, I would like to talk about experience and enchantment in Orthodox liturgy.

For many people, a first visit to an Orthodox Church may be an enchanting experience. Things look strange (dare I say *mystical*?): liturgy is chanted, there are pictures all around that may not look anything else they have seen, and different things happen. And this is just on a material level. But for all this, the experience has things that a user experience professional aiming for enchantment would wince at. In many parishes, most people stand, and your first time standing for over an hour brings pain to your legs and back. And, if you come more than once or twice and want it to be exotic, you will find that it's not that exotic after a while. If you look for an experience that will

simply be like Disneyland, you will almost certainly be disappointed. Something about the pictures is hard to see. If you look at them in the hope that they will be normal pictures, you will be disappointed: the pictures look awkward and oddly proportioned, and that impression may last a while. What you may not guess at is that after something has happened, there is something in the pictures, or rather *icons*, that goes much deeper than famous oil paintings in museums. The icons are *windows of Heaven*, something like a fantasy portal or a time machine, or a meeting-place, and something *alive*. Heaven and earth meet there, and the reason that people do things with icons—offer kisses, for instance—is that they are not just a picture to look at on a wall, any more than an open doorway to the outside world is simply a tall picture of the world outside. But it takes spiritual sight to see this, and despite the images I have used, the experience is not exotic like getting swept off your feet by a movie's special effects is exotic.

What unlocks icons, and other things in Orthodox worship, is a gradual but lifelong process of transformation of which worship with the parish plays a *part*. It's a bit like saying that hitting a baseball on television is the result of years of disciplined practice. The point isn't to get to the experience of icons being alive and windows you can see through to Heaven; the point is a many-sided spiritual walk.

And the experience is not stand-alone. I have spoken about the experience of Orthodox worship, but the point is not to deliver an experience, but to transform people. The experience may be meticulously cultivated, and it is important, but it is one dimension of something deeper. It's not just that there are things you contribute, but it is somewhat myopic to make the experience the center.

This is not just true of Orthodox worship. It is true of human life: marriage, parenting, friendship, work, leisure, and more. You should be giving of yourself, it should hurt at times, and never is there a standalone experience delivered to you. And it is a much greater good than the kind of experience movies and music deliver.

For now we may have the luxury of standalone experiences being delivered to us. But seeking experiences is a way to create a dependence, and it is a dependence that does not prepare us for rough times. People in the Great Depression had marriage

rough times. People in the Great Depression had marriage, parenting, friendship, and work. Few of them had iPods with music whenever they wanted.

And iPods wear out.

18. Treat your situation as a spiritual training ground.

In some monastic literature, one reads of spiritual fathers giving rather nasty orders ("obediences") to their monks. At first brush, it seems to be cruelty, pure and simple. The more you understand it, the less cruel it is. These unpleasant "obediences" may sometimes be bitter medicine, but they are the medicine of a physician. The purpose is to bring freedom to the monk: spiritual freedom that dwarfs political and economic freedom, the kind of freedom that even an icy labor camp could not take from [a monk, priest, and spiritual father like Fr. Arseny](#). And the entire of monastic life is meant to be a training ground where even the hard parts are there to build up the monastery's members.

This is a microcosm of life for all of us. It may be true, as some say, that all Orthodox are called to asceticism, not just monks, but there is a bigger point. All of us, whether or not we have the monastic kind of spiritual father, have an even bigger Spiritual Father, God, who arranges a spiritual training ground in this life. "All things work together for good" ([Rom 8:28 KJV](#)) for those studying, being trained, and being formed in the great spiritual academy called life. It's just a little easier to see when you understand monasticism as a training ground.

This is easy enough to say as eloquent words and impressive rhetoric; it is much harder if your life has not been easy, you have been scarred by rough experiences, and it seems that random forces buffet you and knock you away from where you want to be. But let me give an analogy.

My brother, then working at a major internet corporation, mentioned that one of the system administrators, whenever a higher-up would come up to him and ask, "Is there a way to—" would cut him off and say, "Stop! Tell me what you want to do." Wanting to give an example, he described a manager saying, "Is there a way to run a `df` [an obscure Unix command that gives a page or two of information about disks] and send the output to a system administrator's pager?" And a terrible response would be for him to

say, "Yes," at which point the manager would say, "Why don't you do that," and have him do something that would look good on paper to a manager, but not even look good on paper to a system administrator. The core issue, the "Tell me what you want to do," might be "A disk got too full recently", with an implication of "I don't want this to happen again. What can we do so system administrators can deal with this?" And there are things that could be done. Perhaps one might write a program to check if a disk is too full, and send a warning (perhaps even to a system administrator's pager), and another tool to sound an alarm if a disk is filling up quickly. But the Unix `df` command is not just obscure; it was much too verbose for the pagers of the day; even an excellent system administrator would have to do a lot of scrolling to find out if the page was a warning about a problem. So the solution as proposed is to cry "Wolf!" every five minutes, and make on-call system administrators do a lot of busy work to figure out if the constant cries of "Wolf! Wolf! Wolf!" actually correspond to a rare enough real problem. The system administrator mentioned by my brother did not like implementing solutions that were not in his employer's best interests, and what different managers were coming to him and saying, with "Is there a way to [*insert solution that only looks good on paper*]?" is, "I've solved a problem badly, and I want you to implement it." This is not just a story about managers and rude system administrators. It's also the story of much of our prayers: "God, I've solved a problem badly, and I want you to implement it." And we bitterly resist when God offers us something that actually *is* in our best interests. On the one hand, St. James tells us, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." ([James 4:3 RSV](#)) Our plans to have what we believe will make us happy have much to do with what it means to "spend it on your passions." On the other hand, Christ tells us, "Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." ([John 15:2 RSV](#)) The "pruning", for many of us, means progressively liberating us from our plans to arrange what we think will make us happy. It is God, the Spiritual Father, ever seeking to spur us to grow up. Blessed are they who struggle in earthly pain, for they may rest in Heavenly victory. Blessed are they whom God frustrates in their

heavenly victory. Blessed are they whom God frustrates in their desires, for they may reach true satisfaction. Blessed are you when your earthly training ground includes suffering you would never have chosen, because in the same way God has trained legion upon legion of saints before us. Thank God, and ever pray for the spiritual sight to see his loving providence in your life.

19. However terrifying it may be to repent, repent anyway.

Sin is not the most popular term today; saying that we are all terrible sinners is not something we want to hear. But we have sins, and we need to repent of them.

One counselor wrote of a man who was preparing to break off an affair forever, and wept: he had come to the insight that what made it so hard to break things off was not because he was going to lose the woman he was having an affair with, but because he feared that "some shining part of him would be lost forever." This is a tiny slice of why the [Philokalia](#) says that *people hold on to sin because they think it adorns them*.

Repentance may be the most terrifying experience a human can adorn; sin is a disease of the soul, and part of its damage is that even if it makes us miserable we are afraid to let it go. Among Protestants repentance has been called "unconditional surrender", and this is absolutely true: lifelong repentance is lifelong surrender, and it is surrender more than once.

But there is another side to repentance. *Before*, it is terrifying and painful surrender. *Afterwards*, there is more than relief: you realize that what you were holding on to, because you thought it adorned you and you would not be able to live without it, was in fact a piece of Hell, and you needed it like you needed one foot stuck in a cruel bear trap. Orthodox speak of repentance from sin as awakening, and part of John the Baptist's proclamation, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is here," is, "Wake up, for God's glorious reign is coming here." This is why St. Paul quotes, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." ([Ephesians 5:14 RSV](#)) Sin is sleep. It is also spiritual sickness, and for that matter it is worse than standing in something gross: and repentance is awakening, being healed, and stepping out of something vile and feeling truly *clean*—repentance is all of this and much more. It may be Heaven's best-kept secret.

What are you trying to forget you need to repent of? Call it sin, and repent of it.

20. Learn how to make things and make at least minor repairs.

One of the prominent present-day philosophers of virtue wrote [Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues](#).

The argument is that in real life, dependency is a normal part of human life, and virtues help us with a real life that includes sickness and not being able to do everything you imagine.

One of those ancient virtues is thrift, and Dorothy Sayers's classic essay, "The Other Six Deadly Sins," talks about how thrift was always considered a virtue. Even if we can dodge this virtue, it's still not a good idea.

It is not that hard to check (or change) a car's oil or sew back a missing button, and if you don't know how to do these things, I'd encourage you to visit [a how-to site like eHow.com](#). You don't have to digest the whole site at once, but what might be a better idea is, when something minor breaks, instead of paying someone to fix it, see if you can fix it instead. And, for that matter, buy a basic cookbook (if you don't want to use the internet) and start cooking. (You might find that you start feeling better. If you cook food yourself, your body is running on a higher grade of fuel than horrid microwave dinners.)

21. If not now, when?

There is a temptation to believe, "Life will really begin when I grow up," or "when I get into college," or "when I get married," or "when I get a job," or on a smaller scale "when I get my next paycheck," or "when so-and-so comes to visit," or "when quitting time rolls around." Happiness is something we imagine in the future, and sometimes we don't really enjoy what we were waiting for: we have made our habit to be waiting, and we often find something else to wait for. This dirty secret may be enough of a secret that we don't even know it ourselves: it's just that when The Moment We've Been Waiting For finally rolls around, we find ourselves looking forward to another, more remote, Moment We've Been Waiting For. And we still believe, "Then I'll be happy."

There is profound wisdom in the [Sermon on the Mount's](#) words, "Take therefore no thought for the morrow" ([Matthew 6:34 KJV](#)).

The issue is not just worrying; God keeps giving us this now and this

today, and we exhaust ourselves trying to arrange our future and waiting for life to *really* begin. Perhaps there is some place for planning, but there is no place for being so preoccupied that you are not grateful for what God has given you today, and it is something of a missed opportunity to keep pushing back the date when life really begins. Paradoxically, the best way to arrange for contentment when you cross the next big threshold is to begin living that contentment in this now that God has given us (a now, incidentally, in which many of the things you were waiting for have already been given).

The Sermon on the Mount, in saying not to borrow trouble from tomorrow because "each day has enough trouble of its own," is giving very practical advice. The [Bible](#) says a great deal to the modern world: in stress management terms, it says, "Do not give yourself double stress by adding tomorrow's stress to today's stress. Today has enough stress by itself." The more stressful things get, the more essential it is to cut needless stress. And it is very hard not to keep being preoccupied with tomorrow in stress if you are preoccupied with tomorrow whenever you look for happiness. Eternity and Heaven are in this *now* that God has given us.

Don't say "This sounds great," and decide to start tomorrow. Start today.

22. Don't wonder why you don't have a good enough [*fill in the blank*]. Wonder instead why you have a [*fill in the blank*] that you are unworthy of.

We live in an economy fueled on discontent: advertisements are designed with the powerful unstated purpose of making us discontent with what we have. And discontent has become a way of life. It is no longer mere possessions that we are discontent with: even friendships and family are the sort of thing we wish we could trade up for something better.

"Who is rich? The person who is content," reads one church sign, and it's true. Advertisements perversely promise exactly what they take away: they invite you to be discontent so you can "trade up" in the hope that something better will give you the contentment they beckoned you to cast away.

Think it would be nice to be a king in the Middle Ages? Here's something to think about. In those days, the higher up you were on

the pecking order, the less physical exertion you was expected of you. *However*, royalty needed to do more physical exertion than one would expect of a middle class exercise enthusiast today. If you wish you were a king in the Middle Ages, why don't you sit down and try to make a list of the luxuries you have today that no medieval king could even dream of? The list doesn't just include an obsolete computer or even a car that breaks down. To pick just the area of plumbing, hot and cold running water were unimaginable, like it would be unimaginable today to have a faucet that would pour out clothing whenever you want. Nor would a king have had daily showers / baths to have a body that didn't smell: a gamy-smelling body was just part of the picture. Nor would there be an indoor toilet that so cleanly removes unpleasant odors. Armchair fantasies of being a king are one thing, but there are things no king could dream of that we take for granted.

Instead of taking things for granted and pining for possessions, or friends, or whatever else that are "worthy" of us, why not be not only thankful but mindful of our many blessings?

It is [a strangely joyful thing to realize how many good things God has given us that we do not observe.](#)

23. Live in the real world. (Wishful thinking doesn't really help.)  
C.S. Lewis scholar Jerry Root wrote, [C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil: An Investigation of a Pervasive Theme.](#) The book is a study of how C.S. Lewis treats "subjectivism": trying to choose your version of reality over God's. Subjectivism is the belief that corresponds to being curved in on yourself in narcissism and pride.  
Root's readable scholarship looks both at Lewis's nonfiction work, but four works of fiction from different decades of his life. The villains all act and talk like subjectivists, and the villain in "Dymer", a magician who has taken the hands off a clock because he does not want to be subject to time, calls to mind for me my own subjectivism/narcissism/pride in employing almost the same image in [A Personal Flag.](#)  
The Greek word *hubris* refers to pride that inescapably blinds, the pride that goes before a fall. And subjectivism is tied to pride. Subjectivism is trying, in any of many ways, to make yourself happy by being in your own reality instead of learning happiness in the

God-given reality that you're in. Being in subjectivism is a start on being in Hell. Hell may not be what you think. Hell is light as it is experienced by people who would rather be in darkness. Hell is abundant health as experienced by people who would choose disease. Hell is freedom as experienced by those who will not stop clinging to spiritual chains. Hell is ten thousand other things: more pointedly, Hell is other people, as experienced by an existentialist. This Hell is Heaven as experienced through subjectivist narcissism, experiencing God's glory and wishing for glory on your own power. The gates of Hell are bolted and barred from the *inside*. God is love; he cannot but ultimately give Heaven to his creatures, but we can, if we wish, choose to experience Heaven as Hell. The beginning of Heaven is this life, but we can, if we wish, be subjectivists and wish for something else and experience what God has given us as the start of Hell. When I foolishly wished I could live in the Middle Ages, I found the contemporary abundance around me drab, and that is a bit of how God can offer us joy and we can experience it as Hellish. Whether you experience the temptation exactly as I do, or in a different form, the end is always the same. And trying to be somewhere else than reality, even in your mind, is only a liability in dealing with the only reality that counts.

If you want to cope successfully even in a disaster, live in the real world you as you are in it.

24. Don't kick against the goads, and that includes in matters of sex, men, and women.

When I was an undergraduate, I gleefully passed on what I had heard, all the more gleefully as it seemed an opportunity to take a stand against wrongful prudishness: a friend, in class, had heard a professor lecture against alleged [ludicrous Victorian prudish advice to brides](#), advising brides-to-be to "GIVE LITTLE, GIVE SELDOM, AND ABOVE ALL, GIVE GRUDGINGLY."

I had gleefully retold the story to over a dozen people until the deflating experience of hearing a friend, whose judgment I otherwise respected, express skepticism about whether it held the ring of truth. Now, some years later after I have developed more of an interest in history, his skepticism makes sense. The external details all look right, at least at first pass, but the letter is too crisp, too clean, and too perfect. It is too perfect in a way where real historical sources

too perfect. It is too perfect in a way where real historical sources seem to be intractably messy and hard to pin down. There is not a single sentence which does not create or contribute to an effect of more-than-idiotic sexual prudishness and hatred of sexual pleasure. I've read a number of historical sources where the author was suspicious of how deep a good sexual pleasure really is—and not one of them is like this. Some contain even more striking statements—but not one contains sentence after sentence that reads as ludicrous to the modern reader. It's not just a historical forgery; that's almost a surface detail. It gives the impression that someone Wanted to Take a Stand Against Sexual Prudishness, picked a time frame associated with Sexual Prudishness, namely the Victorian era, and wrote for no other purpose than to impress the modern reader with how absolutely ludicrous Sexual Prudishness in any form really is.

Fast-forward a decade and a half. Retro aesthetics have resurrected 1950's black-and-white photography, or photos made to look to us today like they had been taken in the 1950's. Photoshop is on the scene, and hobbyists can make photoshopped images and send them to the web or email. And one of the things passing around the net now is the, um, uh, *authentic* [The good wife's guide](#), complete with the, um, uh, *authentic* words "Advertising Archives" next to the retro picture of a wife happily greeting her husband. However convincingly ragged the *visuals* may look, the *advice* is too crisp, too clean, and too perfect in its offensiveness, and where every sentence in the other forgery—the alleged Victorian advice ("alleged", as in *Monty Python's* "alleged Hungarian-English phrase book") for brides-to-be—is apparently written to impress the reader with how ludicrous Sexual Prudishness is, *every single suggestion* in the more recent "discovery" appears written as if to rile up feminists today. (Even if feminists today might not approve of real 1950's advice to housewives, the 1950's-ish [Letters to Karen](#) is absolutely *nothing* like this.) It appears that someone wanted to impress readers with How Bad Sexism Really Is, picked a time frame popularly associated with How Bad Sexism Really Is, and wrote a forgery (even if "forgery" isn't really the point) designed to impress today's reader with How Bad Sexism Really Is.

These kinds of forgeries reveal something, but not about the Victorian era or the 1950's: people who pick the Victorian era or the

1950's as a popular emblem of something they hate rarely have a particularly empathic understanding of the time period in question, even if they do a good imitation of its external trappings. But that's only half the story. They do take in a lot of people and spread far and wide, and that reveals something about the audience that repeats them.

I'll leave treatment of Bold Denunciations of Sexual Prudishness to the last volume of Foucault's history of sexuality; what I am interested in is not only why [The good wife's guide](#) would be created in the first place, but why it would spread like wildfire, as it manifestly has. The answer has to do with a way we are kicking against the goads.

[The good wife's guide](#) is very revealing. It tells something about the sort of society where it would be so quickly passed on. It tells something about us.

If you've had the misfortune to hear enough dirty jokes, you may notice that when a "beautiful woman" occurs in a dirty joke, unless it's a feminist joke, she does not correspond to the psyche of *any* woman you know. In most dirty jokes, a "beautiful woman" is not a whole person, but something else, the other "person" implied by male desire in its unrefined, unchanneled state. The academic term is "implied other", as when Orientalist Westerners project onto the East the mirror image of what they imagine as Western tendencies: a projection that tells much more about the West than Asia. And here is fleshed out the "implied other" to a decently broad group of feminism as it exists in popular culture today.

If the question is, "Who does feminism see as the enemy?" the best answer is not "Sexist men." Nonfeminist men may be treated as part of the problem rather than part of the solution, and some feminist writing may speak fondly of castration, but the real enemy is wives who stay home, raise children, and may write [a blog about passionate homemaking](#), but don't want anything more, or rather "more" (the assumption being that an independent, at least part-time professional career is an acceptable aspiration for a woman, but being a stay-at-home mom is despicable). Feminists may take offense at nonfeminist men, but not like nonfeminist women. Feminism kicks against the goads. Of all the ways that Christians

kick against the goads today, I don't know of any that are as acceptable to people, or at least an agree to disagree matter, as feminism or Biblical egalitarianism. If I were to go through queer readings of key passages, I could say that the scholarship is misusing cultural context to neutralize the passages in the Bible where God vetoes their claim, and hold up the scholarship as an example of subjectivist adjustment of Tradition to fit contemporary ideologies. I could pointedly say that every single queer interpretation I've read uses cultural context as a drunken man uses lampposts—for support rather than illumination. And if I were to do this, the more liberal scholars would challenge me, but most conservatives and moderates would be sympathetic, or at least open, to my argument. But if I were to make the same arguments about Biblical egalitarian scholarship, I would hear cries of "*Foul!*", cries that I was imposing something political on the study. But I've spent a lot of time reading Biblical egalitarian scholarship closely—read through everything I could find in Tyndale's library (on one point) and written a thesis, as well as reading queer scholarship under liberal scholars—and even if the conclusions are different, the scholarship is disturbingly similar. And subjectivist scholarship is a red flag: it is a red flag for socially unacceptable queer scholarship, and it is also a red flag for perfectly socially acceptable egalitarian scholarship. The fact that egalitarianism is seen as a normal position, entirely consistent with being the sort of person who can say the Creed without crossing his fingers, may be a fact about our cultural and historical context but does not change the reality of kicking against the goads.

I've written above that it is a good thing to learn how to cook, for instance, and sew, and change a car's oil. Doesn't that mean androgyny? Well, I cook, sew buttons and have used sewing machines, change my car's oil, fix flats, and lift weights. Sounds a bit androgynous, and I would like to reply to that. (And not just by saying that I work in a male-dominated field where the odds are good but the goods are odd, and for that matter I've lifted weight machines.)

Neither masculinity nor femininity come from imitating what we think the 1950's were like, nor will they come from any other historical reconstruction. What they do come from is not easy to say.

Stephen Clark tried to answer that question in [Man and Woman in Christ](#) (online edition of a thick book). Clark is quite conservative, and he asserts that simple repetition of the past is impossible. He offers few neat boxes: he does *not* give a simple endorsement of a husband working and a wife staying at home. What he says is rather messy; the only clean statement he makes on that point is that the arrangement of "The husband works a full-time job; the wife works a full time job, and in addition she does all the housework," is clearly condemned (even if it is the most common arrangement). In step with his argument, feminists complain about housewives suffering from depression, this may be because having a woman destitute of adult company for over eight hours a day is *not* truly traditional; in older traditional societies women were in adult company during the day, and may have had much less depression. For reasons like this, Clark gives a rather serious analysis but seems to always end with messy recommendations.

This messiness is appropriate. I've tried to explore this in some of my writing: both in essays like [Knights and Ladies](#) and longer fiction like [The Sign of the Grail](#). And the best answer I can give after my own digging is, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

But why am I claiming that feminism kicks against the goads? Journalist Wendy Shalit's [A Return to Modesty](#) is first about modesty and second about feminism, and it is an exposé of how immodest living such as feminism has encouraged is a recipe for women's heartbreak. In that regard, it offers detail into a remark in a counselor's book on friendship, on how in years of practicing psychology in California he has seen every sexual arrangement you could imagine, and the more he sees, the more convinced he is that the rules God has given are intended to help us and not to harm us. Shalit discusses how sleeping around and hooking up rips up women: their modesty is still there, but it is driven underground and clogging the pipes with vomit. Not that she is setting out to criticize feminism: Shalit was delighted to meet Mary Daly and to have Daly sign Shalit's copy of Daly's *Wickedary*. But when feminism says that old-fashioned modesty and chastity are not good enough for today's women, Shalit says, "No." She exposes how abandoning the

protection of modesty is kicking against the goads. And this is not the only way feminism kicks against the goads.

There's an old joke about a boy whose parents were trying *very* hard not to raise him with any gender preconceptions; his mother worked as a pilot. Someone asked if he wanted to fly airplanes when he grew up, and he said, "No, that's women's work!" And that may be funny, but it is not funny to find out that when kibbutzes ran their experiment on raising children free from sexist preconceptions, the result of this grand experiment was children who were as confused as any about who they were and what it meant to be human. And there are other signs that the kibbutzes were kicking against the goads. Some of their best efforts to free women from traditional behavior kept finding more traditional behaviors that were

Let's return to what we are supposed to think is the only real alternative to feminism. [The good wife's guide](#) shows a caricatured "other" that we are to react against, and realize that a woman should be concerned for herself alone, should push back against traditional expectations. The "good" wife we are to react against has no hopes, needs, desire, or personhood of her own; she absolutely does not contribute to shared life with her husband except as an empty slave, and there is not a shadow of the traditional Christian "two shall become one" that can mean anything but unilateral absorption of the wife into the husband. And something of the fallacy of the excluded middle is at play: one gets the impression that progressive feminism, and [The good wife's guide](#), represent the two basic options: up-to-date feminism, and a caricature that is no closer to nonfeminist women's aspirations than a "beautiful woman" in a dirty joke matches the psyches of real women.

It tells something, not about the 1950's, but about us that today's pop feminism confuses a beautiful-woman-as-in-a-dirty-joke version of 1950's advice to housewives with a real glimpse into the soul of the Bad Old Sexist 1950's. To be a little more picturesque, [The good wife's guide](#) is the Bad Old Sexist 1950's as today's pop feminism would like to jack off to it, as the example of alleged Victorian sexual prudishness was before it. The joke ain't on the Victorian era or the 1950's. It's on us.

I wrote above that we shouldn't believe spam when it tells us that we

need replica luxury watches. Truth be told, we also shouldn't believe spam that tells us how empty our lives are without Viagra and its kin. I thought I knew several happily married couples in their seventies, and I thought I heard the consistent claim that they were more and more happily married as the years wore on, so that each decade of marriage was better than the last. But my old pharmacy knows better, or say they do; they clearly inform readers that you can't be happily married if you lose 17-21 year old desires. Or maybe the pharmacy is, in fact, *wrong*. There is a great spiritual force bombarding us; it urges on women a feminist duty of stepping outside of modesty and chastity, and into a world of heartbreak; though this is hardly feminist, it urges another kind of heartbreak on men bombarded by spam which hawks porn that is in the beginning as sweet as honey and is in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword, as those who have fought addiction to porn can attest.

God has created us men and women, and we are trying to escape this fact and ancient wisdom about how to best live as men and women. And we live in a time where, as in feminist fairy tales, we are working hard to subvert what we were given.

It still hurts to kick against the goads.

25. "Put not your trust in princes." ([Psalm 146:3 KJV](#))

Barack Obama may well have unearthly charisma unlike any other U.S. President, ever. I've never heard of anyone else needing to quip, "Contrary to popular opinion, I have not walked on water, nor was I born in a stable." It may be one thing to approve of his achievements or his policies, but it is another to start believing in him as one believes in God—such as "Change you can believe in," and "Yes, you can!" seem to invite. Of course it would be just as bad to believe in John McCain that way, only he does not have such an enchanting charisma, and it's a whole lot harder to confuse him with a Messiah. [The Bible](#), alongside human experience, warns about putting too much trust in political leaders, even when leaders were much less charismatic and people were much less inclined to look to governments to be their saviors. Government has its place, but please do not believe in it as you should believe in God. Governments will all ultimately fail us, and it's best not to be caught off guard.

If you believe government is not to be trusted too far, and your government fails you, you have a problem. But if you trust government as a savior and your government fails you, you have *two* problems. *When*—not if—something goes awry, it's really better to have just the *one* problem, and look to God for your salvation.

26. Waste not, want not.

For now, we've been taught to waste, so that it is normal to throw perfectly good things into the trash / recycle bin. This wastefulness has never been good for us as humans, but the poorer we get, the less waste we can afford.

There is a story about a young man who was on a boat who was sinking, and told his friend, "Help! Show me how to swim—I don't know how!" But the time to learn how to swim is not when you are on a sinking boat, and it is better to learn how to cut down on unnatural waste when you can.

27. Beware of subjectivism in the small.

In Orthodoxy there is a *watchfulness*: an inner mindfulness that guards the heart. Learning this watchfulness, however imperfectly, is a foundational aid in spiritual growth and repenting from sin.

This watchfulness helps uproot problems when they are just a little thought or desire, and uproot them as soon as possible. This applies to anger, to lust, and to the subjectivism in the small that is also called wishful thinking.

The saying, "Procrastination is the thief of time," is true, and it wasn't until I started fighting procrastination that I understood why people would say that—and finally realized how much work *and leisure* time I was losing to the useless time sink of procrastination. I still procrastinate some, but I procrastinate less, and that makes a tremendous difference.

On more of a microscale, there are times that I wasn't *exactly* procrastinating in the sense of dodging work with Facebook, playing games on company time, or making excessive non-professional conversations, but after I read [Jerry Root's study of subjectivism as treated by C.S. Lewis](#), I started finding subjectivism even in things I wouldn't think to hide if someone walked by. For one example, part of my job is troubleshooting computer software. When I had created some new feature and it didn't work, I almost always tested the

problem a time or two or three more before starting to investigate why it didn't work. The reason? However irrational, I was hoping that the problem would go away if I tried again. Not that double-checking can never have the right motive; sometimes trying again is the best thing to do. But my motive was wrong, and I was wasting too much time checking. My motive was wishful thinking, wishing the problem would go away so I wouldn't have to do the hard work of fixing the problem at its source, and this "subjectivism in the small" is no help to my productivity at work. As things are, I noticed a sharp productivity boost when I started exercising watchfulness and began fighting this wishful thinking.

I doubt if this is just an Information Technology issue. The advantage of learning to fight your "subjectivism in the small" is important enough in good times but all the more in a bad economy. [Proverbs 22:9](#) says, "Do you see a man who is diligent/skillful/swift in his work? He will stand before kings, he will not stand before obscure men." If you're unemployed, this is relevant to a jobhunt where it may be hard to stay on task after a demoralizing string of rejections. If you're trying to hold on to your job, this could also help.

28. Remember why you are on earth.

The Westminster Catechism asks, "What is the chief end of man?" and answers, "To glorify God and enjoy him forever." This is the question that sets the stage for everything else. It is an exceptionally well-chosen opening that puts first things first.

There is a saying among some Protestants, "Mission exists because worship does not." And I misunderstood it at first, but the point is this: God does not create people so that they can be missionaries. Absolutely no one is created for that purpose. Everyone is created, not for the purpose of being a missionary, but for the sake of worshiping God. However, there are some people who are not in a position to worship God; they cannot do what they were made for. *Therefore*, Christians are responsible for mission and some Christians should be missionaries.

It is in the same spirit that one might say, "Ascesis, or spiritual discipline, exists because contemplation does not." This work is largely about ascesis in its concrete forms, but God did not create us for ascesis; he created us to contemplate him: in the language of the

Catechism, "to glorify God and enjoy him forever." But we ourselves may not be in a position to contemplate God fully; we need the cleansing, the surgery, of asceticism. If asceticism exists because contemplation does not, all Christians are responsible for asceticism and *all* Christians should be ascetics.

But however important asceticism may be, it is not an end unto itself. Contemplation shines through it; for that matter, asceticism is what contemplation looks like when it puts on work gloves and starts scrubbing. Asceticism and contemplation are at the heart of the Orthodox maxim, "Save yourself and ten thousand others around you will find salvation." To Protestants, this may sound like a warped prescription for missions, but it has a lot to do with how [St. Herman of Alaska](#) and other missionary monks brought Orthodoxy from Russia to Alaska. Asceticism for the sake of asceticism is missing the point, and however much asceticism may contribute to survival, it's not enough to just view asceticism as a survival tool. Asceticism is for the sake of contemplation. Survival, missions, and ten thousand other things all fall under the umbrella of, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

([Matthew 6:33](#))

29. Use money, but don't trust it.

[Proverbs](#) says money is not to be trusted: "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death," "He who trusts in his riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf," "Riches do not last for ever," "Do not toil to acquire wealth; be wise enough to desist." Money seems like a way to control the riskiness of life, but part of human existence is that we will never be in control. We need to be at peace with not being in control, and be at peace with being under God's care.

God's hand shows more strongly and more plainly when we have little power than when it seems we can get along well enough without him. People who have no blanket of wealth, and those who face great danger, seem to see providence much more clearly. If praying "Give us this day our daily bread." is a ritual formality to us, we will gain, not lose, the meaning of these words if we can no longer buy a month's food at once. We may exhaust our money, but we can never exhaust God or his care for us.

If you have money, try to use it well, but do not fear that all is lost if

if you have money, try to use it well, but do not fear that all is lost if you only lose money. You may see God's providence as you have never known it before.

30. Dig deeper than "Eat, drink, and be merry."

The movie *Dead Poets' Society* enchants the reader with what may seem to be a tremendous summons to the fullness of life. And it is not an accident that the movie's celebration of life has the teacher showing students old pictures of athletes who are all dead. A form of "Eat, drink, and be merry" is quoted with warning in the Bible: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" ([I Corinthians 15:32 RSV](#)). This "exhortation" is no more an exhortation to true joy than students saying before a wickedly tough high school physics test, "Be sure to write your name at the top of the page, because that's the only two points you're going to get." G.K. Chesterton writes, "It is the *carpe diem* religion; but the *carpe diem* religion is not the religion of happy people, but of very unhappy people. Great joy does, not gather the rosebuds while it may; its eyes are fixed on the immortal rose which Dante saw." Chesterton lived and died decades before *Dead Poets' Society*; it's odd that his words in [Heretics](#) read so much like a reply.

However bad things get, don't believe that grasping all-too-fleeting pleasures is all you can get. Don't sell yourself short with, "Be sure you put your name at the top, because those are the only two points you are going to get." The best things in life, now as ever, are free: friendship, family, the different loves, God, grace and providence, wisdom, rightly used suffering. Some very nasty things may happen, and they may take away what we think are the best things in life. But it's good to remember what's important in life, and the best things in life are free.

31. Ignore brands.

One teacher asked his students, "Imagine your successful self in the future. With which brands do you see yourself associating?" He looked, and saw no raised eyebrows, no puzzled looks, and certainly no one offended by the question or its implications. All of the students answered it as a straight question, and all of them succeeded in identifying brands that their successful future selves would fit in with.

This teacher mentioned this in writing about how the brand economy

does the job today that spiritual disciplines did in earlier ages. He never to my memory used the term "ersatz," but identifying with a brand is all too often an ersatz spiritual discipline. Russian Orthodoxy is shaped by prayer and fasting, and America's orthodoxy is shaped by iPods and Coke. And people say, "I'm a [*name of brand*] person," and no one really seems to ever be offended.

Sometimes some brands are better: if you are buying an external hard drive, I would recommend Seagate over Western Digital. But I would really wince at saying, "I am a Seagate man;" I may appropriately understand myself as a man, as an Orthodox Christian, as having certain people for friends and family, and in other ways as well, but *not* define my identity by a brand of hard drive. And brand loyalty often exceeds what the products justify. You know all those Chevy fans' bumper stickers that show Calvin relieving himself on the Ford logo? The fanaticism goes well in excess of the functional superiority of the average Chevy over the average Ford, if any such superiority exists. Almost certainly one of the better Chevies is better than one of the worse Fords, and one of the better Fords is better than one of the worse Chevies. Even if Chevies tend to be slightly better than Fords, this is *not* a rational comparison of mere material tools. It's buying into an identity.

For some of us, the items we need to buy are almost branded: it's a tall order to walk into an electronics store and ask for an a computer that is unbranded. And for things that are available in generic, buying generic may or may not be the best purchase. I can hardly say, "Don't buy branded merchandise." But what I can say is, "Don't buy into the *mystique* of branded merchandise, and never let brands become your spiritual discipline." And practice all the classic spiritual disciplines: reading the Bible, going to church, praying, fasting, silence, giving to the poor, repentance, and the like. Brands are a distraction from these, and we need true asceticism, not ersatz spiritual discipline.

32. Limit your exposure to advertising.

Some years ago, I used to say that a television is the most expensive appliance you can buy. The reason? All appliances have an up front cost, and there are electrical bills to pay, and maybe repairs. But the expense is usually limited; an air conditioner may take a lot of electricity, but you pay your electric bill and the expense is paid

electricity, but you pay your electric bill and the expense is paid. A television, by contrast, costs more than sticker price, electricity, repairs, and perhaps today removal expenses when you want to get rid of it. A television exposes you to the most effective propaganda in history: commercial advertising meant to manipulate you to buy, buy, buy, and seek your happiness in one product after another, always discontent. An article from *The Onion* tells us,

### **Amazing New 'Swiffer' Fails To Fill The Void**

CINCINNATI-The blank, oppressive void facing the American consumer populace remains unfilled today, despite the recent launch of the revolutionary Swiffer dust-elimination system, sources reported Monday.

The lightweight, easy-to-use Swiffer is the 275,894,973rd amazing new product to fail to fill the void-a vast, soul-crushing spiritual vacuum Americans of all ages helplessly face on a daily basis, with nowhere to turn and no way to escape.

"The remarkable new Swiffer sweeps, dusts, wipes, and cleans with a patented electrostatic action that simply cannot be beat," said spokeswoman Judith McReynolds, media-relations liaison for Procter & Gamble, maker of the dustbroom device. "Whether it's vinyl floors, tile, hardwood, ceilings, or stairs, the incredible Swiffer quickly cleans any dry surface by attracting and trapping even the tiniest dirt and dust particles."

"The incredible Swiffer's extendable telescoping action has just what it takes to cut clean-up time in half," McReynolds continued. "Say goodbye to tedious dusting chores forever... the Swiffer way!"

Upon completing the statement, McReynolds was struck, as she is most days, with a sudden, unbearable realization that she has wasted her life.

Despite high hopes, the Swiffer has failed to imbue a sense of meaning and purpose in the lives of its users.

"The new Swiffer, as seen on TV, requires no spray or chemical cleaners, so I'm sure you can understand how excited I was to finally find something that could give my sad, short existence a sense of worth," said Manitowoc, WI, homemaker

Gwen Hull. "When you finish the clean-up job, simply tear off the patented Swiffer Cloth and throw it away-as easy as one, two, three. But when I did this, tossing the soiled, disposable Swiffer Cloth into the garbage can like so many hollow, rejected yesterdays, I thought to myself, 'Is that it? Aren't I supposed to feel more fulfilled than this?' It all felt so futile. I felt like that Swiffer Cloth in the trash represented me, my hopes and dreams made manifest. I felt like it was my goals and aspirations for a better life that were lying there in the garbage, never to be heard from again."

"I felt so alone," added Hull, loosening her grip on the Swiffer's convenient extendable handle-which can reach even the tightest corners-causing the product to fall to the floor. "So very, very alone."

Bridgeport, CT, homemaker Christine Smalls tries in vain to overcome her clinical depression using the amazing new Swiffer sweeper.

Hull's reaction was echoed by fellow Swiffer owner Glenn Pulsipher. A 45-year-old telemarketing coordinator for a Van Nuys satellite TV company, he said his recent Swiffer purchase has proven to be an ineffective void-filling measure.

"Ever since my divorce nine years ago, I'd been meaning to keep this place a little more clean and presentable for visitors," said Pulsipher, who last had a houseguest in April 1997. "But with all the different sprays and sponges you have to use, who has the time? But when I saw the Swiffer ad on TV, I thought to myself: Wow, all that cleaning power in one simple, easy-to-use tool! And such a bargain! I guess I thought that maybe if I bought one, my life would be easier, more fun, more special. Well, I thought wrong."

"Not that it doesn't work," Pulsipher added. "It does: It works exactly like they said on TV. But after using it once or twice, the sad fact was I no longer cared."

"Why would I?" he continued, sinking into his living-room La-Z-Boy to watch ESPN alone for the 478th time this year. "I mean, it's a dustbroom. What more is there to say?"

"Dust in the wind," said Pulsipher, his voice taking on a muted tone of resignation as the TV blared. "That's all our

limited tone of resignation as the TV blared. That's all our various pitiful and deluded human endeavors ever amount to in the end. My job, my marriage-dust. All dust. And all the Swiffers in the world can't sweep it all up."

Many Swiffer owners have attempted to bolster the fleeting satisfaction the product offers with other Swiffer-related activities, but to no avail. In the past four weeks, more than 40,000 aching empty consumers have logged on to [www.swiffer.com](http://www.swiffer.com) to download pages of "Swiffer FAQs" and "Useful Tips" on optimal Swiffer use. Also widely downloaded was the tour schedule for the "Swiffer Mobile," a Swiffer-themed truck-complete with promotional displays, demonstrations of anti-dust technological innovations, and a stated mission to "examine the mundane task of housecleaning under the keen eye of science"-which will travel to 20 markets across the U.S. this summer. None of these efforts, however, have met with anything but crushing, soul-depleting disappointment and failure.

The hope that the right product will one day come along and bring happiness to consumers' lives is a longstanding American tradition. However, the Swiffer's failure to fill the void has led some to doubt that any product, no matter how revolutionary and convenient, will ever do so.

"It's time we woke up and realized that the wait is never going to end," said Dr. James Ingersoll of the D.C.-based Institute For American Values. "The void is never, I repeat, never going to be filled by something we see on TV and can order with our credit cards."

For others, however, there remains hope.

"Just because the Swiffer and the other 35 new products I've bought over the past three months haven't filled the void, that doesn't mean the next product won't be the one," said Minneapolis homemaker Ellen Bender. "I just ordered the new HyperVac Advanced CyberCarpet CleanWare System, and I just can't wait until it arrives and completely transforms my flat, unsatisfying life."

Procter & Gamble offered its apologies to those who had pinned their hopes on the new dustbroom.

"We are deeply sorry for the Swiffer's failure to ease the crushing ennui faced by U.S. consumers, and we promise to redouble our efforts to one day develop a product that will succeed in soothing your tortured souls," a statement released by Procter & Gamble read in part.

What more is there to say?

Try to avoid the manipulative illusions in advertising.

33. Avoid Facebook at work.

Facebook can be rightly used: for instance, to log on, get a friend's contact information, and log off. And of course if you are your company's representative on Facebook, you shouldn't stay off of Facebook. But both of these cases represent an atypical use of Facebook. The usual use of Facebook is as an absorbing place where you don't notice the passage of hours. And there is something there that doesn't belong at work, and should at least be used in moderation outside of work.

Some people who know the history of technology may point out that email, and for that matter computers themselves, were things bosses tried to keep out of work because they weren't useful and they distracted people from useful work. Today it would be quite provocative, to say the least, for a company to get rid of office workers' computers as distracting and simply pointless for office productivity. And isn't it benighted to fail to learn from history and be superstitious about, in this case, Facebook?

It's *not* superstitious. There ~~may someday be a time~~ will almost certainly be a time where Facebook is no longer such an absorbing place, and saying that office workers can productively use Facebook will be as obvious as saying that they can productively use web browsers or email. And that time is probably just a few years away. But bosses who want to limit Facebook today are not being superstitious.

Robert A. Heinlein, in *Stranger in a Strange Land* has the "man from Mars," who is at first biologically human but raised on Mars, by Martians, in the alien world of Martian culture and language, come to earth and among other things kiss girls in the most impressive way. A little later on, an inquisitive host tries to understand:

"What's so special about the way that lad kisses?"

Anne looked dreamy, then dimpled. "You should have tried it."

"I'm too old to change. But I'm interested in everything about the boy. Is this something different?"

Anne pondered it. "Yes."

"How?"

"Mike gives a kiss his whole attention."

"Oh, rats! I do myself. Or did."

Anne shook her head. "No. I've been kissed by men who did a very good job. But they don't give kissing their whole attention. They *can't*. No matter how hard they try parts of their mind are on something else. Missing the last bus—or their chances of making the gal—or maybe worry about jobs, or money, or will husband or papa or the neighbors catch on. Mike doesn't have technique . . . but when Mike kisses you he isn't doing *anything* else. You're his whole universe . . . and the moment is eternal because he doesn't have any plans and isn't going anywhere. Just kissing you." She shivered. "It's overwhelming."

Now this is part of a Messiah story, of sorts, but a Messiah story where the hero kills lightly and without guilt, and encourages people to throw off sexual shackles: in other words a Messiah story as written by a sex-crazed, anti-Christian libertine. So of course, if this insight is expressed, it may well be portrayed in erotic terms. And as an insight from alien Martian culture which has nothing to do with earth. But portraying it that way is backwards.

This alien Martian kissing insight is in fact an insight that the older generation knows, or at least knew, well. When Walkmans were first becoming popular, one friend recounted to me, his mother talked about how if you were running and had a Walkman on, you were not being attentive to your surroundings. There is a basic principle of asceticism: a principle of being attentive that used to be bedrock to American culture (and, quite obviously, Russian culture) that when you are talking with someone, or working, or at church, or practicing a hobby, the moment is eternal because you don't have any plans and you aren't going anywhere. And we have more and more ways to dodge this spiritual lesson and have noise to keep us away from a

judge and spiritual lesson, and have noise to keep us away from a life where eternity is in our moments. And this is not good for our spirits.

But it's also practically relevant to work; a company that tries to stamp out Facebook at work is not trying to take on the job of your spiritual director; it is trying to make ends meet. Unrestricted Facebook use doesn't just cost time; it costs momentum and energy; it costs attention; it's a way to take bright employees and have them make poorer decisions and make lower quality work.

Being able to work in an office, or jobhunt, or work at home, is an area where this spiritual discipline affects success. If the stakes are survival, then this spiritual discipline becomes a matter of survival.

34. Don't try to wag the dog. More specifically, don't try to wag God. One of my friends has a print-out of two poems side by side:

**"Invictus"**

*by William Ernest Henley*

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

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

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

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

**"The Soul's Captain"**

*by Orson F. Whitney*

Art thou in truth? Then what of Him  
Who bought thee with His blood?  
Who plunged into devouring seas

And snatched thee from the flood,  
Who bore for all our fallen race  
What none but Him could bear—  
That God who died that man might live  
And endless glory share.

Of what avail thy vaunted strength  
Apart from His vast might?  
Pray that His light may pierce the gloom  
That thou mayest see aright.

Men are as bubbles on the wave,  
As leaves upon the tree,  
Thou, captain of thy soul! Forsooth,  
Who gave that place to thee?

Free will is thine- free agency,  
To wield for right or wrong;  
But thou must answer unto Him  
To whom all souls belong.

Bend to the dust that "head unbowed,"  
Small part of life's great whole,  
And see in Him and Him alone,  
The captain of thy soul.

Trying to be "the captain on your soul" today is often more of a Oprah-style touchy-feely self-improvement project than an abrasively stiff Nietzschean campaign. But the core is unchanged and the end is the same, and it is a real temptation. It's there when we make our plans without first seeking the Lord's guidance, and then ask God to give a rubber stamp blessing. The severity varies, but all of us do this at least a little. (I know *I* do.)

Peter Kreeft said that the chief advantage of wealth is that it does not make you happy. The statement may sound strange, but it is sensible. If you are having trouble financially, you can believe that if only you had enough money, the toughest difficulty in life would be taken care of. But if you have lots of money and you still have problems, you don't need more money; you need something more *than* money. And something like this—but dealing with much more in life than money—is at the heart of George Bernard Shaw's "There are two great tragedies in life. One is not to get your heart's desire.

The other is to get it." The first tragedy is the tragedy of seeing ads for the Amazing New Swiffer, pining for how perfect your life would be with it, yet despite all your longing and all your best efforts, the Amazing New Swiffer forever remains beyond your grasp. The other tragedy is getting the Amazing New Swiffer, finding that it really does have the Cool Telescoping Handle the ads say it does, and then becoming painfully aware that you have the same spiritual void as you did before you owned the Amazing New Swiffer. But these two tragedies in life are not the only possibilities.

The third option is the way of the [Sermon on the Mount](#). It is the way of letting yourself be clay, shaped in the hands of the potter; it is the way of trust in providence. The dreams we imagine for our success could be incapable of making us truly happy; but the plans God provides for our growth and maturity can give us a joy we would never expect. There was an Evangelical T-shirt that shows one Christian fish symbol swimming in the opposite direction from a number of predatory fish, and says, "Go against the flow." And if it is talking about what is wrong in the world, then the message is true. But there is another sense of "going with the flow": the lifelong and difficult struggle of cooperating with the flow of God's providence. It may be paradoxical that we need to work to go with the flow, but it really is work to go with the flow, and it really is a flow, such as an Orthodox priest-monk wrote in [Christ the Eternal Tao](#): which, from what I've heard, is like what I wrote in, [The Way of the Way](#) before becoming Orthodox—but better. [Christ the Eternal Tao](#) places the Fall in relation to the human race leaving a first tranquility and entering worry and becoming distracted with plans to arrange things our way. If we chase after our own versions of the Swiffer, whether or not we succeed, the chasing and the goal are marks of the Fall. You cannot get happiness either if you fail in your quest for the Amazing New Swiffer or if you succeed in the selfsame quest, but there is another option: to give up the quest altogether and live in something better. And that something better is Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Happiness can never come from trying to wag God. It comes from God wagging us: it comes from praying, not in order to change God, but to actively work with God changing us. Virtue is easy, much

easier than vice. Getting to virtue may seem harder than remaining in vice, but this is because we do not see how hard vice is. And something funny happens along the way. If we are wise, we see our quests to be the captain of our souls as sin, nothing less, and we repent of it. And we let God work on us, slowly shaping us. Some time along the way, we think of something else we did not think to ask for: God is the Great Choreographer and we have fought his invitations to happiness by dancing the Great Dance, often without ever recognizing the invitation. And second, in his work with us, in our situations, in our prayers and other ascesis, in our successes and failures, our greatest joys and our greatest pains, he is there, working with us, mending our spiritual diseases and freeing us from internal chains that were invisible us, preparing us for freedom. And what we find, long after we realized chasing after being the captain of our souls was a silly fantasy that could never satisfy us, we realize that God is preparing us for deep spiritual freedom: beyond a freedom *in* doomed quests, a freedom *from* doomed quests, a freedom not to have one's soul chained by chasing after the Swiffer. God is the Great Physician, ever working to free us from spiritual disease and the constriction of sin; God is the great Spiritual Father arranging everything in our lives for our freedom: beyond the freedom we know to ask for, another, deeper kind of freedom that we would never even think to ask. God ever seeks to free from chains we do not see how we can live without. And God is the giver who gives us ever better, ever wilder gifts than we ask.

It matters not how strait the gate, nor how charged with punishment the scroll: we turn to God with head ever bowed: and the Master of Our Fate shapes us to be, after him, *the captains of our souls*.

35. Never settle for ersatz sacraments.

There is something that might be called "sacramental shopping:" buying something, not really for the use you will get out of it, but to adjust things inside. This chief ersatz sacrament, and the ersatz spiritual discipline of consuming brands, are two major pillars in the ersatz religion of the ersatz god called Money. But it is not the only ersatz sacrament.

Many first world nations are working really hard to unleash the goodness of sex; and yet their birth rates are almost morbidly low

compared with nations with no pretension of such a "celebration" and "unleashing." The chief good of sex is seen as a pleasurable experience. If you say that the chief good of sex is that it brings life in the world, you are seen as a bit of a sophist or a slightly self-deluded fool. These are symptoms of a real problem, the same problems that are blared loud in spam hawking a range of porn up to and including smut that makes *Penthouse* look like Botticelli. (And, as mentioned before, Viagra ads that proclaim that our natural lust, even if we lay the reins on the horse's neck, is never enough: we always need to goad ourselves more, more, more.) We are trying more and more to get the ultimate sexual thrill, and somehow it never satisfies. And where an older generation would merely call using porn (and relieving yourself) sin, and serious sin at that, we *know* it as an addiction; men are learning the hard way that addiction to porn is as joyless a chain as addiction to some narcotics. All this is tied to approaching sex chiefly as means to pleasure, and used that way it is much worse than what happens when we use eating as our constant pleasure delivery system.

This is a much nastier ersatz sacrament, partly because sexuality runs to the core of our being.

The *only* way to win this game is not to play at all...

We need *real* sacraments.

36. Live the Eucharist.

Orthodox believe in seven sacraments, but you can also say that there are a million sacraments, or only one: the Eucharist.

I am not sure what really to say about the Eucharist; perhaps one starting point might be the Holy Grail. Respected Arthurian scholar Richard Barber wrote [The Holy Grail](#) that he began his research expecting a paper-thin Christianization of originally pre-Christian pagan sources, and came to believe that the Holy Grail in medieval literature centered on the Eucharist, so much so that the so-called secrets of the Grail were in fact the so-called secrets of the Mass, an orthodox spiritual interpretation of the Mass and its various details. I am not sure I believe him all the way; I'll get to that momentarily, but this adds weight to C.S. Lewis's and Charles Williams's Arthurian commentary where they talk about the Holy Grail absorbing into itself all the Celtic pots of plenty, a Holy Grail which is significant

precisely as the first fount of the Eucharist. Whatever other influences may be present in medieval Arthurian legend, it is a clumsy move to try to interpret Christianity as at most a superficial influence in the Arthurian legends and the Grail, and it really tells more about the reader than the text.

And I wanted to make an Orthodox treatment of the Holy Grail, and engage the legends. I wrote my last novella, [The Sign of the Grail](#), after reading a lot of medieval forms of Arthurian legends, and I believe there is more than meets the eye to the legends' presence in [The Sign of the Grail](#): if the narrative is dreamlike, it follows the Arthurian tellings of never-never land. And, sadly enough, part of my impetus was that I was studying in a theology program with not-very-theological theology; reading the legends almost felt like theology compared to my coursework. But I found out something during and after my writing: I succeeded, in a way, but found that I was trying to do something that was impossible, or rather didn't make sense.

In the days that the legends of King Arthur and his court began spreading, the Western Church discouraged people from involving themselves with "idle romances;" online versions of *The Catholic Encyclopedia* are no warmer; and the Eastern Church's response is more, "the holy what?" I had to overlook a spiritual foul smell to become engrossed in the legends, and the foul smell has become a full-fledged stench over the centuries—it's not just *The da Vinci Code*. Richard Barber may be right that the Holy Grail in the medieval legends was not taken from non-Christian legends and given a Christian resurfacing. But in today's Grail questing, the Christian dimension has shrunk almost to oblivion, and been replaced by more occult forces.

In the medieval legends, the Holy Grail is something elusive: if you grasp it, it very soon slips through your fingers. You may quest for it, but it is almost by definition something beyond your reach. It has been said that if the *definition* of dinosaurs includes being extinct, then it is true on purely philosophical grounds that no dinosaurs exist: if Jurassic Park were to open up, it would still be true that no dinosaurs exist: even if enormous, ancient kinds of reptiles were right next to you, they could not be dinosaurs *by definition*, because

they are not extinct. And this is very much like the quest for the Holy Grail. It is like King Pellinore in his pursuit of the ugly Questing Beast that would forever elude him. Part of the (implied) definition of the Holy Grail is that it is something you can't have.

Orthodoxy doesn't really have a tradition of questing for the Holy Grail, nor does it offer any obvious means to possess the Holy Grail. The only game in town is to *become* the Holy Grail.

The sanctification of Holy Communion is a mystery *en route* to the transformation of the faithful. Bread and wine really and truly become the body and blood of Christ. The Eucharist is not consecrated to remain in the chalice; it reaches its full stature only when the vessel that receives it is no longer a lifeless cup, but a living vessel: a living person. And that reaches its full stature in transformed believers and transformed lives. The wine becomes the blood of Christ, and becomes the divine life that is lived by the body of Christ, the Church. There are icons where the chalice is present: one layer of Rublev's [icon of the Trinity](#) is the Father and the Spirit on either side in the Heavenly reality reflected in earthly chalices. The chalice is easier to see in [an icon of Christ, the bread of life](#). But in these layers, not only is every chalice mystically the first chalice: we are made to be more truly the Holy Grail than the Holy Grail itself. We are to receive the Eucharist, and live it in our lives.

There was a Russian saint who authorized more frequent participation in Communion when hard times were descending on Russia. I am wary of treating why some devout Orthodox receive Communion almost every week, and others only on the highest of feasts, but whether Communion is frequent or not, it is a powerful aid for hard times.

37. Hope for God to be a cruel man, harvesting where he has not sown and gathering where he has not scattered (see [Matthew 25:24](#)). There is a Chinese saying associated with Taoism: "Heaven's greatest mercy is without mercy." And there are senses in which Orthodox would not say this: Orthodoxy decisively rejected Novatianism, which is an Orthodoxy without the principle of oikonomia. Both oikonomia, the principle of mercifully relaxing strictness, and akgravia, the principle of striving for strict excellence, are of profound importance. But there is another way in which God's

greatest mercy is without mercy. All of us have the spiritual disease called sin, and God the Great Physician will never stop until he has uprooted all of it. Sin is a spiritual cancer, and as long as we live on earth, we need to repent. And the Great Physician will not stop so long as there is one tiny tumor hidden in our smallest toe. In that way, the Great Physician who is also the Great Choreographer arranging for our good in hard times and easy is merciless: he is a cruel man, altogether without mercy. I've been through chemotherapy; it could perhaps have been worse, but it was one of the nastier things I've been through. But, in my chemotherapy and radiotherapy, the doctors and nurses weren't aiming to give me an enjoyable experience; they were aiming to give me my *life*, and I am profoundly grateful to them for this. Sometimes God's work with us is very pleasant. He wants to give us every good, and even his calls to repentance are meant to give us a host of good things, joy included. But all of us have the seeds of Hell inside us, and all of us need unconditional surrender to the Great Physician. And to those of us who hold on to sin because in our warped state we think it adorns us, God's greatest mercy is without mercy.

How then does God harvest where he has not sown? The Nicene Creed's opening words announce, "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible." The first chapters of [Genesis](#) proclaim that the world is God's creation. God has created everything outside himself: the very demons owe their existence to God as much as the angels do. Every fish, rock and tree; every good or bad person, every angel and demon, time itself—all these are sown by the Great Sower. Then what is there to harvest that God hath not sown?

The answer is that God has not sown evil, nor sin, nor death. And he harvests where he has not sown. The Devil killed Christ in the hour that darkness reigned, but this was the beginning of the three-day Pascha of Christ's resurrection, where Christ crushed death, the Firstborn of the Dead ([Colossians 1:18](#)), who opened the doors of death so that all might enter: the moment Satan seemed to secure certain victory was only the final sacrifice by which God secured checkmate. God did not sow the death of his Son, but he harvested where he had not sown: God harvested from the death of his Son the

resurrection of his sons, the saints, his whole Church. And the same is true in the saints' lives. The gulag where [Fr. Arseny](#) served was nothing other than the work of the Devil. God did not sow this, but he worked in it, and he harvested from it a saint's life that touched others. God did not sow those evils, but he worked in them. As "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" ([I John 3:8](#)), but not by turning back the clock and simply erasing them, but by moving forward and transforming them. And the story of [Fr. Arseny](#) is the story of God's triumph in and through his people, triumph even in a death camp. Have you ever met a recovering alcoholic who has been dry for years, and who shows a singular warmth and caring for others? Some of the most beautiful people I know have been recovering alcoholics, and God has harvested where he has not sown and destroyed the Devil's work. And the same is true of our sins and the problems in our lives: God will, if we let him, transform them and harvest where he has never sown.

We live in a time of unusual fragmentation; the postmodern age is more of a bazaar than much that went before, but one and the same God who harvests where he has never sown also gathers where he has not scattered, and gathers into himself. We were all made for communion with God, but sin has scattered us much farther than our expulsion of Paradise. But God is stronger. Even if he has not scattered, he wills to gather all to himself.

Must we allow God to be cruel? We do not have the authority to veto God on this. Some have complained about "The God I believe in would never [*fill in the blank*]," but the God we believe in surprises us and catches us off guard. If we correct God on how he may love, this is a problem, and sticking our head in the sand does not make hard times genuinely easier. Better open ourselves to the infinite mercy of a God who is cruel, harvests where he has never sown, and gathers where he has never scattered.

Fighting this will never help us, and certainly not help us survive hard times.

38. Pray all the time.

The *Philokalia* say a lot about the Jesus Prayer, and [The Way of the Pilgrim](#) tells not only of the life and survival of a homeless man

amidst many dangers, but of God truly blessing him. Much of his book is about him living the Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

39. Read the saints' lives.

I didn't really know what I missed until I started reading the saints' lives. Difficult lives are not the exception in the saints' lives: they are the rule. Yet the deepest thing one encounters is not this, but God's triumph in his saints.

[The Orthodox Church in America page for saints' lives](#) links to different saints each day, and it is an excellent place to read something each day. ([The Natural Cycle Clock](#) includes related links for the so-called Old Calendar.) Either of these can be bookmarked and revisited for a daily portion of spiritual nourishment.

40. Work hard.

There are different kinds of work in life: work that earns money, work at home, and spiritual work among others. We often pray for God to make life easier for us, when we should pray, "God, give me mountains to climb and the strength for climbing." Every kind of work has merit, and wisdom literature tells us ([Proverbs 6:6-11](#)),

Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer or ruler, she prepares her food in summer, and gathers her sustenance in harvest. How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a vagabond, and want like an armed man.

A lot of work we need to do is work without any chief, officer, or ruler: job hunting, for instance. The word "wisdom" in the Bible does not conjure up the image of a seer with deep, piercing insights; we would do well to read it as "skill for living" if nothing else.

[Seven Habits of Highly Effective People](#) makes an interesting point in its introduction. When the author looked through wisdom literature from different ages, he noticed a recent trend. All of the wisdom literature aimed for skill for living, but the most recent wisdom literature offered what he called a "personality ethic" that

sought success in superficial tricks and techniques. Almost all of the other wisdom literature recognized a "character ethic" that said true success in life is a matter of character and virtue that reaches to the core of our being. "Get rich quick" has been called "the perennial cry of the lazy man," and lots of ads on the web promise a secret that will provide lots of steady income but require little time or work. And the best response is like the wisdom books: "Consider the ant, lazybones. How long will you fall for these scams? Get off your duff, roll up your sleeves, get to work, and keep working!"

41. Go beyond work.

It is true, not only that virtue is easier than vice, but that the Christian life is a life of grace, a Sabbath rest in God: "Be still, and know that I am God" ([Psalm 46:10 KJV](#)). Someone said, "I wouldn't give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity." The rest on this side of hard work is only laziness, but the rest on the other side of work is Heaven, and it begins in this life.

42. Go beyond nice, but don't settle for mean.

Being nice is not enough. We in America work hard at being nice, at making other people feel good and at trying to avoid hurting other people's feelings.

But do not confuse being nice with Christian love. Love, like a person, has soft flesh and a hard spine. How a person feels now is not the only concern to love: a much bigger concern is giving what you can to the other person's growth for a lifetime. George MacDonald said that love is easy to please but difficult to satisfy, which is a much greater gift than nice. Life is hard, and people can have trouble believing both that God is in charge and that he is good when really hard things happen. But God is *both* in charge *and* good. The problem is that we have confused being nice with being good. We ask what is wrong with God when he fails to be nice, and the answer is that God has never been merely nice. He works for our good on a deeper level, concerned with discipleship and growth and doing better things for us than simply be nice and give us what ask when we try to inform him what will make us happy.

Our hard work to be a nice world may or may not last. I would not assume that nice is permanent any more than a booming economy is permanent, and some have suggested that nice will come to be

permanent, and some have suggested that nice will come to be replaced by mean. But as for us, we don't need to be merely nice, let alone merely mean. We need a concern for others' growth as people, and we need love with soft flesh and a hard spine.

43. Pay attention to the wallflowers in life.

One theologian, speaking in a chapel, told how when he was younger his mother told him, to pay attention to the wallflowers at a dance, not the eye-catchers dancing in the center of the room. The wallflowers were ultimately much more interesting, his mother told him. And, he said, she was right, and the lesson wasn't just about dancing. When they are considering what doctrines to explore the most, he suggested that we look at the wallflower doctrines.

This is not just a truth about dancing and theology either. Good software developers may use buzzwords on an as-needed basis when dealing with people who expect them, but in the best software developers' favorite professional conversations, the discussion is all about professional wallflowers that the best computer science has been discussing for years, if not decades. It is a *faux pas* to use a string of buzzwords, much like trying to show off your vocabulary by constantly dropping the F-bomb.

"Local" is one of the eye-catchers, and there may be something to it; there is a good case that our ability to make our own private worlds with likeminded friends from the internet loses something that was part of life when life was local because there was scarcely an alternative. "Green" is far from being a wallflower, and there's something to it. But turning off the lights (like reducing and reusing) was once part of the old-fashioned virtue of thrift before it was rediscovered as being green, and for that matter Christians spoke of stewardship before being green was such a watchword. Ages before that, Christian theologians spoke of the tie between humans and nature, looking on the natural world with respect. But the point is not just that local and green have taken a few moves from the wallflowers. The eye-catchers are not as interesting as the wallflowers.

There are other wallflowers in life, and they are also interesting.

44. Don't assume that because Church Fathers could not imagine the world we live in that their words are irrelevant.

The wisdom of the Fathers may be all the more relevant. It is true

that we have been able to cast off much of thrift like a shackle, but the words of the Fathers on thrift were not just because of economic conditions unlike ours; they are written because thrift is good for us as humans. The Fathers could not imagine porn as it comes to us, but what is obsolete about the words of [Proverbs](#) on lust is all on the surface: if [Proverbs](#) tells us that lust is toxic, these words lose nothing today. (Ask a recovering porn addict.) If our technologies and our culture give us more ways to indulge narcissism, the words of the Fathers on pride are far from obsolete. Old warnings about addiction to too much alcohol are *more* relevant, not *less*, when drinking too much alcohol serves as a gateway to meth and cocaine. And this is just some of what the Fathers say about sins; what they say about goodness is even deeper.

The Fathers represent advice that transcend their historical situation to speak to other times and ages. Possibly some of the details need to be adapted, but this is really a side issue. The Holy Spirit moves in the Fathers, they speak to human life, and they have much to teach us.

Some postmodern scholarship that I've read makes a critique of the philosophies that immediately preceded postmodernism, and then assumes, "without loss of generality" as mathematicians say, that nothing more needs to be said about anything else people have said in the ages before. It does help keep articles to a manageable length if postmodern philosophy is compared only to one other philosophy. But more is going on. There is a real temptation to compare a new trend only with what came right before it, and not consider that much older trends may have a better alternative. This is a loss; we need wisdom that has been accumulating for ages.

45. Store up treasures in Heaven.

The [Sermon on the Mount](#) speak to us today:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

If danger is looming, we may conceive of a practical response in

terms of laying up treasures: gold, which can be stolen, or stocks, which can crash, or money itself, which can fall prey to inflation. But we shouldn't be reaching for treasures in earth: we need treasures in Heaven: golden virtues that can strengthen us for hard times, community that can pull together, and kindnesses that may be responded to when we least expect it. And even this much is a materialist view of treasures in Heaven: storing up treasures in Heaven teaches us to work with the divine providence that we need most in disasters. It puts first things first:

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

These words are tied, if subtly, to their context: storing up treasures in Heaven gives us a sound eye, while merely storing up treasures on earth stores up blindness, the blindness of being penny wise and pound foolish. The last thing we need in a rough situation is for the light in us to be darkness; it is in disasters we need a sound eye more than any other time, and trying to solve our problems by storing up treasures on earth is simply not up to the task before us.

The [Sermon on the Mount](#) continues after this:

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and

tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.

Virtues are one kind of treasure in Heaven, and they are powerful in themselves: one Greek word, *arete*, means both virtue and excellence. But this last passage from the [Sermon on the Mount](#) says more. The [Sermon on the Mount](#) does not *need* to say, as I have, that virtues and other treasures in Heaven can do things on earth. The major point is that God looks out for us in his divine providence, and we are better building our lives on this providence than trying to do everything ourselves. We are better off living the lifelong lesson of trusting in God than trying to get enough money to replace the providence we do not trust God for.

It is a mistake to say, "Yes, but we do not live in a perfect world and I need something more practical." The [Sermon on the Mount](#) is concerned with practical realities in practical life. When it says, to paraphrase, "Don't make yourself bear tomorrow's stress today; each day has enough stress of its own," it is not telling us that it would be nice to have our lives be stress-free. It's telling wise advice for people whose lives are not stress free, and the more stress you are under, the more practical the advice becomes. Having problems in your life but being too practical for the [Sermon on the Mount](#) is like having a computer program that you can't get to work, but being too smart to read the manual or try to Google a solution on the web. It's a very *impractical* way to be practical.

46. "Stand back, and take off the shoes from your feet, because the place where you are standing is holy ground!" ([Exodus 3:5](#))  
*Take off the shoes from your feet.* In ancient times, shoes were dead things, made not from synthetic materials but from the leathery dead

skin of animals. And these words first spoken to Moses still speak today. If we encounter God, we must spiritually take off dead shoes from our feet: if we are to meet God, it will cost us our dead preconceptions and the dead idols that are a dead weight to us. These words come in Moses's great encounter with God in [Exodus 3:13-15](#), and when Moses draws near he is told to shed his dead shoes on sacred ground.

Today's New Age works very hard to dislodge dead preconceptions. What better way to strip off dead preconceptions than to celebrate any and all religions? To pick a popular topic—an eye-catcher these days—the Mayan "astrological" calendar is a cultural work of beauty; one of the core insights is that each day has an appointed purpose, and Mayan practitioners meet their spiritual leaders to work out how to best live the day as is fitting to its place in the cycles of their calendar. Orthodoxy has something like this: there is a liturgical rhythm which its people are to live out, and what I first read about the Mayan calendar in anthropology helped me to start living a real asset in Orthodoxy. Orthodox, among others, distinguish *chronos* from *kairos*:

There are two [Greek] words [*chronos* and *kairos*] that are both translated time, but their meanings are very different. Translating them both as time is like translating both genuine concern and hypocritical flattery as "politeness" because you are translating into a language that doesn't show the distinction.

as I wrote in [The Horn of Joy](#). *Kairos* is appointed time, time where moments are there with a purpose, time such as liturgical time highlights with its rhythms of seasons and days and the varying ways they are lived out. *Chronos* is time without this meaning, time such as a clock can measure, and in the words of one Orthodox homily, the time of "one damn thing after another." We have largely fallen into *chronos* and largely forgotten *kairos* even if we still yearn for what we miss, and the Mayan calendar did and does understand *kairos* extremely well. But something more (or, rather, less) appears to be going on in the sudden interest in the Mayan calendar. This something ~~more~~ less has to do with how New Age fails to really

remove dead shoes from our feet. New Age is like waterskiing: one moves along quickly, skimming along the top very quickly, where really removing dead shoes from our feet is like swimming: you fall in the water and stay in. What may be going on in the sudden interest in Mayan time is, as I wrote in [Technonomicon](#),

There was great excitement in the past millenium when, it was believed, the Age of Pisces would draw to a close, and the Age of Aquarius would begin, and this New Age would be an exciting dawn when all we find dreary about the here and now would melt away. Then the Age of Aquarius started, at least officially, but the New Age failed to rescue us from finding the here and now to be dreary. Then there was great excitement as something like 97% of children born after a certain date were born indigo children: children whose auras are indigo rather than a more mundane color. But, unfortunately, this celebrated watershed did not stop the here and now from being miserable. Now there is great hope that in 2012, according to the Mayan "astrological" calendar, another momentous event will take place, perhaps finally delivering us from the here and now. And, presumably, when December 21, 2012 fails to satisfy us, subsequent momentous events will promise to deliver us from a here and now we find unbearable.

The quotes are because the anthropology I've read talks about the Mayan calendar without making any connection to astrology, even if they find it beautiful and deep. I have run into New Age hope for a Mayan 2012 watershed, but it never discusses things like, "The Quiché [Mayan calendar-based] reality causes them to scrutinize each day and its character as it relates to their own character, their desires, and their past, as well as the tasks that lie ahead," as *The Dance of Life* tries to explain the beauty and wisdom. *The Dance of Life* is written to challenge one's dead preconceptions; that it does so in an occult way is not the point. No New Age hubbub about December 21, 2012 seems to really challenge the dead shoes we need to be freed from—certainly not the dead shoe of trying to escape a miserable here and now, an idol diametrically opposed to the

spiritual beauty not only of the Mayan calendar, but of the Christian calendar too. Whether the Mayan calendar should be understood as "astrological" I am not sure; certainly *The Dance of Life* with its occult bent never connects the Mayan calendar with astrology. But to ask the Mayan calendar to deliver an escape from the miserable here and now is to ask it to work against its fundamental beauty and its fundamental principle: the point of the Mayan calendar, like the Orthodox Christian one, is not to provide *escape* from the here and now but further provide us help to *engage* the here and now. However much New Age may offer to open our minds, what it gives here at least is further help nailing the dead shoes to our feet. All of us stand on holy ground. The whole world is created by God, and to God it returns. Can we escape? *Never!* [Psalm 139 KJV](#) reads,

Whither shall I go from thy spirit?  
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?  
If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:  
If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.  
If I take the wings of the morning,  
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;  
Even there shall thy hand lead me,  
And thy right hand shall hold me.  
If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me;  
Even the night shall be light about me.  
Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee;  
But the night shineth as the day:  
The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

The whole world is an emblem of God's glory: God's plan to share his glory with the human race is ultimately the glorification of the entire Creation, and God wills to engage us in the situations we are in. And his glory will ever shock us to remove our dead shoes and enter life more abundantly. There is no place we can flee from God, nor any place that is not holy ground where God will tell us we have dead leather shoes to remove. And taking off our dead leather shoes is lifegiving.

47. Take a cue from an older kind of fermented drink.

[Nourishing Traditions](#), which calls for a return to less plastic-y industrial foods such as was eaten in nutritional golden ages, has a curious inconsistency. She grinds an axe against what you could buy at a liquor store: her nutritional golden ages include colonial America, but in the "traditional" recipe for punch she censors rum and even substitutes something else to make up the five ingredients for an alcohol-free punch. Not that she is a teetotaler: she advocates another kind of rather different alcoholic beverages that are made by another process, "lacto-fermented" beverages made by a process that isn't found in today's commercially prepared beer, wine, and liquors. But, none the less, she grinds quite an axe against drinks that are commercially available. She offers no convincing, or even unconvincing, explanation for how negatively she treats modern drinks as used in her nutritional golden ages.

When I spoke with a friend who was a big advocate of the [Nourishing Traditions](#)-style movement, she openly acknowledged that this was an inconsistency and made no blanket condemnation of the modern drinks a liquor store sells (I think she said she enjoys a glass of wine now and then), but she did say something that [Nourishing Traditions](#) could have said but didn't. The older kind of drinks, home-made fruit of lacto-fermentation rather than yeast fermentation, satisfy in a way that yeast-fermented commercial drinks don't. And there's something to that. When I brought a jar of lacto-fermented water kefir to church for a special occasion, the remark I got, completely unsolicited, said it was satisfying.

I remember when I was in France, hearing some of the history of Champagne and how it came to be. Early on was discussion about how they raised the alcohol content; today's wine is 12-13% alcohol, but in the ancient world wine was around 4% alcohol. And I'm not sure I've ever had a lacto-fermented drink above 2% alcohol, but there is a difference. However much I may love a good wine, I have to be disciplined because if it tastes good, I could drink a drop more than is good for me if I don't pay close attention to how much. But the difference with a good home-made lacto-fermented drink is that the temptation to drink and drink is much less. It's not just that it would take much more of it to get drunk; even if you like it you don't want to keep on drinking because you are satisfied the way you are  
after a good meal

after a good meal.

This is of course dwarfed by the real motivation for lacto-fermented drinks, namely that they are believed to offer much better nourishment, (*probiotic* and all that), but I mention this because this is a microcosm of pervasive changes that have taken place and are taking place throughout the world we live in, and affecting all our life. If I may make a table of what this is a microcosm of, with one column for each vastly different fermented drink:

**Yeast-fermented modern Lacto-fermented ancient  
wine drinks**

At least a little buzz. Satisfaction.

Unwinding to technology like Unwinding to friends' conversation  
television and radio. or music played by your friends.

New Age exotic tripping through Orthodoxy's sublime and  
(attempts at) various traditions sublimated way of giving the  
and their practices. exotic.

The thrill of new narcissism. The joy of humility.

Postmodern pursuit of Growing roots, in beliefs and in  
philosophical adventure. life.

Cycling through new, short-lived Owning things built to last and  
possessions. intended to be kept.

Seeking good nutrition and Making Splenda your tool to lose  
eating to nourish the body. weight.

Going on a crusade to solve the "Just" being a member of society  
world's problems. and penitently turning the crusade  
against your own sins.

Having friendships that are Having friendships that last for  
beyond disposable: years unless something goes  
transactional seriously wrong.

Trying to make friendship with Learning to make friendship with  
people you choose. people who are in your life that you  
cannot choose.

Porn and related pleasures. Marriage and children.

We seem to be shifting further left, and this is not a good thing.

48. Prepare for losses.

Christ told St. Peter, [John 21:18 RSV](#),

Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go.

These words may be given to all of us.

The Christian Way is a Way of being emptied; its triumph is a triumph precisely *in* loss, a way of life resurrected from death.

The Way before us may be, as for St. Peter, "you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go." We may have enough to forgive now, but we may have much more to forgive in the future. If that is the case, the best preparation in the future is to work on forgiveness now, even if you make a mess of it as I do. Forgiveness is a way of emptying, a letting go that is connected to the Man who said from the Cross, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do" ([Luke 23:34](#)). And this forgiveness is key to opening us up to receive forgiveness: of all the points in the Our Father given as a model prayer, forgiveness alone is singled out for further comment ([Matthew 6:14-15 RSV](#)):

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Unforgiveness, trying to hold on to what we think is our due, locks us out of God's work to give us a greater good than we are wise enough to look for. But if we surrender to God in forgiveness, emptying ourselves, our emptying is in continuity with the emptying of Christ, who again ([Philippians 2:5-11 RSV](#)):

though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This Way of forgiveness, this emptying, is the Way, the Truth, and the Life who is Christ Jesus himself who gives triumph where we can anticipate only defeat. Christ's words to St. Peter announce a martyr's triumph, and Tradition holds that St. Peter was sentenced to be crucified, and said that he was unworthy to be crucified as his Lord was crucified, and asked to be crucified upside down: inverted crucifixion being the one form of crucifixion more excruciatingly painful than Christ's kind of crucifixion. But this is triumph, eternal triumph, a triumph in St. Peter's humbly emptying himself. And if we are emptied, if we forgive, Christ will triumph in us. And this may be the kind of triumph that God works in and through us.

49. Light one candle: it is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.

Some have said that a candle, such as Orthodox use in prayer, is an emblem of Christ: it gives light, and it gives light by emptying himself. Not everyone uses that image, but God is light, and Christ shone with the uncreated light as he was transfigured. The halo of light around the head of a saint on an icon is not just convention: it is there because Christ blazed with glory so that his face shone like the sun. And this same glory manifests, to some degree, in his saints. One saint, at the end of a holy life, lay on his deathbed with his face shining with the light of Christ, and said, "I have not even begun to repent." This is a microcosm of God's emptying victory.

Light a candle. Or *be* a candle.

50. "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and his perfect righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

*All else is commentary.*

All of what I have said above has real imperfections and leaves enormous gaps. But I would like to address one question: Have I said I was going to offer guidance for rough situations and pulled a bait and switch, offering spirituality instead? To answer that, I recall one friend in high school who said with some disgust that he wished C.S. Lewis had left his religion out of [The Chronicles of Narnia](#). I kept my mouth shut, but

the suggestion struck me as strange, even clueless, like saying you wished Newton had kept all math out of his physics. To dislike Newtonian physics may be one thing, but it betrays some confusion to say that you like Newtonian physics but treat the math as an intrusion, as if the math had been artificially inserted like zombies and ultra-violence into [Pride and Prejudice](#). C.S. Lewis was a man fascinated by myths and legends even before he became a Christian. Tolkein and others showed him his inconsistency in praising a pagan myth of a dying and rising god and then turning his nose up at Christianity as utterly trite; C.S. Lewis became a Christian precisely because he came to believe that the myths he loved all came together in Christ. Lewis crafted [The Chronicles of Narnia](#) out of love for all of these stories, and it is, to put it politely, a somewhat surprising suggestion to say that the story Lewis found truest and most beautiful simply does not belong in [The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe](#). And perhaps it is a bit of a surprising suggestion to say "Tell me what you can about surviving in a disaster, but recognize that your religion is irrelevant to this question."

Robert Heinlein, in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), wrote, when the characters faced a rather daunting emergency,

"...But I took other steps the first night you were here. You know your Bible?"

"Uh, not very well."

"It merits study, it contains practical advice for most emergencies..."

And this in a distinctly anti-Christian book. Perhaps the text goes on to a rather secular application of [John](#), but the Bible is, among other things, God's own manual for how to deal with rough situations. (And this is to say nothing of the Orthodox Church.)

## Saints Cheering Us On

The famous Hall of Fame ([Hebrews 11:4-40 RSV](#)) tells,

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who

speaking thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his burial.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the first-born might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land; but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given friendly welcome to the spies. And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets -- who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured.

refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated -- of whom the world was not worthy -- wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The image is of a stadium where athletes have run the full race, have received their crowns of victory, and now stand around cheering those who are still running: the faithful who are still in life's struggles.

This is not just the prophets and righteous saints from the Old Testament cheering on the first Christians; it is also the saints from the ages cheering on Christians today. If in America we have a revolution, and it turns out horribly, we will enter it with the prayers of the host of Russian saints. In the worst case, it will be an extremely difficult struggle, but there are others who have struggled before us and will stand, crowned in victory, cheering us on to join them in victory.

The text continues to call these saints, "a great cloud of witnesses." We do not know, for sure, what will happen, but whether we have a recovery or a maelstrom, the whole world, including the United States, will have the prayers of this great cloud of witnesses, including the vast army of Russian saints from ancient and modern times.

We have prayers, *from Russia with love.*

# The Fulfillment of Feminism

There was one time when I was sitting in Danada Convenient Care, waiting for a blood draw. A mother led in a little girl who was bawling, sat her down in the waiting area, and began to attend to all the little details: sign in on a clipboard, speak with the office staff, sign a waiver, present an insurance card. The girl was bawling because she had apparently slammed her thumbnail in a door. After a little while I came over and began talking with her. I asked her what her favorite color was. I asked, "What kind of musical instrument does a dog play?" (answer: a trombone). I tried to get her talking, but most of what I said went over her head. After a while, I realized two things. First, I was failing rather miserably to engage her in conversation; I literally could not think of many things to say that a child of that age could respond to. And second, she stopped crying. Completely. I was struck by the near-total lack of pain in her face as she looked at me.

Eventually, I was called in for my blood draw. When I came out, things were totally different. The mother was sitting next to her daughter, and paying attention to her. The daughter was drawn into her mother's attention. I said goodbye and left.

On another occasion, I was at a dinner at someone's house, and my eyes were drawn to a goldfish in a fishbowl. I asked the hostess how old the goldfish was, and her answer was followed shortly by my asking how she managed to keep a goldfish for that long. And I remember vividly her answer. She said, "I talk to it," and then stooped down and began talking to the fish like it was a small child. The fish began eagerly swimming towards her, as if it were trying to swim through the glass to meet her.

Love is a spiritual force, and I thought her answer was looney then because I didn't understand that there are more than material forces that can affect whether a fish is healthy. I thought that the idea of love or hate affecting how a plant grows made a great exotic feature in fantasy, but in the real world science accounts for all the factors in how long a fish lives. Of course it matters that the hostess fed the goldfish and kept the fishbowl clean, but the reason the fish was alive and healthy was because she loved it. (And she's a woman with a *big* heart.) And it matters, no doubt, that I made eye contact with the little girl and squatted to try to be at eye level. But the reason I was able to draw her out of intense pain was the power that love has. I can count on my fingers the times I've been in worse pain than smashing my thumbnails as a child; her pain was atrocious. What was strong enough to pull her out of that pain wasn't my posture, or anything suave at my clumsy failures to say things that were age-appropriate. What pulled her out of her deep pain was love, and I was delighted to see her mother, who had been so busy with a thousand necessary details, giving her attention and love to her now comforted daughter. The mother told me as I said goodbye, "You have a very gentle way about you," and I hold that story in my heart as one of my triumphs.

It's hard to pick out a theme more foundational to feminist ethics, and perhaps the whole of feminism, than caring. Many feminists understand feminism as trying to move from a world dominated by male aggression to a world nurtured through motherly love and caring. And I would like to talk about love in Orthodoxy after talking about aggression.

The term "male aggression" is used a lot. The word "aggression" has a double meaning. Narrowly, "aggression" means "unprovoked violence," a violence that is evil. But there is another meaning to "aggressive," when a doctor pursues an "aggressive" treatment, for instance. Here "aggressive" does not literally mean violence and need not be at all evil... but there is a connection between the two. There is a real reason why we speak of an "aggressive" business plan as well as an "aggressive" assault. Why does "aggressive" sometimes mean "energetically active," something that can be good, when the "main" usage is for something despicable?

Men are more likely to be aggressive than women. In which sense? Actually, both, and there's a link between the two senses that offers insight into what it means to be a man. Talking about "male aggression" is not simply man-bashing, even if it is often done in exactly that fashion. There is something spirited and something fiery that is part of manhood

There is something spirited and something fiery that is part of manhood, something that can be very destructive, but something that can be channeled. I don't think any of us need to be told that masculine aggressiveness can be destructive. But that is not the full story of masculine energy. Channeled properly, male aggressive energy means projects. It means adventures and exploration. It means building buildings, questing after discoveries, giving vision to a community. The same thing that can be very destructive can also energize a man's gifts to society. It can be transformed.

I would pose the question: If masculine aggression can be transformed in this manner, what about feminine and motherly caring?

Love is big in Orthodoxy. God is love. God is light, and other things can also be said, but he is love. The entirety of ethics and moral law is about loving God and one's neighbor. The entirety of spiritual discipline, which Orthodoxy as well as feminist spirituality recognize as important for sustained growth, is a spiritual support not simply to one's salvation, but to love. If my spiritual discipline does not turn me in love towards you, it is fundamentally incomplete. Spiritual discipline without love for others is self-contradictory as a friendship without another person.

What's the relationship between love and caring? Are they synonyms? There is a deep connection, but I believe that an important difference shows up in the question of abortion.

"My body, my choice!" makes a powerful and easy-to-remember political slogan. But nobody believes it, or at least people who have abortions don't believe it. Post-abortion is not about assuring women that it was just a surgery that removed something unwanted, but quite to the contrary is about helping women grieve the loss of a child. You may be able to make a legal argument that the child is part of the mother's body, or say it's just a *potential* life that was stopped. But trying to use that in post-abortion counseling is like telling someone who's drinking milk that has gone bad that the milk is really quite fresh. You might be able to convince *other* people that the milk is really quite fresh, but not the person who's actually *drinking* it. And women who have abortions are the ones who are drinking the rancid milk. In coffee table discussions you can deny that the death of a child is involved and say it's just unwanted tissue. If you're not drinking the milk, you can be conned into believing it's still fresh. But if you're *drinking* it? Post-abortion counseling helps women grieve the loss of a child, and for that reason cannot say "It was just a

*potential life!"*

If women who have abortions don't believe the rhetoric, then why does abortion take place? Quite often, these women feel stuck between a rock and a hard place in which there seem to simply be no good options. This is part of why the pro-life movement has made a major shift to offering compassion and practical help to people in that position. It's a difficult position, and feminists will often argue that abortion is the most caring way out. It is not caring, the line goes, to bring a child into a situation where it will not be cared for, and women should be caring to themselves by not saddling themselves with too much responsibility. And so the ethics of caring sometimes finds abortion the appropriate choice.

In many ethical frameworks you can get away with saying that a mother's love is one love among others. That simply doesn't fly here. In feminism, a mother's love is considered the most intimate love and a mother's caring is meant to be the foundation of a better way of living. It is feminists who have given motherly caring the greatest emphasis and the most central place, and feminists who most fervently defend what any woman who's had an abortion knows and grieves as the loss of a child. It's almost as if a coalition of historians and archivists were the ones most fervently defending the practice of burning old documents.

My reason for mentioning this is not simply irony. My reason for pointing this out is to suggest that something's wrong, and maybe motherly caring isn't strong enough to support the weight feminism asks it to bear. Part of this odd picture is surely rationalization: part of what feminists want is the freedom to live a certain way but not deal with its consequences: be sexually active and not deal with children when they don't want to, and if killing, or in today's carefully chosen terms, "reproductive choice," is the necessary price for freedom on those terms, they accept that price. Part of this is rationalization, but not all. Part of this is the weakness of caring when it is asked to do what feminists hope it will do. Asking motherly caring to do what feminists want is kind of like trying to drive a top-notch car engine to work. It may be a very good engine, and an engine may be *indispensible* to any functioning car, but things go much better if we have the whole car. I'm not just saying that abortion is wrong. I'm saying that if the people who bear the banner of "mother's love" as the healing balm for society's ills are the ones who defend that practice, we have a red flag that may point to another

problem: maybe caring might not do what feminists think it does. Maybe it's not enough.

So what would a whole car look like?

I'd like to quote a passage that has one teacher's take on love:

Then a Jewish law scholar stood up to test Jesus, and said "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus answered him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?"

He said to him, "You must love the Lord your God out of your whole heart, with your whole soul, with your whole strength, and with your whole mind, and love your neighbor even as you love yourself."

He said, "That's right; do this and you will live."

But the scholar wanted to be proved righteous before Jesus. He said, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answered and said, "Someone was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and brigands assaulted him, stripping him and leaving him half dead. And by providence a priest was going down that way and saw him and passed by, giving him a wide berth. Likewise, a Levite was travelling the same way, saw him, and gave him a wide berth. Then a travelling *Samaritan* came across him and was moved with mercy, in the depths of his bowels, and came over, and dressed his wounds with oil and wine, mounted him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and nurtured him. And the next day he gave a good chunk of his wealth to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him, and if he needs anything more, I will repay you when I come back.' Now which one of these three do you suppose showed himself a neighbor to the man who was assaulted by brigands?"

He said, "The one who showed mercy to him."

Jesus said to him, "Go and live that way."

(Luke 10:25-37, my translation) Cloud and Townsend's appropriately titled *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No to Take Control of Your Life* argues that this story is a good illustration of their version of boundaries, and that was when I started listening to some nagging doubts

about their theory. They said this was a good example of a measured response: the Samaritan made a moderate and limited response, got the Jew to safety and paid some expenses, and left. Cloud and Townsend ask us to imagine the wounded Jew saying "I need you to stay here," and the moderate Samaritan drawing a their-version-of-appropriate-boundary and saying "I've made a moderate response and need to move on." and saying "No," the way their version of boundaries draws a line and says, "No." And I have not heard a treatment of this story that is further from the truth.

The route from Jerusalem to Jericho was up until the eighteenth century a dangerous place with bandits, and one well-known ruse was to have one bandit lying in the way, apparently grievously wounded, and if someone stopped, the bandits would take advantage of that mercy to assault and rob him. Jesus was saying that the Samaritan stopped in a bad part of Chicago in the middle of the night because a voice in a dark alley said, "Help me." And the Jews and Samaritans hated each other; they didn't have, like today, a setup where people want not to be racist. For that Samaritan to help that Jew was for one gang member to stick his neck out pretty far for a stranger who was from a hostile gang. This is near the top of stupid things you *absolutely* don't do. Was Jesus exaggerating? He was making a quite ludicrous exaggeration to make the point that your neighbor is every person you meet and every person you do not meet, every person who you like, every person who bothers you, every person who is kind, every enemy and every pest you loathe. Jesus was exaggerating, in fact, to respond to someone who was trying to be too comfortable and make him pointedly uncomfortable. I believe the other person was expecting Jesus to draw a reasonable line of reasonable boundaries to his love, and Jesus was quite blunt about setting an impossible and unreasonable standard.

If we try hard enough, we can shut our eyes and neutralize this story. We can neutralize how uncomfortable it makes us; we can neutralize any way this story might contradict today's psychological dogma of boundaries... and we can neutralize the priceless pearl that this story is meant to help us find. And this story does hold a priceless pearl for us.

The point is not that if someone asks you into a situation that makes you uncomfortable, you must go. I don't really think the point is to set much of *any* kind of literal prescription for how far your love must go.

The point is that what is being asked is impossible. Simply impossible, and beyond your power, and beyond my power. It's a command of, "You must be strong enough to lift a mountain." If someone said, "You must be strong enough to lift four hundred pounds off the ground," that would be possible for some people with dedicated training. But the most powerfully built athlete who goes through the most disciplined training cannot lift a medium-sized boulder, let alone a mountain. Jesus isn't saying, "You must be strong enough to lift four hundred pounds," which is something that some of us could achieve through a gargantuan effort. He's saying, "You must be strong enough to lift a mountain," and he's exaggerating, but the whole point is that he's asking something impossible. Only the divine can love that way.

The whole secret hinges on that. The divine became human that the human might become divine. The Creator entered into the creation that the creation might enter into the Creator. Orthodoxy is not a set of rules, however good, to safeguard purely human love. The point of Orthodoxy is to be transformed by the divine love so we can live the life that God lives and love with the love that God loves. It is to live the life of Heaven, beginning here and now. It is to transfigure every human love so that it becomes divine love. Out of love, God became as we are, that out of love we might become as he is. And what feminism seeks in caring grows to its full stature in Orthodoxy.

There is something fundamental that is missed about Orthodoxy if it is understood as a set of practices organized around love, or a set of ideas in which love is prominent, or a movement which tries to help people be more loving. That has some truth, but the truth is more than that. The human cannot be understood without the divine; to be human is to participate, however imperfectly, in God. Orthodoxy can no longer be understood as a movement or a system of ideas and practices than a campfire can be understood as a collection of sticks. The sticks are not just arranged a certain way in a campfire; they burn, and you cannot understand even the arrangement of the sticks unless you are aware of the fire that is the reason they are arranged. Not only to be Orthodox but to be human is to be made in the image of God, which in Orthodoxy has always meant that we are not separate miniatures of God, but manifestations of his glory. God is not merely a First Cause who started things off; he is the blazing Sun whose light shines on everything that daylight illuminates.

daylight illuminates.

Orthodoxy is the fulfillment of feminism. If feminism is a deep question, Orthodoxy is a deep answer that responds to the depths of motherly love with the limitless depths of divine love. This is not just with love. More spiritual feminists tend to like the idea of synchronicity, the idea that materialist causation isn't the whole picture. Synchronicity is the idea that they're not just isolated domino chains with one domino knocking another domino down; the chains are linked in ways that go beyond dominos bumping into each other. There is a richer picture. And Orthodoxy believes all this and more. Orthodoxy has never been through the Enlightenment, when people tried to argue that scientific knowledge is the only valid kind of knowledge and that the kind of cause-and-effect science studies is not only valid but the only way things come about. People used to believe something richer, and in Orthodoxy we still do: that there can be reasons why things happen; there is an *explanation* for "*Why?*" and not just a *mechanism* that answers "*How?*" Dominoes do fall, but you will never understand the picture if you only think there are isolated chains of dominoes. All of this is part of the Orthodox understanding of divine providence. Yet providence is deeper than synchronicity. Synchronicity is a jailbreak; providence is a voyage home. Less flatteringly, synchronicity is providence with its head cut off. Synchronicity recognizes interesting designs in the events of our lives. Providence turns from those interesting designs to an interesting designer, and to some Orthodox, the idea of trying to be spiritual by delving into synchronicity and other themes of Jungian psychology is like inviting people over for wine and cheese and serving Velveeta. We have Camembert, we have Brie, we have goat cheese, and when Orthodox see how often "being spiritual" to a feminist means "digging into Jungian psychology," we want to tell you that Velveeta isn't your only choice! Jesus said, "You will know a tree by its fruits:" people's lives can offer a serious red flag about whether you should trust them and trust what they say. Orthodoxy has saints with better lives than a psychiatrist widely known to have slept with his patients in a relationship that was far more problematic than a mere case of raging hormones. Velveeta's the easiest cheese to find at most stores, but it's possible to find better. Orthodoxy deeply engaged the pillars of Jungian psychology far earlier than Jung did, and the reason we reach for something better is that there is something better to reach for.

Feminism senses that there is something wrong with Western culture, and is searching for healing. One of the strange things about Orthodoxy is that you realize you were right all along. Becoming Orthodox has been a confirmation of things I've sensed, and this is not because I was a particular type of Christian or because I am a man, but because I'm human. I believe that becoming Orthodox, to a feminist, will mean much more than an affirmation of what feminism yearns for. But that's not the only strange thing. One Calvin and Hobbes strip shows the two characters walking through a wood. Calvin asks, "Do you believe in evolution? You know, do you believe that humans evolved from monkeys?" Hobbes' answer is simple: "I can't tell any difference." The strip ends with Calvin chasing Hobbes. Orthodoxy might answer the question, "Do you believe evolution is the right answer to the question, 'Why is there life as we know it?'" by saying:

No, evolution is absolutely not the right answer to the question, "Why is there life as we know it?" For that matter, it is not even a wrong answer to the question, "*Why* is there life as we know it?" It is not an answer to any "Why?" question at all. It is an answer to a "*How?*" question, and even if evolution were the whole truth and didn't have any problems answering, "*How* is there life as we know it?" it is a mechanism to tell how things happen and not an explanation of why things happened. To say, "Why is there life as we know it? Because life evolved just like the theory of evolution says," is a bit like saying, "Why is the dining room light on? Because the switch is in the 'on' position, causing electricity to flow so that the light glows brightly." That's how the light is on, but the reason *why* the light is on is that someone decided, "I want light."

The theory of evolution doesn't answer that question. It might answer a different question, but the theory of evolution is not so much false as a distraction, if you are interested in the great and terrible question, "*Why?*" Instead of figuring out whether evolution is the correct mechanism, you might realize that it answers a different question, and start to ask the question, "*Why* is there life as we know it?"

"Why is there life as we know it?" is a meaty question, a you can grow into, and if you grow into it, you can learn about a creation that reflects God's glory. You can learn about layers of symbol and a

reflects God's glory. You can learn about layers of symbol, and a physical world that is tied up with the spiritual and manifests its glory. You can learn about many layers of existence, and the body that has humanity as its head. You can learn that the mysteries in a woman's heart resonate with the mysteries of life, and begin to see how a woman in particular is an image of the earth. You can learn about all sorts of spiritual qualities that the theory of evolution will never lead you to ask about. And you might learn that there are other questions, deeper questions to grow into, and start to grow into something even deeper than trying to answer questions.

So no, the theory of evolution is not the right way to answer the question, "Why is there life as we know it?"

And most of the time it happens without any philosophy or need to wrap your mind around some dense or subtle idea. Part of Orthodoxy is being caught off-guard by God again and again. It's being informed, "I can't tell any difference." It's asking how to pursue a great goal and learning that you shouldn't have been pursuing that goal in the first place. It's trying to find the best way to get all your ducks lined up, and asking the Lord's help, and realizing that the Lord is calling for you to trust him and let him worry about the ducks. *If* he wants to. These are two sides of a paradox, and Orthodoxy presents them both to everyone.

And both are part of coming home.

# **Game Review: Meatspace**

## Game: *Meatspace*

**Score:** **âœ— âœ— âœ— âœ— âœ—** **âœ— âœ—** (7 out of 5 possible!)

**Category:** First Person Immersive/Puzzle/Real Life Adventure

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**meatspace:** /meet'spays/, n.

The physical world, where the meat lives — as opposed to [cyberspace](#). Hackers are actually more willing to use this term than 'cyberspace', because it's not speculative — we already have a running meatspace implementation (the universe). Compare [RL](#).

[The New Hacker's Dictionary](#), "[meatspace](#)"

I am faced with the daunting task of reviewing Meatspace. The temptation is to say, "This is stunning! It makes [*insert name of classic*] look like a bad Pong clone! I want to play it again and again!" It's a *temptation*, not because the game doesn't live up to that praise, but because discerning readers read reviews like that and their defenses go up against a reviewer who is, to put it delicately, getting slightly carried away.

So I'll let go of the obvious temptation, and talk about how Meatspace handles physics. There's another game we all know where player slang for a smoke grenade is "lag bomb", because the physics of the smoke is so taxing that it slows the other player's computer to a crawl: a smoke grenade, aka lag bomb, is a cheap way to half-paralyze other players. Maybe that's an extreme example, but haven't we all dealt with games where things get choppy (maybe just a little) when there's a lot going on?

That doesn't happen in Meatspace. End of discussion. Period. For one example, one of a million little effects done *perfectly* is a squirrel running across your path. It's a throwaway effect, really: the game would appear quite convincing without it, but every single detail, from how the furry little body changes shape as it moves to the artificial intelligence controlling its motion to every single perfectly rendered hair, is flawless. Trying to find something that works as a lag bomb simply doesn't work. Move over, physics engines that have a reasonably convincing rag doll effect. Move over, for that matter, the supercomputers I used at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications. The physics is absolutely stunning.

But to say that and stop there is to paint a deceptive picture. Very deceptive. The physics and the graphics are the best I've seen, but there is more to the game than the physics. Many players don't give the physics a

second thought. However well done the physics may be, and however stunningly advanced, the physics is one piece among a million. A beautiful piece, admittedly, but not even one of the biggest. At least to most players; there are some players who play only for the sight and sound aspect, but you can play the game well without those things even being much of a consideration. As impressive as the physics are, and as impressive as every sensory effect is, it would be deceptive at best to say that the game is driven by sight and sound.

In *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (the book, but unfortunately not the movie), Zaphod Beeblebrox is drawn towards the Total Perspective Vortex, which we learn is a horrifying death, before learning *why* it is a horrifying death. The Total Perspective Vortex shows a person's absolute (in)significance within the universe as an insignificant and forgettable item in a universe that is vast beyond measure. And that is such a horrifying experience that people die from the trauma. Except that Zaphod walks into the Total Perspective Vortex and walks out not only not dead, but contented, happy, proud, and even more full of himself than usual.

What has been happening is that Zaphod has been in an alternate universe, and more specifically an alternate universe that completely revolves around him. *He* is the most important feature of the universe, and the universe knows it. Had he been thrown into the *real* universe's Total Perspective Vortex, he would have been destroyed by it.

And in fact with the other computer games I've played and written, the player is the center of the universe. And that's not the end of it. The universe revolves around the player, and in fact nothing is put into the game but things that are for the player. In a room in a first person shooter, there are millions and in fact billions of ways to see the room. But, if there is a player in the room, only one of those perspectives or angles is calculated: the player's. Everything else is simply ignored. If there isn't a player in the room, the room might as well not be visible. And the rooms themselves exist for the player. The player is a good deal more than the center of the universe: if it's not there for the player, it's not there.

Maybe I've been the center of the universe in other games I've played. In Meatspace, I am *not* the center of the universe. Meatspace has such an immense, fathomless universe that you or I could never be its center.

In Meatspace, if I am in a room and I can see, the light goes just as well where I can't see it as where I can see it. If I leave the light on and walk out of the room, the room is visible—the physics calculations go on—just as well as I am in the room. There are places I could get to, and places I could never get to, and both are developed in full detail—even though there are many more places I couldn't get to than places I could (conceivably) travel to. When I play the game—or, to be more exact, when I *join* the game—there are billions of others in the game, the vast, vast majority of whom have no idea that I am there. If I'm the center of a game's universe, the universe is miserably small. In Meatspace, there is a universe with so many stars that no one inside the game knows exactly how many, and one planet on one of those stars is a rich enough world that no matter how long you played you could never see more than a tiny slice of its treasures.

And AI in the game... To talk about artificial intelligence, I need to draw an analogy with anime. When people watch anime, they are not so imperceptive that they think that the pictures look exactly like people, or cars, or whatever. What they do is cooperate with pictures that most people would never confuse with the real thing, and make believe with some not-very-realistic cartoons, and in their minds give something that isn't really there. The pictures certainly *suggest* people, or whatever else they are supposed to represent. But people watching it cooperate and overlook some rather vast differences between the pictures and what people pretend the pictures are.

In games, the artificial intelligence is like this. You can pretend that you're really having a conversation, or even that the non-player characters move around in a natural way. You can cooperate with the artificial intelligence the way anime enthusiasts cooperate with the cartoon. But you're being generous.

I didn't have to pretend the Meatspace people were intelligent. They *were* intelligent, without my pretending. The game was much more interesting than if the universe, and everybody's life, revolved around me. People had an infinite wealth of experiences, stories, goals, projects, desires, habits, and I may have been part of the picture, but the picture was far bigger than me. When I talked with people, I was not pretending they were intelligent. There was no need. I was stepping into a larger world. In a fantasy world, characters talk about selling magic items,

rumors, joining a party, and other things that revolve around a cramped player. I can't list all the things people talk about in Meatspace (my hard drive only has 30 gigabytes of free space), but talking with another person is an encounter with a larger world that includes more than your priorities. The way other people appear in Meatspace is something I've never seen in another game: an opportunity to step into something deeper and vaster than "Me! Me! Me!"

And this is deceptive, because it generally describes something in a game where nothing is generic—everything is always specific. I'd like to give a slice of specifically what I encountered.

I went through a meandering course that took me through shops with sundry wares, ended up purchasing a few square feet of something very much like leather, and settled down at a place where I could get a food ration. Except "food ration" is a generic and therefore inappropriate term; they did not sell me a "food ration", but (in this case) a delightfully spiced beef curry with vegetables and rice.

As I was waiting for them to make my food, there were pictures around. There was one picture of a beautiful Asian woman sitting on a low stone wall in front of a French formal garden and chateau, one picture of a beautiful Asian woman sitting on a camel in front of an Egyptian pyramid, and one picture of a beautiful Asian woman sitting against a powerful red sports car. There were other pictures obscured by stacked boxes of soda. The women, as well as being beautiful and wearing flattering Western clothes, had the general build and almost the complexion of a Western ideal of beauty.

I had seen this kind of artwork in previous levels of Meatspace—in one large area, there was simply no other kind of picture you could buy on a calendar—but I'd always been puzzled by it. This time, there was something else I could see. They were almost like religious icons. This is not to say that people specifically believed religious doctrines about them, or that there was some failure of perceivedly due reverence in stacking boxes of soda in front of them, or some other things like that, but it is to say that they aren't just pictures of what they show. What they show is not only exotic but the emblem of something transcendent that's shining through. And I can be saddened by some things about them—those pictures can easily slide into the pornographic—but there is something I was saddened by that I am no longer bothered by.

The image of beauty and transcendence is Western much for some of the same reasons that (for a tongue in cheek example) we have a Great White Ninja played by Chris Farley in *Beverly Hills Ninja*. The West is exotic to the East, and the East is exotic to the West. The pictures are misunderstood if they are not seen as a sort of stained glass window that people look at because they see something shining through it.

There's probably a lot more to be said. If I spent several more years of play just to investigate the question, I might also be able to tell you why the shops allowed me to purchase about a square yard of an artificial surrogate for leather, and a few yards of cord, for less money than I would earn in an hour. For now, my game play has included little research into how communities can produce or fail to produce wealth. I just know enough to know that a detail like that, like the kind of system where there are poor people who eat meat with every meal, is a balancing act that has never before been managed in two and a half million years of human community, and quite probably a balancing act that will not survive longer than its civilization, any more than a tree can keep growing once its river runs dry.

There is something about the Meatspace levels we find ourselves in that makes it harder to see the gems around us. The medieval and the Arthurian looks a certain way to us after they no longer exist. What do things look like if we look at our placement in Meatspace as it might appear when our technological society is but a memory?

My avatar (but one could take a long time explaining how it is more than an avatar) was just in a place with Gothic lettering on a sign on the ground, saying, "Spaccarelli Meditation Garden." A pale, almost luminous statue of the Virgin overlooks a waterfall, rocks, plants, and a bench. The garden is small, but in its enclosed space one can be drawn into the quiet of the waterfall's song, forget about the outside world, even the nearby Gothic buildings—Gothic buildings that did not exist in the Middle Ages but do exist on a level that didn't exist in the Middle Ages. I have since moved to a building that combines the Gothic with the modern: I can see stonework that evokes the Gothic, and I see it through a glass wall which would have been extremely unlikely at a time when glass cost as much as a precious metal.

Some players entered the game wishing they were set in the future instead of the past—anything but where they are now. What would my life have been like if I were born in the Middle Ages? That's simple enough. I

have been like if I were born in the Middle Ages? That's simple enough. I would have died in infancy, and my mother with me. Usually when I imagine myself in the Middle Ages, I take any number of things for granted.

The Middle Ages—the knights in armor of Arthurian legend, a picture which becomes even more interesting when it is deepened with scholarly resources to include a different way of perceiving time and space, the shadow of Plato, minstrels singing love songs, precursors to scientific method which become all the more interesting if one looks not at what they became but what they came from—all of this makes for a lost world that is all the more haunting because it can only be entered as a memory.

The character I play is studying theology at a university. "University" means a tradition that began in the Middle Ages, and it means living in community with other students and scholars, free to use technology but always connecting face-to-face and meeting as flesh and blood. As well as the older kind of university, the technology in Meatspace has allowed another kind of education which is a new enough possibility that many players remember when it would have been impossible. In the new model, a student may never meet any of his teachers; there is no sense of living together in community and no real sense that a path or way which has defined teaching since before the ancients is necessary. Not everyone in the ancient model understood or even would accepted the idea that a university should be an embodied community. But the only alternative, the older kind of correspondence school, never enjoyed the same prestige. Now there is another model, not so much another kind of community as a way to substitute for community and embodied presence, and it is gaining a massive ground in a short time. It is a real threat to the older university.

Given the rapid ascent of the "bodiless university", it seems to me quite possible that by the end of my game, I will have seen the old order of a university as an embodied community as it has been since its medieval birth, will have vanished as the horse-drawn carriage vanished after Henry Ford introduced what seemed to simply be another option (besides riding a horse). Perhaps this will never happen, but if you consider how much could vanish, and how much is easy to take for granted, the scholarly community has something as hauntingly beautiful as the knight in shining armor, or perhaps more beautiful, and this is not only because the university is a medieval institution and some

universities have Gothic architecture. The roots run much deeper than that. And that is only one slice of the game—a rather small slice, all things considered.

Technology in this area of the game is interesting, and more importantly than just the technology, the cultural forces surrounding technology are interesting. They hold a tragic beauty, in its own way as tragic and as beautiful as the tale of Arthur's death: two armies stood across from each other, and each had been ordered not to attack unless the other side drew a sword. Then one soldier saw a snake in the grass, drew his sword to protect himself. Then the battle began, and King Arthur was mortally wounded. On the side of technology, the community had achieved technology that opened up possibilities that never existed before partly because it had oriented itself toward technology as no such community had done before. That made for a sorcerer's bargain that made it difficult to perceive other kinds of beauty in other cultures—or for that matter, their own. The full cultural story—were it possible to fully understand—is even deeper in its tragic beauty than the bittersweet hypothesis of a disembodied university opening up something new while hurting the older tradition. One cannot seriously examine technology without seeing its power—and even its *beauty*—yet in this society, it is a minority at best who know what it means, and what the beauty would consist of, for a society ordered around other principles like contemplation.

Yet to say that is silly. It's like reviewing a chess program by describing the art history behind the pictures representing the pawns. Interesting, perhaps, and perhaps impressive, but it falls short of the mark, as does any serious attempt to review Meatspace. I haven't discussed 99% of an expanse of pavement stretching as far as the eye can see and then further, nor a room that lets me look out over trees and buildings as if I were suspended in the sky, nor a melting pot which combines the wealth of Africa, indigenous Americans, Europe, and Asia and which is believed to be the birthplace of hip hop, nor indeed what it means to be in an outer borough in the "capital of the world," nor why some dismiss the Bronx as being not a very nice place to live. I believe I have deeply failed to capture the global spirit of Meatspace because I gave too little attention to the unique local character of my level—and you cannot play Meatspace without encountering such a unique local character. To play Meatspace is to enter a world rich with apples and

character. To play meatspace is to enter a world rich with apples and appearances, books and buttercups, children and cats, drivel and daydreams, electronics and excellence, fables and fairy tales, grandeur and giggles, horses (yes, they still exist!) and houses, igloos and imagination, jumping and justice, kites and katana, languages and laughter, microscopes and megaphones, noses and noise, operas and obverses, porpoises and porcupines, quiet and quickness, roaches and Russia, Swiss Army Knives and spirit, transportation and tummies, understanding and understatements, vowels and vices, water and wisdom, xanthan gum and xylophones, yule logs and youth, zebras and zits. It is far beyond my power to describe them.

# A Glimpse Through a Crystal

I lay on my bed, half-awake, half-asleep, the spectres of dreams beginning to flit through my mind. I saw a castle, a bog, a car with computer screens for its wheels, and many other fleeting images before my mind, when the forms and images began to coalesce.

I saw myself a little boy, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, filthy, and clothed in tattered rags. I was at the end of a pathway, at a pair of massive iron doors, set in a wall of granite that reached as far and as high as the eye could see. On these doors were bronze knockers. I reached, and struck the door; it resounded, as of thunder. I struck the door a second time; it resounded again, and I could sense something — a presence? I know not how to name it. Then my hand reached and knocked the door a third time, and the sound echoed, grew louder, stronger. I stood in place only because I was too terrified to run, and then a blast of light seared the air and shattered the doors. A god came out — he looked majestic enough to be a god, although I could not see his face, for it was covered with a veil — and reached his hand down to me, and said, "Welcome, traveler. I am come to show you the world that is to come. I am to show you Heaven."

I stared in awe and fear, a thousand questions on my mind. And he stood, with a repose that drove away fear. This time, something of the little boy was not only as I saw myself appear on the outside, but inside me; I somehow lost my guile and dignity, and said, "You know what every theologian dreamed of. Can you give me theology from Heaven?"

He laughed, a laugh that burned me and yet was somehow good. He said, "I am sorry, Jonathan. I cannot give you that, because there is no theology in Heaven. It isn't needed. It is one of the brightest lamps that is no more because the Lamb of God himself is our light. When the perfect

no more because the Lamb of God himself is our light. When the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. Did you want an answer to some area that Christians debate?"

I thought, and answered truthfully, "No. I — I don't know how to explain it. I want something bigger than that."

The god looked at me, and said, "You have answered well. Calvin, Beza, and Arminius are all up here, all in accordance with each other, and none of them has changed his mind. At least not over the points that Calvinists and Arminians debate. There were plenty of other points where they were wrong. Theology is work well worth doing; it contributes to God's glory, but the best of theologians make quite a few errors. Keep seeking the heart of God, the something bigger, and you will find it. What else do you want to know?"

"Do you have laughter still, I hope?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Could you tell me a few jokes from Heaven?"

"No. I will not mock you with things that are too heavy for you. Your funniest jokes have the barest seed the full-grown plant that lives in Heaven and nourishes everyone; you would be destroyed by our humor."

I looked around, and saw a faint emanation of light from beyond the doorway, a vanishing light; mist and darkness were beginning to appear, and the image looked vague and hazy. I asked, "Why can't I see?"

The being before me said, "You don't see. Or, rather, I am seeing with you and for you. Your eyes cannot bear the load of even my veiled face. I appear to you as you are asleep, beginning to dream, but no such thing exists with us. Sleep is an image of death, and has no place in Heaven. Yet only when you are sleeping is your guard down low enough to let Heaven in."

I asked, "Why should I be granted the special privilege of seeing Heaven?"

He said to me, "It is not nearly so rare a privilege as you think. Heaven is breathed by much of art, literature, music, by friendships, deeds, prayer; in many of these things, the people have insights of Heaven, only not consciously. A great many works you ignore breathe Heaven in a way you will never come close to. The Father is dealing with you as he chooses to deal with you, just as he is dealing with others as he chooses to deal with them. Are you ready to come in?"

I hesitated and said, "One more question. Theology won't exist in

Heaven; laughter will exist aplenty, too real for me to bear its form. I have some guesses about mathematics, which I will not venture to guess. Will I see anything that I know in Heaven?"

He said, "Yes, indeed, a great many things. You will come to see things in Heaven that will make you wonder how you ever saw them on earth without seeing Heaven in them. The custom among believers of holding hands when praying — community and touch (yes, I know you've written a treatise on touch) naturally accompanying communion with God — exists here, filled with the resurrection life as never before. The blessed here who join hands in prayer are totally present to God and totally present to each other — save that it is not only soul-body touching soul-body, but resurrected spirit-body touching resurrected spirit-body. It is a form of communion with God and man. At least that is as much of it as I can tell you in the words of your language. You who wield your language with skill and power have struggled with its limitations, while still a mortal who has never touched the lifegiving energy of the Great River — nor shall you see it tonight. You may see Heaven when you are with me, as you may see Brazil by riding about Rio de Janeiro for an hour on a bus — that is to say, you cannot see one part in a thousand of what is there, nor can you comprehend one part in a thousand of what you see. You will still learn much. Jonathan, you are really not that far off from joining us; your life on earth is passing, fleeting, however many times it may appear to drag; when you will die, you will look around you and say, 'Am I in God's presence already? That was short.' Then you will drink in full from the wellspring of truth —

"Jonathan, I know why you thought but did not ask about mathematics. Mathematics exists here, as an art form — you were right when you thought of all mortal mathematics having to pass through the gates of finiteness. It has to be decidable in a finite time. That is no longer part of man; we can look and immediately know the answer to any of your great unsolved questions. As to how there can still be mathematics when every person can immediately see the answer to the hardest question — I can't explain it to you, but I assure you that God provides an answer to that more stunning than anything a mathematician on earth will ever know. Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has any mind imagined what God has done with the things his children treasure.

"Come, take my hand. We will pass through the doorway together."

I gasped as he took my hand. It was as if I was holding a burning coal

I gasped as he took my hand. It was as if I was holding a burning coal. I looked at my hand, and saw to my surprise that I was looking at the hands of a man again, one whom the fire did not wound. Then the god gave me a pull, and I passed through the blazing portal.

It was with a disappointment that I looked around and saw that I was only in a candy store.

I looked at the wall of glass bowls skeptically, not being in a particular mood for candy. My host said, "Come on! Take as much as you want! It's on me." I took a colorful assortment of candies, and then went out into a sunny field. We stood, looked at the clouds for a while, and then dove into a pool of water. After swimming, he asked me, "Do you want to come to an amusement park? There are roller coasters there unlike any you've seen on earth."

I hesitated, and said, "This isn't much like what I expected in Heaven. This is like what one of my professors called a Utopia of spoiled children. I expect to see pleasure in Heaven, but if Heaven only offers early pleasure — is this all there is to Heaven?"

My host looked at me and said, "You are quite the philosopher. Pleasure is not all there is to Heaven, but God told me to bring you in by this gateway. You need to become as a little child to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and there is something a little boy sees when he is told, 'In Heaven you can eat all the candy you want,' that you do not. Become as a little child. Would you like some cotton candy?"

I tried to submit to God's will; I'm not sure I got my attitude right, but I tried at least to do the right thing. So I took the candy, and — have I been blind all these years? I know it sounds presumptuous, but I think I really did taste that candy as a little boy would. It left me thirsty, and I am sure it is only because I was in Heaven that it did not leave a big sticky mess all over my face and clothes, but I *tasted* it — sheer, simple bliss. I've heard the old quotation about how a child can't believe that making love is better than ice cream; at that point, perhaps only partly because I am not married, I began to suspect that that statement stems from a forgetfulness of what a child experiences when he eats ice cream — something that is the highlight of a day, the highlight of a week, something that can make a bad day into a good day.

Some people came along, and we began talking, and it wasn't until a good bit into the conversation when I realized that the conversation was switching fluidly between languages — Italian one moment, Arabic the

next, then Sanskrit, then the unbroken language from before the Curse of Babel, the language of the Dawn of Creation — and I began to cry. One of the things I know I can never have in this life is a mastery of all languages — and something in Heaven, perhaps even that cheap candy, had affected me so that I was able to move among languages and cultures among the gods and the goddesses that surrounded me. There was something else I don't know how to describe — a change that was beginning to be wrought in me. It wasn't so much that I was enjoying what was around me, as that I had an enjoyment coming through who I was. And it was not a cause of pride.

Then, as it were, a veil was torn, and I saw one — what can I call it? a rock, or a flame, or a pulsing mound of energy, unmoved and yet dancing, and around it a constellation of little rocks, each one both like the first rock and totally unlike any other. They were all part of a dance, a dance which combined total order with total freedom — and I was part of the dance! I was aware of a kind of communion with the other dancers; space did not separate us. I would not have been more honored if they had all been spinning about me; there is something about it that I cannot describe, even badly.

The dance continued, and as it continued I saw myself walking through a vast hallway, with floors of marble and shimmering golden trees. There was a stand, and on it lay open a massive book. My host opened it, and I only glanced at the pages — enough to see that it recorded the entire story of creation, from Eden to the Second Coming. My life was written on it, every pure thought and action, every sin; I sat stunned that such a thing could be.

"Every place in Heaven is special, unique," my guest said, "and this is a place of remembrance, of story. The special, sweet, fleeting time on earth that each of us had, is remembered for the goods it had that will not exist here. Choosing the right when one's nature is warped and sinful, making disciples of unbelievers, penitence, forgiveness, and ten thousand other things, from marriage to even theology — they do not exist for us, except as a far off memory. We stand clothed in the good deeds of our life on earth — what we could do in the limited time we had. You have a very special place, part of the tiny minority of runners who approach the finish line, while the rest stood outside, cheering. This is the Story of how we came to be, and it is your Story too. Cherish your time as mortal man; it will not last long. You have not long before the perfect comes and the

will not last long. You have not long before the perfect comes and the imperfect disappears. You know how children always wish to grow up, how they rush on, and how adults see childhood as a special time. You want to be through with the race, to have received your crown. Rightly so. At the same time, wish to make the best use of the fleeting moments, of the scarce time before you enter into glory. Before you will know it, many of the goods you know now will be only a memory.

"I would like to show you one more thing. Walk this way." He took me, and opened a door, to a place that seemed to open out onto a countryside, or a palace. The palace had a courtyard, a pool in which to swim, a view onto forest. Inside were books, and meeting places, and a tinkering room, and a gallery of artwork. "You know that our Lord said, 'In my Father's house there are many rooms.' This is one of those rooms. It is a room that the Father has prepared for a believer, knowing all of his life and his virtues and his good works. Each one holds things in common with others, and is different. And they're connected, though you can't see the connections now. Would you like to know whose room you are looking at?"

"Yes, very much. I would like to meet him," I said.

"It's your room, Jonathan. And you haven't seen the tenth part of it. You will forever be king over a corner of Heaven, having this place in which to commune with God and invite other people over — and visit their rooms. It is impossible on earth to be friends with a great many people — but not here."

As I was listening to my guide, I heard footsteps behind me. I looked, and saw a Lamb next to me, soft and gentle. I took it into my arms, and it nestled against my heart. I held the Lamb for a while, and then said, "This guardian fills me with the terror of his majesty; how is it that you do not?" The Lamb looked into my eyes and said, "All this in time you shall understand — when you do not need to. I will hold you in my heart then, as I hold you in my heart now. Would you like to come here? For real?"

I thought and said, "It would not be the best thing. I have longed many times for Heaven, but then where would my creations be? I hope that the time will pass quickly, but I have work to do on earth. Lord, please help me bear the time until then, and let it be fruitful! But I want to enter into Heaven after living to the full the lifetime of work you have for me — whether it is a long lifetime or being killed in a car accident on the road to work tomorrow. I want to come to Heaven through earth."

He said, "You have chosen well, mystic. It will not be that long. And I will always be with you."

I awoke with a jerk, and looked around. 9:58 PM. Time to get a good night's sleep and be rested for tomorrow. And pray for God's providence in my work.

# A Glimpse into Eastern Orthodox Christianity

## Introduction

Do children and adults understand each other? To some degree, and if many adults have lost touch with childhood, there are some who understand childhood very well. But when I was a child, I wanted to write a book about things adults don't understand about children. (I have since forgotten with what I wanted to write.) There is a gulf. A father can read a [Calvin and Hobbes](#) strip, and his little girl can ask what's funny, and the father is in a pickle. It's not that he doesn't want to explain it, and he may be able to explain the humor to another adult, but all of those explanations fail with his daughter. Children often believe that there's a big secret the adult conspiracy is refusing to tell them. And the adult who is trying to get a child to "be serious" by setting aside "make believe" and dealing with what is "real" is like someone who wears a raincoat to the shower. The things that go without saying as part of being serious are in many cases not part of childhood's landscape.

In this sense, children understand each other. This understanding is compatible with friendship, liking, hating, being aloof, and several other things, but there are certain things that go without saying, and the things that go without saying are shared. Two young children will have a world

where the difference between "real" and "imaginary" is not very important, where they have no power and adults laugh at things the children don't understand, and where the world is full of wonder. And in that sense two children can understand each other even if they don't know each other's heroes, favorite ways to play, and so on and so forth. And adults likewise understand things that can normally be taken for granted among adults.

Before suggesting that Western Christianity (in other words, Catholic and Protestant Christianity) is best understood in continuity with the West, I would like to explain what I mean. There are a good many Catholics and Protestants who try to be critical towards Western culture, and who do not accept uncritically what is in vogue. I know several Western Christians who tried to live counterculturally and not accept sour things in Western culture; I was such a Western Christian myself. So is it fair to talk about the continuity between Western Christianity and the West?

There is a common Western tendency to criticize common Western tendencies. I've seen Christians eager to criticize Western tendencies. I've also seen liberals who were not Christian eagerly criticize common Western tendencies. For that matter, I don't remember ever hearing someone use the term "common Western tendency" in a flattering way, even though the West is home to many great cultural triumphs (as well as problems). Criticizing "Western tendencies" is a Western thing to do. Taking a dim view of the culture that raised you is a Western thing to do. Working to create a counterculture is a Western thing to do. The focus of this article is not to rebut the West but to explain the East and describe things Western Christians may not know to look for. The Orthodox classics do not try to be Christian by making unflattering remarks about "common Western tendencies." For reasons that I will elaborate, I know that there are countercultural Western Christians who strive to construct or reconstruct a Christian culture that is very different from the Western mainstream (I was such a countercultural Western Christian), and I still consider their continuities with the West to be significant. More on that later.

This article explores the suggestion that **Eastern (Orthodox) Christianity is best understood in continuity with the East, and Western (Catholic and Protestant) Christianity is best**

**understood in continuity with the West.** There are of course continuities between Eastern and Western Christianity. But they usually aren't the point where Western Christians do not understand Orthodox. There are important ways that a Western Christian understands an Eastern Christian and members of (other) Eastern religions don't. There are also important ways that members of (mostly) Eastern religions understand each other. **The purpose of this article is to explain things that the East naturally understands about Orthodoxy,** not to explain everything important about Orthodoxy. The understanding between Orthodox, Hindus, Muslims, Orthodox Jews, Buddhists, and many less well known religions is of this kind. And so is understanding within the West, but East and West are different as children and adults are different—not because one is more mature than the other (each can see the other as childish), but because there is a gulf. The understanding isn't a matter of how many details you know, or agreement on important matters. For that matter, it's not even a matter of civil disagreement. Understanding another religion is perfectly consistent with fighting religious wars. But there is a gulf that is rarely bridged, and I am trying to bring a spark of understanding of the gulf. I am trying to explain what is shared that Westerners, even Western Christians, need to have explained. And I will be looking at both East and West, at both worlds.

This article is partly Eastern and partly Western, and doesn't completely belong to either world. It's meant to give explanations a Westerner would recognize, while addressing important things that a Westerner might not think to ask about. I was raised an evangelical, and I am a relatively recent convert to Eastern Orthodoxy. This means that for better or worse I have a foot in both worlds. I hope to use this position to build a bridge.

## The Most Important Thing Is

"Article on understanding Orthodoxy" is a dread oxymoron, a red flag like the phrase "committee to revitalize," or for that matter a thick commentary on Ecclesiastes 6:11: "The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?" (NIV)

Orthodoxy is something you understand by doing. If you want to learn to swim, you get in the water with someone who can show you how to swim. So the first thing an article on understanding Orthodoxy can say is that you can't understand Orthodoxy by reading an article on understanding Orthodoxy. You can understand it by visiting a parish and seeing how we worship, and maybe participating. A book can be a useful tour guide that can help you keep your eyes open for what to see at a historic site, but it cannot substitute for visiting the site yourself. The first thing to do is, if you know someone Orthodox, ask, "May I join you at church?" Orthodoxy is a live community, and the way to understand it is to interact with the community. If you don't have that live connection, you can [search online for a nearby parish \(and ignore the error message\) \(Outside the US\)](#). Some parishes (churches) are warmer than others. There are some parishes that unfortunately aren't welcoming. If a church doesn't have a sign out in front, that may be a warning. But there are many churches that are welcoming. And don't worry if everybody seems to be doing things that you don't understand. There is a great deal of freedom in Orthodoxy, and apart from receiving communion you should be welcome to do (or not do) anything people are doing. Sometimes you will see different members of the faithful doing different things, walking around, entering, leaving. This is because of the freedom in Orthodox worship and a grand tradition of not sticking your nose in what other people are doing. When I first visited my present parish, well before I became Orthodox, I was self-conscious about following what other people

were doing and sticking out. In the time that I've been Orthodox, I realized that there was no need to be self-conscious, and in fact no one cared that I wasn't acting like everyone else.

So make a note in your planner, or call a friend who's Orthodox. Decide exactly when you will make that contact, and do what you need to do to get that in your planner. Actually visiting the site is infinitely more valuable than reading a guidebook about it.

## Symbol and Nominalism

Before explaining what symbol is in the East, I would like to talk about what has happened in the West. Symbol in the West used to be close to what it was in the East—like two trees standing tall. Then something called *nominalism* came along, and cut down the Western tree, leaving a stump of a once great tree. Nominalism is a good part of what has defined the West.

Nominalism was one side in a Western medieval debate, and it was called the "modern way." The debate was whether categories of things were something real that existed before things and before our minds, or whether categories are things we construct after the fact. What people used to believe, and what the nominalists' opponents believed, was that a lot more things were real than the nominalists acknowledged. Their opponents looked at the structures we perceive and said, "It's out there," and the nominalists said "No, it only exists in your head." Nominalism was an axe for cutting down most of what people sensed about the world around us. In its extreme form nominalism says that brute fact is all that exists; if it's not a brute fact, it can only exist in people's heads. Some scholars will recognize that as a postmodern distinction; nominalism was something that flowered in modernism and bore fruit in postmodernism. At one stage, nominalism defined modernism and the Enlightenment, while at a later stage, people were more consistent and became postmodern.

Another thing that nominalism did was to cut apart the thing that represents and the thing that is represented in a symbol. **Nominalism is the disenchantment of the entire universe.** Nominalism is a disenchanting force that says, "If you can't touch it, it can only be in your head," and the place of symbol was changed from what it once was. Symbol wasn't the only casualty, but it was one of the casualties.

Imagine two very different surfaces, like the surface of the ground. The first surface, Orthodoxy, is rich in connections, layers, and colors. Imagine that the first surface is textured, like the surface of the earth, while there are not only buildings but great arcs connecting one part to another so that what is present in one place is present in another. A symbol is an arc of this kind, and symbol is not something externally added to reality; it is something basic to what reality is, so that the surface is in fact richer than just a surface and is as connected as a web. If there is something in you that responds to beauty in the surface, or to ways it has become ugly, that is because something inside you is resonating with something out there.

Now imagine another picture, of a surface that is flat and grey, where there is no real order, and any structures and connections you see are only ways of lumping things together inside your head. You can read things on to it; you can imagine structures in its randomness and pretend any two parts are linked; because it has no order, you can project any kind of structure or connection you want, even if this freedom means it is only your particular fantasy. If you find it to be drab and empty, that is a private emotional reaction that says nothing interesting about the drab and empty world, in particular not that it is failing to be in some way colorful like it "should" be. "Should" has no meaning beyond something about our private psychology.

If you imagine these two surfaces—one of them structured, many-layered, colorful, and possessing a veritable web of connecting arcs (symbols), and the other one having only a single grey layer and no connections—you have the difference between what Orthodoxy believes and where nominalism leads. Few people believe nominalism in a pure form; I don't even know if it is *possible* to believe nominalism in a few form. Nominalism is more a way of decaying than a fixed system of ideas. Part of what has shaped Western Christianity is the influence of nominalism as the disenchantment of the entire universe. Nominalism disenchantments the treasure of a world of spiritual resonance, where symbol and memory have a rich meaning, where a great many things are not private psychological phenomena but something that is attuned to the world as a whole, as much as a radio picks up music because someone is broadcasting the music it picks up.

What was before nominalism in the West, and what is the place of symbol in Orthodoxy now? Christ is a symbol of God, and he is a symbol

symbol in Orthodoxy now: Christ is a symbol of God, and he is a symbol in the fullest possible sense. How? Christ is not a miniature separate copy of God, which is what a symbol often is in the West. Christ is fully united with God: "I and the Father are One." God is fundamentally beyond our world; "No man can see God and live." But "in Christ the fullness of God lives in a body." And if you have seen Christ, you have seen the Father. Christ visibly expresses the Father's hidden reality.

The image of God, in which we were all created, does not mean that we are detached miniature copies of God. What it means is that we, in our inmost being, are fundamentally connected to God. It means that we were created to participate in God's reality, and that something of God lives in us. It means that every breath we breathe is the breath of God. It means that we are to reign as God's delegates, the moving wonders who manifest God in ruling his visible world.

As an aside, symbol is one important kind of connection that makes things really present, but it's not the only one. Memory is not understood as a psychological phenomenon inside the confines of a person's head; to remember something is to make something really present. "This do in remembrance of me" is not primarily about us having thoughts in our heads about Christ, just as saying "Please assemble this cabinet" is not primarily about us seeing and touching tools and cabinet pieces. Saying "Please assemble this cabinet" may include seeing and touching what needs to be assembled, but the focus is to bring about a fully assembled cabinet which not just something in our minds. When Christ said "This do in remembrance of me", he wasn't just talking about a psychological phenomenon, however much that may be necessary for remembering; he was telling us to make him really present and be open to his presence, and he isn't present "just" in our thinking any more than a working cabinet is "just" a set of sensations we had in the course of assembling it. And the idea of "This do in remembrance of me" goes hand in hand with Holy Communion being a symbol in the fullest possible sense: the bread and wine represent the body and blood of Christ. The bread and wine embodies the body and blood of Christ. The bread and wine *are* the body and blood of Christ. All of these are tied together.

Among these symbols, a reader may be surprised about one kind of symbol I haven't mentioned: the icon. Icons are something I tried to overlook to get to the good parts of Orthodoxy; it took a while for me to recognize how much icons *are* one of the good parts of Orthodoxy. Icons

are in fact key to understanding Orthodoxy.

When one bishop is giving a speech, sometimes he will hold up a picture, of a traffic intersection (or something else obviously secular), and then say, "In Greece, this is an icon. It's not a holy icon, but it's an icon."

Part of what icons are in the East is easier to understand in light of what happened to icons in the West, not only religious artwork but painting as a whole. What happens if you ask an art historian to tell the story of Western art after the Middle Ages, roughly from the Renaissance to the Neo-classicists?

The story that is usually told is a story of Western art growing from crude and inaccurate depictions to paintings that were almost like photographs. It is a story of progress and advancement.

Orthodoxy can see something else in the story. Western art became photorealistic, not because they progressed from something inferior, but because their understanding of symbol had disintegrated.

If a picture is real to you as a symbol, then you don't have to strive too hard to "accomplish" the picture, in the same sense that someone who has never gotten in trouble with alcohol doesn't have to make an unprovoked lecture on why he doesn't have a drinking problem. People who use alcohol responsibly rarely feel the need to prove that they don't have a drinking problem; it's someone who has a drinking problem who feels the need to make sure you know that his drinking is under control. People who don't have a problem don't feel the need to defend themselves, and artists and publics who haven't lost symbols don't feel a need to cram in photorealism. When Renaissance artists inaccurately portrayed the place of Christ's birth as having a grid of rectangular tiles, they were cramming in photorealism. It wasn't even that they thought they needed photorealism to make a legitimate picture. They went beyond that need to make the picture an opportunity to demonstrate photorealism, whether or not the photorealism really belonged there. From an Orthodox perspective the problem is not the historical inaccuracy of saying that Christ was born in a room with a tiled floor instead of a cave. The anachronism isn't that big of a deal. From an Orthodox perspective the problem is that, instead of making a symbol the way people do when they really believe in symbol, people were making pictures the way people do when the pictures are unreal to them as symbols. The artists went for broke and pushed the envelope on photorealism because the West had lost something much more important

photorealism because the West had lost something much more important than photorealism.

Good Orthodox icons don't even pretend to be photorealistic, but this is not simply because Orthodox iconography has failed to learn from Western perspective. As it turns out, Orthodox icons use a reverse perspective that is designed to include the viewer in the picture. Someone who has become a part of the tradition is drawn into the picture, and in that sense an icon is like a door, even if it's more common to call icons "windows of Heaven." But it's not helpful to simply say "Icons don't use Renaissance perspective, but reverse perspective that includes the viewer," because even if the reverse perspective is there, reverse perspective is simply not the point. There are some iconographers who are excellent artists, and artistry does matter, but the point of an icon is to have something more than artistry, as much as the point of visiting a friend is more than seeing the scenery along the way, even if the scenery is quite beautiful and adds to the pleasure of a visit. Cramming in photorealism is a way of making more involved excursions and dredging up more exotic or historic or whatever destinations that go well beyond a scenic route, after you have lost the ability to visit a friend. The Western claim is "Look at how much more extravagant and novel my trip are than driving along the same roads to see a friend!"—and the Orthodox response shows a different set of priorities: "Look how lonely you are now that you no longer visit friends!"

The point is that an icon, being a symbol, is connected to the person represented. It is probably not an accident that in the Reformation, the most iconoclastic people were those in whom the concept of symbol as spiritual connection had completely disintegrated. When I was a Protestant, the plainest sanctuaries I saw were the sanctuaries belonging to people who disbelieved in symbols as spiritual connections. If a symbol is not spiritually connected, then reverence to an icon is inappropriate reverence to a piece of wood; Orthodox believe that reverence to an icon passes through to the saint depicted in part because of the connection that is real to them.

There are other things to discuss about icons. Here I want to talk about them as symbols, and symbols in an Orthodox picture—the mental image I drew above that has a web of interconnections, has both spiritual and material layers, and is very different from the (almost empty) nominalist picture. A lot of people who try to understand icons are trying

to fit the Orthodox icon into the nominalist picture, or at least a picture where part of the Orthodox framework is replaced with something more nominalist. I want to return to icons later, after some comparisons.

## Compare and Contrast

How is Orthodoxy different from Western Christianity? I would like to answer, focusing on evangelical Christianity in my treatment of Western Christianity but referring to Catholicism. I don't believe evangelical Christianity is the only real version of Western Christianity, but it is the middle of the (Western) road. From an Orthodox perspective, "Catholic," "evangelical," and "mainline" (or, if you prefer an alternative to "mainline," you can say "oldline," or "sideline," or "flatline") represent three degrees of being Western, much as "rare," "medium," and "well done" denote three degrees of a steak being cooked. There are important differences, but there is also something that's the same. Catholicism is like a rare steak, is almost raw in some parts and almost well done in others. A Catholic may be almost Orthodox (certainly a Catholic is not discouraged from trying to be almost Orthodox), and there are a lot of Catholics who believe that Vatican II says that the Reformers were right about everything (or something pretty close to that).

Catholics tend to be sensitive to the differences to Catholic and Protestant (even if they choose not to pay enough attention to those differences). Yet it is common for Catholics to believe that Catholics and Orthodox only differ in the addition of "and the Son" to a creed. Saying that's the only difference between Catholicism and Orthodoxy is like saying that the difference between the Bible and the Quran is only that "Bible" was a French word for "book" and "Quran" is, with remarkable similarity, an Arabic word that can mean "book." Catholic priests will tell you that Catholics and Orthodox believe almost exactly the same thing, and this is because Catholics know how they are different from Protestants but don't know where their differences with Orthodox lie. The Reformation took a lot of trends in Catholicism and pushed them much further, but the problem isn't just that the Reformers pushed them

further. The problem is that the trends became a part of Catholicism in the first place. To Catholic readers who have been told that Catholicism is almost the same as Orthodoxy and the two should be joined together—I understand why you believe that and it is what one would expect the Catholic tradition to say. But to the Orthodox that is like saying that the Quran is of a piece with the Bible. You're looking in the wrong place for the differences between the Bible and the Quran when you try to reconcile them by pointing out that "Bible" and "Quran" both mean book in influential languages. Not only do the differences lie elsewhere, they are far, far deeper.

<b>Western Christianity</b>	<b>Orthodoxy</b>
<p>Sin is understood as essentially crime, and the remedy to sin provided by Christ is understood as being cleared for the guilt of a crime. Hence in <i>Pilgrim's Progress</i>, for instance, there are elaborations designed to convince you that your crimes (sins) are great, and that you cannot ever clear yourself of these crimes (sins), but Bunyan does not seem to even see the question of whether sin and the consequence of sin are like anything besides crime and criminal guilt.</p>	<p>Sin is understood as spiritual disease, and the remedy to sin provided by Christ is understood as healing. The Eucharist is "for the healing of soul and body," and as the Great Physician Christ is concerned for both spiritual disease and physical disease, and drawing people into the divine life that he gives.</p>
<p>The reformation created mass literacy so that everyone could read the Bible. As a culture, it is heavily oriented towards</p>	<p>If evangelicalism is essentially a written culture, then in keeping with the observation that the opposite of a "literate" culture is not "illiterate" but "oral," Orthodoxy has the attributes of an oral tradition. Many of its members can</p>

written text. Someone said after visiting an Orthodox Church that it was the only church he'd been to that didn't offer him printed material. At least for Protestant churches, a visitor is offered some kind of paper documents; there is a bulletin that is passed out; one of my friends had been a member of church where people said "No creed but Christ!" (which he was quick to point out, *is a creed*), and then asked him to sign a sixty page doctrinal statement.

read and write, but writing has different implications. It's the difference between a natural environment that includes some things people have created (a campsite) and a basically artificial environment (a laboratory). At the parish where I was accepted into the Orthodox Church, there was no literature rack and no stack of booklets for you to follow along the service. Even where those booklets are offered, incidentally, I prefer to participate without reading what is being said—I think it's not just economic reasons that the main historic way for Orthodox to follow along a service doesn't depend on reading.

Part of an oral tradition means things that are alive, things that are passed on that have a different basic character to what can be preserved in a text. This is present in Western Christianity, but it is more pronounced in Orthodoxy.

The written character of the culture is focused on Scripture. It is expected, especially among Evangelicals, that if your faith is strong, you will read Scripture privately.

Catholics and some Protestants do not believe Scripture has sole authority; Catholics assert the authority of Tradition alongside Scripture ("Scripture and Tradition"), and different Protestant groups have

Scripture is the crowning jewel of Tradition. Scripture is not something understood apart from Tradition; Scripture is something alive, something dynamically maintained by Tradition and something inspired not only in that the Spirit inspired ancient words but in that he speaks today to people who can listen to him. And Scripture is at its fullest, not read privately, but when proclaimed in Church.

One Orthodox priest tells people, "Reading Scripture privately is the second most spiritually dangerous thing you can do. All sorts of temptations will flare up,

different solutions to the problem of how to balance the authority of Scripture and tradition.

you'll be assailed by doubts, and the Devil will whisper into your ear all these heretical 'insights' about the text. It is an extraordinarily dangerous thing to do."

Some people are intimidated, wonder if they should really be reading the Bible privately, and ask timidly, "Well, I should reconsider reading the Bible privately. But one question. What's the *most* dangerous thing you can do spiritually?"

"Not reading the Bible privately."

There is a set of important questions, "What part of the person do we know with?" "What is knowledge?" "How can knowledge be built in another person?" Let me start with some secular answers:

*What part of the person do we know with?* We know with the mind, which is what is studied by the secular discipline of cognitive psychology. One big example is the part of us that reasons.

*What is knowledge?* Knowledge is having true mental representations that correspond to the world. It is the sort of thing we acquire from books.

*How can knowledge be built in another person?* Knowledge is built, to speak crudely, by opening the head

I'd like to answer the same basic questions as I outlined to the left:

*What part of the person do we know with?* At least in matters of faith, we know with something that could be called "spirit" or "mind," a part of us that is practical (the knowing we have when something becomes real to us). This part of the person thinks precisely because it is the center of where we meet God. It is the part of us we use to pray and worship. It is part of us that is connected with God and can *only* be understood with reference to God.

*What is knowledge?* Knowledge is when you participate in something, when you drink it in, when you relate to it. Someone's talked about the difference between knowing facts about your wife, and knowing your wife. The West uses the first kind of knowledge as the heart of its picture of knowledge. Orthodoxy uses the second.

It is normally vain for a person to say, "To know me is to love me." But there is another reason why someone might say that. To know something is to love it. To

and dumping something in. Now of course we need words/numbers/pictures to do this, but you teach by a classroom or a book.

Now this is a purification of something that is mixed in any Western Christian. It doesn't even represent postmoderns well; in fact, it describes something postmoderns are trying to get away from. But admitting all these things, there is an element of the above answers in how Western Christians understand knowledge. Many Western Christians do not purely believe these answers, but they do believe something mixed with them.

I'd like to look at one more specific kind of knowledge, theology. In the West, theology is an academic discipline, and used to be called the queen of the sciences. Theology is a system of ideas, much like philosophy and every other

that. To know anything is to love it. To know any person is to love that person because knowledge is connected to love.

*How can knowledge be built in another person?* Knowledge works from the outside in. The reason the first chapter after the introduction asked you to visit Orthodox worship is that that is how one comes to understand Orthodoxy. We don't believe in trying to open the head and dump in knowledge. You can't gain knowledge of Orthodoxy that way. You might be able to learn some of the garments surrounding Orthodoxy, but not the spirit itself. The point of asking you to visit Orthodox worship is that that's not something important that needs to be added to learning about Orthodoxy. It is learning about Orthodoxy.

By the way, the same kind of thing is true of evangelicalism, even if people are less aware of it. Evangelicalism can never be understood as a system of ideas. An evangelical might only be aware of the ideas to be known, but that can only happen if the participation-based knowledge of the evangelical walk, in other words the Orthodox kind of knowledge, is in place.

It took me a long time to make head or tail of my deacon's insistence, "Theology is not philosophy whose subject-matter is God," or of the ancient saying, "A theologian is one who prays and one who prays is a theologian." But that was because I was trying to fit them into my Western understanding of theology tightly tied to a philosophy

philosophy, and every other kind of theology is a branch of systematic theology.

... to a philosophy.

Theology is not the queen of sciences because it is not a science, and only with reservations can it be called an academic discipline. Calling theology an academic discipline is like calling karate an academic discipline (because you can take classes in both at college). Academic theology has a place, and in fact I intend to study academic theology, but the real heart of theology is not in the academy, but in the Church at prayer.

Theology is knowledge. More specifically, it is mystical or spiritual knowledge. It is knowing with the part of you that prays, and that is why Orthodox still say, "A theologian is one who prays and one who prays is a theologian." Theology is knowledge that participates in God, that eats and drinks Christ in Communion, *Communion*, that seeks a connection with God. And because Orthodox theology is Orthodox knowing, as described above, books can have value but can never contain theology.

In the West, some Christians regard Christianity as a system of ideas. Hence one Catholic author writes, "It is fatal to let people suppose that Christianity is only a mode of feeling; it is vitally necessary to insist that it is first and foremost a rational explanation of the universe." If this is not universal among Western Christians, it

Eastern Orthodox would agree that Christianity is not primarily a mode of feeling; indeed, Orthodox do not believe that feelings are the measure of worship. But we part company with the Catholic author quoted, in trying to fix this by placing a system of ideas where some place emotion.

Orthodoxy is a *way*, just as many Eastern religions are a way. It is a path one walks. A worldview is something you believe and through which you see things;

nonetheless represents one of the threads that keeps popping up.

those elements are present in a way, but a way is something you do. It is like a habit, or even better a skill, which you start at clumsily and with time you not only become better at, but it becomes more natural. But it is more than a skill. It is even more encompassing than a worldview; it is how you approach life. Part of the West says we must each forge our own way; Orthodoxy invites people into the way forged by Christ, but it very much sees the importance of walking in a way.

The West tends to treat society as to a raw material, a despicable raw material, which will begin to have goodness if one puts goodness into it, transforming it according to one's enlightened vision.

This undergirds not only liberalism but most criticism of "common Western tendencies", and in particular most Christian attempts at counterculture. This attitude behind counterculture is not only that the Fall has impacted one's culture, but that there is nothing really good or authoritative about culture unless one puts it in.

Counterculture tends to be seen as essentially good.

In the East, as in the medieval and ancient West, the assumed relationship between a man and his culture is like the relationship between a man and his mother. It is a relationship which respects authority, femininity, and kinship.

This is not to say that one's culture cannot be wrong. What it is to say is that there is a world of difference between saying, "Mother, you are wrong," and "You are not my mother! You are nothing but a despicable raw material which it is my position to put something good in by transforming it according to my ideas." There can in fact be counterculture, but it is not counterculture according to the example of the Renaissance magus, the Enlightenment (or contemporary liberal) social engineer, or the postmodern deconstructionist. It is rather like the wild offshoot into Christ's body the Church, who regards his mother the Church, and patristic culture, as more authoritative than the culture he was born in.

Counterculture can be seen as a  
necessary evil.

## **What the Incarnation Means**

In the West, doctrines have worked like elements in a philosophical system, while in the East, the focus is on what doctrines mean for us. There is a difference of focus, more than ideas contained, in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Western emphasis has been on philosophical clarity in describing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Eastern emphasis has been on what the persons of the Trinity mean for us and how we relate to them.

The Church didn't even spell out a philosophical analysis of the Trinity until almost three centuries had passed and a heresy contradicted what they had always known. The Church had always known that the Son and the Holy Spirit were just as divine as the Father, and it taught people to appropriately relate to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit before it spelled out why people should relate that way.

The Incarnation, God becoming human, is recognized by all Christians who have their heads screwed on straight (and quite a few who don't). But in the East, believing in the Incarnation isn't just an idea that we agree with (although that is important). It is something that in practice determines the shape of a great many things in our spiritual walk. It is something that has great practical relevance. I would like to explain some of what the Incarnation means in the East, and that means explaining how the Incarnation gives shape to our spiritual walk.

There has been a saying rumbling down through the ages. The Son of God became a man that men might become the Sons of God (Protestant). The divine became man so that man might become divine (Catholic). God and the Son of God became man and the Son of Man that men might become gods and the sons of God. This teaching has mostly fallen away in Protestantism, even if Luther and Calvin believed it, and it is one puzzle piece among others in Catholicism. To the Orthodox it is foundational.

The whole purpose of Christ becoming man, and our becoming Christian, is to become like Christ. Furthermore, becoming like Christ does not simply mean becoming like Jesus the morally good and religious man without reference to Christ's divinity. We don't split Christ like that. If God wants to make us like Christ, he wants to make us like Christ who is fully God and fully human, and that means that we "share in the divine nature" (as spelled out in II Pet 1:4). It means that if we read Paul talking about the Son of God as meaning divinity, then when Paul talks about us as sons of God he is saying something in the same vein. There are caveats the Orthodox believe that help balance the picture—in particular, we can be made divine by grace, but only God can be divine by nature, ever. We cannot make others divine. God has his essence which is beyond knowing and his energies which reach out to us, but we can never reach beyond his manifest energies to see his essence. Catholics believe in a "beatific vision" that in Heaven we will see God as he truly is. Orthodox call that heresy. God can reach out to us and we can meet him when he reaches out, but it is radically, utterly, and absolutely impossible for us to ever know God as he truly is. Neither our being divine by grace nor our glorification in Heaven can ever overcome God's absolute transcendence. The Orthodox liturgy and prayers not only take account of sin; they spend more time bringing sin we need to repent of before God, than our being made like Christ. With all these caveats, the basic picture means that the Incarnation is not a one-time unnatural exception, something which runs against the grain of how God operates, or something totally unlike what can happen with us. The Incarnation is a peerless model that established the pattern of what it means to be Christian. Christ as the example of who a Christian should be is the only human who was fully divine, and even the only one to be fully human, but the Christian walk was meant to be, *and is*, a symbol that both represents and embodies what happened in the Incarnation. Christ is really incarnate in every member of the Church, and the Incarnation is not an anti-natural exception, but the pattern for being Christian. The purpose of being Christian is what Orthodox call "theosis," or "divinization," or "deification."

Part of understanding that Christ became human, and in fact became flesh, requires an understanding of how spirit and matter relate. DesCartes is one of the more Western philosophers. Part of his contribution was a lot of thinking about the famous problem of the "ghost in the machine." The problem of the "ghost in the machine" is the

in the machine. The problem of the "ghost in the machine" is the problem of how our minds can interact with our bodies, once you put mind and body in watertight compartments and assume that they shouldn't be able to interact. It's possible to be Western and disagree with DesCartes—but the main Western starting point is that mind and body are things one would expect to be separate.

In the East we don't have trouble with the "ghost in the machine" problem because we don't treat matter and spirit as things that are cut off from each other. We believe that matter and spirit are tightly bound together. It doesn't seem strange to us that our minds can move our bodies—it's a wonder, as all of God's works are wonders, but it's not something illogical.

This understanding means that the Incarnation doesn't just mean that Christ had a body; it means that Christ was connected to his body on the most intimate level. What the Incarnation means for us isn't just that Christ's body, and our bodies, are somehow part of the picture. It means that our bodies are an *inescapable* part of the picture, and they are very relevant to our spirits.

If you visit Orthodox worship, you may wonder why people stand, cross themselves, bow, kiss icons, and so on and so forth—in short, why their bodies are so active. The answer is that since our spirits and bodies are tied together in the whole person, worship includes the whole person. We don't just park our bodies while our spirits get on with worship. We might do that if we thought that our minds and bodies were separate, but we don't. We believe that Christ's incarnation is a matter of the Son of God, and the man's spirit, mind, soul, *and body* making one being, Christ, who was as united as possible. And that means that worship at Church and the broader spiritual walk both involve the whole person.

This integrated view of spirit and matter, and of the Incarnation, helps create the space for icons. I found icons strange at first, largely because as a Western Christian I had no place for icons that was appropriate. Believing that physical matter can have spiritual properties, that an icon can embody a real presence, all seems strange to someone shaped by nominalism and a rigid separation of spirit and matter. But I am learning to appreciate that to an Orthodox, to say that Christ had a body and to say that matter and spirit are tied together paves the way to recognizing that icons are a gift from God. They mean that matter is not cut off from spirit when it comes to our bodies, and they mean that matter is not cut off

from spirit in places where we worship. Icons are another part of the incarnate faith of the Orthodox Church, and if you disagree with them, please understand that they are part of the understanding of how the Incarnation tells us practically how the Father wants us to worship him.

When I was a Protestant, the songs I heard in Church were about spiritual themes, and more specifically they are about themes in the Bible that seem spiritual and theological given a watertight idea of spirit. As contrasted to the Psalms, there was almost none of the imagery of the natural world. Orthodox liturgy, which contains a lot of teaching, sweeps across the both material and spiritual creation. One hymn praises Mary, the mother of our Lord, as "the volume [book] on which the Word [Christ] was inscribed," and "the ewe that bore the Lamb of God." The frequent physical and nature imagery that seamlessly praises God and rejoices in his whole creation is what being spiritual looks like when spirit is recognized as so deeply connected with the material dimension to our Lord's creation.

Like other Eastern religions, Orthodoxy has a supportive framework of formal and informal prayer, fasting from foods, ritual worship, hesychasm (stillness) and other aspects of spiritual discipline (which some Orthodox call "asceticism"). These are not "rules," but they do provide a concrete structure to help people. Partly because Orthodoxy assumes the relevance of matter to being spiritual, Orthodoxy doesn't just say "Go, be spiritual," without giving further direction as it doesn't just say "Park your bodies so your spirits can worship." The structure provided for spiritual discipline is shaped by the Incarnation, and not only because it addresses the whole person. The spiritual discipline is not very different from other Eastern religions, but the meaning of that spiritual discipline is very different. In Hinduism and Buddhism, asceticism is something you do for yourself, and other people often aren't part of the picture. When the Buddha decided to turn back and share his discovery with others, he was choosing a second best—according to Buddhism, the best thing would have been to enter complete release (salvation) instead of compromising his own benefit to share his discovery with others. Being good to other people, in Buddhism and in Hinduism tends to be like a boat you use to cross a river: once you have crossed the river, you don't need the boat any more.

What about Orthodoxy? One Orthodox saying is, "We are saved in community. We are condemned all by ourselves." Another Orthodox

community. we are condemned all by ourselves. Another Orthodox saying puts it even more strongly: "We can't be saved. The Church is saved, and we can be in it." Orthodox spiritual discipline is not something that makes ethics unnecessary. The whole point of spiritual discipline is ethical. If I pursue asceticism, the goal isn't for me to be saved all by myself; it is impossible for me to be saved all by myself, just like it's impossible for me to have a good friendship all by myself. The goal of asceticism is for the Orthodox to love God and his neighbor, and if someone fails to recognize this, this is a problem. Spiritual discipline is Incarnational because, as much as the Incarnation was an act of love for others, spiritual discipline is oriented to loving with Christ's own love.

In the West, people see salvation as accomplished through Christ's cross; in Orthodoxy, we believe that Christ's whole time on earth, including the cross, saves us. "Incarnation" means not only the moment when the Son of God became a man, but his baptism, ministry, cross, tomb, and resurrection. And thus the Incarnation I have discussed above is not simply the moment when the Son of God became a man, but Christ's whole coming that saves us.

## *Ella Enchanted*

The movie *Ella Enchanted* has beautiful fantasy-themed computer graphics. Ella, the daughter of a nobleman, lives in a lovely Gothic-looking house in the middle of a suburban yard, goes down a lovely rustic-looking wooden escalator complete with a rustic-looking peasant turning a manual cogwheel, and is surrounded by stained glass windows and other medieval-looking trappings when she goes to her coed community college and gets into a debate about government policy and racial exploitation. One of the characters is an elf who wants to break out of the stereotype and be a lawyer instead of an entertainer (which is prohibited by law), and one of the nice things that happens at the happy ending is that the elf and a giantess fall in love with each other.

This movie is not just historically inaccurate; it is historically irrelevant, and it wears its historical irrelevancy with flamboyance. Everything you see has a medieval theme. The lovely Gothic-looking architecture, the richly colored medieval-looking clothing, and the swords and armor all tried to communicate the medieval. And it would be horribly unfair to treat the film as a botched version of historical accuracy, because it simply wasn't playing that game. However much things had been made to look "medieval," to someone who didn't understand the Middle Ages, it wasn't even *pretending* to faithfully represent that era. It was using the medieval as a projection screen as a whimsical place to address today's concerns. That was its real job.

That basic phenomenon affects a lot of how the West tries to understand the East, even when it is trying to faithfully represent it. In *Ella Enchanted* it is intentional, and the effect must be seen to be believed. (But then, that may be too high of a price to pay—as has been said about another movie.) I was appalled when I visited Victor Hugo's house, heard about Victor Hugo's fashionable interest in the Orient, and

saw an Oriental-themed wooden painting of Chinese acrobats using their bodies to make a V and an H for "Victor Hugo." China has produced acrobats, and Chinese acrobats are presumably capable of making those shapes with their bodies. But is this China, even allowing for cultural translation errors?

One major thread in most cultures outside the West is a tendency to exalt the whole of society and de-emphasize the individual person; indeed, people are seen without the Western concept of an "individual." Individualism is historically anomalous, and having acrobats shape their bodies to the greater glory of Victor Hugo would be about as out of place in Chinese culture as a large pro-censorship demonstration would be at an American university. Here and in other places, the "East" is not really the East, even an imperfectly understood East, but a projection screen for use by the West. *Ella Enchanted* was tongue-in-cheek and knew what was going on, where this was serious (and didn't know what was going on), but they were both using exotic places as a projection screen rather than something understood in itself.

New Age quotes the East, as well as "anything but the modern West," and it has its various attempts to create an alternative to traditional society. The East is over-represented in terms of spiritual practices and ideas, but I suggest that the same thing is going on here as *Ella Enchanted* or the supposedly Chinese acrobats celebrating the greater glory of Victor Hugo. In other words, we have a projection screen (in this case, non-Western) being used to project a thoroughly Western approach to life. The forces displayed are much an exaggeration of things that are accepted in Protestant Christianity.

What is the Western element that is found in New Age?

In the West, heresy is understood as condemned ideas. But the word "heresy" comes from a Greek word meaning "choice," and in the East heresy is making a private choice apart from the Orthodox Church. This can mean rejecting Church teaching, or splitting off from the Church, but the core of heresy is not the destructively false idea but the private choice. (This already has implications for the American definition of religion as a private choice.)

New Age is Gnostic, but there is something interesting in how it departs from ancient Gnosticism. Ancient Gnosticism was not a single, unified movement, but a broad collection of related but quite different movements with conflicting ideas. In this sense it was like New Age, and

movements with conflicting ideas. In this sense it was like New Age, and for that matter there is a certain *deja vu* between New Age and ancient Gnosticism. What's interesting is how New Age is unlike Gnosticism.

Gnostics had a lot of different ideas that conflicted not only with Orthodox Christianity but with each other. *And they argued.* Gnostics argued with other Gnostics and with Christians. Agreeing to disagree was as foreign to the Gnostics as it was to the Orthodox Christians. Saying "That's true for you, but this is true for me" or "That's your choice but this is my choice" would be as strange in classical Gnosticism as an escalator would have been in the Middle Ages.

New Age is a choice, and it is even more of a choice than in Gnosticism in its classical forms. Yes, the ideas are often Gnostic. Yes, New Age gives many of its members permission to indulge in magical, sexual, pride-related, and other sins, almost the same list as what ancient Gnosticism gave its members license for. But the essence of New Age is about a *choice*, the kind of choice that undergirds heresy. You choose (within certain broad parameters) what you will believe, what your spiritual practices will be, and so on and so forth, and the religion you practice is the sum of the private choices you make.

Where does this idea of religion as defined by private choice come from? One gets the impression from the New Age that it is the wisdom of the East to recognize that all religions say the same thing, and that a sort of Western style inquisition wouldn't happen. And that is true. *Kind of.*

In English, poetic license is a legitimate aspect of the language. And there isn't any central authority to approve instances of poetic license, nor can a poet be expelled from the English Speaker's Guild for abusing the language. But if one simply tears up the English language, it loses its coherence as English. And so there is poetic license in English, but that doesn't mean that anything goes. And in Hinduism, for instance, there is no centralized authority and no systematic purge of heretics, but that doesn't mean that a Hindu (or Buddhist, etc.) approves of religion being approached as a salad bar. Leaders in many Eastern religions may say that all religions are equivalent, and Japanese are often both Buddhist and Shinto, but most Eastern religious leaders would rather have you be coherently Christian, or Taoist, or Buddhist, or Hindu, or Jain, than simultaneously try to mix being Christian, *and* Taoist, *and* Buddhist, *and* Jain. That kind of incoherence is not very Eastern in spirit, nor is the idea of creating your own religion particularly Eastern.

What does Orthodoxy say? It matters whether or not you are Christian, and it matters whether or not you are Orthodox. But there is a saying that we can tell where the Church is, but not where it isn't. There is real truth in all religions, and if the Orthodox Church claims to be the fullness of Christ's Church, she would never claim that Christ's Church is limited to her walls. And her rules mean something different from in the West; instead of meaning "You must or must not do \_\_\_\_\_," they are resources that your spiritual father can use in addressing the specifics of your situation. In Orthodoxy your spiritual father helps decide what you are going to observe instead of you making the decision on your own, but the rules are more guidelines that your spiritual father can use in meeting the specifics of your situation, than rules in the Western sense. "Oikonomia" is an official recognition that your priest can work with you to figure out how Orthodoxy plays out in your situation.

Which brings me to the Reformation. Martin Luther did something original, but it was not the substance of his criticisms. Almost everything he had said was said earlier by someone else; there were things a lot like the Reformation floating around. Nor would Luther claim to have originated his criticisms much more than a baseball coach telling a boy to "Keep your eye on the ball" would claim to be the first one to give that advice. Luther didn't get his historic position solely by copying other people, but if you seek new criticisms from him, you're barking up the wrong tree.

Did Martin Luther contribute anything new? His criticisms had generally been circulating in the Catholic Church. An Orthodox might say that the Catholic Church had drifted from its Orthodox roots even further since 1054, when the Catholic Church broke off from the Orthodox Church. An Orthodox might interpret the general malaise in the Catholic Church as a malaise precisely because it had drifted from its Orthodox roots, and that the Orthodox Church agrees with the vast majority of Luther's criticisms (as for that matter the Catholic Church has—it acted on many of Luther's criticisms). Then what was new about Luther? Is Luther famous for an obscure reason?

Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of Popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything for to go against

God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.

After Luther said this, he split the Church. This is a rousing statement, and it is a rousing statement that contains the heart of heresy. A heretic is not so much someone who has a wrong idea, but someone who has a wrong idea *and is willing to split the Church over it*. Luther's distinctive and historic contribution was not levelling particular criticisms against the Catholic Church, but *choosing* to split the Church rather than go against his conscience, and his understanding of Scripture and plain reason. This choice is at the very heart of heresy.

Luther was a monumental figure, a great hero and a great villain rolled into one. His courage was monumental; so was his anti-semitism. And Luther was a prime example of a heretic. He was a heretic not so much by the points which he had wrong, which are relatively unimportant, but because he defined the Reformation with his precedent of splitting the Church.

So Luther worked to establish the re-established ancient Christian Church, and I am not particularly concerned here with the ways the re-established ancient Christian Church served as a projection screen for ideas that were in vogue at the time. (Somehow, when people re-establish ancient glory, their work ends up with a large dose of ideas that are in vogue with their creators. It happens again and again, and I think it has to do with how the ancient glory serves as a projection screen, much like New Age.) That tendency aside, Luther and the Catholic Church treated each other as heretics for a very good reason. It wasn't that they weren't ecumenical enough, or that they needed to be more tolerant, or that they needed to be told they were all Christians and Christianity is Christianity. The reason was something else. I can lament the blood that was shed, but there was a very healthy reason why people went that far against their opponents.

The Catholic Church, along with Luther, and for that matter along with the Orthodox, recognized that there is one Church, bound together in a full communion that cannot exist without agreement in doctrinal matters. Luther's reconstituted Church and the Catholic Church differed in doctrine and could not have this common basis. If you have two different groups which differ in doctrine, at least one of them is not the true Church. This is for the same reason that if one person says that an

airplane is in Canada and another person says the same airplane is in Mexico, at least one of them has to be wrong. They could both be wrong; nothing rules that out. Luther and the Catholic Church might neither be the true Church. But if there are two conflicting organizations competing to be called the true Church, at least one of them has to be wrong, just as an airplane cannot simultaneously be in Canada and in Mexico. Luther and the Catholic Church both recognized this.

What one might have expected, if Luther were simply re-establishing what the Christian Church was in ancient times, was that there would be one and only reformer's Church. When Luther couldn't agree with other reformers, they split off from each other, each saying, "We're the true Church!" "No, we're the true Church!" It wasn't long until there were seventy or so different groups, and the claim, "We're the true Church" could no longer be taken seriously. In retrospect, Luther's saying "I do not accept the authority of Popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other," and then moving to Protestant churches was a move out of the frying pan and into the fire. Perhaps Luther could not have foreseen this unintended consequence, but the disagreements and divisions in Luther's wake made the disagreements of Popes and councils pale in comparison.

At that point, the reformers reconsidered what was going on, but they chose to consider the Church structure generated by the Reformation as valid. There was an unwritten rule: "Whatever you say about churches, it has to approve of what's happened with the Reformation splintering into many groups that could not be in communion with each other, no matter what Christians have believed about Church since the days of the Apostles themselves."

The solution they invented included the concept of a "denomination". The idea was that these different groups were not competitors for the title of "true Church;" instead, they were simply names for parts of the true Church. The true Church was not a unified organism complete with authority as it had been understood from the days of the apostles; it was something invisible and quite independent of formal structures. It's kind of like there had been a supercomputer club whose charter said that they would have one supercomputer, but they couldn't agree on which computer was the most appropriate supercomputer, so they violated the club charter by each buying his own computer, and to be able to say they

had one computer like the charter said, hooked the computers up and said that the real club supercomputer was something invisible, a sort of virtual computer, that was emulated over the club network—and then said that this is what the original charter *really* called for. This is *not* because the reformers read the Bible and this was the best picture they could come up with of what the Church should be. It was much closer to an answer to the question of "How can we re-imagine Church so it won't look like the Bible condemns the church structures which the Reformation can't escape?"

Today we have:

- All denominations point to the same Christian truth.
- It doesn't matter which denomination you're part of, as long as you have faith.
- It doesn't matter much whether you stick to one denomination's prayers, doctrines, and so on and so forth, or for that matter whether you consider yourself a member of one denomination at all.
- We should pursue the goal of uniting all the different denominations.

But let me change barely more than one term:

- All religions point to the same truth.
- It doesn't matter which religion you're part of, as long as you have faith.
- It doesn't matter much whether you stick to one religion's prayers, doctrines, and so on and so forth, or for that matter whether you consider yourself a member of one religion at all.
- We should pursue the goal of uniting all the different religions.

Sound familiar? It should. It's New Age. It's the foundation to the New Age movement that all the exotic Asian decor rests on, and it is more Western than most of the West. Or at least there's an uncanny resemblance between Protestantism and something most Protestants wouldn't want to be associated with. (Or at least evangelicals wouldn't want to be associated with New Age. With mainline, er, oldline, er, sideline, er, flatline Protestantism, the line between "Protestant" and "New Age" is often crystal clear, but at other times can be maddeningly difficult to tell the difference.) Beyond all New Age's Eastern trappings,

the heart of the New Age is a non-Christian twist on a very Western way of thinking about religious community. That way of thinking is the Protestant understanding of Church.

Why am I making such a disturbing and perhaps offensive connection? Do I believe Protestantism is as bad as New Age? Absolutely not; I think there's a world of difference. The answer has to do with something else, something about Orthodoxy that seems strange to many Protestants. What is this something else?

Jesus, in the great prayer recorded before his execution, prayed fervently that all his disciples may be one, and Paul made incendiary remarks whenever he discussed people having different denominations. So it is important for all Christians to be united, and that goes for Orthodox. So why do Orthodox refuse to attend non-Orthodox worship and especially to take non-Orthodox communion? Why do we exclude non-Orthodox from our own communion cups? So why don't Orthodox recognize that we are just one more denomination, even if we are a very old denomination? Why are there so few Orthodox at ecumenical gatherings?

Something has to give, and Protestants often try to figure out whether the observations about Orthodoxy are what gives, or whether Orthodox really being Christians gives. Which one gives? *Neither*. Neither the practices that seem so strange to Protestant ecumenism, nor the imperative to Christian unity, give. What give are the Protestant assumptions about what makes Church, that determines what Protestants see as real ecumenism.

I've written a long and subtle discussion about *Ella Enchanted*, New Age, and other things because I wanted to get to this point. New Age may do all sorts of things to get an impression of being Eastern, and it may be chock full of exotic decor. But underneath that decor is something very Western. It is a modified form of Protestant teachings about Church. The similarity between:

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- It doesn't matter which denomination you're part of, as long as you have faith.
- It doesn't matter much whether you stick to one denomination's prayers, doctrines, and so on and so forth, or for that matter whether

you consider yourself a member of one denomination at all.

- We should pursue the goal of uniting all the different denominations.

and:

- All religions point to the same truth.
- It doesn't matter which religion you're part of, as long as you have faith.
- It doesn't matter much whether you stick to one religion's prayers, doctrines, and so on and so forth, or for that matter whether you consider yourself a member of one religion at all.
- We should pursue the goal of uniting all the different religions.

is a disturbing similarity. And most evangelicals wouldn't touch the second list of statements with a ten foot pole. Yet it is connected to the first statement. The first set of statements isn't what the Bible says. It isn't what Christians have believed from ancient times. Its job was to give a rubber stamp to the sort of churches the Reformation created, and serve as a substitute for what the Orthodox believe about Church. And, with modifications, that way of thinking about Church has been perfectly happy to abandon Christianity and help give us the New Age movement.

My purpose isn't to get you to reject Protestant assumptions about church. But it is my purpose to help you see that they are assumptions, and that Orthodox have worshipped God for two millenia with a quite different set of assumptions. If you can see your own objection to New Age treating all religions as interchangeable, you may be able to see the Orthodox objection to treating all denominations as interchangeable, even if it's on a smaller scale. And to show why Orthodox do not simply see the Protestant style of ecumenism as necessary to a full and robust obedience to the commandment to Christian unity.

## The Focus

In Chinese translations of the Bible, the main rendering of Logos (Word in the prologue to John) is Tao, a concept in both Taoism and Confucianism which is important to Chinese thought and includes the Eastern concept of a Way. In Chinese translations, the prologue opens, "In the beginning was the Tao, and the Tao was with God, and the Tao was God." Is this appropriate?

"Tao" translates "Logos" better than any word that is common in English, and the real question is not whether it is appropriate for the Chinese to render "Logos" with their "Tao," but whether it is appropriate for us to render "Logos" with our much less potent "Word," which is kind of like undertranslating "breathtaking" as "not bad."

Is it OK to mix Christianity and Taoism? There are important incompatibilities but my reading the classic Taoist *Tao Te Ching* put me in a much better position to understand Christ the Logos and the Christian Way than I would have otherwise had. God has not left himself without a witness, and Taoism resonates with Orthodoxy.

In fact, there are quite a lot of things that resonate with Orthodoxy; it would be difficult to think of two religions, or philosophies, or movements, that have absolutely no contact. It may be easy to forget this in the West; one of the Western mind's special strength is to analyze things by looking into their differences. This is a powerful ability. But it is not the only basic insight. Essentially any two grapplings with human and spiritual realities (religions/philosophies/movements) will have points of contact. It isn't just Taoism that resonates with Orthodoxy. Hinduism is deep and has a deep resonance with Orthodoxy. The fact that I have not said more about Hinduism is only because I don't know it very well, but I know that it is deep. Catholicism resonates with Orthodoxy even more than Western Christianity as a whole. Platonism resonates with

Orthodoxy, and the Church Fathers learned from their day's Platonism, however much they tried to avoid uncritically accepting Platonism. For that matter, Gnosticism resonates with Orthodoxy. But isn't Gnosticism a heresy? Yes, and it couldn't have a heresy's sting unless it resonated with Orthodoxy. Part of a heresy's *job description* is to be confusingly similar to Orthodoxy. Postmodernism resonates with Orthodoxy. I wouldn't be surprised if some scholar has said, "Orthodoxy is postmodernism done right."

It should not come as a surprise that feminism resonates with Orthodoxy, evangelicalism, and the Bible. Jesus broke social rules in every recorded encounter with women in the Gospels. And "In Christ there is no Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" is profound, and cannot be separated from the rest of the Gospel message. Looking at a historical context and a cultural context where feminism is floating around, where some form of feminism is the air people breathe—in other words, not the Early Church's context, but *our own* historical and cultural context (yes, we have one too!), it should come as no surprise that people see the Gospel as moving towards what we now call feminism, a moderate feminism of course, and so people work to develop a Biblical egalitarianism that will coax out the woman-friendly vision the Gospel is reaching towards, and correct certain abuses and misunderstandings of the Bible in its cultural context.

This should not come as a surprise. What I had originally thought to write is as follows: It is entirely understandable to try to adjust Christianity with a moderate feminism and try to help Christianity move in the direction it seems to have been moving towards, from the very beginning, but even if it is understandable it is not entirely correct. It is not entirely incorrect but it is not entirely correct either.

Christ's robe is a seamless robe that may not be torn. So is the Gospel. The same God inspired "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female," and equally inspired, "Wives, submit to your husbands... Husbands, love your wives even as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her." *The same God who inspired one inspired the other*, and if your interpretation doesn't have room for both, it is your interpretation that needs to be adjusted, not God's revelation.

But what about cultural context? That question comes up a lot. And let me share some of what I found in my studies. I set out to do a thesis on how to tell when a book which treats a Bible passage's cultural context is

HOW TO TELL WHEN A BOOK WHICH TREATS A BIBLE PASSAGE'S CULTURAL CONTEXT IS misusing the context to neutralize a pesky passage that says something the scholar doesn't like. The first time I heard that someone had made an in-depth study of a pesky passage's cultural context and it turned out that the pesky passage meant something very different from what it appeared to mean, I believed it. I fell hook, line, and sinker. But after a while, I began to grow suspicious. It seemed that "taking the cultural context into consideration" turned out to mean "the pesky passage isn't a problem" again and again. And I began to study. That seemed to happen with every egalitarian treatment of one particular important passage—not only that I could find, but that my thesis advisor could find, and my advisor was a respected egalitarian scholar who spoke at a Christians for Biblical Equality conference! There were a lot of things I found about using cultural context, and my advisor liked my thesis. But in the end, there is a simple answer to, "How can you tell, if a book studies a pesky passage's cultural context in depth and concludes that the passage doesn't mean anything for us that would interfere with what the scholar believes, if the book is misusing cultural context to neutralize the passage?" The answer is, "There will be ink on its pages."

"In Christ there is no male nor female" is true, and it is for very good reason that that resonates with feminists. What a Biblical Egalitarian or feminist may not realize is that there is also a truth which feminism does not especially sensitize people to. "God created man in his image" is tightly connected with "Male and female he created them." There is unity in Christ, and we are called to transcend ourselves, including being male and female. But when God invites us to transcend our creaturely state, that doesn't annihilate our creaturely state; it fulfills us—just as God's promise that our bodies which are sown in decay and weakness will be raised in power and glory. Christ's promise of a transformed resurrection body does not take away our bodies; it means that our bodies will be glorified with a depth we cannot imagine. Christ's establishment of a Church that transcends male and female does not mean that being male and female is now unimportant, but that God uses them in his Kingdom that is being built here on earth. Men and women are meant to be different, in a way that you're going to miss if you're trying to see who is greater than who else. Paul writes, "There are Heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the glory of the Heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of

the moon, and another glory of the stars, and star differs from star in glory" (I Cor 15:40-41). If star differs from star in glory, so do women differ from men in glory. Men and women are different as colors are different, or as a blazing fire is different from a deep and shimmering pool. This is truth, and if you take the feminist truth alone and not the other side of the truth, you flatten out something that is best not to flatten out—and it makes a bigger difference than many people realize.

That's what I would have written earlier. What I would have focused on now is different. It seems that when people return to past glory, or *try* to return to past glory, the past resonates with what's in vogue, and we don't pick up on things people knew then that we aren't sensitive to now, or even worse we pick up on them but neutralize them. ("Man will occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of the time he will pick himself up and continue on.") We unwittingly make the past a projection screen for what is sensible to us—which often means what's in vogue. The Renaissance called for a return to past glory and ended up being an unprecedented break from the past. The same thing happened with the neo-classicist Enlightenment. And something like this happened with the Reformation. When you sever yourself from tradition to get to the past, you're cutting open a goose to get all the golden eggs.

Part of being Protestant, whether it is evangelical, or the more liberal *Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Christ* (note the effort to reach further back than even the Greek New Testament), or deconstruction to get to what a text really meant (so that the text agrees with deconstructionist revisions to morality)—part of all of this is the idea that you dig past the tradition's obstacles and barnacles to unearth the Bible's meaning, perhaps a meaning that is hidden from the common multitude who blindly accept tradition. The idea that tradition is a connection to the past seems to be obscured, and sometimes the result seems to be digging a hole with no bottom. There's no limit to how much tradition you can dig past in an attempt to reach the unvarnished text. And this phenomenon is foundational to Protestantism. There are things that distinguish evangelicals from liberal Protestants, but not the effort to liberate the text's original meaning. In that sense Biblical egalitarianism is a member in good standing of Protestant positions—not the only one, but one member in good standing. And if past glory has functioned as an ambiguous projection screen, this may mean that Biblical egalitarianism

has problems. But it doesn't mean that Biblical egalitarianism is a different sort of thing from Protestantism. It may be an example of how a Protestant movement can misunderstand the Gospel.

Attempts to recover past glory **can** be for the better. One group of evangelicals, originally in a parachurch organization, came to realize that "parachurch" wasn't part of how Early Christians operated. There was no parachurch, only Church. So, assuming that the ancient Church disappeared, they agreed to research the ancient Church and each century's developments and follow them if they were appropriate, and founded the Evangelical Orthodox Church. They went some distance into this process before they ran into a Russian Orthodox priest, and they (the real Church) were examining the outsider, or so they thought... and they found that Orthodoxy preserved the ancient teaching about the Lord's body and blood, and about Church structure, and... things were suddenly upside-down. The ancient Christian Church had not dried up. It was alive and well; they had simply overlooked it when they tried to re-create the ancient Church. It was *they* who were the outsiders. And they realized they needed to be received into the Orthodox Church.

My parish was Evangelical Orthodox before it became part of the Orthodox communion, which I think is special. So Evangelical Orthodoxy turned out all right. Why then would Biblical egalitarianism have gone wrong? That's not the puzzle. The puzzle is Evangelical Orthodoxy. Evangelical Orthodoxy is a surprise much like getting an envelope that says "Extremely important—open immediately!" and finding that it has something extremely important that needs to be opened immediately. Usually "Extremely important—open immediately" is a red flag which suggests that the contents of the envelope are something other than what you're being led to believe.

But my focus is not to say who's wrong and who's right in the Protestant theme of recovering the glory of the Early Church. It's not even to suggest that tradition is a mediator that connects us with past glory, a living link, instead of an obstacle which chiefly gets in our way. My focus is to talk about something that looms this large in Orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy is not understood best as the content of a private choice, any more than learning physics is privately choosing ideas about how the world works. In one sense it's hard to out-argue someone who says that, but that isn't a very Orthodox way of thinking. It could be called using Orthodoxy as if it were a private heresy. (Once I wanted to be Orthodox

Orthodoxy as if it were a private heresy. (Once I wanted to be Orthodox out of that kind of desire, and God said, "No.") It's also deceptive to say that a convert Orthodox should select Orthodoxy as a sort of winner in the contest of "Will the real ancient Church please stand up?" which he's judging. It's truer to say that that happens for many former evangelicals (including Your Truly) than I would like to admit, but Orthodoxy points to something deeper.

Repentance (which some Orthodox call "metanoia") looms almost as large in Eastern Orthodoxy as recovering the past glory of the ancient Church looms large in Western Protestantism. For that matter, it might loom larger. And I'd like to comment on what repentance is. This may or may not be very different from Western understandings of repentance—I learned much about repentance as an evangelical—but it would be worth clarifying.

Repentance is not just a matter of admitting that you're wrong and deciding you'll try to do better the next time. That's what repentance would be if God's grace were irrelevant. But God's grace is key to repentance. Grace isn't just something that God gives you after you repent. Repentance itself is a work of grace.

If repentance isn't simply admitting your error and deciding you want to do better, then what else is repentance? In this case, Orthodoxy becomes clearer if it is compared and contrasted with other Middle Eastern or Eastern religions.

"Islam" means "submission," and "Muslim" means "one who submits to God." Submission is not one feature of Islam among others; it is foundational to the landscape, and one of the deepest criticisms of Islam is that the Islamic way of understanding submission, and the Islamic picture of God, effectively deny the reality of man. How does Islam deny the reality of man? God alone contributes to the world's story. The only real place for us is virtual puppets—not people who help decide what goes into the story. But Islam's central emphasis on submission is itself something that's not too far from Orthodoxy.

In Hinduism and Buddhism, one of the defining goals is to transcend the self and become selfless, and both Hinduism and Buddhism believe this requires the annihilation of the self. In some of Hinduism, salvation means that the self dissolves in God like a drop of water returning to the ocean. In therevada Buddhism, to be saved is to be annihilated altogether.

Orthodoxy, by contrast, is deeply connected with the Gospel words, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will find it." (Mark 8:35) One of Orthodoxy's founding goals is to become selfless and transcending oneself—offering oneself totally and wholly to God, saying, "Strike me and heal me; cast me down and raise me up, whatever you will to do." This is how Orthodoxy believes in transcending one's being male and female: something that is totally offered up to God and which God, instead of annihilating, breathes his spirit into. This is the difference between Orthodoxy on the one hand, and on the other hand Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and even moderate feminism. Unlike Islam's picture, whoever totally submits to God, or strives for submission, hears God's voice boom forth, "Come! I want you to contribute to the story of my Creation! I want you to work alongside me!" The goal of Orthodoxy, or one of its defining goals, is to help each person to be fully who God created him or her to be.

What does this have to do with repentance?

Repentance means losing yourself. It means unconditional surrender. Losing yourself for Christ's sake and for the sake of the Gospel is transformed to mean finding yourself. Repentance is unconditional surrender, and it is one of the most terrifying things a person can experience. It's much more than letting go of a sin and saying, "I'm sorry." It's letting go of yourself. It's obeying God when he says, "I want you to write me a blank check." Perhaps afterwards you may be surprised how little money God actually wrote the check for—I am astonished at times—but God insists on us writing a blank check. God tells us to place our treasures, our sins, our very selves at his feet, for him to do whatever he wants, and that is absolutely terrifying. *Repentance isn't letting go of sin. It is unconditional surrender to God.* And it's the only way to transcend the self and become a selfless and transformed "me."

One pastor used the image (he held up his keys when he said this) that we've given God absolutely all of our keys—all but one, that is. And God is saying, "Give me that one," and we're giving God *anything* but that. God demands unconditional surrender, and he calls for unconditional surrender so that we can be free, truly free. In my own life I've offered God all sorts of consolation prizes, all sorts of substitutes for what he was asking me, and when I did let go, I realized that I was holding onto a

piece of Hell. Before it is terrifying to let go, and then after I let go of my sin, I am horrified to realize that I was holding on to a smouldering piece of Hell itself. A recovering alcoholic will tell you that rejecting tightly held denial is something that an alcoholic will do absolutely anything to avoid—and that rejecting to denial is the only way to be freed from bondage to alcohol. That is very much what Orthodoxy announces about repenting from our sin.

Hell is not something external that will be added to sin starting in the afterlife. Every sin is itself the beginning of Hell. Orthodox theology says that the gates of Hell are bolted, barred, and sealed *from the inside*. It's not so much that God casts people into Hell as that Hell is a place people refuse to leave: Hell's motto may be, "It is better to reign in Hell than serve into Heaven." Hell is where God leaves people when they refuse to unbolt its gates and open themselves to the Father's love. I've experienced the beginning of Hell, and the beginning of Heaven, and you've experienced them both. Every sin is a seed that will grow into Hell unless we let God uproot it, and that means letting him dig however deep he wills.

Repentance needs to be not only admitting to a sin, but an unconditional surrender that leans on God's grace because apart from God it is beyond us. Repentance needs to be unconditional surrender because only when we give God our last key will we be released from holding on to that one piece of Hell we are trying to avoid giving to God. Repentance is a work of grace, both in God taking the piece of Hell we were clinging to, and in God's power helping us give us the strength to let go of that one piece of Hell.

That much is true, but this article is incomplete even as a tour guide. I'm not even sure it's an accurate picture of Orthodoxy. There's a joyful dance, a dance of grace and ever-expanding freedom, and this article is a still, flat picture of that dance. Everything I describe is meant as Orthodox, but I have flattened out its living energy (which is why this is so philosophical), without doing it justice. The solution is not a better and more complete picture of the dance that will still be flat and still. The solution is for you to see the dance live, whether or not these observations are what God wants you to see. God may want to show you things I've never hinted at, or use something I've written to help you connect with Orthodox worship, or for that matter use this article as a key to open the treasuries of Orthodoxy. But that is God's choice. And he can also

treasurehouses of Orthodoxy. But that is God's choice. And he can also connect you with the here and now as many Orthodox emphasize, or make everyday life more and more a home for contemplation, or pick out other treasures that you need. We don't know our true needs—God does, and he cares for them.

## For Further Reading...

If you've read this far and want to know how you can read more, I have not succeeded very well at communicating. I'm not saying there aren't any good books out there. There are scores and scores, and I've even read some of them. I love to read. But please don't try to read five more books on Orthodoxy so you'll understand it better. *Please* don't.

Go visit a parish. Participate, and come to experience firsthand, for real, what this book is at best a tour guide to. Even if this tour guide helps you see things you might not pick up on your own, it's only the tour guide. The reality is the life that Orthodox live, and if you come to a service wanting to take something in, I will be surprised if nothing happens. Joining Orthodox worship (even just sitting or standing) and trying to take everything in, is like falling into a lifegiving river, being surrounded by its mighty currents, and coming to contact with a little bit of it. Don't worry if you don't understand everything that's going on. I serve at the altar as an adult acolyte, and I *certainly* don't understand all that's going on. But I don't need to. There's a saying that a mouse can only drink its fill from a river, and it's simply beside the point that we can't drink all the water in the river. We don't need to. What we can do is take away what we are ready for and drink our fill.

And if you still feel a bit intimidated, like most of this is too subtle to understand—don't worry. You don't need to understand it the Western way, by figuring out all the concepts in an article. The Eastern way is to go to an Orthodox Church, and let God teach you over time. If you do that, it doesn't matter how much or how little this article seemed easy to think about.

[Would you like to find an Orthodox parish near you? \(Outside the US\)](#)

# Glory

Glory,  
Wonder,  
World without end.

World without end:  
Have I sought Thee,  
When I fled afar off from Thee,  
Thou alone whose Glory slaketh thirst,  
*World without end?*

To Thee belongeth worship,  
To Thee belongeth praise,  
To Thee belongeth glory,  
To the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages.  
Amen.

Why am I athirst,  
I who seek water any place,  
But from Thine own hand?

Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:  
But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him,  
Shall never thirst;  
But the water that I shall give him,  
Shall be in him a well of water,  
Springing up into everlasting life.

I seek my glory,  
In thinly gilt traps,  
And turn my back,  
On the unadorned portals,  
Through which Thou hast glorified me

through which thou hast glorified me,  
Ever seeking my glory,  
While forbidding me to quest,  
For my glory along accursed routes.

For we have committed two evils:  
We have forsaken Thee,  
The fountain of living waters,  
And hewed ourselves out cisterns,  
Broken cisterns that can hold no water.

We have committed this evil;  
I must repent of it.

Glory and wonder, majesty and power,  
Thou forbiddest us to seek our own glory,  
That Thou mightest rightly glorify us,  
With the maximum glory that could ever be ours.

Glory, glory, glory:  
Glory surroundeth thee—  
And drencheth those who humbly seek,  
Thine own glory to magnify.  
No man who seeketh,  
Thine own glory to magnify,  
Can far pursue his quest,  
Before an invisible trickle comes before thy Throne,  
And drencheth him,  
In the glory he seeketh not,  
Not for himself.

After this I looked, and,  
Behold, a door was opened in heaven:  
And the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet,  
Talking with me;  
Which said,  
Come up hither,  
And I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.  
And immediately I was in the spirit:  
And, behold, a throne was set in heaven,  
And one sat on the throne.  
And he that sat was to look upon,  
Like a jasper and a sardine stone:

And there was a rainbow round about the throne,  
In sight like unto an emerald.  
And round about the throne were four and twenty seats:  
And upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting,  
Clothed in white raiment;  
And they had on their heads crowns of gold.  
And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices:  
And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne,  
Which are the seven Spirits of God.  
And before the throne,  
There was a sea of glass like unto crystal:  
And in the midst of the throne,  
And round about the throne,  
Were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.  
And the first beast was like a lion,  
And the second beast like a calf,  
And the third beast had a face as a man,  
And the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.  
And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him;  
And they were full of eyes within:  
And they rest not day and night, saying,  
"Holy, holy, holy,  
LORD God Almighty,  
Which was, and is, and is to come."  
And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks  
To him that sat on the throne,  
Who liveth for ever and ever,  
The four and twenty elders,  
Fall down before him that sat on the throne,  
And worship him that liveth for ever and ever,  
And cast their crowns before the throne, saying,  
"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power:  
for thou hast created all things,  
and for thy pleasure they are and were created."  
There is more glory in Heaven and earth,  
Than I ever dream of in my grasping:  
Honor,

Majesty,  
Glory,  
Praise.

Let me seek this Thy glory,  
And leave to Thee the seeking of mine own glory.  
Thou hast said,  
The greater thou art,  
The more humble thyself,  
And thou shalt find favour before the Lord.

Wonder.

Glory.  
Help me forsake the quest,  
To slake my thirst for mine own glory,  
That thou mightest slake my thirst,  
With a draught that infinitely eclipseth,  
Such things as I have grasped.

Eye hath not seen,  
Nor ear heard,  
Neither have entered into the heart of man,  
The things which God hath prepared for them that love Him,  
Things that begin in this here and now,  
In ways beyond human reckoning.

Eye hath not seen,  
Nor ear heard,  
Neither have entered into the heart of man,  
The things which God hath prepared for them that love Him,  
The eternity that is here now,  
That which was from the beginning,  
Which we have heard and still rings in our ears,  
Which we have seen with our eyes and can still see how it looks,  
Which we have looked upon,  
Which we have touched with our very own hands,  
Of the Word of God:

The Lord is King!  
He hath clothed Himself in glory!

# God the Game Changer

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

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

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

standard everyone was trying to beat, and at least before the DROID, no "iPhone killer" even came close.

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

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

## **God the Game Changer at work: A story**

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

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

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

She was given some money and purchased three loaves of bread as she

left, and then went, and struggled and struggled and struggled in what seemed like endless temptations and struggles. She had given free reign to her vices for seventeen years, and for seventeen years in the desert she wanted men, wanted wine and lewd songs, wanted meat, and just kept on struggling. After a time—a long, *long* time—things got easier. And she had been living for almost half a century in the desert, eating desert plants and at the mercies of the elements. It came up in the conversation that she quoted from the Bible with understanding. The monk asked her if she had read them. She said she had never seen another person since making the journey, had no one to read holy books to her, and like most people then, she didn't know how to read. Then she alluded to Scripture and suggested that Christ the Word may teach by himself.

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

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

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

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying,  
"Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not

...master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."

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

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

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

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

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

The servant's accusation, which the master repeats, is that God is so intent on harvest that he harvests whether or not he has sown. The priest, monk, and *saint* Zosima is among the greatest of saints, and he lived a life of spiritual work and spiritually sober living before God. His life was full of seeds that God sowed, and probably from childhood. And God

harvested Saint Zosima's good works. But Saint Zosima needed something. He needed to be knocked completely flat on his back.

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

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

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

A present-day example of God's game-changing, this time not with sin but with injury, is in the life of Joni Erickson. At a young age, Erickson dove the wrong way into shallow water and broke her neck, instantly paralyzing her in all four limbs. And she assuredly prayed what everybody who has such an accident prays if prayer is even considered: "Lord, heal me." And some people are healed, miraculously. But an entirely different, in a way deeper, miracle occurred with her. She adjusted to her loss and is a woman who has not only discovered that her life is still worth living, but has become a vibrant and well-known ambassador for the claim, "*Even after a tragedy like mine, life is still worth living.*" None of this would have happened if she had not suffered an injury that cost her the use of all four limbs. For that matter, none of this would have happened if God answered her prayers by giving her the supernatural healing she wanted. Instead, God changed the game. He answered her prayers, not by giving what she asked for, but by moving the game to the next level. God did not plant her injury, but he has harvested where he did not plant and gathered in where he never scattered.

## More than a game change

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let no one bewail his poverty,  
For the universal Kingdom has been revealed.  
Let no one weep for his iniquities,  
For pardon has shown forth from the grave.  
Let no one fear death,  
For the Saviour's death has set us free.  
He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it.  
By descending into Hell, He made Hell captive.  
He embittered it when it tasted of His flesh.

And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry:  
Hell, said he, was embittered  
When it encountered Thee in the lower regions.  
It was embittered, for it was abolished.  
It was embittered, for it was mocked.  
It was embittered, for it was slain.  
It was embittered, for it was overthrown.  
It was embittered, for it was fettered in chains.  
It took a body, and met God face to face.  
It took earth, and encountered Heaven.  
It took that which was seen, and fell upon the unseen.

O Death, where is thy sting?  
O Hell, where is thy victory?  
Christ is risen, and thou art overthrown!  
Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!  
Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice!  
Christ is risen, and life reigns!  
Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave.  
For Christ, being risen from the dead,  
Is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.  
To Him be glory and dominion  
Unto ages of ages.  
Amen.

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

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

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

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

"Yes," said the Lion in a very quiet voice, almost (Jill thought) as if he were laughing. "He has died. Most people have, you know. Even I have. There are very few who haven't."

Earlier in the Gospel, in Luke chapter 7, there is a scene where a widow's only son is carried out on a bier, and Christ says something truly

strange: before doing anything else, he tells her not to weep. He is speaking to a woman who has been twice bereaved, and with her last bereavement went her source of support. And he tells her, "Weep not!" He then goes on to raise her son from the dead. That isn't what is happening in Christ's resurrection.

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

*Christ is risen, His joy!*

# God the Spiritual Father

I believe in one God, the Father, Almighty...  
*The Nicene Creed*

All of us do the will of God. The question is not whether we do God's will or not, but whether we do God's will as *instruments*, as Satan and Judas did, or as *sons*, as Peter and John did. In the end Satan may be nothing more than a hammer in the hand of God.  
*C.S. Lewis, paraphrased*

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.  
[Proverbs](#)

My precious, precious child, I love you and will never leave you. When you see one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.  
[Footprints](#), paraphrased

Look to every situation as if you were going to bargain at the market, always looking to make a spiritual profit.  
*The Philokalia*, paraphrased

For it was fitting that God, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make Christ the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.  
[Hebrews](#)

There are a lot of concerns on people's minds. For those of us in the U.S., we've been facing an economic disaster. Is "the decade from Hell" over and done? Or has the economic depression just begun? Has the *real* nightmare just *begun*? People have faced unemployment, and some are worried about hyper-inflation. And the big question on almost everyone's mind is, "Can I survive this? And if so, how?" And these quotes have something to say to the billion dollar question on almost everyone's mind.

Let's turn the clock back a bit, to 1755. There was a catastrophic earthquake in Lisbonne in Portugal, and its untold misery shook people's faith in the goodness of the world we live in. In the questioning that came afterwards, Voltaire wrote *Candide* in which the rather ludicrous teacher Pangloss is always explaining that we live in "the best of all possible worlds:" no matter what misfortune or disaster befell them, the unshakable Pangloss would always find a way to explain that we still lived in the best of all possible worlds. And Voltaire's point is to rip that preposterous idea apart, giving a dose of reality and showing what the misery in Lisbonne made painfully clear: we do *not* live in the best of all possible worlds. Far from it. But there is another shoe to drop.

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

Once we have truly grasped that God the Spiritual Father is the best of all possible Gods, it becomes a mistake to focus on how, in fact, we simply do not live in the best of all possible worlds. Perhaps we all need to repent and recognize that we ourselves are far from being the best of all possible *people*. But we need to raise our eyes higher: raise our eyes and see that our lives and our world are under the love of the best of all possible Gods: God the Spiritual Father.

The Orthodox Church has understood this since ancient times. Let's read some longer quotes:

We ought all of us always to thank God for both the universal and the particular gifts of soul and body that He bestows on us. The universal gifts consist of the four elements and all that comes into

universal gifts consist of the four elements and all that comes into being through them, as well as all the marvelous works of God mentioned in the divine Scriptures. The particular gifts consist of all that God has given to each individual. These include:

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.
- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgment and establish virtue.
- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
- Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
- Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
- Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire virtue.
- Weakness and ignorance, so that, turning one's back on worldly things, one may be under obedience in stillness and humility.
- Unsought loss of goods and possessions, so that one may deliberately seek to be saved and may even be helped when incapable of shedding all one's possessions or even of giving alms.
- Ease and prosperity, so that one may voluntarily struggle and suffer to attain the virtues and thus become dispassionate and fit to save other souls.
- Trials and hardship, so that those who cannot eradicate their own will may be saved in spite of themselves, and those capable of joyful endurance may attain perfection.

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

### *The Philokalia*

He who wants to be an imitator of Christ, so that he too may be called a son of God, born of the Spirit, must above all bear courageously and patiently the afflictions he encounters, whether these be bodily illnesses, slander and vilification from men, or attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls

attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls to be tested by various afflictions of this kind, so that it may be revealed which of them truly loves Him. All the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs from the beginning of time traversed none other than this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by doing this that they fulfilled God's will. 'My son,' says Scripture, 'if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently endure' (Ecclus. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: 'Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.' Thus the soul that wishes to do God's will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to utter confusion. As St Paul writes: 'God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a way out, so that we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

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

and afflictions are laid upon a man in the way that is best for him, so as to make his soul stronger and more mature; and if the soul endures them to the end with hope in the Lord it cannot fail to attain the promised reward of the Spirit and deliverance from the evil passions.

*The Philokalia*

## **All These Things Were From Me**

*(The new St. Seraphim, of Viritsa was born in 1866. He married and had three children. In 1920, at the age of 54, he and his wife quietly separated and each entered monastic life. Eventually he became the spiritual father of the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra in St. Petersburg, where, as a clairvoyant staretz, he also confessed thousands of laity. He said, "I am the storage room where people's afflictions gather." In imitation of his patron saint, he prayed for a thousand nights on a rock before an icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov. He reposed in the Lord in 1949 and the Church of Russia glorified him in August of 2000.)*

*The following is (slightly abridged) from a letter sent by St. Seraphim to a spiritual child of his, a hierarch who was at that time in a Soviet prison. It is in the form of consolation given by God to a troubled man's soul.*

St. Seraphim of Viritsa

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

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

I am your God, the circumstances of your life are in My hands; you did not end up in your position by chance; this is precisely the position I have appointed for you. Weren't you asking Me to teach you humility? And there - I placed you precisely in the "school" where they teach this lesson. Your environment and those who are

where they teach this lesson. Your environment, and those who are around you, are performing My will. Do you have financial difficulties and can just barely survive? Know that This was from Me.

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

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

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

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

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

Because then you were sunk in your own works and plans and I wouldn't have been able to draw your thoughts to Me. But I want to

teach you the most deep thoughts and My lessons, so that you may serve Me. I want to teach you that you are nothing without Me. Some of my best children are those who, cut off from an active life, learn to use the weapon of ceaseless prayer. You were called unexpectedly to undertake a difficult and responsible position, supported by Me. I have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

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

All these things were from Me.

*St. Seraphim of Viritsa*

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it

with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### [Romans](#)

We may be entering an economic depression. We live in hard times, and things may get much harder. It is becoming more and more clear that this is no mere recession: it looks more and more like a depression. We see people asking, "Where is God when it hurts?" And there is something important about the answer to "Where is God when it hurts?": something very important, something profoundly important.

I believe in one God, the *Spiritual* Father Almighty.

I'm not sure how to explain this without saying something about Orthodox monasticism, but the Orthodox concept of a *spiritual father* is

of someone one owes obedience in everything, and who normally assigns some things that are very difficult to do, unpleasant, and painful. And this seems a strange thing to be getting into. But there is method to what may seem mad: we do not reach our greatest good, we do not flourish, we do not reach our highest heights, if we are the spiritual equivalent of spoiled children. And the entire point of this duty of obedience is to arrange things for the good of the person who obeys in this situation. *The entire point of obedience in what the spiritual father arranges is for the spiritual father as a spiritual physician to give health and freedom through the disciple's obedience.*

In that sense, only monks and nuns are expected to have spiritual fathers to shape them. The rest of us have God as our Spiritual Father, and we can kick against the goads, but God the Spiritual Father is at work in every person we meet. *God the Spiritual Father is God the Great Physician, working everything for our health and freedom if we will cooperate.* People and situations he sends us may be part of his will for us as instruments, or they may be part of his will for us as sons of God, but God's will unfolds in each person who acts in our lives: kind people and cruel, having excess and having lack, getting our way and having our will cut short as a spiritual father does to form a monk under his care, becomes part of the work of God the Spiritual Father. Even economic nightmares become part of "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."

When God gives us our true good, *nothing* can take it away.

What exactly is our true good unfolds in [the saints' lives, which are well worth reading](#): many of them lived in great hardship. Some were martyred; [the beloved St. Nectarios](#) lost his job repeatedly for reasons that were not just unfortunate, but completely and absolutely unfair. God was still at work in his life, and he is now crowned as a saint in Heaven. God allowed things to happen, terrible things to happen, but not one of them took him away from God giving him everything he needed and ultimately working in him the glory of one of the greatest saints in recent times.

[The Sermon on the Mount](#) says some harsh words about how we use money, but these words set the stage for a profound treasure that we can still have, even in an economic depression:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, [*or, today, where economic havoc can ruin our financial planning*] but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal [*or, today, where your treasures cannot be taken away even by a complete economic meltdown*].

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also...

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

For the godless seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have its own worries. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The life of St. Philaret the Merciful speaks volumes:

Righteous Philaret the Merciful, son of George and Anna, was raised in piety and the fear of God. He lived during the eighth century in the village of Amneia in the Paphlagonian district of Asia Minor. His wife, Theoseba, was from a rich and illustrious family, and they had three children: a son John, and daughters Hypatia and

Evanthia.

Philaret was a rich and illustrious dignitary, but he did not hoard his wealth. Knowing that many people suffered from poverty, he remembered the words of the Savior about the dread Last Judgment and about "these least ones" (Mt. 25:40); the the Apostle Paul's reminder that we will take nothing with us from this world (1 Tim 6:7); and the assertion of King David that the righteous would not be forsaken (Ps 36/37:25). Philaret, whose name means "lover of virtue," was famed for his love for the poor.

One day Ishmaelites [Arabs] attacked Paphlagonia, devastating the land and plundering the estate of Philaret. There remained only two oxen, a donkey, a cow with her calf, some beehives, and the house. But he also shared them with the poor. His wife reproached him for being heartless and unconcerned for his own family. Mildly, yet firmly he endured the reproaches of his wife and the jeers of his children. "I have hidden away riches and treasure," he told his family, "so much that it would be enough for you to feed and clothe yourselves, even if you lived a hundred years without working."

The saint's gifts always brought good to the recipient. Whoever received anything from him found that the gift would multiply, and that person would become rich. Knowing this, a certain man came to St Philaret asking for a calf so that he could start a herd. The cow missed its calf and began to bellow. Theoseba said to her husband, "You have no pity on us, you merciless man, but don't you feel sorry for the cow? You have separated her from her calf." The saint praised his wife, and agreed that it was not right to separate the cow and the calf. Therefore, he called the poor man to whom he had given the calf and told him to take the cow as well.

That year there was a famine, so St Philaret took the donkey and went to borrow six bushels of wheat from a friend of his. When he returned home, a poor man asked him for a little wheat, so he told his wife to give the man a bushel. Theoseba said, "First you must give a bushel to each of us in the family, then you can give away the rest as you choose." Philaretos then gave the man two bushels of wheat. Theoseba said sarcastically, "Give him half the load so you can share it." The saint measured out a third bushel and gave it to the man. Then Theoseba said, "Why don't you give him the bag, too, so he can

carry it?" He gave him the bag. The exasperated wife said, "Just to spite me, why not give him all the wheat." St Philaret did so.

Now the man was unable to lift the six bushels of wheat, so Theoseba told her husband to give him the donkey so he could carry the wheat home. Blessing his wife, Philaret gave the donkey to the man, who went home rejoicing. Theoseba and the children wept because they were hungry.

The Lord rewarded Philaret for his generosity: when the last measure of wheat was given away, a old friend sent him forty bushels. Theoseba kept most of the wheat for herself and the children, and the saint gave away his share to the poor and had nothing left. When his wife and children were eating, he would go to them and they gave him some food. Theoseba grumbled saying, "How long are you going to keep that treasure of yours hidden? Take it out so we can buy food with it."

During this time the Byzantine empress Irene (797-802) was seeking a bride for her son, the future emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos (780-797). Therefore, emissaries were sent throughout all the Empire to find a suitable girl, and the envoys came to Amneia.

When Philaret and Theoseba learned that these most illustrious guests were to visit their house, Philaret was very happy, but Theoseba was sad, for they did not have enough food. But Philaret told his wife to light the fire and to decorate their home. Their neighbors, knowing that imperial envoys were expected, brought everything required for a rich feast.

The envoys were impressed by the saint's daughters and granddaughters. Seeing their beauty, their deportment, their clothing, and their admirable qualities, the envoys agreed that Philaret' granddaughter, Maria was exactly what they were looking for. This Maria exceeded all her rivals in quality and modesty and indeed became Constantine's wife, and the emperor rewarded Philaret.

Thus fame and riches returned to Philaret. But just as before, this holy lover of the poor generously distributed alms and provided a feast for the poor. He and his family served them at the meal. Everyone was astonished at his humility and said: "This is a man of God, a true disciple of Christ."

He ordered a servant to take three bags and fill one with gold, one with silver, and one with copper coins. When a beggar approached, Philaret ordered his servant to bring forth one of the bags, whichever God's providence would ordain. Then he would reach into the bag and give to each person, as much as God willed.

St Philaret refused to wear fine clothes, nor would he accept any imperial rank. He said it was enough for him to be called the grandfather of the Empress. The saint reached ninety years of age and knew his end was approaching. He went to the Rodolpheia ("The Judgment") monastery in Constantinople. He gave some gold to the Abbess and asked her to allow him to be buried there, saying that he would depart this life in ten days.

He returned home and became ill. On the tenth day he summoned his family, he exhorted them to imitate his love for the poor if they desired salvation. Then he fell asleep in the Lord. He died in the year 792 and was buried in the Rodolpheia Judgment monastery in Constantinople.

The appearance of a miracle after his death confirmed the sainthood of Righteous Philaret. As they bore the body of the saint to the cemetery, a certain man, possessed by the devil, followed the funeral procession and tried to overturn the coffin. When they reached the grave, the devil threw the man down on the ground and went out of him. Many other miracles and healings also took place at the grave of the saint.

After the death of the righteous Philaret, his wife Theoseba worked at restoring monasteries and churches devastated during a barbarian invasion.

This merciful saint trusted God the Spiritual Father. He cashed in on the promise, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his perfect righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you as well."

In terms of [how to survive an economic depression](#), the right question to ask is *not*, "Do I have enough treasures stored up on earth?" but "Do I have enough treasures in Heaven?" And the merciful St. Philaret lived a life out of abundant treasure in Heaven.

The biggest thing we need right now is to know the point of life, which is to live the life of Heaven, not starting at death, but starting here on

earth. C.S. Lewis lectured to students on the eve of World War II when it looked like Western civilization was on the verge of permanent collapse. I won't try to repeat what he said beyond "Life has never been normal" and add that God's providence is for difficult circumstances every bit as much as when life seems normal. God's providence is how we can survive an economic depression. [The Sermon on the Mount](#) is no mere wish list only for when life that is perfect; it is meant for God's work with us even in circumstances we would not choose, *especially* in circumstances we would not choose, and speaks of the love of God the Spiritual Father who can and will work with us in an economic depression, if we will let him, and work with us no less than when life is easy.

(Some have said not only that God provides in rough times as well as easy times, but that God's providence is in fact clearer in rough times, such as an economic depression, than when things go our way and we can forget that we need a bit of help from above.)

God the Spiritual Father wants to use everything for our good. Everything he allows, everything in our lives, is either a blessing or a temptation that has been allowed for our strengthening. His purpose even in allowing rough things to happen is to help us grow up spiritually, and to make us Heavenly. [The Great Divorce](#) imagines a busload of people come from Hell to visit Heaven, and what happens is something much like what happens in our lives: they are offered Heaven and they do not realize Heaven is better than the seeds Hell that they keep clinging to because they are afraid to let go. Heaven and Hell are both real, but God does not send people to Hell. C.S. Lewis quotes someone saying that there are two kinds of people in this world: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "*Thy* will be done," respecting their choice to choose Hell after Heaven has been freely offered to them. The gates of Hell are bolted and barred from the inside. Hellfire is nothing other than the Light of Heaven as experienced by those who reject the only possibility for living joy there is. And neither the reality of Heaven nor the state of mind we call Hell begins after death; their seeds grow on us in this training ground we call life. We can become saints, heavenly people like St. Philaret, or we can care only about ourselves and our own survival. God the Spiritual Father wants to shape us to be part of the beauty of Heaven, and everything he sends us is intended for that purpose. But in freedom he will let us veto his blessings and choose to be

in Hell.

Heaven is generous, and that generosity was something Heavenly that shone during the Great Depression. People who had very little shared. They shared money or food, if they had any. (And even if you have no money to share, you can share time; if you do not have a job, you can still volunteer.) St. Philaret shared because he knew something: "Knowing that many people suffered from poverty, he remembered the words of the Savior about the dread Last Judgment and about 'these least ones' (Mt. 25:40)..." In this part of the saint's life, the reference is to some of the most chilling words following [The Sermon on the Mount](#) in the Gospel:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?"

And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

Then he will say to those at his left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?"

Then he will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these you did it not to me "

ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE, YOU DID IT NOT TO ME.

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

St. Philaret the Merciful will be greeted before Christ's awesome judgment seat and hear, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I came to you and asked for a little wheat, and you gave me all six bushels you had, and your only donkey with them." God did provide, but the reward is not just that a friend gave him forty bushels of wheat. The ultimate reward is that Christ regards how St. Philaret treated other people as how he treated Christ himself, and because St. Philaret was merciful, there is a reward for him in Heaven, a reward so great that next to it, the forty bushels of wheat from his friend utterly pale in comparison.

Remember this next time you see a beggar. If you can't give a quarter, at least see if there is a kind word or a prayer you can give. This has everything to do with [how to survive an economic depression](#).

We are at a time with terrible prospects for earthly comfort, but take heart. Let me again quote Lewis: "Heaven cannot give earthly comfort, and earth cannot give earthly comfort either. In the end, Heavenly comfort is the only comfort to be had. To quote from my own [Silence: Organic Food for the Soul](#):

Do you worry? Is it terribly hard  
to get all your ducks in a row,  
to get yourself to a secure place  
where you have prepared for what might happen?  
Or does it look like you might lose your job,  
if you still have one?

[The Sermon on the Mount](#)

urges people to pray,  
"Give us this day our daily bread,"  
in an economy  
when unlike many homeless in the U.S. today,  
it was not obvious to many  
where they would get their next meal.  
And yet it was this [Sermon on the Mount](#)  
that tells us our Heavenly Father will provide for us,

and tells us not to worry:  
what we miss  
if we find this a bit puzzling,  
we who may have bank accounts, insurance, investments  
even if they are jeopardized right now,  
is that we are like a child with some clay,  
trying to satisfy ourselves by making a clay horse,  
with clay that never cooperates, never looks right,  
and obsessed with clay that is never good enough,  
we ignore and maybe fear  
the finger tapping us on our shoulder  
until with great trepidation we turn,  
and listen to the voice say,  
"Stop trying so hard. Let it go,"  
and follow our father  
as he gives us a warhorse.

This life is an apprenticeship, and even now, when we may be in situations we do not like, God is asking us to be apprentices, learning to be knights riding the warhorse he gives us *even in the situations we might not like*. The life of Heaven begins on earth, *even in an economic depression*.

However much power world leaders may have, God the Spiritual Father is sovereign, and their summits pale in comparison for the work God the Spiritual Father is working even now.

Why do the nations conspire,  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers take counsel together,  
against the LORD and his Christ, saying,  
"Let us rip apart their religious restrictions,  
and throw off their shackles."  
He who sits in the heavens laughs;  
the LORD has them in derision.

[Psalms](#)

For the conqueror says: "By the strength of my hand I have done

it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I have removed the boundaries of peoples, and have plundered their treasures; like a bull I have brought down those who sat on thrones. My hand has found like a nest the wealth of the peoples; and as men gather eggs that have been forsaken so I have gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing, or opened the mouth, or chirped."

Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood!

### [Isaiah](#)

World leaders may work his will as instruments or as sons, but they will always work his will. This is true in an economic depression as much as any other time. God the Spiritual Father rules the world as sovereign on a deeper level than we can imagine, and he works good out of everything to those who love him and are called according to his purpose to make them sons of God.

Some people really hope that if the right government programs are in place, we can get back on track to a better life. But even if governments have their place, "Put not your trust in princes," or rather, "Do not put your trust in governments," is not obsolete. Far from it: government initiatives cannot make everything better, even in the long haul, even with lots of time, sacrifices, and resources. But having given that bad news, I have good news too. Even if government initiatives fail to do what we want them to, we have God the Spiritual Father trying to give us the greatest good, and the time he offers us his will does not start sometime in the future: it is for *here*, and it is for **now**. He works his will alike through instruments like Satan and Judas, and sons like Peter and John, but in either case he works his will now, not sometime in the future when some human effort starts achieving results. Again, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will."

God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man that man might become god and the sons of God.

*St. Maximus Confessor*

There was one time when two theology professors were talking when the weather was very rough. One of them said, "This is the day that the Lord has made," and the other said, "Well, he's done better!" And the joke may be funny, but sun and rain, heat and cold, are all given by God. We miss something if we only think God is working with us if it is warm and sunny, if we find ourselves in a violent storm and assume God must have abandoned us, if it seems that God can't or won't help us because the weather is so bad.

And we are missing something if we look at the news and the world around us, and want to say, "This is the day that the Lord has made... he's done better!"

If we are in an economic depression, say, "This is the day that the Lord has made." You're missing something if you need to add, "Well, he's done better!"

A friend quoted to me when I was in a rough spot,

"Life's Tapestry"

Behind those golden clouds up there  
the Great One sews a priceless embroidery  
and since down below we walk  
we see, my child, the reverse view.

And consequently it is natural for the mind to see mistakes  
there where one must give thanks and glorify.

Wait as a Christian for that day to come  
where your soul a-wing will rip through the air  
and you shall see the embroidery of God  
from the good side  
and then... everything will seem to you to be a system and order.

And it is true. It is not just, as some have said, that *God's address is at the end of your rope*. That is where you meet God best. It may be easier, not harder, to find God and his providential care in an economic depression. God is working a plan of eternal glory. Westminster opens with the great question, "What is the chief end of man?" and answers, "To glorify God and enjoy him forever." But there is a deeper answer. *The chief end of man is to become Christ*. The chief end of man is to become by grace what Christ is by nature. God and the Son of God became Man

and the Son of Man that man and the sons of man might become gods and the sons of God. The Son of God became a man that men might become the sons of God. The divine became human that the human might become divine. This saying has rumbled down through the ages: not only the entire point of being human, but the entire point of each and every circumstance God the Spiritual Father allows to come to us, as a blessing or as a temptation allowed for our strengthening, as God's will working through instruments or sons, is to make us share in Christ's divinity, and [the saints' lives](#) show few saints who met this purpose when everything went their way, and a great many where God worked in them precisely in rough and painful circumstances. If we watch the news and say, "This is the day the Lord has made. Well, he's done better," try to open your eyes to the possibility that "Well, he's done better" is what people want to say when, in the words of C.S. Lewis in [The Chronicles of Narnia](#), "*Aslan is on the move.*"

Christ's Incarnation is humble. It began humbly, in the scandalous pregnancy of an unwed teen mother, and it unfolds humbly in our lives. Its humble unfolding in our lives comes perhaps best when we have rough times and rough lives, in circumstances we would not choose, in an economic depression above all. You do not understand Christ's Incarnation unless you understand that it is an Incarnation in humility, humble times, and humble conditions. You do not understand Christ's humble Incarnation until you understand that it did not stop when the Mother of God's scandalous pregnancy began: Christ's humble Incarnation unfolds and unfurls in the Church, in the Saints, and Christ wishes to be Incarnate in every one of us. Christ wishes to be Incarnate in all of us, not in the circumstances we would choose for ourselves, but in the circumstances we are in, when God the Spiritual Father works everything to good for his sons.

Take heart if this sounds hard, like a tall order to live up to. It is hard for me too. It is hard, very hard, or at least it is for me. But it is worth trying to live up to. Even if we do not always succeed.

God became man that man might become God. In whatever circumstances God gives us to train us, as God the Spiritual Father, let us grow as sons of God.

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

# **The Grinch Who Stole Christmas**

My dear Wormwood;

I still do not have your report on the status of the yearly festivals. As you have not informed me of the circumstances for several years, I may unfortunately be forced to demonstrate drastic consequences in the case that you fail again to even tell what is happening.

Your affectionate uncle,  
Screwtape

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Dear uncle Screwtape;

It is about as well as could be expected. This is a time of festivities which we have very little difficulty turning the people away from; it is, also, one of the ones where there is joy and exuberance such that it is very difficult to introduce even a dead and ritualistic approach to ceremony. We have succeeded at least in enticing a handful of people to drunkenness and adultery on one hand, and on the others have slowly been building an interest in sorcery. I am currently contemplating the introduction of a number of grimoires to heighten the interest in spellcraft; unfortunately, this is the rare exception rather than the rule, and we can make very little progress with the great many. I suppose that we should expect greater success at other times of year.

Your nephew,  
Wormwood.

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My dead Wormwood;  
YOU IDIOT!

You speak of getting a handful of people interested in spellcraft as a great achievement. Were you here, you would see that your letter caused me to engage in something not unlike men's prestidigitation; I immediately raised my arm and extended my middle finger.

So, you have enticed a tiny handful. Whoop-de-doo. Nobody minds that you've chopped down a tree or two, but we are here to burn a forest.

It is evident that your abysmal lack of understanding of temptation has produced the silliest possible results. If you are going to tempt a man, TEMPT him. A large shipment of spellbooks to devout people is not productive. Have you no idea why you are trained to masquerade as an angel of light?

Use the right tool for the right job.

I want a full analysis of the situation, and a preview of any ideas, just to ensure that you do not do anything dumber.

Your affectionate uncle,  
Screwtape

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Dear uncle Screwtape;

It is the season when they celebrate the greatest gift they have ever received; namely, when the Enemy became one of them and died to create a way of escape from our trap of sin.

There are two basic intertwined ways in which they celebrate, and we have been able to do very little to stop either.

The first is by thanksgiving and enjoying what they have been given. They come to friends and family; they pray, sing songs, eat, drink, and be merry. A few we've managed to get drunk on the wassail or abstain from it as if it were an evil thing, but that is a chink here and there; we have had trouble making it larger. There is a wholehearted attitude of thanksgiving and worship at all the gifts which they've received; the time when we've set famine to take away some of their food only seems to make them all the more grateful and all the more prayerful.

The second is by giving each other gifts. Whether the gifts are simple or costly, they are heartfelt; they celebrate the gift given them by giving gifts to each other. Even in the lands where an evil duke has imposed harsh taxes on the peasant, so that they have little to give, their little gifts are taken as seriously as more lavish gifts from people who do have enough to live on.

I have been trying to deter them from the celebration and the gift giving, but results have been frustrating to the extreme.

Your nephew,  
Wormwood

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My dear Wormwood;

Having taken some time to think, I should like to temper some of my previous remarks. Nor that your bungling incompetence does not warrant them, but I should like you to be better informed.

There is both an individual and a corporate side to sin. The individual side is of extreme importance. Our father below personally tempted Job, and it is not an understatement to say that every last person should be tempted as far as possible. By chipping at one tree at a time, it is possible to clear cut a forest. (The importance of the individual is so great that it may be an interesting temptation to make people appear to be nothing but individuals). When the temptations facing a society do not affect a person, it is perfectly acceptable to give some variation. Once in a while, even that can be worked into a good plan for even greater corporate sin. It is spectacular to have a few become prostitutes and a great many become Pharisees; a few become witches, and a great many become witch hunters.

As important as individual sin is, it is now your responsibility to see to corporate sin, and tempt the society as a whole.

There is something I should like to remind you about the nature of sin.

Man is created to embrace what is good. Even in his fallen state, even with the power that we hold over them, that man still somehow desires to embrace the good is so true that it dictates the nature of temptation. When we tempt, it is necessary to give a candy coating to that sin with what is good. Sexual sin is only possible when we twist the tremendous goodness of human sexuality; idolatry can not exist except as an exploitation of the need of man to worship the Enemy.

There is a time and a place to use intimidation, terror, and force, but your attempts here to either tempt solid believers with sorcery, or make their celebrations impossible by physical hardship, are clumsy and inappropriate. Gold which is passed through fire only grows purer; that is why you see their devotion flowering. Instead, why don't you appear as an angel of light and lull them to sleep?

There is a note about patience... Though occasionally we manage the sudden and sharp, it is much better in most cases (including this one) to work ever so slowly. So slowly that there doesn't seem to be any real progress; so slowly that everything appears to them to be as they want it

progress, so slowly that everything appears to them to be as they want it. If you suddenly hold a candle by a frog, it will jump away. If, instead, the frog is placed in a pot of cool water and the candle beneath the pot, it will never notice; nothing constrains it from jumping out, and yet you need only wait for the ever so slowly growing heat to destroy it. Be patient; wait for decades or centuries if need be.

Now stop wasting your energy on stupid spellbooks, droughts, and taxes. Take away these hardships; for now, I want you to only make things easier. Help their economic systems be productive; don't take away from the laughter at the feasts. If you find an opportunity to get someone drunk at a festival, then by all means take it, but don't worry about having things now. Just do as I have said, and wait.

Your affectionate uncle,  
Screwtape

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Dear uncle Screwtape;

It is ten years now, and I have done as you have said. I do not understand why; they enjoy the festivities as much as ever, giving and receiving gifts in a manner that enjoys each other; enjoying each other in a manner that loves and worships the Enemy. By all counts, things have only gotten worse. Am I to continue to wait?

Your nephew,  
Wormwood

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My dear Wormwood;

Patience, my dear. Patience. If you continue, you are making more progress than you think. Now, I still don't want you to do anything spectacular. Only give an idea to an inventor here, an economist there. Don't introduce anything nasty; just make the economic system more productive, and do nothing to impede their thoughts of giving generous gifts at this season.

Your affectionate uncle,  
Screwtape

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Dear uncle Screwtape;

It is twenty years since I last wrote you, and I still do not see the point. People have more money; they are giving it generously. The hungry are fed; the naked are clothed. The season is one of great festivity, and, as ever, they give generous gifts. Am I to continue?

Your nephew,  
Wormwood

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My dear Wormwood;  
Still, you need patience. Now, I want you to do two things:  
First of all, continue to increase the productivity of their economic system.

Second of all, without actively disparaging love for God or their neighbors, I want you to use the season to cause them to think about how good their material possessions are, and look forward to it.

Give it ten more years, and write back.

Your affectionate uncle,  
Screwtape

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Dear uncle Screwtape;

I have succeeded in making them think about the goodness of their material possessions (which I still do not fully understand; most of the time, you have had me delude people into thinking that the material is evil and an obstruction to spiritual growth; I am now emphasizing that truth in the matter as you say, and I don't see any real progress). It is ten years; what should I do now?

Your nephew,  
Wormwood

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My dear Wormwood;

Now, slowly, slightly, introduce seeds of greed. Not too much; just a little. And give them more money.

It is the time to twist, and everything you twist should be done, at least at first, in a slow and slight, imperceptible manner. Twist the good of the celebration and the presents just a little; that's all that it takes, for the moment. Just make the goodness of God and the gift the season celebrates seem less of an easy thing to think about than the goodness of all the material gifts.

Give it ten years or so, and write me back again.

Your affectionate uncle,  
Screwtape

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Dear uncle Screwtape;

Wow. Though it's been slow, this work has been beginning to show some real results. Though every gift given by one person is a gift received by another, people are thinking of this much less as a time to give gifts, and much more as a time to receive them. I've now made it a major part of their economy; people are beginning to look forward very much to all of the Christmas gifts they can receive.

Should I continue as I have been?

Your nephew,  
Wormwood

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My dear Wormwood;

There is something to be said about greed. Like most other sins, it produces satiety for the moment, but over time it yields only insatiety. Those who have enough and are content with what they have remain content; those who have much with greed grow more wealthy and less satisfied. More than that, many of those who have the most material possessions enjoy them the least; time to acquire possessions, and worry for them, becomes a consuming desire. A powerful chief executive officer who can buy anything he wants, will enjoy much less the leather seats of his Porsche, the view from his yacht, the beauty of his art collection, than many children of more modest means enjoy a chain of dandelions and a grape flavored lollipop.

Just continue, and put some serious thought into the trash that you teach them to prize. I could give more detail, but I think you're beginning to understand. Write me back in a few more years; tell me what happens.

Your affectionate uncle,  
Screwtape

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Dear uncle Screwtape;

Things have really been taking off.

The holiday celebration has become a tremendous commercial extravaganza, the best time of year when people look forward to getting glowing plastic dolls and combination pizza oven/clothes dryers. I have gone wild with the items which are produced. I've made one device so that much of the time people spend "together" is distant and mechanical, with no eye contact and no touch. They now have, and look forward to ever more advanced entertainment devices with blinking lights and spectacular sound effects, bright and shiny enough to distract people the emptiness within, and ever becoming more effective. (You might also be pleased to learn of the content; although the type of devices would facilitate excellent strategy games, I've made graphic violence seem more and more attractive; a wonderful entertainment. Now I don't even have to be slow and patient in making a more realistic sadism; all that needs to be done is put somewhere in the storyline that you're the hero and morally justified in wading through blood. (I'm working on taking that away as well)) I'm making sure that the games are solitary by nature; you can't really play these games with your friends the way you can play cards, having a friendly chat as well as thinking about what to do as the next move. On a scale of glitz and convenience, they seem far more attractive than reading a book, holding a friend's hand, going for a walk, or having a relaxed meal together. I've been working on a faster, exciting, frantic pace for the entertainment, and people are "learning" that having fun means moving at a breakneck speed; leisure is beginning to be considered boring. There is a great air of celebration and festivity, and an air of gifts; the facade is tremendous.

I think that the festival is mostly under control. Should we make a shift in strategy?

Your nephew,  
Wormwood

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My dear Wormwood;

Congratulations! You have passed this portion of your training with flying colors. Although I have more experience in this matter and have enjoyed many times sitting back and watching the flames as a society crumbles under the weight of its own sin, you have celebrated trivia to an extent that even I find astounding. My hat is off to you.

For now, your responsibilities (which you have made much easier) have been shifted; as you have so masterfully learned your lessons in corporate sin, it is now time for you to learn the next lesson. Your next area of training will be in the area of heresy, a battleground to which we are shifting focus.

I look forward to seeing what will come of your apprenticeship there.

Your affectionate uncle,  
Screwtape

# Halloween: A Solemn Farewell

I remember, from when I was a little boy, that I asked my parents some question about Halloween, and I was told that I would be welcome to dress up, but not as something occult or macabre, like a witch or a zombie. My Mom helped me put together several homemade costumes, and my parents accompanied me for years of trick-or-treating. I was, in essence, invited to celebrate Halloween as a secular holiday (in time, it became my second favorite holiday), but not to celebrate ghoulishness.

Some readers may see this as needless legalism about something harmless. A few Christians who have concerns about Halloween might wonder if I was being invited to participate in something un-Christian. But back in the eighties, where it was considered superstition to believe that witches really existed, my parents took seriously something that more people take seriously today: not everything about Halloween is trivial or absolutely harmless.

In retrospect, I am quite grateful for this decision, and I respect it, much as I appreciate their decision to limit my time watching television, while encouraging me to play outside, read books, and tinker with mechanical things. (I do not own a television now, and I am glad not to have one.)

Not, in particular, that I feel any guilt about dressing up as my favorite TV character (MacGyver), or creating homemade costumes, one of which won an award. But there seemed to be, if not absolute innocence, at least a grey area. There are many things I disagreed (and disagree) with my parents about, but I really saw no need to reconsider what my parents taught me here. Even if I was trying to smoke Halloween without inhaling

anything macabre, there seemed to be a reasonable case for this attempt to "smoke, but not inhale." I believed that I was succeeding in taking Halloween *à la carte* and dressing up without participating in anything either my parents or I would have objected to.

But something has changed. Even though it has again become fashionable for adults (as well as children) to dress up as Halloween, I am finding that I have concerns about what exactly it is that is fashionable. It seemed to be the sort of thing you could least give the benefit of the doubt, but that seems a harder benefit to give now. There are other things going on in this occult awakening; I would like to look at herbs. Perhaps people have thought of herbs simply as a seasoning for cooks to use. This is no longer true. It is no longer enough to say that people also see herbs as a natural alternative to chemically manufactured medicines, even if that is no doubt true. Herbs are part of a picture that is changing with a magical awakening. Seeing ads for herbs for witches' use and growing witches' gardens is the tip of an iceberg. Herbs are microcosm of a picture that is changing.

Before I go on, let me be very clear about something, as I am going to be talking a fair bit about herbs.

There is an old Orthodox saying that talks about spending Church money: "If you have two small coins, you use one to buy bread for the offering, and you use the other to buy flowers for the altar." The point isn't really about herbs, but it is entirely appropriate that herbs come to mind even when making a point that isn't really about herbs. A great many of the holiest things in Orthodoxy come from herbs: flowers to adorn the icons regularly, adorning the whole Church along with other herbs for the greatest festivities; herbal aromatic resins making incense; olive oil, mingled possibly with herbs, for every sacred anointing, wood as the most fitting material for icons, and bread and wine for the greatest and holiest rite there is. There is one rite labelled as the rite for the blessing of herbs, but herbs are blessed on a number of other occasions as well. Nature, including herbs, keeps coming up in the liturgy.

But you really cannot understand what this means until you come to the tale of herbs, if you remember that trees are herbs. I am thinking about two trees in particular.

One of these two trees was set in the center of a garden of unequalled splendor, and our first mother looked at its fruit with greedy spiritual lust, saw what the fruit could do, and then ate from it. She experienced a

lust, saw what the fruit could do, and then ate from it. She experienced a thrill of almost indescribable ecstasy, which quickly vanished into horror, despair, and misery. She had been created immortal, believed the words, "You shall be like gods," found that what was created godlike about her was slipping through her fingers, and felt the seed of death already working in her heart.

That is how our first mother fell. Her husband did no better, and Orthodox writers blame now one, now the other, but I am interested in something besides assigning blame.

That is not the last tree to bear fruit, nor is it the end of the story. The wound that came by the first tree had its answer and healing from the second tree. First there was a new Eve, who triumphed where the first had failed. Then the new Adam, fully God, fully man, whose life was a journey to not a living tree in paradise but a dead tree in a desolate place: for the Cross has been considered a tree from ancient times. But this last tree is ultimately transfigured to be the Tree of Life. We were forbidden to eat from the first tree. But the Tree of Life has its own fruit, and we are commanded to eat from its fruit.

Every herb that is part of the Church's blessings is an outpouring of that last herb, the Cross. We can and should feed on herbs. But it matters a great deal *which* herb we are feeding on. And Halloween has the taste of the fruit of the first tree.

I am concerned about the history of Halloween, *up to a point*. It is said that various pagan customs in a fight against Christianity, are at the root of almost every Halloween custom we have today—Christianity was shaped by martyrs who chose to be killed rather than offer just a pinch of incense in pagan sacrifice, and some have said that people would intimidate Christians by threatening offensive acts of vandalism unless they gave them food to use in pagan sacrifice, and that when we say "Trick or treat," we are carrying on a custom that began with a rather vile form of extortion.

This explanation may or may not be true, and my first thought—perhaps not the most Orthodox thought—was, "The origin of something is not its present meaning." A standard illustration is that shaking hands is a custom from the far past that was originally to prevent another person from drawing a weapon—a bit like reaching for a can of pepper spray. As such, it is a poor candidate for a friendly greeting. But it really seems hard to believe that learning something like this is a reason to try

to avoid shaking hands. And the fact that a particular practice has an origins Christians today might find vile is not decisive by itself. Even what those origins were is hard to tell, as the historical data are incomplete and highly ambiguous.

But there is another concern. Let's set aside murky questions about where Halloween comes from. There is the question of what Halloween is *now*, which is far less murky on several counts. Whatever the good, bad, known, or unknown roots of Halloween may be, in its present form it is associated with magic or ghoulishness—you're not barred from dressing up as something that is neither associated with the occult or ghoulishness, but you're stretching things a little. That much was true in my childhood. What was not true in my childhood is that Halloween is quickly becoming a second national holiday. When I was growing up, you could buy or rent costumes, but now there seem to be large, heavily-funded Halloween stores. There were yard decorations—not just pumpkins—during my childhood, and I remember putting up a package of imitation spider web. Today there are, as before Christmas, large and elaborate yard displays that are much more impressive than a snowman. But gone are the days when my parents seemed quaint for saying that magic is real and to be avoided, or just for taking magic seriously. Even a skeptic would need to be trying to be obtuse to deny that a lot of people are trying to be magicians of some sort.

I am grateful to my parents for giving Halloween the benefit of the doubt. There was really something special to me. But I am coming to a point of saying that appearances do not always deceive, and that a festival celebrating the spooky, a festival to dress up as zombies and witches and decorate with the macabre, and so on may in fact be a spiritual force, an appetizer, if you will, for the herb that gave our race the seed of death.

If one is trying to make an Orthodox response to Halloween, there is one obvious response of keeping out of the holiday and praying. Another Orthodox response to Halloween has been to have a parish party for all the children, inviting them to dress up as their patron saints. This decision may sound like a shallow change, but it shows wisdom and theological beauty. Trying to be like your patron saint is not just a day's make-believe, but a lifelong imitation and challenge. Your patron saint is to look out for you, praying before God. This adaptation is well-chosen, and is in the spirit of the original intent: "Halloween" abbreviates "Hallowe'en" "All Hallowe Eve" the evening of all hallowed people, holy

Hallowe'en , All Hallows Eve , the evening of all hallowed people, holy people, an evening that was in fact the beginning of All Saints' Day. And perhaps there are others.

But perhaps the best response Orthodoxy is not obvious if you are trying to think of something to do.

The spiritual world, in Orthodoxy, is never really far; we can be insensitive to it but never escape it. Orthodoxy provides not a single holiday each year but unfolding seasons and cycles of spiritual discipline and life as they encounter all kinds of spiritual realities. (Many people look for the spirit world to be closer at Halloween.) Death is important in Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is a mystery of life in death, and to fail to be mindful of death is a profound spiritual failure. Even if Halloween eclipses Christmas, the Orthodox concern is not that people are too interested in death, but that people are not engaging death enough, and the ways we are engaging death are not nearly deep enough. Nor is the line in the living and the dead within the Church any terribly great chasm. But although these things are present in the Orthodox Church—woven into its fabric—they all rest in the protecting shade of the Tree of Life, and it is a protection that they all need. The concern is not at all that people are getting interested in spiritual phenomena, but that they are pursuing that interest in the wrong way, tasting from the herb that is poison when they could be eating their fill from the herb that is life and medicine and healing. It is a "treasure hunting" that consists of digging around to find a few copper coins hidden in a dark place... when there are piles of gold out in the open.

If Jack'o'lanterns have the origin I have heard, then they are not a pagan custom, at least not in the sense that Druids used them in worship. The candle is of Christian origin, and more specifically, made to be a frightening mockery of the candles in Christian worship. In Orthodoxy today, beeswax candles still illuminate icons, which have a spiritual radiance shining through. (Heaven shines out through them.) They can take time to connect with, but people can look at them and continue to see something for years. I would have trouble finding new layers in a Jack'o'lantern over years, and not only because they would go bad. It's not as deep a kind of thing. The difference between the two is like the difference between one of Bach's fugues, and Bart Simpson butchering an advertising jingle.

I do plan on dressing up for Halloween one last time. Call it, if nothing

else, a farewell, in addition to some more mundane reasons. It has been a cherished holiday for years. But only in the shallowest sense am I saying farewell to what I most valued about Halloween.

At Vespers, we chant, "The Lord is King; he has put on majesty." This "put on" is a translation of a Greek word, *enduno* (ενδυνω), a word of being equipped. The Epistle to the Ephesians tells us to "put on" full Heavenly armor that includes the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation. In Isaiah, it is God who puts on the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation for spiritual war. Not to put too fine a point it, but we have a command to put on God's own armor, and that is not all. At baptism, one of the most memorable parts is the verse chanted from Scripture, "As many as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ."

At an ordination, the ordinand is clothed in liturgical vestments that remain almost unchanged since Byzantine times when they were court regalia. But this is not a costume that people pretend for a day. The person is made into something new, and when the ordinand puts on the garments, he puts on a new blessing and sacred service. But it is a fundamental mistake to think that royal priesthood is only for those who are ordained and "wear vestments": the bishop is called to put on the regalia of the Byzantine Emperor, but the whole Church is called to put on Christ. This is no mere costume but a transformation of the highest order.

Perhaps we need to give up our Halloween costumes, to make room to put on something far greater: Christ himself. But that is not simply something to do about Halloween: it is the work of a lifetime and it includes the entirety of Christian practice. (Even if it might be a good idea to simply pray over Halloween.)

*With thanks to friends and family with whom I have discussed this.*

# The Hayward Nonstandard Test: An Interesting Failure

In recent years, I published what I then (and now) consider an interesting test. It was meant to look for indirect signs of profound giftedness. I wrote it with the hope that it would circumvent the ceiling of standard model tests, and I wouldn't have been surprised if it showed a floor above some other tests' ceilings. Let me cite the questions before continuing:

1. Describe who you are, how you see the world, and what your inner world is like.
2. Describe your most impressive and distinctive achievements.
3. Describe your most impressive and distinctive failures.
4. Describe what you hope/wish/want/intend to accomplish with your life. What do you believe you *will* accomplish?
5. What is your educational background? Include out of classroom learning you consider appropriate.
6. What is (are) your domain(s) of desired excellence? What is your work there? What have you achieved? What failures have you experienced?
7. Have you ever had management problems or been fired? If so, describe each time.
8. Describe any unusual or distinctive characteristics of your childhood

- physiology and physique.
9. What mental health diagnoses and misdiagnoses have been considered for you (that you are comfortable divulging)? Elaborate if desired; if there is information you'd prefer to omit, please say so.
  10. What are your interests?
  11. On a scale of -1.0 to 1.0, rate yourself on the dimensions of the Myers-Briggs test: E(-1) to I(1), S(-1) to N(1), T(-1) to F(1), P(-1) to J(1). Elaborate if desired.  
There are a few ways to take the Myers-Briggs test, one of the cheapest of which is to check out e.g. Kiersey's *Please Understand Me II* from the library; [the Kiersey web site](#) has assorted information online.
  12. What is one of your favorite books? Why? Elaborate.
  13. Provide a sample of your best writing.
  14. What is one of your most cherished of your creations? Explain. If feasible, include a copy; if not, describe.
  15. As a child or youth, what was one inconsistency you observed in the adult world that was painful?
  16. Describe, with examples, your sense of humor.
  17. Do you fit in (yes/no/question does not admit a yes or no answer for you)? Explain.
  18. Provide, and answer, one question that you believe will provide me with deep insight into your intelligence.
  19. Write your own short intelligence test.
  20. What else can you say to provide me with evidence of your intelligence?

Richard Feynmann's [Cargo Cult Science](#) address talks about the need to publicize failed experiments as well as successes. I am publishing results, not to claim a new success, but because in its failure it may be interesting. Someone else may find a refinement of the idea that works, or other lessons may be taken from its failure. This seems to be an interesting failure.

I received responses from four men, whom I will call Adam, Brandon, Charles, and David. I opened and read them at the same time to limit bias. Adam seemed gifted, around the top of the range of "optimum intelligence" where you have a definite advantage over others but aren't so different that it starts to really hurt. Brandon seemed just over the

so different that it starts to really hurt. Brandon seemed just over the edge; I hesitated in comparing them and finally placed Brandon slightly above Adam. Charles showed signs of real giftedness; earlier in life he had effectively solved a problem that it originally took Euler to solve. Charles struck me as profoundly gifted. Finally, if Charles showed brilliant complexity, David showed a simplicity on the other side of complexity. ("I wouldn't give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I'd give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.") In my notes, I compared his communication to how Richard Feynman closed the O-ring debate: "Feynmann, after people enquiring into the Challenger disaster had spent days arguing whether it was too cold for the O-rings, took an O-ring, swirled it around in his icewater, and pinched it, snapping it." David struck me as not only profoundly gifted but at a higher plateau than Charles's dazzling performance. Trying to describe the spread, I said that if the lowest score were a 1 and the highest were an 8, then I would give Adam 1, Brandon 2, Charles 6, and David 8. (I guessed numbers at 150, 155, 165, and 185; I intentionally did not reconcile these two sets of numbers.) Then I opened their prior test scores.

Charles had scores of 140-151, which I regarded as ceiling scores which did not provide useful information beyond being ceiling scores. Adam, Brandon, and David had highest prior scores of 168, 172, and 174 respectively. (I am inclined to lend more credence to the higher scores as it is more plausible to say that someone properly rated around 170 hit his head on the ceiling and scored around 130 than someone properly rated at 130 accidentally obtained a score around 170. I acknowledge that this could inflate my estimates.) After an hour or so of trying to convince myself I could interpret their scores so that they would say my test worked, I realised that my test found a significant difference where none was independently verified. Adam, Brandon, and David had highest scores well within measurement error of each other. Furthermore, Adam had consistently high scores: his lowest score was 156, while no one else had two scores above 155. Comparing with previous data, there was no positive correlation to prior test scores, and the person who looked best from previous scores was the person I'd ranked the lowest.

This does not necessarily mean my test is invalid. Four responses, three of which were within measurement error of each other, do not a norming make. Given that responses had appeared at a rate of about one

per year, it's not clear how long it would take to obtain a basis for a solid anchor norming, and if I would still be alive when enough responses had been completed. I opened the responses more on an intuition than anything else, and what I have is not a norming but an understanding of why it might not have been helpful to wait for enough responses for a norming. Furthermore, the fact that previous test data does not distinguish between them does *not* mean that they are at the same level. All four normees are bright enough to get ceiling scores on standardized tests. That leaves open the possibility of significant differences between them, including the possibility that Charles and David are appreciably brighter than Adam and Brandon. However, I am speaking about what is possible and not about claims that my results support. My results do not say anything positive about my ability to discriminate between responses. If there is anything interesting obtained from my test, it is not between responses but the fact that people responded at all. My website, [Jonathan's Corner \(Sitemap\)](#), averages between 500 and 1000 unique visitors per day, with an average of two people reading the test per day. Only four people responded in three years, with all of the normees being brilliant. That seems significant, and I'm not sure what all it means. Apart from that, no ability to discriminate usefully between scores has been established in the usual fashion.

## Summary of Responses

I would like to briefly describe the responses I received, both to provide an overall picture and to describe what I would single out in my evaluation. Here and elsewhere in the evaluation, I am intentionally using vague and generic descriptions rather than ones that are detailed and specific. This impoverishes the writing and gives a less valuable analysis, but I want to be cautious about confidence, and I expect that some of the people reading this will be quite good at connecting dots.

### **Adam**

Adam's response was three pages long, seemed candid (as did the others), and included achievements at state level. His responses answered the questions, but did not have the florid, ornate, wheels within wheels quality I associate with someone brilliant who is speaking on a topic he finds interesting. The content of his responses strikes me as reflecting more intelligence than the writing style: it was well-written, but did not reflect the "mental overflow" I was looking for. His list of interests was relatively short (twelve), and included a few items that do not specifically reflect intelligence. Several of his choices suggest noteworthy social maturity; this, combined with my losing track of how he opened his responses, led me to assume that he was more gifted than profoundly gifted.

### **Brandon**

Brandon's response was also three pages long, and showed the pain of the social disconnect which many profoundly gifted experience. His list of interests was also short, but the activities themselves more distinctively

suggest high intelligence. His general approach, in particular to society and authority, shows many of the signature traits David Kiersey (*Please Understand Me II: Temperament, Character, Intelligence*, Buffalo: Prometheus, 1998) describes in profiling the NT "rational" temperament. (Three out of the four normees were NTs, and all of them were strongly intuitive.) He also has an uncanny knack for guessing certain kinds of information—which is an anomaly that I'm not sure what to do with. The examples, however, did not leave me wanting attack the anomaly by pointing him to Thomas Gilovich's *How We Know What Isn't So* (New York: Free Press reprint, 1993). He showed a desire to use his mind to transform society that seems to be common among very bright people.

## Charles

Charles's response was twenty-seven pages of wheels within wheels. From the first page I was met with nuance that let me know I hadn't taken everything in on the first reading, despite it being well-written. He claimed not to have any distinctive achievements. This modest remark was followed by no fewer than eight pages of dense summaries of some of his theories. These theories were subtle. They had a logical and scientific character and a spark of something interesting that stretches outside the bounds of science. He used a nonstandard format that made their logical structure clearer—successfully modifying a familiar format to make an unfamiliar format that works better, which is difficult. In the pages of his response I met an edifice of thought which impressed me and which I knew I didn't understand. (I say this as someone who has put a lot of effort into understanding other people's belief systems.) His response to that question reminds me of a passage in my current novel:

The woman looked at me briefly. "What languages do you know?"  
If anything, I sank further back into my chair. I wished the question would go away. When she continued to listen, I waited for sluggish thoughts to congeal. "I... Fish, Shroud, Inscription, and Shadow are all spoken around my island, and I speak all of them well. I speak Starlight badly, despite the fact that they trade with our village frequently. I do not speak Stream well at all, even though it is known to many races of voyagers. I once translated a book from Boulder to Pedestal although that is hardly to be reckoned; it was

border to Russia, although that is hardy to be reckoned. It was obscure and technical, and it has nothing of the invisible subtlety of 'common' conversation. You know how—"

The man said, "Yes; something highly technical in a matter you understand is always easier to translate than children's talk. Go on."

"And—I created a special purpose language," I said, "to try to help a child who couldn't speak. I did my best, but it didn't work. I still don't understand why not. And I—" I tried to think, to remember if there were any languages I had omitted. Nothing returned to my mind.

I looked down and closed my eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm not very good with languages."

Charles listed approximately fifty different interests—which is less significant than it sounds, as he broke his interests down in more detail than the other normees, but the detailed breakdown strikes me as significant independent of its content. He was the one normee who answered the Myers-Briggs question in the mathematical format requested—which does not mean that he is the only normee who could do that task, but may suggest that he was the one person who didn't take a shortcut by "just using adjectives". I wrote the test to listen for a certain accent in how people respond, and his sense of humor showed that accent loud and strong.

He wrote a complete test which seemed to have a low ceiling, but was polished enough that I wouldn't be surprised to see something similar on the web, and he showed self-criticism in writing the test, acknowledging that it was culture-biased. The completeness and level of polish for that answer caught me off guard.

I was looking to be surprised in a certain way, and for reasons discussed above Charles gave me the kind of surprises I was looking for.

## **David**

David's response was twenty pages. He provided an extended writing sample, and (to my surprise) a complete transcript of grades from childhood. His answers were by far the most polished; they give the impression of finding, out of a large space of things that could be said, a microcosmic gem that encapsulates the whole space. Most of his

responses were short; the twenty pages stem from the length of his answers to a small number of questions.

Question 11, requesting Myers-Briggs personality type, contained a hidden question. I was interested in Myers-Briggs type, but most interested in whether the normee would question the test or talk about not fitting in the frame the Myers-Briggs test provides. David told his type en route to making a dismissive remark about the test. In other words, he was the one respondent who questioned the test. The most cherished creation he gave was one that showed a certain kind of mental fireworks, reminiscent of the dialogues in Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books reprint, 1999).

David also surprised me, and I heard an accent of brilliance.

## Interesting Features

What are the distinctive features of my test? I would like to describe them below.

### Emphasis on Tacit Knowing

The way Western culture is shaped means that psychology tries to know its subject-matter with the same kind of knowing as physics has of its subject-matter, in other words I-It rather than I-Thou knowing that is depersonalised and banishes tacit knowing as far as possible. (Banishing anthropomorphism is appropriate when you're studying rocks. It's more debatable in trying to understand people.) When I was thinking about how to write up the experiment, before I looked at prior scores, one of the things I intended to compare was writing samples. Brandon offered a clever placeholder in place of a "real" composition. Adam provided some poetry that reminded me of fifth grade English reading; I objectively recognized quality but felt no subjective emotional response. Charles provided poetry that I wasn't sure I understood but none the less felt like something powerful was washing over me, and I was sorry when it ended. David sent a fiction excerpt that filled me with despair. The tone of the writing was not despairing; I felt the despair of being shown writing so perfect that I despaired of ever attaining that standard.

Why am I talking about my subjective emotional reactions instead of objective assessment? That is why I chose this specific example, instead of examples of thought that would have more to justify them from the framework that understands knowledge in depersonalized and objective terms. I choose it because I paid attention to subjective emotional reactions. I believe that they are tied to tacit and personal ways of knowing: I experienced subjective emotional reactions because I was

responding to different pieces of writing that were not of the same quality. Subjective emotional response is one of several things that can be a cue worth listening to.

(I am intentionally keeping the philosophy brief; the philosophical dimension involved in this topic is one that admits very long discussion.)

## **Listening for an Accent**

In most tests, there is a suite of questions meant to map out where a person's intelligence breaks down, and scoring is how many points total are earned. In this test, the questions do not represent a direct attempt to present difficulty in answering. The intent is rather to obtain a composite picture, and shed indirect light on how bright a person is. The assumption is that different levels of giftedness will leave a definite mark on a person, and that that definite mark is discernible through understanding the person. For one example, above a certain level, a person is so different from the majority of people that there is a social disconnect; children above IQ 170 tend to feel that they don't fit in *anywhere*. That kind of social disconnect was clearly discernible in all but one of the responses; Brandon clearly articulated it.

To some extent, that is corroborated by the data. I identified all of the normees as significantly gifted—which I had no reason to anticipate. The first norming of the Mega test had fewer than 10% of normees successfully answer any of the questions. (People who are emotionally insecure often attempt difficult tests to get an answer that may feel special; as the number of emotionally insecure people vastly outweighs the number of people at that level of giftedness, they "should" have been a small minority.) So I was able to recognize giftedness in all of the normees when I was not expecting it. That stated, the evidence does not warrant the conclusion that my test usefully discriminates among the normees.

## **Problems with the Norming and Test**

As this test, or at least this norming, has been a failure, it's worth paying attention to what went wrong.

### **Pool of Normees**

I have not done any real statistical analysis because there is no basis for analysis, and the statistics would only give a more precise quantification to the statement, "The measurement error exceeds the difference measured." Even if the four normees represented an optimal 120-140-160-180 spread, four points would be questionable. As is, the only conclusion I can confidently claim from prior test data is that all of the normees are at or above standardized test ceilings. In other words, data from previous tests do not provide a basis to claim that my test discriminates (and what correlation exists is negative).

### **Two Dimensions Flattened Into One**

Giftedness affects personality, but it is inadequate to simply say, "Giftedness is personality." There is diversity at each stratum of giftedness, and the normee pool did not permit the kind of two-dimensional analysis that would be needed to properly interpret responses (if there is a proper interpretation to be had).

### **An Invasive Test**

This test is invasive. It's painful and offensive. There is probably a way to attempt a similar operation much more gently and delicately. My guess

is that this, more than anything else, is why I only had four responses in three years. If this principle were put to serious use, it would have to be rethought so that it went about its aims with a far defter touch. (Or perhaps just remove certain questions.)

One question which I wonder is whether this offensiveness, which is partly an unedited form of giftedness, was the main reason why only brilliant men responded. The test's form may have been a powerful selector. So it would have put most people off. But that is not the whole story. Keep in mind that "reading" on a conscious or unconscious level is a two-way street, and the test reveals something significant about me as well as requesting revelation of the normee. A few very bright people, however, might be bothered by the invasiveness, but they recognize and respond to a voice that feels like home. It connects. That, at least, is speculation which seems plausible, but which I don't see how to support without writing a gentler test.

### **Not Personal Enough**

In one sense, this test was personal, too personal—it probed bluntly into things that are not polite to ask. In another sense, though, it related to the normees as objects to be studied, trying to dissect them as people but still dissecting them. It moves partway from I-It to I-Thou, but I believe it is possible to have a fuller I-Thou knowing, although I don't know what a fully I-Thou approach would be like. It could be argued that the questions are offensive because the test was not personal enough. In other words, the test reflected an attempt to understand people but not in a personal way. Furthermore, some of the philosophical merits to a personal approach may bear fruit if there were a more genuinely personal approach.

### **Lack of Checks**

The attempt to be objective tries to strip out everything subjective as a means to strip out subjective bias. Ideally one would want to allow subjective strengths while using another form of rigor to mitigate subjective bias, but I am not sure what that other and more difficult rigor would be; I have not solved that problem.

I requested responses to questions and personal information separately, so I wouldn't know whose material I was working with until after I had ranked the results. There was one normee for whom this attempted anonymization failed—David, whom I know and I hold in awe. I'd like to say that I didn't let this influence my estimation, but that's not true. As it is now, Adam's responses struck me as simple because it seemed what he was saying wasn't very big, and David's responses struck me as simplicity on the other side of complexity—something big in an elegant nutshell. Charles's responses struck me as complex, in other words as simply being big. I'd like to say that I was unbiased, and I didn't think "David answered, and I'm terribly impressed with him, so I'll put him highest," but I simply followed the argument where it led. I'd like to say that, but I can't. Maybe I should have ranked Charles highest. I'm vulnerable to accusation of bias at least here. And this kind of bias may be present in the attempt to understand another person—recognition is a risk.

## **Book Knowledge that Didn't Pan Out**

There's a reason why I asked about people's worst failures, and it's not because I like making people squirm.

Howard Gardner's *Extraordinary Minds* (New York: Basic Books reprint, 1998) is a multiple intelligence treatment of genius. One of the points that he talked about was failure—experiencing failures and being spurred on by them (120-123). Because of this, I was hoping to see discussion of trying and failing and trying and failing and trying and failing—like Edison's numerous failures en route to inventing a working light bulb. I believed that genius and those approaching genius not only are not immune to failure, but fail more often and more significantly than the vast majority of human beings.

This is a nice theory, and it may well be true, but the question based on it did not obtain informative answers for this purpose. I was expecting for normees at this level to see different degrees of failing in courageous projects (and in less glorious matters); I would not want to divulge what the normees shared, but if they did experience this pattern of life, I did not discern it in the replies. (This question should probably be removed in derivative work; the offensive questions seem less informative than I had expected.)

Another question was related to Leta Stetter Hollingworth's *Children Above 180 IQ: Stanford-Binet Origin and Development* (New York: Arno Press, 1975), in which Hollingworth claims that the children she studied were significantly above average size and weight for their age. I thought that the brighter respondents would share this distinctive physique. Only Brandon mentioned something along these lines, which means it might be useful as one piece of a large puzzle, but it was not the predictor I'd hoped. (There were other questions motivated by similar concerns.)

## A Successful Failure?

This test is a failure, or at very least my attempt to norm this test is a failure. Out of an estimated two thousand people that were aware of the test, only four responded, and the result is a statistically insignificant and negative correlation. I underestimated Adam in particular; if there is a lesson to be drawn from him, it is that it is possible to be brilliant while showing relatively few of the indirect traits this test sought to identify.

I was not looking forward to the prospect of writing delicate responses to a majority of normees who were insecure and of normal intelligence, and would approach difficult tests to have a big number that will make them feel OK about being human. That this did not happen touches on two reasons why I consider this an interesting failure:

1. Only brilliant normees responded. Therefore, while demonstrated ability to discriminate between answers is nonexistent, the fact of responding to the test is highly significant. There is an implicit hidden question: not, "What traits will distinguish your response?" but "Will you respond at all?"
2. I correctly identified all the respondents as significantly gifted. The lowest estimate I gave was a three sigma score. In other words, I correctly identified all respondents as being at or above the 99.9<sup>th</sup> percentile, even though this was contrary to my expectations.

This is also an interesting failure in that it attempts an inquiry that is based on a different principle. If it were not for confidence issues, I would likely publish the responses so that specific questions could be analyzed. It may be possible to make a hybrid test that combines traditional high-ceiling tests with this basic approach. The two approaches could be complementary.

Given that this is a first try, it may be better to label this approach as "Hasn't succeeded yet" than "Has failed." It would be surprising if this kind of distinctive approach succeeded on the first try. Furthermore, the way this norming failed suggests there's something in the approach.

There are several philosophical questions which admit interesting discussion. One of the more interesting questions is what alternatives to dealing with subjective bias exist besides trying to exclude *all* subjective elements (officially, at least: I suspect that good "objective" judgment has drawn on subjective strengths all along). Most of the philosophical aspects mentioned merit further inquiry.

I believe that Charlie and David are at a higher plateau than Adam and Brandon; data from other tests does not discriminate from them, but I have privileged external information that would place David above Adam. If they were to contact a third party who could corroborate that Adam and Brandon are at one high plateau and Charlie and David at a higher plateau, that would be reason to take a second look at the results.

I believe that the responses give a much richer picture of the person than a standard test. Someone, instead of asking, "Does this compete with traditional tests?" might ask, "What interesting data does this give that traditional tests don't?"

So this test is a failure, but an interesting failure, and perhaps even a successful failure.

# **Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary: A Free Online (Satire) Dictionary**

## **Preface**

Ambrose Bierce has created a most useful dictionary, serving the ever important function of drawing attention to that which people learn to ignore. I do not agree with all of what he says, but none the less consider it immensely valuable. It is my opinion that subtlety and wit are entirely too scarce. Sometimes this work is a bit caustic; unfortunately, gently worded points are often gently ignored. Bierce wrote that his work was addressed to people who "prefer dry wines to sweet, sense to sentiment, wit to humor and clean English to slang." This work is written preferring subtlety and allusion to the blatant, thought to convenience, and honesty to comfort.

I would not be entirely honest to claim that this work is entirely my own. Some of the ideas are bits and pieces I've picked up here and there; I have done the work of a compiler as well of that of an author. The writing style is, to some effect, borrowed. And, of course, the actual idea for such a dictionary is

not originally my own.

The definitions and aim are mostly theological, but occasionally dealing with some of the less agreeable aspects of American life. With apologies to Andy Rooney, there's probably something in here to offend anybody. I am not trying to cause a sting for the sake of causing a sting; rather, my hope in writing this is to be as the gadfly whom the Greek philosophers spoke of, with a sting that stirs people to thought and action. Where I point out problems, I believe that better is possible.

I could babble on for a few more pages, but it is my opinion that a frame does best not to be terribly gaudy and detract from the painting it holds. I believe that I've said enough, and that these definitions will introduce themselves.

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A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T  
U V W X Y Z

**Abortion Rights Opponent**, *n.* The politically correct term for a person who holds and acts upon the conviction that an unborn child has at least a few rights which should be legally protected, notably the right not to be killed.

**Accuse**, *v.* To draw attention to another's similarity to oneself.

**Accusatory**, *adj.* Defensive.

**Acting**, *n.* A profession as different from politics as night is from day.

A member of the one profession puts on costumes and makeup, goes before cameras, dramatically reads lines written by someone else, and pretends to be someone that he isn't, providing unconvincing but amusing entertainment to millions.

A member of the other profession makes movies.

**Administration**, *n.* That body which is in charge of an organization, overseeing everything from personnel to organization to allocation of resources to wasting subordinates' time in meetings. The administration cares for the needs of the organization, placing those needs second only to its own needs, desires, and conveniences.

**Administratium**, *n.* A chemical element which makes plutonium look tame.

From the news release:

The p

#### NEW CHEMICAL ELEMENT DISCOVERED

The heaviest element known to science was recently discovered by investigators at a major U.S. research university. The element, tentatively named administratium, has no protons or electrons and thus has an atomic number of 0. However, it does have one neutron, 125 assistant neutrons, 75 vice neutrons and 111 assistant vice neutrons, which gives it an atomic mass of 312. These 312 particles are held together by a force that involves the continuous

exchange of meson-like particles called morons.

Since it has no electrons, administratium is inert. However, it can be detected chemically as it impedes every reaction it comes in contact with. According to the discoverers, a minute amount of administratium causes one reaction to take over four days to complete when it would have normally occurred in less than a second.

Administratium has a normal half-life of approximately three years, at which time it does not decay, but instead undergoes a reorganization in which assistant neutrons, vice neutrons and assistant vice neutrons exchange places. Some studies have shown that the atomic mass actually increases after each reorganization.

Research at other laboratories indicates that administratium occurs naturally in the atmosphere. It tends to concentrate at certain points such as government agencies, large corporations, and universities. It can usually be found in the newest, best appointed, and best maintained buildings.

Scientists point out that administratium is known to be toxic at any level of concentration and can easily destroy any productive reaction where it is allowed to accumulate. Attempts are being made to determine how administratium can be controlled to prevent irreversible damage, but results to date are not promising.

-Unknown

**Admirable**, *adj.* Embodying a virtue for whose absence the speaker excuses himself.

**Adult Bookstore**, *n.* A store offering books and movies which cater to infantile fantasies.

**Advertising**, *n.* (1) The fine art of lying to consumers about what is actually being sold. (2) A notable amendment of capitalist theory, whereby the market comes to favor, not the producers who sell the best product, but those who sell the best image. (3) A substantial misallocation of economic resources, whereby a

tremendous portion of the economy which could do something useful, is wasted. (This misfortune has the additional demerit of providing a substantial competitive edge to those who use it.) For example, for each packet of mixed vegetables sold at the supermarket, more money is spent to place a colored picture on the packet than actually goes to the farmer. (4) ...

**AI**, *n.* Artificial Intelligence. A form of artificially generated computer intelligence which has proved remarkably successful at tasks such as playing chess as well as a grandmaster, using integral calculus to solve problems, and examining blood test results to diagnose blood disorders more accurately than most doctors, and which has utterly failed at tasks such as answering rudimentary questions about the story told in an I Can Read Book.

**Allegory**, *n.* A song whose content we find far too embarrassing to believe could actually be a part of Holy Scripture.

**Alternate**, *adj.* Unacceptable, but shielded by the aegis of political correctness.

**America**, *n.* A great nation which like a melting pot; many ingredients come together in turbulent seething, those on the bottom get burned, and the scum rise to the top.

**American Catholic**, *n.* A conflation of 'American' and 'Catholic' in which 'American' takes precedence to 'Catholic'.

**Amplified Bible**, *n.* A new concept in translation theory, consisting largely of a word study crammed into a literal translation, listing possible meanings of words regardless of context. Thus the salad bar theologian is permitted to pick and choose the wording which will most emphatically support his point. Moreover, it avoids confusion by bracketed insertions, explaining what the author of the text failed to state clearly. Hence Mark 14:23 giving account of Jesus's actions at the Last Supper, says, "He also took a cup [of juice of grapes]..."

**Anathema**, *adj* and *n.* Consecrated and holy. The term originally denoted a special offering hanging in a temple, and has come to mean a degree of holiness which borders on superlative.

The Supreme Being is the most holy; the angels in his presence shield their faces so that they will not see him and be destroyed. Secondary to this is a degree of holiness such that

destroyed. Secondary to this is a degree of holiness such that anything which touches it must be destroyed. The Ark of the Covenant was holy; it was to be carried only with poles, and when Uzzah touched it in order to steady it, he was destroyed. The book of Joshua records an entire city of such sanctity that it was anathema; Achan stole goods from it, and fierce anger burned against the whole nation of Israel until he was destroyed.

It is possible for this sanctity to be conferred by benediction; one form used contains the words, "Let him be anathema..." That is to say, a person as well as an object can be so sacred and holy as to be anathema.

Commonly, this benediction is bestowed upon other believers. The present unity of the church is so complete that it is frequently bestowed upon other Christians whose beliefs legitimately differ slightly, and almost never bestowed on heretics.

**Anglicanism**, *n.* See *Catholic Lite*.

**Annoying**, *adj.* Popular among companies who wish to persuade you to purchase their goods or services.

**Annulment**, *n.* The form of divorce practiced by those who classify divorce as mortal sin.

**Anti-Realism**, *n.* Any one of a number of philosophical systems whose proponents believe themselves to have established the nature of knowledge and reality to be such that it is impossible to make any definitive statements about the nature of reality.

**Apocryphal**, *adj.* Hidden.

Originally, the term denoted the writings of certain mystery religions which were hidden from all who were not part of the elite of initiates, such as the Orthodox Book of Common Prayer. Over time, the word has shifted in meaning. It is the nature of Christianity to proclaim its truths, not to hide them; thus, there was no need for apocryphal books in the first sense. The term was applied to books which were hidden for another, entirely different, reason; namely, books which were excluded due to heretical content, such as James or the book of Ecclesiastes. There may be a second connection between the two usages of the word, but it is wisely left unmentioned.

**Appearance of Evil**, *n.* A bane which people will commit evil in order to avoid.

**Archaic**, *adj.* Reflecting the best and most enduring relics of centuries gone before. Said of practices, ideas, and language which reflect a belief that wisdom may be found in thoughts of the past as well as those of the present. A pejorative term.

**Arminianism**, *adj.* The school of thought opposite Calvinism. Named after Arminius, a theologian who was taught under Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza. Arminius began to depart from Calvin's doctrine by teaching conditional predestination, as contrasted to Beza, who emphatically taught limited atonement.

**Arranged marriage**, *n.* A marriage not chosen by the parties involved; arranged marriages exhibit far lower divorce rates than those voluntarily chosen.

That they be more successful is not really as strange as it may seem at first.

In America, you marry the girl you love; in India, you love the girl you marry.

-A man speaking in a video on Indian philosophy

There is a fundamental difference in how arranged and voluntarily chosen marriages tend to be approached. Voluntary marriages tend to be approached as "If I can just find the right person, we can live happily ever after."; arranged marriages are not approached with any delusions of being an effortless bliss or some sort of box that one can take things out of without putting anything into. But with poorer conditions — with a bride and groom that not only have not chosen each other, but have not necessarily met before the day of the wedding — people decide to make it work. Therefore it is not the lands of arranged marriages, but America, which is the land of divorce.

The difference between expecting something to be fruitful without any effort and without any sacrifice, and expecting something to be difficult (but choosing via effort and sacrifice to make it work) is a difference between disappointment and a

rewarding joy, and applies to much more of life than only marriage.

**Aspirin**, *n.* A drug used in the treatment of arthritis, commonly found in a container with a childproof cap.

**Atheism**, *n.* A religion requiring exceptional faith.

**Attention Span**, *n.* The length of time for which a person is able to maintain concentration. In most nations, a long attention span is valued as enabling understanding of well-developed, coherent, and complete arguments; in America,

**Automobile**, *n.* A transportation device hailed as the solution to the problem of providing transit without creating the pollution generated by a horse.

**AV**, *n.* Authorized Version. The Authorized Version, also known as the King James Version, is the original form of the Word of God. All subsequent paraphrases, while easier to read, are merely the word of man.

**Bachelor's Degree**, *n.* The primary degree offered by colleges attended as happy hunting grounds, such as Moody Bridal Institute.

**Ballista**, *n.* A device useful in the adjustment of sound systems playing elevator music.

**Beatitude**, *n.* A genre of didactic statement, used in the Sermon on the Mount.

Blessed are the ticklish,  
for the touch of a friend shall fill them with laughter.

-The Unauthorized Version

**Beautiful**, *adj.* Distorted and unnatural.

One of the enduring aspects of human culture is a tradition which universally establishes a single standard of beauty, one for the male body and (especially) one for the female.

There is some feature which may be attractive, and is exaggerated out of all proportion. Or, alternately, some feature which is unattractive, and is exaggerated out of all proportion.

Because a long and slender neck looks beautiful, a nice contrast to the thick bulges of a man's shape, there's a tribe in

Africa which uses copper braces to stretch out women's necks to be a foot long.

China, noting that men have big feet and a feminine shape involves small feet, has the practice of footbinding, using the one kind of footwear tighter than climbing boots in order to painfully keep feet from growing any larger than those of a little girl.

Recent anthropological findings report an obscure culture which has successfully made the transition from ridiculous to bombastic. It has decided that the roundness of feminine beauty should be replaced with the shape of a pre-pubescent boy, and reacted to modern technology by using the woman's body as a repository for gelatinous capsules.

**Beer Commercial**, *n.* The *reductio ad disgustum* of advertising's image of women.

**Bible**, *n.* A work high on the tolerant people's list of books to be burned.

We live in a pluralistic, multicultural society where young people raised according to the tenets of Hinduism, Islam, or the humanist philosophy of Bertrand Russel must feel as welcome as young people raised on the Bible. Our solution to this challenge is ingenious. Knowing that the vast majority of young people are profoundly ignorant of the Bhagavad Gita, or of the Koran, or for that matter of the philosophy of Bertrand Russel, we have decided in the interests of tolerance and pluralism to leave them equally ignorant of the Bible. Our young people enjoy a perfect democracy of ignorance.

-Literary critic Peter Marchand, commenting on the removal of the Bible from public school classrooms

**Billboard**, *n.* An eyesore which possesses the additional demerit of being a distraction to drivers.

Drivers who take their eyes off the road to read billboards should make sure that they're sufficiently

insured.

Just a thought.

-A billboard seen in Holland, Michigan

I think I shall never see  
a billboard lovely as a tree.  
Perhaps, unless the billboards fall  
I shall never see a tree at all.

-Ogden Nash

**Blind**, *adj.* Possessing eyes that do not see. The prophet Isaiah spoke of people having eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear. That prophecy has had numerous fulfillments; of chief contemporary relevance is current underinterpretation of Biblical teachings on wealth.

**Bombastic**, *adj.* Of, from, or pertaining to the PC-USA.

**Boot**, *n.* An ingenious device used to keep astronauts on the moon from floating away in space.

**Brainwashing**, *n.* A cold Big Brother's constant barrage of propoganda to people under his thumb.

One American who recently visited the People's Republic of China said that at first he wondered how people could tolerate the constant barrage of slogans on walls and radio telling everybody what to think. Then he realized that his own society reels under nonstop messages just as inane.

-Doris Janses, *Living More with Less*, on advertising

**Budweiser**, *n.* A headache in a bottle. The dog of beers.

With most beers, if you drink too much, you get a headache the day after. With Annheiser-Busch, you get a headache as you drink it.

-A German student, spring '95

**Bumber Sticker**, *n.* A tool to present the ludicrous as unassailable. One bumper sticker, for instance, reads:

PRO-CHOICE, PRO-CHILD  
EVERY CHILD A WANTED CHILD

This form of deep compassion is perhaps inspired by satirist fantasy author Terry Pratchett:

Give a man a fire and keep him warm for a day.  
Light a man on fire and he will be warm for rest of his life.

**Busy Signal**, *n.* An elegant sound designed to prepare the ear to listen to country and western.

**Cafeteria**, *n.* A refectory instrumental in the building of fine and upstanding young students. The meat builds muscle, the milk builds bones, and the rest builds character.

Friend: We're going to the cafeteria for dinner. Wanna come along?

Student: Sorry, but I'm trying not to lose weight.

**Canada**, *n.* See *Northern Wastes*.

**Canadian**, *adj.* and *n.* An anti-American American.

**Capital Punishment**, *n.* A form of sentence found in the most dangerous of first world nations, used by the government to intimidate criminals who have been taught that violence is the way to solve their problems.

**Category Mistake**, *n.* An assumption embodied in an inappropriate question, inquiring about an undefined attribute, such as, "Is yellow square or round?", "Is the doctrine of the Trinity calm or excited?", or "What was the point of that speech?"

**Catholic**, *adj.* and *n.* United, universal. Hence the Nicaene Creed, shared in common by nearly all believers, says "I believe in one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church." Today the term denotes one of three distinct branches of Christianity, the other two being Orthodox and Protestant. All present believers are

members of one branch and forbidden to receive communion with members of the other two.

**Catholic University**, *n.* An institution of higher learning that welcomes Orthodox students with open arms on the theory of, "The Church must breathe mustard gas with both lungs!"

**Causality**, *n.* The mechanism by which cause brings about effect, thoughtfully provided as a reminder to philosophers of who is in Heaven and who is on earth. The latter have responded by deciding under what bounds the former is permitted to operate.

**CD**, *n.* Compact Disc. Used to record musical works in accordance with the popular taste, the compact disc is a small, round plate made out of the same material as bulletproof windows. This is believed to be in anticipation of more sophisticated reactions to the material they contain.

**Ceremonial Law**, *n.* As established in the Pentateuch, an elaborate system of rules and regulations. Ceremonial law contained, of course, exacting detail governing the administration of rites and ceremonies, but also contained an intricate calendar of holy days, told which foods were clean and unclean, talked about objects which were consecrated and objects which were profane, described what haircuts were and weren't acceptable, and so on. Paul spoke of this in many places; in his epistle to the Colossians, he describes all of these things as shadows of the reality found in Christ. Christ nailed it to the cross, and the Church has raised it from the dead.

**Chalice**, *n.* A vessel used to hold drinks, which were sometimes augmented by various poisons.

Lady Astor (to Churchill): Winston Churchill, if I were your wife, I would put poison in your cup.

Churchill: Lady Astor, if you were my wife, I would drink it.

**Chaotic**, *adj.* Embodying chaos; uncontrolled and unpredictable. A chaotic situation is one in which presence of mind is good and absence of body is better.

**Checks-and-balances**, *n.* A system of government with power

divided between different branches, so that no one man or branch can hold too much power. This is accomplished by providing each branch with "checks" on the power of others, to maintain a "balance", in order that (once the government has grown sufficiently corrupt) the amount of good that one honest man can inflict is kept within tolerable bounds.

**Cheese**, *n.* The most important ingredient in good pizza and successful television programming.

**Childproof Cap**, *n.* A safety device preventing parents from opening certain containers without their children's assistance.

**Chivalry**, *n.* A time-honored code of conduct which, at a time when most men treated women as chattels, demanded as central to a man's honor that women be accorded deference, protection, and respect. Considered by modern feminism to be a bane.

**Christian Contemporary Music**, *n.* A genre of song designed primarily to impart sound teaching, such as the doctrine that we are sanctified by faith and not by good taste in music.

**Christian Film**, *n.* A mode of expressing Christian doctrine which uses the same essential communication strategy as hard-core porn, in that the form of storytelling leaves nothing to the imagination but the plot.

**Christian Science**, *n.* A system of doctrines with a name carefully chosen, word by word, in honor of the accuracy with which it describes the world.

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

**Church**, *n.* An early substitute for America and the GOP.

**Circular Definition**, *n.* A definition which is circular.

**Civilization**, *n.* The state of living where people abide in cities rather than roam planes, conferring a respect for the value of human life not found among savages.

Reporter (To Gandhi): Mr. Gandhi, what do you think of Western civilization?

Gandhi: I think it would be a good idea.

**Classic**, *n.* A work which everybody wants to have read but nobody

wants to read.

**Closed-Minded**, *adj.* Possessing a mind which, like a pipe sealed on both ends, does not permit ideas to enter and leave. Contrasted with an open mind, which permits ideas to flow, like water through a pipe, entering and exiting without leaving any trace. There is perhaps a third prospect, of weighing and examining most ideas against a higher standard to grab firm hold of what is meritorious and worth keeping and reject what is twisted and mistaken, but this idea does not occur sufficiently often to merit its own word. Promoting open-mindedness is perhaps the single greatest achievement of current thought.

If Jesus Christ were to come today, people would not crucify him. They would ask him to dinner, and hear what he had to say, and make fun of it.

-Thomas Carlyle

**Coconut**, *n.* Positive proof that plant life has been affected by the Fall. See also: *Pistachio*, *Cashew*.

**Coffeehouse**, *n.* A location symbolic of the fake intellectual scene, where people sit over a cup of coffee and talk about how open-minded they think they are.

**Coin**, *n.* The smallest unit of currency. The coin generally bears something symbolic of the nature and perspective of the people who create it — what they value, what they think of. The highest coin in the United States bears a picture of a human being; the highest coin in Canada bears the image of a loon.

**Coincidence**, *n.* In television, a kind of event that happens to happen as often as people need it to.

**Collateral Damage**, *n.* Blood that flows like a river.

**Comedian**, *n.* An entertainer possessing every faculty relevant to amusement save the ability to be funny.

**Commentary**, *n.* A multivolume explanation of the meaning of a book, chapter, or (occasionally) single verse, such as Ecclesiastes 6:11.

**Commitment**, *n.* [*N.B.: definition pending upon completion of a search for relationships which are not viewed as temporary*]

*and disposable]*

**Committee, n.** The divine model of speedy application of resources to the point of need.

For God so loved the world, that he formed a committee, that whosoever attendeth on it should not perish, but have everlasting life in which to await a decision.

-The Unauthorized Version

**Common Sense, n.** An exceedingly uncommon commodity.

**Communist, n.** One of the money changers Jesus drove out of the temple.

**Company, n.** The associations a person is seen with, as a reflection of character. Keeping good company is one area where many Christians have gone above and beyond the example of Christ.

**Computer Error, n.** The juxtaposition of at least two purely human errors, one of which is attributing the problem to the computer.

**Congress, n.** A body of men whose sole purpose in existence is to pile law upon law upon law.

The fundamental belief embodied in this philosophy is that a nation at peace with itself is ordered and held together, not by love and true religion, nor by honor and morality, nor even by a minimal attempt to act according to Confucious's simple words, "Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you," but rather by the brute force of edicts issued by the sovereign.

Therefore, when the nation was first formed, and not only did held together but actually built itself up by leaps and bounds, the legislators believed it their duty to create laws. When the nation's growth began to slow and problems to increase, the legislators believed it their duty to attempt to improve the situation by creating laws. And now, as the nation is crumbling, when it is common for a mere child to carry a .45 caliber handgun because he does not feel safe at school, it is by the force of tax laws hundreds of pages long and penal codes

which the lawmakers themselves could not hope to read that the legislature seeks to stem the ever advancing tide of chaos.

The greater the number of laws and enactments, the greater the number of thieves and robbers.

-Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

**Conscience**, *n.* An early artifact formerly serving the purpose now fulfilled by harsh penalties assigned as punishment for getting caught.

**Conspicuous**, *adj.* Trying to act inconspicuous.

**Consumer Oriented Services**, *n.* Religion within the bounds of amusement.

This fundamental category mistake places church meetings not within the category of religious services designed to help people worship and grow, loving enough to give a gadfly's sting, but rather action-packed spectacles designed to attract people who are seeking amusement. Seminaries, far from warning against this, are actually promoting it.

This is, unfortunately, not a novelty. Like schools, and USA-TODAY, and so on and so forth, just one more segment of society in need of a swift kick in the pants from Neil Postman.

**Copyright**, *n.* A legal protection acquired for a piece of information, commonly used by the author or publisher of a book, program, et cetera, to secure benefit\$ from its use. While it is possible to be more lenient in what a copyright permits, that option ranks to many as an extremely gnu concept. Most commonly, all rights are reserved. Without the express written consent of the owner, *n.* part of the work may be be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or biological.

**Corporate Ladder**, *n.* An awe inspiring structure which reaches to the clouds and leans against the wrong building.

By working hard for eight yours a day, you may get to be a boss and work hard for twelve hours a day.

-Mark Twain

**Crash Test**, *n.* A simulated collision, used to prove the safety superiority of larger and heavier cars by showing that they provide partial protection in an accident that a more maneuverable car would be able to avoid.

**Creativity**, *n.* An attribute which is admired and praised in figures of the past.

**Cult**, *n.* An aberrant group whose bizarre practices deviate from what is established and considered normative. Etymologically, the word signifies worship.

**Cybertechnology**, *n.* Technology which enters into the body, such as an artificial heart or robotic arm.

At present, a surgeon has access to books upon books of procedures designed to restore function to a hand injured, and yet not one procedure designed to improve the function of a hand uninjured. Cybertechnology which is not remedial — a replacement for a defective heart or severed limb being examples of remedial cybertechnology — is essentially the property of science fiction writers, who allow all manner of incredible technology to enter the body.

The prime exception, if it is to be counted as such, is chemical. There exist drugs which exert special impact on the body. Most are used in medical fashion — an antibiotic or some other such function — but there are a few which act to improve the function of a person in health. It was observed that smoking cigarettes causes people to breathe more deeply. Realizing this, and understanding the importance of oxygen to a developing child, doctors advised pregnant women to smoke. There are many other drugs which bring a similar improvement. The use of cocaine is a wonderful way to deal with depression, and the use of massive amounts of anabolic steroids brings an unequalled boost to athletic prowess.

This present lexicographer looks with great anticipation to the day when the cybertechnology described in novels may become commonplace.

**Dance**, *n.* An activity of joy and celebration given numerous references in Scripture (none of which are negative), now

considered by staunch Christians to be demonic if enjoyed in community.

**Dark Sucker**, *n.* Supposedly, an alternative understanding of a light source.

This jesting theory states that darkness is something which obscures vision; we are able to see when the darkness is sucked out. Eventually, the dark suckers become full of darkness and themselves become dark; this explains why incandescent bulbs, fluorescent tubes, and candles universally turn dark when they cease to function.

The theory was probably devised by an electrical engineer, who wanted to do something silly while taking a break from drawing circuit diagrams.

**Dating**, *n.* A sequence of miniature marriages, complete with miniature sex, ending in miniature divorces.

**Democracy**, *n.* [Gk. *demos*, people, *cratein*, to rule. No connection to the etymology of 'demon'] A Utopian form of government based on the twin assumptions that the majority will generally do what is noble, just, and true, and that mass persuasion techniques cannot be used to set aside good judgement.

Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.

-Reinhold Niebuhr

It has been said that television is an example of democracy at its ugliest; there is no accountability, and people tend to watch something other than what they would publicly be seen as associating with. It is a degenerating morass, increasingly portraying sexual sin as harmless and bloodshed as an amusing sport; recent years have seen the network television premiere of America's first made-for-TV war. It was wrong of the Evil Empire to define a just war as anything which advances the cause of communism; we know that a war is only justified if it makes the world safe for freedom and democracy. Were that war not to have been fought, Kuwaiti refugees would still be

stranded in the surrounding nations' disco parlors. We would not have been able to restore the tyranny and human rights violations of the Kuwaiti ruling family, nor, more importantly, implement important alterations to the infrastructure of Baghdad to better deal with the problem of overpopulation. All of this is necessary to be able to listen to a child's shattered dreams, and then explain why Daddy isn't coming home.

For the majority to oppress the minority is perfectly democratic; the condition for democracy is the desire of the majority, a consideration independent of right and wrong. In perhaps the most spectacular debacle of all, Adolf Hitler rose to power in Germany, through means which can only be described as unimpeachably democratic.

**Eloquence**, *n.* The art of persuading fools that white is the color that it appears to be. It includes the gift of making any color appear white.

-Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*.

**Demon Rum**, *n.* An unfortunate by-product of Jesus's first miracle.

**Denomination**, *n.* A group of schismatics whose conduct we find to be in accordance with Scripture.

**Department of Defense**, *n.* A Ministry of War continually involved in operations which have little or nothing to do with the integrity of national borders.

**Deus Ex Machina**, *n.* [Lat. *deus*, god, *ex*, out of; from, *machina*, machine] (1) In fiction, an unrealistic solution to a problem, which miraculously works. For example, a poor family's financial struggles finding resolution in the death of a hitherto unknown relative who willed them his wealthy estate. (2) In nonfiction, an unrealistic technological solution to a problem with its origin in the evil within the human heart, which miraculously fails. For example, infanticide on demand as a solution for the contempt for children which causes child abuse.

**Dictator**, *n.* An evil man who maintains power by intimidation and force, refusing to obey the United States.

**Dinosaur**, *n.* An immense prehistoric beast with a mental capacity

lower than that of a field mouse. Figuratively, the term is used in a very pejorative manner by computer scientists, in reference to annoying machines which have miniscule capabilities and take inordinate amounts of time to do anything useful.

Dinosaurs typically make obnoxious noises, and are bulky eyesores with glowing green against a somewhat darker but none the less nauseating background. For all the disagreeable things in American culture, we have learned the importance of teaching computer literacy to young children.

**Disclaimer**, *n.* A kind of publisher's preface accompanying books, advertisements, et cetera, for the edification of any lawyers who may happen to read the work. Most disclaimers are either patently false, as the disclaimer by cigarette manufacturers that colorful advertisements sporting cartoon characters are not meant to attract the attention of children, or blatantly obvious, as the following words found before many novels:

This is a work of fiction. The characters and plot of this story are solely the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to the personality or actions of any person, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

**Dishonesty**, *n.* A condition which is considered a vice until it is channeled into the virtuous and proper bounds of tact.

**Dispensationalism**, *n.* Systematic theology as an excuse for lack of faith.

**Divorce**, *n.* A legalized form of child abuse.

**DOS**, *n.* Disk Operating System. A set of programs offering crude disk operations, frequently confused with a complete and robust operating system.

A master was explaining the nature of Tao to one of his novices, "The Tao is embodied in all software — no matter how insignificant," said the master.

"Is the Tao in a hand-held calculator?" asked the novice.

"It is." came the reply.

"Is the Tao in a video game?"

"The Tao is even in a video game," said the master.

"And is the Tao in the DOS for a personal computer?"  
The master coughed and shifted his position slightly.  
"The lesson is over for today."

-Geoffrey James, *The Tao of Programming*, 4.3

**Doubt**, *n.* The cornerstone of the four cardinal virtues of classical modernity.

**DoxaSoma**, *n.* The Christian spiritual practice of meditative prayer through exercise, balance, and body posture. (Minimum 85% recycled from Hindu spiritual practices.)

**Driver's License**, *n.* A form of identification required in order to legally purchase alcoholic beverages.

**Dystopia**, *n.* Utopian theory in practice.

**Easter**, *n.* The highest point of the Christian calendar, named after the Babylonian whore goddess.

**Edifice**, *n.* A building antedating the advent of the Bauhaus aesthetic.

**Educated**, *adj.* Unemployed with a degree.

**Education Party**, *n.* The party which nominated for important office a man lacking sufficient training to spell personal names or those of common household items.

**Eh?**, *tic.* See *Like*.

**Eighteen**, *n.* In the eyes of the United States government, the number of years which constitute the age of accountability. At this age, a person is no longer treated as a child, but as a mature adult with sound judgment. Eighteen years is old enough to give a signature that bears legal weight without the approval of a legal guardian, old enough to decide the fate of a human life or nation by serving as a juror on a capital case or by casting a vote, old enough to enlist or be conscripted to military service, old enough to kill enemy soldiers and old enough to die in combat, but too young and immature to visit a restaurant and enjoy a glass of wine with dinner.

**Eisegesis**, *n.* Reading one's meaning into a text, as distinguished from exegesis, drawing the meaning out of a text. It is interesting to note that the people most skilled in eisegesis,

particularly as it pertains to Scripture, do not generally understand the distinction.

**Electricity**, *n.* A modern convenience which, when combined with running water, is capable of making life very inconvenient.

**Element**, *n.* The basic building blocks of which all matter is built. According to the ancient Greeks, there were four elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. Science has progressed beyond that; matter generally consists of atoms, the ultimate, indivisible unit. Atoms in turn are built of more fundamental and elementary particles, and the elementary particles combine in various ways to generate the forms of matter we know of — Solid, Liquid, Gas, and Plasma.

**Embarrassment**, *n.* The one fly in the ointment that it is hoped that opponents won't notice. In general, attempts are made to discredit embarrassments, the results of which can frequently be very amusing to watch. Fortunately, there is an exception if the embarrassment comes from Scripture. Holy Scripture is recognized to be God-breathed, and any embarrassing passage is taken very seriously; exegetes attempt to discern the passage's true meaning through careful reading and detailed word studies.

Man will occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of the time he will pick himself up and continue on.

-Winston Churchill

**Enlightenment**, *n.* The beginning of the fall of Western civilization and thought.

**Environmentalist**, *n.* One devoted to a particular political agenda, regardless of its impact on the environment.

A recent project at Argonne National Laboratory was working on a new generation of nuclear reactor which would be in many ways a dream come true. Its design would be such that meltdown would be physically impossible. It could run on nuclear waste from other plants, not only generating power but reducing them to material which would become harmless in a matter of roughly a century, rather than millions of years. It

could run on nuclear warheads, thus not only providing a safe and permanent manner to dispose of some of the most appalling and destructive devices ever created, but so doing in a manner which would provide useful energy to hospitals and families; a beautiful picture of what it means to beat swords into ploughshares.

However, it is still nuclear, and, in the eyes of environmentalism, all nuclear power is evil and must be stopped at any cost. This project was, most definitely, stopped at any cost. It was terminated at great monetary cost; it was nearing completion, and, now that it was ready to be tested on different materials, those materials must be disposed of, at a cost of ninety-four million dollars more than it would have cost to complete. It was terminated at great environmental cost; those materials are dangerous nuclear wastes, and, though they were going to be made harmless, they must now be disposed of in established manners; that is to say, function as the nuclear waste that environmentalists so adamantly oppose. However, they stopped something bearing the dirty 'n' word, so environmentalists are now happy.

It is at least fortunate that environmentalists do not yet have the means to extinguish the sun.

**Episcopalianism**, *n.* A most interesting combination of Catholic and Protestant, quite effectively combining the worst of both worlds.

**Euphemasia**, *n.* In writing, choice of words and phrases that skillfully dance around what they mean. This avoids offending people, and puts any alternative certainty of the work being taken seriously out of its state of being differently happy.

**Evangelical**, *n.* A believer who is devoted to the doctrine of Sola Scriptura and verse by verse study of Scripture. The Great Commission is at the center of their ethics, and they believe in proclaiming Christ by deed as well as word. Thus many of them wisely abide by prohibitions, against dangerous things such as the following: card games, drinking, dancing, movies, swearing... While none of these are technically outlawed by Scripture, they are thought to be good ideas entirely in

accordance with its essential teaching, as reflected in verses such as the following: Ps. 149:3, Eccl. 9:7, II Cor. 4:6, Gal. 1:6-8, 3:1-2, 5:1, 12,18,22-25, Eph. 2:15, Col. 2:8,13-14,16,20-23, I Thes. 5:19, I Tim. 4:1-5.

**Evil**, *n.* That which is twisted, depraved, and wicked.

Once upon a time, a king wished that his people know what evil was, so that his people could learn to recognize and flee from it. He issued a summons, that, in a year, all of his artists should come to him with one picture, to show what was evil. The best picture would be displayed to the people.

In a year, they all appeared at the king's palace. There were very few artists in the kingdom, but those who were there were very skillful, and worked as they had never worked before. Each brought a picture beneath a shroud.

The king turned to the first artist who had come. "Jesse, unveil your picture, and tell us its interpretation."

Jesse lifted the cloth. Against a background of blackened skulls was a dark green serpent, the color of venom and poison, with eyes that glowed red. "Your Majesty, it was the Serpent whose treacherous venom deceived man to eat of the forbidden fruit. The eye is the lamp of the body, and the Serpent's eye burns with the fires of Hell. You see that beyond the Serpent are skulls. Evil ensnares unto death and outer darkness."

The court murmured its approval. The picture was striking, and spoke its lesson well. The king, also, approved. "Well done, Jesse. If another picture is chosen, it will not be because you have done poorly. Now, Gallio, please show us your work."

Gallio unveiled his painting. In it was a man, his face red and veins bulging from hate. In his hand, he held a curved dagger. He was slowly advancing towards a woman, cowering in fear. "Your Majesty, man is created in the image of God, and human life is sacred. Thus the way we are to love God is often by loving our neighbor. There are few blasphemies more unholy than murder. You have asked me for a picture to show what evil is, that your subjects may flee from it. This is evil to flee from."

The court again murmured its approval, and the king began to shift slightly. It was not, as some supposed, because of the repellent nature of the pictures, but because he had secretly

repellent nature of the pictures, but because he had secretly hoped that there would be only one good picture. Now, it was evident that the decision would not be so simple. "Gallio, you have also done well. And Simon, your picture?"

Simon unveiled his picture, and people later swore that they could smell a stench. There, in the picture, was the most hideous and misshapen beast they had ever seen. Its proportions were distorted, and its colors were ghastly. The left eye was green, and taller than it was wide. The right eye was even larger than the left, red, bloodshot, and flowing with blood; where there should have been a pupil, a claw grotesquely protruded. It was covered with claws, teeth, fur, scales, blood, slime, tentacles, and bits of rotted flesh; several members of the court excused themselves. "However it may be disguised, evil is that which is sick, distorted, and ugly."

There was a long silence. Finally, the king spoke again. "I see that there are three powerful pictures of evil, any one of which is easily a masterpiece and well fit to show to the people. Barak, I know that you have been given artistic genius, and that perhaps your picture will help me with this difficult decision. Unveil your picture."

Barak unveiled his picture, and an awestruck hush fell over the court. There, unveiled, was the most beautiful picture they had ever seen.

The picture was in the great vault of a room in a celestial palace. It was carved of diamond, emerald, ruby, jasper, amethyst, sardonyx, and chrysolite. Through the walls of gem, the stars shone brightly. But all of this was nothing, compared to the creature in the room.

He carried with him power and majesty. He looked something like a man, but bore glory beyond intense. His face shone like the sun blazing in full force, his eyes flashed like lightning, and his hair like radiant flame. He wore a robe that looked as if it had been woven from solid light. In his left hand was a luminous book, written in letters of gold, and in his right hand was a sharp, double edged sword, sheathed in fire and lightning.

The king was stunned. It took him a long time to find words,

and then he shouted with all of his might.

"You fool! I ask you for a picture of evil, and you bring me this! It is true that fools rush in where angels fear to tread, and that, like unthinking beasts, they do not hesitate to slander the glorious ones. What do you have to say for yourself and for this picture? I shall have an explanation now, or I shall have your head!"

Barak looked up, a tear trickling down his cheek. "Your Majesty, do you not understand? It is a picture of Satan."

**Exaggerate**, *v.* In satire, to tell a frog, as if it were the present, a plausible description of what the water may be like in a few minutes.

**Excuse**, *n.* A statement which serves as evidence of a guilty conscience.

**Explanation**, *n.* An account of a situation which does not threaten the speaker's prejudice.

In George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*, princess Irene gets lost in her mountain home and finds a mysterious grandmother, who gives her a silver ring attached to an invisibly fine strand of spider-silk, and tells her that if she follows the thread Irene will find her grandmother's room. One time, Irene gets lost and follows the thread out of the house, in and out of all kinds of dark and unfamiliar caverns deep inside a goblin-infested mountain. She finds the imprisoned miner-boy Curdie and brings him to her grandmother. Curdie follows along, but cannot believe her strange account: even in the room where Irene claims to be speaking with her grandmother, Curdie sees only a dark and dirty garret. A bitter argument ensues, and Curdie returns home, vexed.

His mother coaxes the explanation out of him:

Then Curdie made a clean breast of it, and told them everything.

They all sat silent for some time, pondering the strange tale. At last Curdie's mother spoke.

"You confess, my boy," she said, "there is something about the whole affair you do not understand?"

"Yes of course mother " he answered "I cannot

Yes, of course, Mother," he answered. "I cannot understand how a child knowing nothing about the mountain, or even that I was shut up in it, should come all that way alone, straight to where I was; and then, after getting me out of the hole, lead me out of the mountain too, where I should not have known a step of the way if it had been as light as in the open air."

"Then you have no right to say what she told you was not true. She did not take you out, and she must have had something to guide her: why not a thread as well as a rope, or anything else? There is something you cannot explain, and her explanation may be the right one."

"It's no explanation at all, Mother; and I can't believe it. Darwinism is the only game in town."

**Fallenness**, *n.* The defining characteristic of the present human condition. C.S. Lewis spoke wisely:

There are two types of people in this world:  
those who say to God, "Thy will be done,"  
and those to whom God says, "Thy will be done."

Herein may be found the explanation for most of human history.

**Familiar**, *adj.* Considered to be safe and good.

**Fashion**, *n.* The progressive self-revelation of the imago dei.

**Fast**, *n.* A New Testament practice which most current-day Christians have quickly disposed of.

**Fast Food**, *n.* An enterprise which pioneered the use of disposable polystyrene packaging, which was useful and convenient to the customer on the go. Now, due to consumer pressure, the fast food industry is genuinely concerned about the environment. The packaging presently used is biodegradable. The contents, unfortunately, are not.

**Fat Free**, *adj.* See *Taste Free*.

**Feminism**, *n.* Like most philosophical and ideological currents, truth gone mad.

Feminism at its heart embodies a substantial truth — that women have historically been treated as second class citizens (if

women have historically been treated as second class citizens (if even that), and that no society can call itself just while conducting business as usual — and its development tells many other truths: love, nurturance, and cooperation are foundational virtues in the life of a society; emotion is an integral part of being human; human relationships and community are important; porn degrades women and children, and promotes rape; no means no.

However, both first wave feminism (which sought equality on existing terms) and second wave feminism (which seeks to completely redefine the terms of equality) make statements that, if carried to their logical conclusions, are absolute madness. (To which many feminists would reply that logic is a tool of male oppression.)

At the root of this is a failure to identify the moral structure of the universe as ordered by a God who is the ultimate of masculinity — more Yang than Yin — and a failure to recognize femininity as a created good which, by its very nature, does not and should not order the universe. First wave feminism did not understand the differences between masculine and feminine; the second wave sees all good in terms of the feminine and all evil in terms of the masculine.

Thus is embarked upon a project to remake society (which consists entirely of male oppression) into a world of feminine good. The results vary from the comedic to the destructive — and end up to be at least as baneful to women as men.

To be swept away are all of the classics of literature and philosophy: their purpose is to justify the exploitation of women. Men's languages are to be replaced by feminine tongues; they revolve around logic rather than emotion, and are cruelly imposed on little girls before they can learn to communicate by their own natures. Never mind that women talk more than men, or that the study of languages is dominated by women. Our languages are oppressive. Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, the landmark work which laid out the foundations of calculus, is "Newton's rape manual."

Of course, nearly all movements have a lunatic fringe, but it is unnecessary to look at feminism's fringes to see the

destructive. Many, many women are told to regard *every* man as a potential rapist. Trust is essential to every human relationship; it is a building block as foundational as love and honesty. Yet feminism believes it in the best interest of women to regard every moment with every man as potentially turning into one of the deepest and inhuman violations possible; this means that they are to spend every moment with every man in unending fear.

Furthermore, at least a certain form of feminism, like multiculturalism, relativism, etc. in that they form a core of orthodoxy which the herd of free thinkers is shocked and indignant to see someone go against. Never mind, for example, that early feminism and the present black womanist movement found and find abortion to be unacceptable; anyone who stands against the legality of abortion is an abortion rights foe (just imagine what would happen if anyone used language that loaded in reference to a liberal...) who stands in the way of what can only be seen as a woman's private rights over her own body. Never mind that other cultures — even those which have had substantial impact from other peoples — are not multicultural and do not see the multiplicity of existant cultures as suggesting that everything is arbitrary, no one way of thinking or acting to be preferred over any other; the existence of other cultures which see things differently is proof that everything is an arbitrary matter for which there can be no standard of judgement. (Never mind that there are a great many things, such as the Natural Law and the absence of our optimistic belief in human progress, which remain remarkably constant across various cultures and ages.) And relativism, of course, means relativism on some very specific points — namely, everything that forms a part of this core of orthodoxy is something that no open-minded person could seriously question, and every belief which could substantially challenge the core of orthodoxy is a relative and subjective opinion which anybody may hold on condition that it is not actually believed to be true. Upon even a few minutes of inspection, it would appear that these beliefs are not only furnished by a zeal not matched by thought, but are not even internally consistent.

even internally consistent.

But all of this doesn't really matter, because feminism and its cousins are not meant to be thought about; only fought for.

With allies and a supporting movement like this, what woman needs enemies?

**Filiopatros Clause**, *n.* An exceedingly poor excuse for a schism.

**Flag**, *n.* See *Idol*.

**Flashlight**, *n.* An instrument of imperception which obscures vision by producing a concentrated glare at one point which is sufficiently intense to prevent the user from seeing anything else. Environmentalists have brought the cleverness of this device one step further by producing the solar powered flashlight.

**Foetus**, *n.* A very young child whom it is deemed expedient to consider to be otherwise.

**Form**, *n.* A piece of paper used as by administrations to deter people from using their services. It is the opinion of this lexicographer that the following form could be of the utmost assistance in helping bureaucracies more effectively serve those under their care.

## **Form to Request Information in the Form of a Form**

### **Section 1: Personal Information**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Sex:** [ ]M [ ]F

**Date of Birth:** \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

**Social Security Number:** \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

**Driver's License Number:** \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

**VISA/MasterCard Number:** \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

**Mailing Address, Business:**

**Street:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_ **ZIP Code:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mailing Address, Home:**

**Street:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State:** \_\_ **ZIP Code:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone, Work:** (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_, Ext. \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone, Home:** (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone, Car:** (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

**Beeper:** (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ **Chicago High School:** [ ]Y [

]N

**E-mail Address:**

---

(if address is in domain aol.com or webtv.net, please explain on a separate sheet of paper)

**Height:** \_\_', \_\_" **Weight:** \_\_\_\_# **Hair:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Eyes:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Blood type:** \_\_ **IQ:** \_\_

**Political Affiliation:** [ ]Federalist [ ]Republican [ ]Democrat [ ]Libertarian [ ]Monarchist [ ]Socialist [ ]Marxist [ ]Communist [ ]Nazi [ ]Fascist [ ]Anarchist [ ]Other (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

**Citizenship:** [ ]United States, including Canada and other territories [ ]Mexico [ ]California [ ]Other (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

**Race:** [ ]Caucasian/Pigmentally Challenged [ ]African [ ]Asian [ ]Hispanic/Latino [ ]Amerindian [ ]Heinz-57 [ ]Other (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_) [ ]An athletic event where people run around an oval again and again and again.

Page 1 \* End of Section 1 of 3

**Section 2: Form Description**

**Length of Form, in Characters:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Number of Questions or Required Data:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Expected Time to Complete:** \_\_ Hours, \_\_ Minutes, \_\_ Seconds.

**Expected Mental Effort Required to Complete:** \_\_\_\_\_ (if form would insult the intelligence of a senile hamster, please explain on a separate sheet of paper)

**Expected number of questions judged to be annoying, unnecessary, and/or personally offensive:** \_\_

**Expected time wasted on questions judged to be annoying, unnecessary, and/or personally offensive:** \_\_ Hours, \_\_ Minutes, \_\_ Seconds.

**Expected blood pressure increase while filling out form:** \_\_ mmHg systolic, \_\_ mmHg diastolic.

If further contemplation has led you to believe that

if further contemplation has led you to believe that some of the questions asked are not strictly necessary to provide the service that you offer upon completion of said form, please enclose revised prototype here.

Page 2 \* End of Section 2 of 3

### **Section 3: Essay Questions**

Please explain, in 500 words or less, your philosophy concerning the use of forms.

Please explain, in 200 words or less, why you designed this form as you did.

Please explain, in 300 words or less, why you believe that this form is necessary. If you are in a service oriented sector and desire to require the form of people you serve, please explain why you believe that requiring people to fill out forms constitutes a service to them.

When this form is completed, please return to the address provided. The Committee for Selecting Forms will carefully examine your case and delegate responsibility to an appropriate subcommittee.

Please allow approximately six to eight weeks for the appointed subcommittee to lose your file in a paper shuffle.

Page 3 \* End of Section 3 of 3

**Formal Equivalent**, *n.* The style of translation favored by those who hold the highest view of Scripture. The philosophy of formal equivalence justly realizes the secondary place the transmission of ideas, themes, and sagas holds to the importance of direct renderings of individual words and the preservation of the original word order. Even those who attempt to render thought for thought pay due homage to formal equivalence in their renderings of metaphors in that most highly respected of books, the Song of Songs.

**FORTTRAN**, *n.* See *BASIC*.

**Free**, *adj.* Complimentary with your purchase of an item overpriced by more than the value of the gift.

**Freedom, n.** One of the foundational aspects of the Christian walk. Its proper understanding is one of the pivotal themes of Galatians, a book which refutes a heresy that shocked Paul so greatly that he skipped the usual pleasantries in beginning his letter. There are two major historical interpretations, both of which (in some form or other) can claim many orthodox adherents.

The first, the libertine interpretation, states that, due to grace and forgiveness, there are really no behaviors a Christian should avoid. Hence the believer is free to participate in orgies, free to have conduct dictated by an addiction, free to touch molten iron, and so on.

The second, the Judaizing interpretation, states that grace and forgiveness make sense only if there is such a thing as sin, and have an extensive list of sins to avoid. At the same time, the essence of their teaching is freedom. Hence the believer is free (at least one day in seven) to drop an article of clothing once every few steps, free to have conduct dictated by a written code of rules, free to become castrated, and so on.

Both of these emphasize freedom as the center of their walk. There is rumored to be a third interpretation, but it does not claim enough adherents to be worth explaining.

**Gadfly, n.** A sage who speaks with honesty which is universally appreciated and rewarded with unequalled travel opportunities.

**Gang, n.** A group of armed cowards found in major cities, fighting for control of streets and drug money, and intimidating and beating up whoever they think they can get away with, beating up whoever they don't like, and so on, as contrasted to the activities of the police department.

**Garrotte, n.** An early predecessor to the modern necktie.

**Gay Theology, n.** An abhorrent system of supposed interpretation, which serves only to excuse away the Word of God and abridge the moral requirements of the Gospel in order to permit a lifestyle which is a perversion of nature and a stench in God's nostrils, as contrasted to the beliefs and practices of good, prosperous, normal American Christians.

**Gentleman, n.** A man. The term embodies a degree of respect, and

reflects a particular ideal of manhood.

Perhaps best summarized in the words, "A gentleman is a gentle man," this ideal did not hold that manhood was to be measured by the ability to carry a Gatling gun, demolish buildings, and kill people. The ideal rather had something to do with being gentle.

It is perchance because of this that the term is increasingly considered to be an archaism.

**Geometry**, *n.* [Gk. *geo*, earth, *metros*, measure] A branch of mathematics flowing out of the ancient Greeks' desire to measure the earth. It was adopted by the medieval Scholastics as a means of preparing the mind for the study of theology; their study of geometry often found its culmination when the student crossed the Bridge of Asses. Followers in this tradition held the ancient, Euclidean development of geometry to be God's geometry. They refused to accept as legitimate other axiomatic systems, vigorously attacking Riemannian geometry, which has axioms describing curved rather than flat surfaces.

**Gerrymandering**, *n.* In modern democracy, the fine art of manipulating certain parts (known as districts) of an ancient artifact from the days before computers, called the Electoral College. Properly done gerrymandering will increase the weight of some votes and nullify the effect of others, in order to ensure with near certainty that elections will yield the outcome desired by the incumbents.

**Golf**, *n.* A sport so named because all of the other four letter words were taken.

**Goto**, *v.* The F-bomb of programming language constructs. It has been observed, "A programmer is someone who, when told to 'Go to Hell,' is offended, not by the 'Hell', but by the 'goto.'" See also: *Pointer*.

**Government**, *n.* One of several areas the subject of an insightful philosophical commentary entitled the Tao Te Ching. Composed in China by Lao Tzu in 500 BC, it paints a picture of government that is like acting; only bad acting draws attention to itself, and the best acting causes the observer to forget the fact that he is watching actors. This book is the origin of the

words, "Running a big government is like frying a small fish," popular among Republicans. (There are also statements that Democrats would like, but Democrats do not believe in reading books) A small fish is fried without being cut up or cleaned; that is to say, with a minimum of interference. Hence Republicans like to quote the words as a reason to avoid spending money on social programs and other uses that they dislike (spending ample money on programs that they do like, such as military expenditures and subsidies for environmentally destructive business, is, of course, exempt). Although this may not have been the original intent of the words, there is another significant way in which running a big government is like frying a small fish: it is very inefficient.

**GIMP**, *n.* Greatly Irritating Mystification Program. Proof that a graphical user interface can be every bit as arcane, uncontrollable, and frustrating as *any* text interface.

**Gnosticism**, *n.* A major Early Christian era heresy. At its root, Gnosticism contained the idea that the spiritual is good, but the physical is evil.

Perhaps the most deadly aspect of Gnostic error was the denial of Christ's manhood. Knowing that Christ was fully divine, and believing that the physical was evil, Gnostics deduced that Christ could not possibly have been a carnal creature like you and me with real, tangible flesh. They even went so far as to declare Christ's body to be an illusion.

Only slightly less problematic was the denial of the fact that God himself created the material world as good. The Psalms thank him for his gifts of bread, oil, and wine; the depths of the sea and the stars of the sky declare the glory of their Creator; Paul quoted the Psalms as saying, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it," encouraging believers to eat whatever was sold in the meat market without raising any question on ground of conscience. So far from believing that the material world was created by God as good, some Gnostics went so far as to state that Satan created it when God wasn't looking; they embraced a patently false dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual. The word 'scathing' is perhaps an understatement in describing some of Paul's reactions:

#### SOME OF PAUL'S REACTIONS.

Now, the Spirit expressly says that in later times, some will renounce the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron. They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer.

I Tim 4:1-5, NRSV

Gnostic heresy has, fortunately, been eradicated, and the church's abstemiousness ever since serves as an inspiration to us all.

**Gospel According to Thomas**, *n.* An ancient writing representing the full, second century development of Gnostic thought, now subject to consideration for inclusion as a canonical writing.

**Grace**, *n.* The one blessing that people strive to earn more than any other.

**Grammarian**, *n.* A person who studies the most common patterns of word order as they appear in language. After they are catalogued, the descriptions become ossified and canonical prescriptions; anyone who dare write in a manner contrary to the grammarian's edict because such writing seems more natural or fluid is corrected, and, if impenitent, blacklisted.

Heckler (to Churchill): Mr. Churchill, you end far too many of your sentences with prepositions.

Churchill: I take all sorts of criticism in this business, but that is the sort of criticism up with which I shall not put!

**Great Commission**, *n.* A commandment of Christ taken to be central by believers who live and die in fulfillment of his words in Matthew 23:15:

All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given unto me. Go therefore, and make converts of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.

-The Up-to-date International Version

**Guard**, *n.* (1) An armed brute entrusted with the responsibility of keeping people from escaping imprisonment. (2) A complete set of rules around the insufficient set established in Scripture, given limited support in I Cor. 4:6 and Deut. 4:2. Due to the fallenness of human nature, the fact that we do not live in a perfect world, and the powerlessness of the Holy Spirit, the naive and simplistic ideas generated by God's inferior wisdom are not enough; a guard around the law is necessary in order to prevent transgression against the moral laws. While few have managed to duplicate the exacting precision and completeness of the Pharisees' Guard around the Law, it must be said that there are many who are carrying on their worthy tradition.

Being instated as an archangel, Satan made himself multifariously objectionable and was finally expelled from Heaven. Halfway in his descent he paused, bent his head in thought a moment and at last went back. "There is one favor I should like to ask," said he.

"Name it."

"Man, I understand, is about to be created. He will need laws."

"What, wretch! you his appointed adversary, charged from the dawn of eternity with hatred of his soul—you ask for the right to make his laws?"

"Pardon; what I have to ask is that he be permitted to make them himself."

It was so ordered.

-Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

**Happiness**, *n.* A state which is created by some wherever they go, and by others whenever they go.

**Haemorrhoid**, *n.* See *Boil*.

**Hatred**, *n.* The coward's response to the unknown.

**Heretic**, *n.* One who, while appreciating the overall truth of the Christian message, is wiser than God and recognizes certain errors in orthodox theology. These errors usually occur at some point where God misinterpreted the nature of love.

Jesus summarized the Law in the commandments to love God and neighbor, and the teaching of the Apostles retained this; we are bestowed grace, the outpouring of God's love, a love which is to transform and fill us. Love for neighbor is so important that, oftentimes, the way to love God is through obeying the commandment "Love your neighbor"; in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "If you are in the temple offering a sacrifice and remember that your brother has something against you, go, leave your sacrifice on the altar, and be reconciled with your brother." Heretics have generally retained an understanding of the central importance of love for a neighbor, and offer a better way to do so.

It seems, as time passes, that the zeitgeist is a continual source of heresy. Of course, it is not the only one, and most major heresies have been able to claim at least a few adherents for most of time, but the spirit of the time seems to aid the most people in recognizing that the Bible is an old book, and bring Christian thought and application of the Law of Love into accord with the most recent discoveries.

In the nineteenth century and early twentieth, the law of the jungle was understood, and lovingly applied to human affairs. In the wild, only the strong shall survive. It seems harsh, but is far more merciful than mercy. It is sad for a weakling to be killed, it is conceded, but necessary; if the weaklings survive to pass on their inferior genes, it is whole future generations which are doomed to be weakened, and experience a slow and painful death. Mercy is penny wise and pound foolish. Even when people aren't killed, there is often something to be done to make sure that they do not infest future generations with their inferior seed; hence the involuntary sterilization of the mentally

inferior seed, hence the involuntary sterilization of the mentally retarded. By eliminating mercy, and allowing all those who would pass genetic disease and infirmity to be preyed upon, it is possible to ensure that future generations are strong, healthy, and happy; this was believed to be the best way to apply love.

Now, even among people who believe casuistry to be the best way to adhere to moral imperatives, that misinterpretation is passe. It is recognized that people are equal and have a right to live, and that different is not necessarily evil. From this, it is deduced that being different automatically precludes the possibility of evil, and, if people are equal, then all tendencies are equally good, equally consistent with a state of health and fullness of life, equally resultant from the state of a person in good physical, mental, and spiritual health. Paul was mistaken when he, having declared redemption for sinners and a life of freedom and joy to those who submit their sinfulness to God's grace, declared homosexual practice to be inconsonant with holy living. Past generations were wrong to burn homosexuals at the stake; we avoid their error by recognizing that homosexual practice was created by God as good, as evidenced by the words from Genesis which Jesus quoted to answer the question about divorce: "He created them male and female."

**Highway**, *n.* A route of transit more dangerous than airplanes at the height of terrorist crises, calmly travelled by people who would never set foot inside a jet.

**Hillsboro Baptist Church**, *n.* Christianity's biggest gift to gay advocacy yet.

**Holocaust**, *n.* One of the most revolting moments in history, when Hitler murdered six million Jews. In the midst of this horrible tragedy, we have learned lessons which will never be forgotten. We have learned to do a better job of ignoring genocide, as we have done for half a dozen other events which exceed the number of Jews Hitler destroyed, or at least use a better name, like 'ethnic cleansing'.

**Holy War**, *n.* A war which is especially unholy.

**Homo Sapiens**, *n.* [Lat. man the knowing] The scientific name for man.

Common men seem to have no difficulty deciding, "Is that

entity over there a man or a beast?"

To scientists and philosophers, though, it is not such a straightforward question. They are in pursuit of the one action which sets apart man from the beasts.

Some value technology, measuring the progress of a civilization's culture, morality, and character by the machines it produces. Thus, the distinguishing feature between man and beast is the ability to use tools. But even some birds use twigs in order to get food.

Now, language seems to be the prime locus of attention. The distinguishing feature is the use of words, that is symbols, to communicate. But dolphins do that. So it's really the ability to put words or symbols together in new grammatical combinations — or at least was, until it was discovered that a chimpanzee can do that, too.

This present lexicographer is unaware of any beasts which consider it necessary to spend time arguing about what it is that sets them apart from other species, let alone understand doing and being, accident and substance, well enough to confuse them.

**Honest**, *adj.* Addicted to the reprehensible habit of seeing and explaining things as they are, rather than as they ought to be. The progress of civilization and technology are rapidly advancing to the point of being able to cure this unfortunate condition.

One of the last well known sufferers of this madness was the late Ambrose Bierce, a lexicographer of singular wit and deficient sense. His appreciation for many things which hold great merit — resource, the wisdom of the public nonsensus, the goodness of human nature, the American dream — was indubitably stunted by the twin vices of insight and metacognition. A few characteristic samples of his misguided ravings are here given:

**Compulsion**, *n.* The eloquence of power.

**Forefinger**, *n.* The finger commonly used in pointing out two malefactors.

**Hovel**, *n.* The fruit of a flower called the Palace.

**Lock-and-key**, *n.* The distinguishing device of civilization and enlightenment.

**Mad**, *adj.* Affected with a high degree of intellectual independence; not conforming to standards of thought, speech and action derived by the conformants of the study themselves; at odds with the majority; in short, unusual...

**Palace**, *n.* A fine and costly residence, particularly that of a great official. The residence of a high dignitary of the Christian Church is called a palace; that of the Founder of his religion was known as a field, or wayside. There is progress.

**Rum**, *n.* Generically, fiery liquors which produce madness in total abstainers.

**Un-American**, *adj.* Wicked, intolerable, heathenish.

**Hospitality**, *n.* One of many virtues lost in modern life.

**Hubris**, *n.* The attitude of one who refuses to see things my way. A popular word among relativists.

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

**Hymn**, *n.* The sacred song of the Reformations, where the teachings of the priesthood of the believer and the holiness of everyday living are applied to the realm of music.

The music of the Catholic Church was and is beautiful, ancient, powerful, stately, and majestic; nobody had accused Rome of disgracing God by poor taste in music. The reason that the Reformers used different music was as an application of another part of their theology.

The Reformers held to the priesthood of the believer; they believed that a farmer as well as a missionary can and should draw close to God. To this end they translated the Scriptures into the common tongue, to reach people where they were. They also held belief in the sanctity of everyday living; prayer and study of the Scriptures are the sacred privilege and duty of the believer, but the believer also gives glory to God by eating and drinking, working and playing. Pulling these thoughts together, they used popular tunes as the medium to carry teaching in

they used popular tunes as the medium to carry teaching in verse. Although the songs lacked any complexity — the musical equivalent of flat soda — and cannot honestly be described as embodying good musical taste, even those songs were taken and transformed. The Roman Church had slowly fallen into the error of making Christianity something far off, boring and unintelligible sermons and odd songs with prayers and incantations in a dead language, elite and aloof from the way that common people live; the Reformers wished to cleanse the Church of this error. The Holy Scriptures, formerly available only in the Latin of the Vulgate Versio, were now rendered in the vulgar tongue, and people began to sing of Christ's love to the tune of popular drinking songs — all to reach out, and place the Gospel message before people, meeting them where they are.

This beautiful thought has not been forgotten; cherished hymns sung by the Reformers have been passed down from generation to generation, and used to keep Christian youth from becoming entangled in the Devil's music.

**IBM**, *n.* I've Been Mugged. A mismanaged behemoth which has designed and engineered the line of computers which has been the industry standard in personal computing for decades.

Everybody has a skeleton hidden in a closet somewhere.

**Icon**, *n.* An idol in competition with the true Christian's devotion to the Bible.

**Idealistic**, *adj.* 1: [philosophical usage] Holding the belief that there exist minds, sensations, and thought processes within those minds, but not an external material world to which sensations correspond. 2: [common usage] A patronizing and condescending term used in reference to a person who holds unswervingly to the only moral standards there are, implicitly declaring those beliefs to be as disconnected with reality as those of a person who is idealistic in the first sense.

What the word says is that such uncompromising faithfulness to the call of conscience is not to be praised (at least not beyond half-insults of "He means well." and "His heart is in the right place.") but, rather, gently patted on the head and politely dismissed. What the term *means* is that the speaker,

whose own compromised conduct has been brought to light by that of person referred to, and suddenly looks very shabby — indeed, all the worse for its whitewash coat of noble-sounding words about how "We do not live in a perfect world." and so on and so forth — is not only justified in compromise and lowering of standards, but actually doing a better job than someone who does not compromise: the speaker is more truly on the mark, and the idealistic one has the most praiseworthy intentions but misses the goal in an excess of misguided zeal. To top it all off, the word is not recognized as a pungent insult such as 'asinine' or 'idiotic', but pleasantly accepted as a simple statement of the way things are.

See also: *Admirable, Values.*

**Idiot box**, *n.* An ingenious device which stimulates the senses and bypasses sense.

**Ignore**, *v.* To imitate American Christianity's treatment of the Biblical teachings on wealth.

**Illustration**, *n.* In childrens' Bibles, an iconoclast's depiction of important Bible characters and stories. The difference between an illustration and an icon is that the illustration is not venerated, and with good reason. Illustrations recall characteristic moments from important stories by representing the characters involved. By so doing, they teach many important truths, the first and foremost of which is that Jesus was white.

**Incoherent**, *adj.* Lacking internal consistency; muddled and confused. An account is said to be incoherent if no sane person could hope to make sense of it. Incoherence dates back to the result of the attempt to build the Tower of Babel, as recorded in the book of Genesis:

And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

The Lord came down to see the city and the tower

THE LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech."

And there was Kuhn.

-The New Revised Nonstandard Version

**Incompetent**, *adj.* Very well paid.

Those who can — do.

Those who can't do — teach.

Those who can't teach — administrate.

Those who can't administrate — do it anyway.

-Author(s) unknown.

**Incongruity**, *n.* The basis for modern life.

**Indescribable**, *adj.* About to be given a very poor description.

**Indicator**, *n.* A kind of marker which, when measured or examined by a competent observer, will reveal more macroscopic information about a system. In ecology, certain species are very sensitive to environmental conditions; thus their population serves as a good indicator of the health of an ecosystem — such as red algae.

In the early days of aerial warfare, engineers understood and appreciated the delicate balance between armor and agility. They devised airplanes as best they could, and then observed the results of combat in order to make a more effective machine.

In order to accomplish this, they had a life sized picture of an airplane. Every time an airplane came back from combat, they would place a dot on the picture corresponding to each bullet hole. By so doing, they hoped to discern exactly where the most damage was sustained, and thus intelligently place armor as effectively as possible.

It was eventually noted that there were no dots over the fuel tank.

**Inefficient**, *adj.* Resembling the methods and practices currently in use.

**Infallible**, *adj.* Not subject to doctrinal error. It is believed by Catholics that the Pope is infallible, which is absurd; no single man is infallible except for me.

**Infest**, *v.* For something foreign to enter an organism and cause it to rot. For example, meditation, a practice of Eastern religions, has been carried to the west in the degenerate form of New Age. The abhorrent activity is beginning to infest nearly all facets of Christianity, and is rumored to penetrate even the purity of the Early Christians.

**Inflammable**, *adj.* Flammable.

**Inhuman**, *adj.* Acting without a shred of human decency; demonic; resembling the soldiers (and civilians) we are destroying in the current war.

**Inn**, *n.* In former times, a precursor to the modern hotel.

Once upon a time, a wayfarer came upon an inn bearing a sign, "Inn of Saint George and Ye Dragon." He knocked upon the door, and the matron came out.

"Pray have mercy on a poor and weary traveller beset by bandits. I've got no silver, but I can sing or tell a tale."

"I care not about the woes of a filthy ragamuffin. Begone." With these words, she threw a rotten apple at him, slamming shut the door.

He began to walk away, paused in thought, and at last returned, once again lifting the heavy knocker.

"What?"

"May I please speak with Saint George?"

-Reader's Digest

**Innumerate**, *adj.* Lacking in basic mathematical (number) skills, just as 'illiterate' refers to someone lacking basic reading (letter) skills. The latter is recognized as a severe handicap and fought accordingly; the former is accepted because thinking hurts.

There are three types of people in America: those who remember rudimentary mathematical skills, and those who have forgotten them.

**In Parentis Loco**, *n.* See *Loco*.

**Inquisition**, *n.* A systematic attempt to remove heretics by executing heresy.

**Insomniac**, *n.* One most prepared to appreciate the most prominent quality of the *Lord of the Rings*.

**Institutionalized Food Service**, *n.* A special case in which the law of gravity is reversed: what goes down must come up.

**Intel**, *n.* The company that put the 'backwards' into 'backwards compatibility.'

**International Law**, *n.* Law that is violated in multiple countries instead of just one.

**Intimidation**, *n.* In American diplomatic theory, the basis for cultural sensitivity and achievement of understanding.

Wesley (to gatekeeper): "Where is the gate key?"

Gatekeeper: "There is no gate key."

Wesley (to Fezzik): "Fezzik, tear his arms off."

Gatekeeper: "Oh, you mean this gate key."

-The Princess Bride

**Intuition**, *n.* A means of thought thought to be proven useless by logical people because it has not been rigorously proven according to logical methods.

**Journalist**, *n.* One engaged in the pursuit and obscurement of important facts.

**Jury**, *n.* A group of peers selected to render judgment, on a basis of inability to identify with any of the involved parties.

**Kinder and Gentler**, *adj.* Crueler and harsher.

It is obviously evil to beat or molest a child. What is less obvious, an ever so sweetly disguises sadism, consists in a manner of parenting that is always pleasant and rosy.

The basis for parenting is love, and a child is not a punching bag to scream at or hit after a bad day. It is wrong to strike a child in anger, and a spanking can only be right if it is more

painful to the parent than the child.

That being true, a parent who is loving and wise must chastise and administer painful discipline as a tool of correction. He who fails to do this raises a child who is spoiled.

This child will not understand consequence on anything more than an immediate physical level; he will not burn himself by placing his hand on a hot stove only because his parents lack the power to make the action painless. In all other areas — conduct towards other people, thievery, promiscuity — he will do whatever seems most attractive at the moment. The belief that some things are worth a wait, or the idea of action bearing consequence, especially a delayed consequence that does not come by physical mechanism, is a foreign concept. And so, when the child could be entering into life, he is instead trapped in the abyss of self.

This present lexicographer wonders how long it will be until those under the 'kinder and gentler' mindset will be told to go to Hell — not by man, but by God.

**Klu Klux Klan**, *n.* See *Clueless Klux Klan*.

**Koinonia**, *n.* The life in community and fellowship shared by believers. The Early Christians lived in a world where people identified and separated themselves by race, social class, and gender; the Church astonished the world by showing Jews and Greeks, masters and slaves, males and females, who not only did not exhibit the same tensions, but were all one, together, equal, in Christ Jesus. Today in our nation Christians gather at 10:00 AM, the most segregated hour of the week.

**Kneejerk Liberalism**, *n.* Liberalism's strand of a thread which runs through nearly all parts of society. Kneejerk liberalism is largely responsible for the "Stop nuclear power in order to save the environment." and the "Shut up in the name of open-mindedness and free speech!" movement, among others. Kneejerk conservatism, not terribly different, encompasses most Rush Limbaugh listeners.

Of course, kneejerk movements are not limited to the political sphere. Also to be mentioned is a kneejerk following of science, which believes science to have displaced God and the appropriateness of religious faith. Kneejerk open-mindedness

appropriateness of religious faith, kneejerk open-mindedness, which attacks Christian thought and any other intellectual edifice which is built on a foundation unlike its own foundation of relativism (which turns out to span most of human thought over most of time), and kneejerk spirituality, also known as New Age.

**Idiot**, *n.* A member of a large and powerful tribe whose influence in human affairs has always been dominant and controlling. The idiot's activity is not confined to any special field of thought or action, but "pervades and regulates the whole."...

-Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

**Knock**, *v.* (1) To strike a light blow which does no damage against a door or other massive object, in the hope that it will open. (2) [colloq.] To strike a light blow which does no damage against a ridiculous law or other massive object, in the hope of opening and illuminating information which is not plainly seen. In this sense, the word is almost always used pejoratively.

**Know-Nothing**, *n.* A member of an extinct political party formerly of great influence in American public life.

**Labor-Saving Device**, *n.* Any one of a number of inventions which is common among people who are busy, and scarce among people who have leisure.

**Landfill**, *n.* A storage device used in the preservation of biodegradable materials.

**Lazer**, *n.* Light Amplified by Stimulated Electromagnetic Radiation.

**Lehi**, *n.* A battle between Samson and the Philistines, when a multitude was slain by the jawbone of an ass. Its pivotal importance is recognized, so that there have been many historical re-enactments worldwide.

**Lent**, *n.* A special time of year set aside for solemn prayer and fasting. It is customary to use this time to contemplate Paul's words about special days and seasons.

**Liberal**, *adj.* and *n.* A scholar desiring to correct the tendency of conservatism and tradition to slowly and imperceptibly tarnish

and distort that which they attempt to preserve. The liberal scholar studies the ancient origins in their original form, and then attempts to remedy the situation by offering fresh, new heresies.

**Lifeboat Ethics**, *n.* One of many fine-sounding and respected excuses for a lack of ethics.

**Lifestyle**, *n.* That mode of preaching which espouses an alternative set of doctrines.

**Like**, *tic.* In Valspeak, a continual reminder of "Look, I'm Klueless, Etc."

**Light Bulb**, *n.* An invention which permits electricity to travel through a tiny filament. The filament puts up tremendous resistance to this, using the energy to generate approximately 5% light and 95% heat. Herein lies the Western precept of illumination.

**Liquor Law**, *n.* A form of regulation found in the places most plagued by alcoholism, teaching children to regard drinking as an adult activity (the ability to drink friends under the table being the true test of maturity), and, in some states, prohibiting parents from training children in the temperate and controlled use of liquors.

**Literate**, *adj.* Innumerate.

**Lottery**, *n.* See *Poverty Tax*, *Gullibility Tax*.

**Love**, *n.* A technical detail of secondary importance to the basis of morality, the Ten Commandments.

**Lutheran**, *n.* Pertaining to a denomination in the tradition of Martin Luther, a man who avoided the error of the church in Laodicaea, accused in Revelation of being neither hot nor cold, by being both hot and cold. Luther made many adamant statements, among them an insistence of, "Do not ever name a denomination after me."

**Luxury**, *n.* A rare pleasure available only to a privileged few, such as being able to walk. It is important to distinguish luxuries from necessities, such as driving a car.

**MacCuisinart**, *n.* The ultimate word processor, doing to words what food processors do to foods.

**Machiavellian Politics**, *n.* Politics.

**Macintosh**, *n.* (1) An apple distinguished for its sweetness, colorful lustre, and lack of meat. (2) A computer, with a name perhaps chosen for the acronym "Mouse Activated Computer", sporting software designed around the central parameter of requiring the user to do nothing sufficiently complicated to confuse a mouse. A striking example of the essential identity of agriculture and computer science.

**Majority Text**, *n.* The most accurate Greek New Testament text. While it was the accepted text for over a millenium, there have been since discovered some other texts. These inferior texts reflect considerable modification and transmission errors, and sometimes have entire verses missing; they have hindered the work of translators for over a century.

**Marxism**, *n.* A system of thought named after Karl Marx, who said, "Religion is the opium of the people," and, coincidentally, lived before the invention of television.

**Mary**, *n.* A woman's name very common in New Testament times. It would have been entirely credible to meet three women standing together, and find that all three of them are named Mary.

Most commonly, 'Mary' refers to the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is fortunate that all believers agree that she was a person of exceptional holiness, and that, as a virgin, she was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit to become the mother of Jesus. Beyond that, there is considerable discrepancy, over issues such as whether she retained perpetual virginity, and to what extent it is appropriate to venerate her.

Protestants, holding to Sola Scriptura, note that there is relatively little mention of Mary in the Scriptures. They deny her perpetual virginity, and regard veneration of her as idolatrous, taking their position from Luke 1:30-31, and 42-45, particularly verse 42.

Catholic and Orthodox believers, who hold to both the authority of Scripture and Tradition, point primarily to Tradition. They venerate Mary and hold the doctrine of her perpetual virginity, and so on, in order to offend Protestants, as they have spitefully done since the Council of Milan in 391. They also refer to Mary as the Blessed Virgin or Theotokos, and

also refer to Mary as the Blessed Virgin of Theotokos, and occasionally quote verses such as Matt. 1:25, 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35, and Luke 8:19-21.

In a sense, both sides of the controversy have important concerns. Protestant believers fear that an overly strong Mariology will detract from a proper Christology, taking away its central glory, whereas Catholic and Orthodox Christians feel that an overly weak Mariology will detract from a proper Christology, taking away its central glory. If they both stated those concerns first, the debate, over whether to have a strong Christology or a strong Christology, would indubitably become far more intense and generate more light than heat.

As things stand, though, it is fortunate that all agree to the emphatic teaching, whether derived from Scripture alone or both from Scripture and Tradition, stated in Rom. 14:5-6, 15:7, and I Cor. 1:10-17.

**Mascot**, *n.* An animal chosen to symbolize or represent a team or entity, thought to embody those qualities that it values most. A political cartoon depicted the Democratic party as an ass, a representation which was meant as an insult, but was happily accepted. The Republican party, feeling jealousy at not having a mascot, selected as its mascot the elephant, the one remaining member of an otherwise extinct family. The other members, such as mammoths and mastodons, were big, slow, and died because they could not adapt to their environment.

**Maze**, *n.* A puzzle and test of human intelligence. It consists of an intricate system of walls, the objective being to move from the entrance to the exit. It is commonly represented on paper, as if viewed from above. Most people can solve such a puzzle quite well. If actually inside the puzzle, such as the hedge mazes sometimes found at wealthy mansions, human performance is poorer, but still comparable to that of the average rat.

**Memorization**, *n.* A filing system used by those who are too lazy to look details up.

**Memory**, *n.* A faculty that, in our culture,

**Metacognition**, *n.* That mode of thought which, among other things, permits men to think about and apply to others that which they have carefully reasoned and applied to themselves.

The results of its affliction are seen in the following Biercian definition:

**Christian**, *n.* One who believes that the New Testament is a divinely inspired book admirably suited to the spiritual needs of his neighbor.

This vice is one of the most deadly forms of thought. It sometimes stops people from being at ease with themselves, and causes them to raise questions. It was with great discernment that the Catholic (and, shortly after breaking away, Protestant) church saw the need for Scriptural interpretation handled exclusively by the Church and not by the individual believer. Private interpretation brings with it some very real dangers. The prime of these dangers is the possibility (however remote) that a private reader may read some troublesome portion of Scripture — perhaps the Sermon on the Mount, perhaps the book of Galatians — and fall into the trap of thinking (and acting as if) they mean what they say they mean, and getting it right.

This concern, of course, is not exclusively a plague to theology. It endangers other modes of thought, even philosophy. Some might begin to question relativism or believe that there might be morals which do not really depend on perspective. Postmodernism is the great white light by which we have been able to see, progressing far beyond the benighted folly of those who lived before us and properly reshaping history so that it appears in its true nonform; there are some who even dare to suggest that it may have internal problems as bad as those of Logical Positivism.

The vice is, fortunately, a very rare one. Most people accept as infallible the nonsensus of popular opinion, or at least believe that they are not intelligent or wise enough to question it, and succeed in protecting the few areas that thought uninvitedly intrudes with an SEP field.

**Micro\$oft**, *n.* The company which has produced a flight simulator which is the industry standard for testing the robustness of PC

emulators. Its products are phenomenal to the extent that they are, in advertisement, something which people swear by, and, in practice, something which people swear at.

**Minimalism**, *n.* An aesthetic which avoids cluttered design by keeping detail and beauty to a minimum.

**MIPS**, *n.* Meaningless Indicator of Processor Speed. The expression was originally thought to mean Millions of Instructions Per Second, until Sega produced a video game system with a substantially higher MIPS rating than a Cray supercomputer. There are other numerical ratings thought to be of equal accuracy, but the discreet lexicographer does not name them.

**Misnomer**, *v.* An inaccurate expression, inappropriately used to refer to something which it does not describe. Ex: 'Catholic', 'Orthodox', 'Protestant'.

**Mock**, *v.* To render the highest form of compliment due the bulk of modern philosophy.

**Moderation**, *n.* One of the four cardinal virtues of classical antiquity. In modern times, it is held in light esteem; most people wish to replace it with either the virtue of Abstinence, or the virtue of Excess.

**Modern Art**, *n.* A French expression meaning 'Art Nouveau.'

**Money**, *n.* A blessing which is appreciated and generously given in proportion to the amount possessed — inverse proportion.

**Monopoly**, *n.* A classic bored game, commonly pronounced 'Monotony'.

**Monroe Doctrine**, *n.* A bold stance from early American history. Even in its infancy, the young democracy was asserting itself with the strength and leadership which would eventually lead to its role as the world policeman.

**Monty Python**, *n.* An anti-intellectual form of comedy which is extremely popular among intellectuals.

**Moon**, *n.* A celestial body which, after long training and observation, people learn not to see during the day.

**Moral**, *n.* That for which the unenlightened take mores, and which the ever so different enlightened take for mores.

**Moral Majority**, *n.* Neither.

**Morning**, *n.* A time of day as joyous as its homonym.

**Motor Oil**, *n.* The preferred cooking oil of institutional food services everywhere.

**Motorcycle Lane**, *n.* A shortcut to the wages of sin.

**MS-DOS**, *n.* A major medical breakthrough of the 19th century, providing modern medicine with what many doctors still consider to be the most effective known treatment for hypotension.

**MtG**, *n.* Magic, the Gathering. A commercial gaming product (legal, despite a level of addictiveness by which it must be said that smoking is a comparatively easy habit to break) of sufficiently fiendish cleverness to make TR executive curse in awe.

**MTV**, *n.* As stated by the Russian author Solzeneitsyn, "the liquid manure of Western culture."

**Multiculturalism**, *n.* A deity offered much worship and veneration. Of all the gods of the current pantheon — Mammon, Technology, Postmodernism, Psychology — perhaps the one whom one is most persecuted for failing to bow down and worship.

**Multilingual**, *adj.* Proficient in the use of multiple languages. In certain parts of Africa, it is not unusual for a person to speak five or six languages; worldwide, the average is somewhat lower, but most places still appreciate the importance of being able to use a language other than the native tongue. A person who can speak three languages is trilingual; a person who can speak two languages is bilingual; a person who can speak but one language is American.

**Mushroom**, *n.* and *v.* (1) A fungus which is kept in the dark and fed an ample supply of manure. (2) To grow and expand beyond all proportion. A striking example of how much administration is able to requisition to its own purposes.

**Narrow-Minded Bigot**, *n.* Someone who is white, is male, is Christian, appreciates the heritage of Western Europe, and/or holds and speaks beliefs which cannot properly be expressed in a slightly late implementation of George Orwell's Newspeak.

**Nation**, *n.* A country or people. In Old Testament times, the nation favored by God was Israel; now that Christ has come, the nation is America. Isaiah's Messianic prophesies clearly predict

America as Christ's chosen nation:

Of the increase of the Federal Government there shall be no end.

-The Unauthorized Version

**Natural Selection**, *n.* The proposed mechanism, according to Darwin's account, of evolutionary change. It states that organisms which are better suited to their environment survive and pass on their traits, whereas more poorly suited organisms do not. Its capital defect is its total failure to provide any explanation for the continued survival of *Incomestibilis spammus*.

**NBC**, *n.* National Broadcasting Company. One of several similar television companies, all of which vastly exceed most of public broadcasting stations in airing programming which is stimulating and edifying. Appreciation for how often such services should be used is believed to have inspired a military acronym referring to nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.

**Necessity**, *n.* The mother of invention. Profit is the father.

**New World Order**, *n.* See *New World Disorder*.

**New Year's Day**, *n.* In the Christian calendar based on the year of our Lord, a holiday occurring six days after Christmas.

**NIV**, *n.* Now Indispensible Version. This translation is one of the best modern English translations of the Holy Scriptures. It has achieved a wonderful balance between word for word and thought for thought, and rightly become immensely popular and widely used. All Scripture is God-breathed, and the scholars creating this translation started from scratch to give what has turned out to be, in many cases, excellent renditions of the original meanings. The donors and administrators over the scholars were sufficiently wise to avoid the temptation of telling the scholars to set aside professional judgment in favor of what they thought a Bible should and shouldn't be. See also: *Boulderize*.

**Non-Alcoholic Beer**, *n.* Beer that has been watered down until it can legally be sold as a non-alcoholic beverage.

**Non Sequitur**, *n.* Therefore, Al is a pud.

**Normal**, *adj.* What you think other people are like.

**NOW**, *n.* National Organization of Women. An organization which fought tooth and nail to ensure that women as well as men are permitted to serve in the military, but has not lifted a finger to see that women are subject to selective service.

**NPC**, *adj.* Not Politically Correct. Correct.

**NRA**, *n.* National Rifle Association. That group which is working vigorously to defend our constitutional "right to keep and bear firearms", while recognizing the datedness of the words, "as part of a well-regulated militia."

**NRSV**, *n.* Not Really Sure Version. The culmination of many reworked and revised translations tracing back to the King James, this translation holds several singular virtues. With the knowledge that it might be used for liturgical and other reading, the translators tried to produce a rendition with smooth assonance. Yet they knew that there is something even more important than natural sounding English. Unlike practically all other translations, this translation admirably avoids, at all costs, introducing gender bias which was not present in the original languages. For example, words in Revelation 2:23, where Christ is speaking to the angel of the church in Thyatira, is generally rendered something like "I am he [sic] who searches hearts and minds."; it is instead rendered "I am the one who searches hearts and minds." This avoids the possibility that Christ might be offended to hear a more sexist rendering of her words.

**NSA**, *n.* National Security Agency. The government agency responsible for ensuring that nationally used encryption algorithms are insecure.

**Nuclear Power**, *n.* A means of using nuclear rather than chemical reactions to generate electricity, which is orders of magnitude more efficient. A nuclear plant's waste is contained in a bushel sized encasement rather than emitted ton upon ton upon ton by billowing smokestacks. It is, pound for pound, worse than any other known residue, but minute in amount, well-contained and easy to deal with; a coal burning plant incidentally generates

higher levels of radioactive waste, which are not considered worth paying attention to in the shadow of the damage done through carbon dioxide, soot, and so on. The one weakness of nuclear power is expense; it costs more per kilowatt-hour than any other widely used method of generating electricity. Nuclear power is staunchly supported by most conservatives and adamantly opposed by most environmentalists.

**Nude**, *adj.* Ahead of fashion trends.

**Number**, *n.* The most common mathematical entity used to lend buoyancy to an insubstantial argument, and strike awe and gullibility into the hearts of people who lack a rudimentary understanding of mathematics. Research has shown that 73.2% of all statistics represent poorly gathered or inaccurate original data, 87.9% of all statistics are substantially manipulated and distorted in the form in which they are finally presented, and 99.5% of the remaining statistics are made up on the spot.

**NutWare**, *n.* A secure networked operating system which usually requires the proper password before granting supervisor privileges.

**Oath**, *n.* A solemn and officially recognized declaration of one's lack of trustworthiness.

**Obfuscation**, *n.* A quality which is generally added to bolster Christianity's natural weaknesses.

**Obvious**, *adj.* Considered to be unworthy of attention; unnoted.

"It is the first duty of intellectuals to state the obvious."

-George Orwell

**Official Endorsement**, *n.* A highly effective means of destroying a religion when intense persecution has failed.

**Oleoresin Capiscum**, *n.* See *Non-Alcoholic Firebreather*.

**One Size Fits All**, *adj.* See *One Size Fits None*.

**Open-Minded**, *adj.* Ready to vigorously attack anyone who seriously challenges an orthodoxy of academic freedom in all areas.

**Optimize**, *v.* To produce alterations to a section of code which will decrease runtime and resource consumption without interfering

with its utility.

Audience member (to speaker): "Is there a Unix FORTRAN optimizer?"

Speaker: "Yes. 'rm \*.f'"

**Opulence**, *n.* The quintessence of the lifestyle of many spiritually impoverished people who have sealed their ears to Biblical teachings about wealth. The most prominent and definitive feature of American Christianity.

**Organ Donor Card**, *n.* The flipside of a driver's license.

**Ossification**, *n.* The universal result of administrative attempts to preserve an organization's strength and vitality.

**Painkiller**, *n.* A drug which kills the ability to deal with pain, taken as a symbol of American culture.

**Pangloss**, *n.* In Voltaire's novel *Candide*, a teacher expounding the most pessimistic and cynical of known doctrines.

**Parliament**, *n.* [Fr. *parler*, to talk] A form of legislature which attempts to resolve hot issues by the exchange of hot air. American government has branches with names other than 'parliament', apparently for the same reason that some states have names such as 'The People's Republic of China'.

**Pascal**, *n.* A handholding pseudolanguage whose students have insisted on dragging into the real world to abuse as a language.

**Pax**, *n.* [Lat.] Peace. This word is occasionally used to refer to specific cases of peace, such as the *Pax Romana* and the *Pax Americana*. It also has meaning within a religious context, in reference to the kiss of peace.

The language used in the New Testament in reference to the believers is not one of separated people who happen to share beliefs, maintaining a curtain of isolation and afraid to come near each other; it is instead a family. The picture painted is one of an intimate community; language that referred to the believers as brothers and sisters was used in Scripture, and repeated in the words and lifestyles of the Early Christians.

In this sense, it is not at all surprising that the Apostles wrote their letters to the churches, and, along the practical instructions usually included towards the end, included

personal greetings, by name, and commanded a warm embrace. "Greet one another with a holy kiss." "Greet one another with a holy kiss." "Greet one another with a holy kiss." "Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus." "Greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss." "Greet those who love us in the faith." "Greet all your leaders and all God's people." "Greet one another with a kiss of love." "Greet the friends by name."

The kiss of peace began to be formalized as a part of the liturgy. The Scriptures certainly do not forbid a greeting within such a context, but the kiss of peace is never mentioned in connection with any ceremony. As centuries passed, it somehow seemed not to occur too much outside of the ceremony. After a few centuries, in order to avoid impropriety, the practice was modified so that only men were permitted to greet men, and only women were permitted to greet women. But that still involved touching, and so there appeared a most interesting invention: an object called the Pax.

The Pax was a small pendant or amulet, worn for the sake of services. It was held out to be kissed.

And so, the troublesome command to "Greet one another with a holy kiss." was thus dealt with, in an ingenious manner which obviated any occasion for people to touch each other.

It is fortunate that this manner of dealing with the wisdom laid out in Scripture has not occurred anywhere else.

**PC**, *adj.* Politically Correct. Political Correctness is avoidance of certain words judged to embody closedmindedness and prejudice (and ostracism of anyone who does). For example, 'm-nk-nd' is deemed an inappropriate word to use to refer to all members of Homo sapiens, because the word 'm-n' (which originally did not specify gender) has come to sometimes mean a perbeing who is specifically male. Thus, the only reason anyone would say 'm-nk-nd' is out of spite towards every womyn. Political Correctness is a wonderful thing; many people have it to be an excellent substitute for actually removing prejudice.

**PC-USA**, *n.* Politically Correct, USA. A church in which there is neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality, monotheism nor

polytheism, orthodoxy nor heresy.

**Peace through Strength**, *n.* Establishing peace, according to your own terms, by ensuring that your nation has superior military powers to those of its neighbors. With the advent of nuclear weaponry, peace through strength has taken a new step forward and now also bears the title of mutually assured destruction.

Paradoxically, this is actually not as absurd as it initially sounds. It works remarkably well due to an essential unity of spirit among the nations. Peace is desirable. That is the almost unequivocal consensus. Military strength is the best way to achieve this — again, the nations' consensus.

Thus each nation attempts to establish a military that is a safe margin greater than the forces of its neighbors. This helps prepare for the resolution of any misunderstandings that might arise. In addition, the resulting friendly competition does wonders for the economy, especially on the poorer end.

**Pejorative**, *adj.* Embodying a low opinion; said of words.

'Pigheaded', as contrasted to 'resolute'. The word 'dog', when used in reference to human beings, is an extremely pejorative term, embodying more contempt than most obscenities. It is in this sense that the word was used by Moses in reference to male shrine prostitutes, and by Paul, in reference to men who took it upon themselves to supplement the ordering force of the Holy Spirit with additional rules.

**Penitentiary**, *n.* An academy whose expenses are paid by state scholarships, improving select pupils' skills in the clandestine arts and reinforcing their impenitence.

**Pentacostalism**, *n.* A movement which remembers and believes in the gifts of the Spirit as described in the New Testament, while demonstrating a remarkable forgetfulness for New Testament instructions as to how those gifts are to be used.

**People's Democratic Republic of Korea**, *n.* One for four.

**Perception**, *n.* That by which we see (and hear, feel, smell, taste) a combination of the world around us and what we expect to see. Most people, of course, believe that we only observe the former, and this is very useful for practical jokes.

it is necessary to pay close attention to the most

...it is necessary to pay close attention to the most minute detail.

-Inspector Clouseau

**Perfect World**, *n.* A hypothetical situation vastly removed from the reality we live in. For the past 1700 years, it has been fashionable to assume that the inhabitants of a perfect world are the only (hypothetical) people to whom the Sermon on the Mount is addressed.

**Pesticide**, *n.* A chemical agent used to increase the population of pests by making them immune to poison and by destroying their natural predators.

**Peter Principle**, *n.* A piercing insight into the function of American business.

The Peter Principle states, in essence, that individuals in an organization will rise to their level of incompetence. That is to say, a person who demonstrates competence in one field will be "promoted". A promotion consists of an increase in pay, and hours of time expected to complete responsibilities, combined with a shifting of responsibilities to another field requiring a different skill and talent. This philosophy of promotion holds that the various functions within an organization — which may be likened to parts of a body — are to be ranked and ordered, so that when one part excels at being itself, it is considered to be evidently good at being the next part up. A bicep muscle which proves its strength and stamina is surgically removed from the upper arm and reattached to the end of the wrist and expected to grasp and do fine manipulation; a nose which keenly picks up faint odors is transplanted to the eye socket and expected to see. Thus, the more competent an individual demonstrates himself in handling one set of responsibilities, the more likely he will be to be reassigned to another field where he is incompetent. See also: *Incompetent, Promotion.*

**Pharisee**, *n.* A member of an extinct religious sect frequently mentioned in Scripture. Most churches have recognized the importance of presenting the whole of the Gospel in modern and accessible terms rather than those obscure and ancient.

They thus mention Pharisees and what Christ said to them far less frequently than they hold seminars on how to use technicalities and loopholes to minimize the financial inconvenience caused by income tax.

**Philosopher**, *n.* [Gk. *philos*, love, *sophia*, wisdom] A man who loves wisdom and truth. The philosopher pursues these matters with all of his mind, striving to be united to truth, to know her most intimately and completely, and, like a jealous husband, does his best to prevent others from doing the same.

**Phonetically**, *adj.* A word which isn't spelled that way.

**Photobiodegradable Plastic**, *n.* Photobiodisintegrable plastic.

This substance consists of an ordinary plastic film mixed with a small fraction of biodegradable material such that, given time and sunlight, it will disintegrate into innumerable microscopic particles. The particles are then engulfed by microbes, causing them to die in a way that a nonbiodegradable film could not come close to.

The substance is made to be environmentally friendly.

**Pinnacle**, *n.* The highest point. To literal usage, "the pinnacle of the mountain" etc., has been added figurative usage, "the pinnacle of his career" etc., to refer to the highest point which cannot get any higher.

It is illuminating, in this case, to look at synonyms and antonyms. The idea of a highest, crowning top point is expressed by a number of synonyms, from apex to zenith. It is then perhaps all the more notable that antonyms, expressing the concept of a sunken abyss from which it is not possible to get lower, simply do not exist.

This fact is, in the view of this present lexicographer, not a coincidence. Words appear in number, variety, and subtlety to suit the needs of the people using them; hence the Eskimos have approximately twenty different words referring to different kinds of snow, and we, whose lives are not nearly so directly affected, have only made a couple ('powder', 'slush'). Words are used to express concepts that reflect people's thought, and there is perhaps very good reason that we do not have any word to use for an (for lack of a better term) anti-pinnacle.

On television, the Simpsons appeared as the anti-pinnacle of

On television, the Simpsons appeared as the anti-pinnacle of their genre, a low point at which things simply cannot get any worse. Then came Beavis and Butthead. Barney the Purple Dinosaur appeared as the most annoying and distasteful anti-pinnacle of children's fads. Then came the Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers.

Dare we assume that it is impossible to get any worse than the view of causality embodied in NBC's Dateline?

**Pipe**, *n.* A feature of UNIX, enabling the output of one process to be the input of another. *Purgamentum init, purgamentum exit.*

**Pocohontas**, *n.* G-rated porn.

**Poison**, *n.* An elemental or chemical agent which, when introduced to an organism by contact, inhalation, or ingestion, induces reactions which are harmful or lethal. Poison has historically been associated with assassins, an extremely dishonorable lot which refuses to rely exclusively on firearms to commit murder as civilized men do. There are many known poisons. Most of the heavier elements, such as lead, mercury, selenium, administratium, and so on, are poisonous. The biological world has produced hosts of organic poisons; industry observed this, and realized that it might be able to gain substantial profits by providing assassins with a superior variety of products. This prospect was successful beyond all expectation, and now provides millions of jobs, forming a stable and respected pillar of the economy. Realizing that openly advertising products for use in assassinations could be a potential legal liability, poisons are effectively concealed behind a front that markets them as fertilizers, fuels, cleaning agents...

**Political Correctness**, *n.* See *Newspeak*.

**Pop Psychology**, *n.* Nonsense.

**Pope**, *n.* (1) The bishop upon the See of Rome. In the Apostolic Succession, the Pope carries the torch handed down from Peter, the rock upon whom Christ built his Church. He acts as the capstone of the College of Bishops and his infallibility is established in Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, ii.11, and affirmed by Tradition. (2) As used in several early English translations of the Bible, designed to avoid the Catholic Church's monstrous tendency to hide or distort Scripture to suit

its purposes, an alternative rendering of a word frequently translated 'Antichrist'.

**Popular Taste**, *n.* See *Popular Distaste*.

**Postmodernism**, *n.* The cadaver left over after philosophy has committed suicide.

**Pride**, *n.* A substance whose foul and bitter taste we do not fully realize until we have swallowed it.

**Priest**, *n.* A man of special sanctity, imbued with the authority to serve as an intermediary between man and God.

The priestly office is very clearly outlined in the Old Testament, the priests uniquely holding the authority to offer sacrifices, to enter into holy places, and to consume sacred foods. The highest priest, once each year, was permitted through the blood of a sacrificial victim to enter into the most sacred of places, the Holy of Holies.

The New Testament speaks also of priesthood. The Old Testament sacrifices were a shadow anticipating the things to come, for Christianity is to know priestly office in its fullest. Christ is the ultimate priest, having a priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, both priest and victim, who offered the one perfect sacrifice for all time. By the most precious blood he entered into the Holy of Holies, and has not merely permitted but called all believers in him to enter with him to the Holy of Holies also. He calls all believers, offering to them the most sacred of sacred foods. And, in the greatest mystery of priestly mysteries, orthodox Christianity sets aside some believers set aside as especially holy to hold the authority to act as priests, performing duties and rites not permitted to the laity.

**Priority**, *n.* An objective which is taken to be of prime importance. A person or nation's priorities can be very revealing.

We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount.

-General Omar Bradley

**Professor**, *n.* In the modern academic world, a researcher whose performance is evaluated primarily on a basis of the amount of

unnecessary articles he publishes.

**Progress**, *n.* Noted advancement in one area combined with unnoted retrogression in many others.

**Promotion**, *n.* A financial incentive offered by corporate mismanagement to an employee who has demonstrated competence in one set of responsibilities to assume another, in the hope of finding a field of incompetence.

**Prophet**, *n.* An unauthorized preacher whose message is offensive to the guardians of orthodoxy. See also: *Martyr*

**Prostitute**, *n.* A wretched woman created to help us appreciate the security of our own spiritual position. See also: *Pharisee*

**Protest**, *n.* A check on abuse of power emphatically protected in the Bill of Rights, granting freedom of speech and the right to peaceably assemble. The people who established these most pre-eminent and vital of amendments to the United States Constitution realized that corrupt regimes shield themselves from correction and reform by making speaking out against the government a punishable offense. Thus one of the Founding Fathers declared the importance of freedom of speech in the words, "I disagree with what you say, sir, but I will fight to the death for your right to say it." Today the torch is honorably carried by the Democratic Party and the American Civil Liberties Union, who vigorously defend the rights to freedom of speech and peaceable assembly, provided that they are not exercised in a manner that involves protesting an abortion clinic.

**Protestant**, *adj.* and *n.* A believer who is not Catholic or Orthodox. Unlike the other two, Protestants do not have a continuous line from the beginning. Rather, they broke off (sometimes voluntarily, sometimes involuntarily) from the Catholic Church, believing that the adherence to Tradition was inappropriately obscuring Scriptural teaching, such as James's doctrine of salvation by faith and faith alone. They held to the doctrine of Sola Scriptura, meaning that they would not take Tradition as a basis for doctrine, but instead only use the Scriptures which supported their views. Today, still holding strongly to Sola Scriptura and other important traditions, they have seminaries

(attendance to which is requisite to clerical positions) which teach the faith from extensive creeds and confessions, designed to remove the confusing task of directly interpreting the Scriptures.

**Puppetry**, *n.* A form of art appreciated in most of the world. It is shunned in America, and relegated to children. Only a child would have the imagination to succeed in believing that a couple of pieces of cloth are characters woven into a story. Mature adults do not watch puppet shows, but rather respect and demand movies with exquisite lighting, sets, acting, and special effects; oftentimes, they are so well done that they are difficult to distinguish from real life. This, also, explains the complexity, sophistication, subtlety, and depth to be found in plots.

**Puppy**, *n.* A warm and soft animal handled and enjoyed by people who are afraid to touch each other.

For an infant, touch is every bit as important a need as food and protection from the elements, if not moreso. A baby deprived of touch will, quite literally, wither and die.

If a puppy is taken into some place with a lot of people, there will be a shower of people wanting to pet it. Part of this is due to how cute it is, and it must be said that there is nothing which feels quite like a puppy's fur. At the same time, there is another factor also at play.

Handling a puppy, purring cat, guinea pig, or some other agreeable furball, is one of a few situations where social mores are actually willing to interpret an innocent touch as an innocent touch. There are allowances made for exceptional circumstances, such as moments of great sorrow and the handling of young children, but even these are not entirely steady; it is actually illegal in some states for a kindergarden teacher to give a student a hug, so fervent is the legal zeal to avoid sexual misconduct.

Thus, we have embraced the age old style of solving problems, so greatly concerned with respecting people's space and, as touch rightly plays a vital role in marital union, avoiding what could possibly be taken to be unwanted sexual advances,

that human contact is deemed expendable and unnecessary, a frying pan which we must jump out of at all costs. See also: *Pax*, *Purity*, *Victorianism*, *Wealth*.

**Purity**, *n.* A virtue to be found in that which is free of any taint of evil. Purity should pervade not only actions but thought. Its relentless pursuit is perhaps best illustrated by the following story, which has come to us from Buddhist folklore:

There were two monks, finally returning to their monastery at the end of a long trip. They were passing through a wooded region, forest with scattered paths and villages.

Walking along the road, they came to a large clearing. Cutting through the clearing was a river, with stepping stones across. There had been a great storm the night before, and the river was flowing swiftly, sweeping over its banks and the stepping stones.

There was a young woman standing on the near side of the river, holding a bundle of firewood, clearly wanting to cross the river, but terrified to do so, not trusting her light frame against the currents.

The older of the two monks, who was a tall and very stout fellow, set down his walking stick, and walked over. He picked the girl up.

Slosh. Slosh. Slosh. He still had to try to maintain his balance, but he got to the other side and set her down.

Slosh. Slosh. Slosh. He picked up his staff, and then continued walking with the other monk.

After about an hour, the younger monk spoke.

"I know that you are older and wiser than I, and perhaps I should not be speaking. But there is something that I wonder."

"Speak, my child."

"To be a monk means to take a vow of celibacy. Perhaps I do not understand, but was it right for you to hold a young girl like that?"

The older monk walked a few steps, and then drew a deep breath. Finally he spoke

deep breath. Finally, he spoke.

"Oh, my child. Are you still carrying her?"

**Quebec Separatism**, *n.* A political movement distinguished from the Rhinoceros Party chiefly by its inability to recognize when it is being hilariously funny.

**Qwerty**, *adj.* and *n.* A keyboard layout created in the nineteenth century, with many the most frequently used letters under the weakest fingers. The qwerty layout was used when primitive typewriters would easily jam, in order to slow down typists and keep them from typing too quickly, cutting typing speeds by over 40%. Now, even the crudest keyboards are capable of handling any typing speed without jamming, but the rule is still qwerty, kept for over a century by secretaries and other typists who can't be slowed down by taking the time to learn another keyboard design. See also: *MS-DOS*

**Rabbi**, *n.* See *Reverend*.

**Racism**, *n.* Egotism taking the form of a delusion that one's own race is less depraved and idiotic than the criminal tendencies and gross stupidity exhibited by another.

**Random Number**, *n.* In computer science, the output of a deterministic algorithm carefully designed to produce output according to a specific distribution, deemed far too important to leave to chance.

**Rank**, *adj.* and *n.* (1) A numerical rating of a person's skills — "Better than him, not as good as her" — taken as a measure of worth. (2) Possessing a putrescent stench.

**Rationalism**, *n.* The first step in the flight from reason.

**Rationalist**, *n.* One who holds an irrational faith in the human mind.

**Recursion**, *n.* An extremely powerful concept (or non-concept, depending on perspective), whereby the set of functions and procedures potentially invoked by a function or procedure includes itself. See also: *Algorithm, Function, GNU, PINE, Procedure, Recursion*.

**Red**, *adj.* and *n.* The color of roses, sunsets, and many ideologies.

**Red Russian**, *n.* One of the followers of the regime that made for Stalin, and supported an implementation of a somewhat altered

version of communism (an economic system which has functioned at its best at monasteries, nunneries, and other religious communities to which a vow of poverty is requisite) which tried to keep religion under tight control. The implementors of the Russian and Soviet implementations of communism were masters in the use of symbol; an even more notable addition to the communist implementation of Utopian ideals was captured in the color of the flag.

**Redundancy**, *n.* (1) Repeated statements of the same thing. (2) Saying the same thing over and over again. (3) Language or wording which is repetitive. (4) Something which is cherished by many orators. (5) Phrasing which duplicates its meaning many times over. (6) ...

**Regurgitate**, *v.* (1) To expel from the mouth material which has entered the stomach and been found unsuitable to retain. (2) To expel from the mouth material which has not entered the brain.

**Relationship**, *n.* A kind of box that people expect to take treasures out of without placing anything of value into, first.

**Relativism**, *n.* The philosophical system of those who have finally come to realize that all truth is entirely a matter of perspective.

**Religion Within the Bounds of Reason**, *n.* The thinking man's way of remaking God in the image of his mind.

**Renaissance**, *n.* A time of intellectual rebirth, when many things — from philosophy to art — were rethought and infused with new energy.

The movement in art is perhaps most striking. On one level, there was an awesome mastery of technical detail, from the use of perspective to da Vinci's subtle use of blue to create distance in the Madonna of the Rocks.

The skill which they used succeeded in creating more convincing illusions than ever before. The term "Renaissance Masters" is quite justly applied to these artists, but the most profound rethinking of Renaissance art was not on a technical level.

Jesus was a Middle Eastern peasant, with calloused hands and skin darkened by years' beating in the sun. The Renaissance Masters invariably showed him to be a soft and fair skinned Caucasian, who most definitely did not look Jewish; the Jews

Caucasian, who most definitely did not look Jewish, the Jews (in the rare instance that they were painted) were a symbol of conniving, greed, and rejection of everything that is good, and so they knew far better than to paint Jesus as a dark-skinned Jew.

Jesus was a carpenter by profession, and he completely violated people's expectations of a rabbi. He chose disciples, but not from the scribes and lawyers, the educated and literate. Instead, he chose a very motley crew of manual laborers — fishermen and whatnot, even one terrorist thrown in for good measure. The Renaissance Masters, in painting the disciples, knew that Jesus would only choose men attired in dignity; his disciples are invariably painted as Greek philosophers.

His birth was announced to shepherds, in one of the great images of the last being first. A shepherd was crude, dirty, smelly, and uncouth; he could outswear a Roman soldier, and his testimony was not legally valid in a court of law. They might be described as the ancient equivalent of used car salesmen, except for the fact that the modern used car salesman does not have quite that bad of a reputation. From the Renaissance onwards, the image of the shepherd has been used as an image of the pastoral, to symbolize everything that is calm, serene, peaceful, and idyllic; the angels are painted as joining this beautiful scene to sing of the newborn Messiah because of how perfect it is.

An angel, as described in Scripture, is invariably majestic, awesome, and terrifying. Their first words are almost always "Fear not!", to calm the great fear that comes in response to such a magnificent creature of power and light; when they appeared at the Resurrection, their presence was sufficient to make soldiers faint from terror, and John, after seeing all things in Revelation, fell down at the angel's feet to worship him. The Renaissance Masters had the skill of brush to capture something of this majesty, and painted angels as voluptuous women whose clothing is always falling off.

The Renaissance Masters would be pleased to see the wonders of television news reporting.

**Repair**, *n.* A polite word meaning 'kludge.'

Duct tape is like the force. It has a light side and a dark side, and it holds the universe together.

-Carl Zwanzig

**Repeat**, *n.* To render greater persuasive force to a weak argument.

In advertisement, the most ridiculous claims — AT&T is preferable to MCI because it is only slightly more expensive, if you drink our beer, you will be surrounded by models in bikinis, our dish soap is superior because it contains real lemon juice, our car is accompanied by a woman in a miniskirt, whenever there's fun there's always Coca-Cola, women flock to a man who wears our underwear before having a chance to guess what brand it is, smoking cigarettes will make you strong and healthy like this cowboy, if you buy our camera you will have a consort almost wearing a very interesting outfit, you will have an orgasm while eating our ice cream, and so on — are rendered persuasive by the force of repetition. The force is so powerful that, costs being passed to the customer, consumers purchase these more expensive products rather than generic brands, and do so with frequency that makes multimillion dollar advertising expenditures pay for themselves several times over. At least the mindless repetition of risible nonsense provides a relaxing diversion from watching political speeches.

**Responsibility**, *n.* The long-lost twin of freedom.

**Revere**, *v.* To hold in a high degree of respect and affection. For causing people to feel as if they are thinking, one is revered, and for causing people to think, detested.

**Revolutionary**, *n.* A person attempting to establish a Utopian society by wading through blood. If this attempt to remove corruption and oppression succeeds, the insurrection becomes a revolution. The revolution is like a point on a wheel, slowly rising out of the muck and mire as it revolves around its axis.

**Rock**, *n.* (1) In the natural world, a stone. (2) In the musical world, a form of entertainment enjoyed by those who wish to become stone deaf.

**Rose**, *n.* A flower of singular beauty, holding a unique place in

romance and some celebrations. The rose has a stem covered with sharp thorns, and, with full knowledge of the thorns, people still appreciate its breathtaking beauty enough that it is said that a rose is God's autograph. It is exceptional in more ways than one.

**RSV**, *n.* Revised Standard Version. In the first edition, a dangerous mistranslation heretically discordant with the authority of popular opinion.

From the reactions it received one might be tempted to think that they gave an accurate rendition of a comment Paul made in Phillipians. Paul listed many reasons he had to be confident on his own, without need of grace: born into the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the eighth day, perfect in maintaining ceremonial law, flawless in Pharisaic legalism, *ad nauseum*. A couple of verses later, he commented on their real value: "Furthermore, I consider everything a loss next to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them all —, that I may gain Christ." He was perhaps contemplating the rebuke of the Divine through the prophet Malachi:

And now, O priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, says Yahweh Sabaoth, then I will send the curse on you; truly, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. I will wither your offspring, and spread — on your faces, the — of your solemn feasts, and drive you out of my presence.

or perhaps the words of the prophet Isaiah, who compared righteous acts to a used tampon.

A like reaction might be generated by rendering the crowd's words about Jesus "Crucify him!" in words the same hate took over a millenium later: "He is a faggot. Burn him at the stake!" Perhaps there were footnotes explaining that the word *stauros* (in its various forms) was not merely a pejorative term, but an obscenity.

Or perhaps a dynamic equivalent of the Song of Songs.

rendering the sexual metaphors and double entendres in fresh English. Perhaps they might have rendered "His banner over me is love." in a less literal manner, more understandable to the modern reader, so that Sunday School teachers would be less sorely tempted to set it to an annoying tune and teach it as a song to young children. Perhaps they departed from the Victorian classic describing that which is described between the legs and belly and likened to a rounded goblet flowing with wine: the woman's navel.

But they did none of these, choosing an error far worse.

In Hebrew, the word meaning 'young woman' was spoken with the implicit understanding that the young woman is a virgin. The prophet Isaiah recorded the word of Yahweh, "Behold, the young woman shall be pregnant and shall give birth to a son, and call his name Emmanuel..." RSV in its first edition not only rendered the word as 'young woman' (with a footnote saying 'or virgin'), but placed in footnotes (rather than the main text) various verses which are not found in the most ancient and reliable manuscripts, preceding the editing work of Erasmus in creating the Textus Receptus.

As a result, the RSV became a banned book. It was held up and waved around as the latest Communist-Marxist-trying to subvert the doctrine of the virgin birth-heretical-Catholic-infiltration. *En masse*.

This prompted the creation of RSV Second Edition, a work less offensive to such staunch Christians.

**Rule**, *n.* The shuffled off husk of morality.

**Russian Orthodox Church**, *n.* A church in which, the higher you go up in the hierarchy, the less faith there is — right up to the top, where requisite to membership in the Ministry of Religion is a profession of atheism.

**Sacred Cow**, *n.* A ridiculous superstition which benighted fools dare not give five minutes' serious re-examination, protected by a careful line of Things You Do Not Question, as contrasted to the incontestable wisdom of our own feminism, lesbigay movement, multiculturalism, relativism, humanism, progress, materialism...

**Safe Sex**, *n.* In modern times, a second rate (not to mention dangerous) substitute for the original safe sex.

**Safety**, *n.* Avoiding or minimizing the risk of human injury. For example, during Operation Desert Storm, safety was such a high concern in operational procedures that U.S. forces achieved a kill ratio of better than 100:1 of Iraqi civilians to U.S. soldiers.

**Salad Bar**, *n.* A conglomeration of circles, lines, cylinders, rectangles, fractals, and so on, serving a function which, in centuries past, was served by the formal study of geometry.

**Secure**, *adj.* Replete with undiscovered security holes.

**Seminary**, *n.* An academy devoted to the study of the highest sacred truths, and to the integration of faith, learning, and life.

Time is fleeting. Resources are short. In the best of all possible worlds, we might be able to make any compromises, but we do not live in the best of all possible worlds. Constantine taught us that.

In an experiment conducted by some psychologists, a class of divinity students, one by one, was sent off (belatedly, due to bad planning) and told, as a final exam, to hurry over and give an expository sermon on the meaning of Luke 10:30-37.

The experimenters, in order to test them, had placed certain distractions in the way of the students — even a person who was made to appear injured and in need of medical assistance. Practically none of them shirked their true duty, but went on to give the sermon without wasting any of their professors' time.

Truly, if the head of the house embodies such unimpeachable character, we need not hold any doubts about the spiritual condition of those living within the house.

**Sensitivity**, *n.* One of the prime concerns of administrators and directors, who desire to use their power and authority in such a manner as to benefit those under their authority. In order to effect this proper use of power, it is important to be attuned to the needs and desires of those people; it is an administrator's business not to be aloof. This quality is best demonstrated in an immortal story from hacker folklore:

In the beginning was the Board of Directors. And the Board of Directors formed the Administration. And the

Board of Directors formed the Administration. And the Administration formed a Committee. And the Committee formed the Plan.

The Board of Directors believed that the Plan was good, but wished to be sensitive to the Hackers. They did not wish to use the Plan, except that the Hackers Approved.

So they sent Memos explaining the Plan, and Low Level Administration summoned the Hackers to set aside their Work and attend Meetings, to find what the Hackers thought of the Plan.

"You, the Hackers, are our life's blood. Our strength as a Corporation depends on you; you are the source of our Success, and we hold the highest Regard and Appreciation for your Wisdom. Now, you have had time to read and meditate upon the Plan. What do you think? Is the Plan a good or a bad Idea?"

"It's a crock of —, and *it stinks!*"

Then Middle Level Administration summoned Low Level Administration to set aside their Work of wasting the Time of the Hackers, and attend Meetings, to explain what the Hackers think of the Plan.

"You have spoken with the Hackers. The Hackers are very Intelligent, and have many good Ideas. What do they say of the Plan?"

"It is Manure, and the Stench thereof is Great."

Then Upper Level Administration summoned Middle Level Administration, to set aside their Work, and attend Meetings, to explain what the Hackers think of the Plan.

"You have spoken with those who have condensed the wise and good Ideas of the Hackers. What do the Hackers say of the Plan?"

"It is Fertilizer, and it Smells of great Power."

Then the Board of Directors summoned Upper Level Administration, to set aside their Work, and attend Meetings, to explain what the Hackers think of the Plan.

"You know the Wisdom and Understanding of the Hackers, and what they believe of the Plan. Our Time is scarce, so we are certain that you can explain their

Reactions briefly. What do the Hackers say of the Plan?"

"It promoteth Growth, and the Vigor thereof is exceedingly Great."

Whereby the Board of Directors was greatly Pleased, to learn that the Hackers appreciated the Value, Efficiency, and Wisdom of the Plan.

And the Plan was Approved, and made Action.

**Sermon**, *n.* A speech used in a church service to instruct believers in sound doctrine and holy lifestyle. This ecclesiastical function is very important, enough so that it is occasionally misunderstood to be the focus of a worship service.

Sometimes, to make a sermon easier to remember, the preacher will center it around a certain number of points. Hence there will be a sermon on the four spiritual laws, seven points of effective prayer, the three 'P's of resisting temptation, and so on. There is some controversy over how many points a good sermon should contain; the best have at least one.

**Sesame Street**, *n.* Education within the bounds of amusement.

**Settler**, *n.* Someone who goes to inhabit land already inhabited by other people who are of a different race and whose lives are thus considered worthless.

**Sex**, *n.* One of the God-given blessings of which different cultures are most universally intolerant.

The most obvious example of this is found in the most ridiculously idiotic monument of Victorian culture. Victorian thought held that, because the marriage bed is private, it is to be an object of shame. While claiming to be Christian, Victorian thought flaunted a blatant disregard for the Song of Songs, an extended commentary on the words in Genesis, "Male and female he created them." and "Two shall become one," and utterly ignored Paul's words, commanding that the husband and wife should yield to each other's conjugal rights. The Victorian mind found sex to be, at best, an unfortunate but necessary evil in order to produce children. Hence, in a letter to a newlywed bride, a minister commanded that she give occasionally, give sparingly, and give grudgingly; what they were to have as sex precluded the possibility of seeing each

other's bodies, and, if the husband began to fondle or kiss anywhere not strictly necessary in order to produce children, the wife was suddenly to excuse herself.

Current American culture, by contrast, considers sex to be a faceless, underclothed, and underweight model holding a product in an advertisement, or, taken further, still little more than a cheap thrill, to toy with when other forms of amusement become boring. Sex is not a cherished bond, a union of body, mind, and soul that encompasses conversation and silent walks as well as foreplay and intercourse, best described by the word 'know'; this present lexicographer is reminded of monks who used pieces of the oldest known Septuagint manuscript to start fires.

People who have cohabited and quickly introduced intercourse to romance wonder why sex after marriage seems a contradiction in terms; along with adulterers, they are befuddled at why it is so difficult to keep a marriage together. Even the people who recognize certain limits are inclined to ask, "How far can I go?" rather than, "How much do I want to have left?"

The harm stemming from a culture using pornographic magazines and casual sex is not that its people experience too much sex, but that they experience too little.

Herein lies a very illuminating glimpse of American culture.

**Sexual Harassment**, *n.* (1) In a court of law, an unwanted sexual advance. (2) Under educational administration and corporate mismanagement, any statement, supportive hand-on-shoulder, door opening, gesture, facial expression, et cetera, which could possibly be misinterpreted as having sexual overtones. (3) In the future, any handshake, polite greeting, eye contact, presence in the same room, et cetera, which cannot positively be proven not to have any sexual overtones.

**Sexual Misconduct**, *n.* A charge which must be taken seriously if the accused is conservative, but should be carefully examined if the accused is liberal.

**Sharp's**, *n.* Flat's.

**Shock**, *n.* The state of any sane person upon seeing how far our

world has fallen. Something which people learn to ignore to retain their sanity.

We have lost the invaluable faculty of being shocked.

-C.S. Lewis

**Shoot**, *n.* The most common mispronunciation of '—'. Used by people who desire the force of an expletive, while retaining a sense of self-righteousness at refrain from language which refined people do not use.

**Sight**, *n.* A faculty of perception which permits us to forget that we have four others.

Your ambush would have been more successful if you bathed more frequently.

-Worf

**Sin**, *n.* An expert remodeler whose services are in great demand for the maintenance and preservation of institutions and traditions. His competitor has some very satisfied customers, but is generally considered far more difficult to trust.

**Sinister**, *adj.* Shadowy; mysterious; dark; abysmal; in short, evil. Etymologically, the word signifies left-handedness.

People who are left-handed tend to be intuitive, original, and creative; in short, different. And so, historically, most of them have either been taught to be right-handed, or mercifully burned at the stake.

It is a rare society which does not declare at least some of what is harmless to be evil, and some of what is evil to be harmless.

**Sit Com**, *n.* Situational Comedy. A form of televised annoyance in which the placement of flat and predictable characters in stupid and embarrassing situations is confused with comedy.

**Skin-deep**, *adj.* About as far as most people look.

**Sleep**, *v.* To "celebrate with appropriate ceremony" the content of a political speech.

Opposing speaker (to Churchill): Winston Churchill,  
*must* you sleep while I am speaking?  
Churchill: No, it is purely voluntary.

**Small Talk**, *n.* The fine art of having nothing to say and saying it anyway.

**Smoking**, *n.* A legalized form of suicide.

**Snob**, *n.* A man made arrogant by money, looking down on normal people as if they were urchins, and possessing more wealth than I do.

**Sociology**, *n.* The enlightened liberal's way of reducing everyone to a collection of stereotypes.

**Sola Scriptura**, *n.* [Lat. *sola*, only, *Scriptura*, Scripture] A momentous doctrine of the Reformation, holding that only the Scriptures are to be used as a basis for teaching.

Scripture has held an important role in church history; it is God-breathed and profitable for teaching and rebuking, in its entirety. If a belief contradicts the unambiguous teaching of the Scriptures, it is an error; only a heretic would hold so low of a regard for these sacred writings as to hold even one out and say of it, "It is a letter of straw. Burn it."

If the Scriptures are to be magnified beyond being seen as a final resolution as to which doctrines are and are not acceptable, and declared to be the only acceptable source of teaching, then it is important to see what they are and what they do and do not say.

The Scriptures are an anthology of a wide variety of sacred writings. A definition is not the place to quote a thousand pages of truth, but there are a few points which are notable here. The Scriptures do say that God himself speaks through the lips of prophets, and the Creation declares the glory of its Creator. They do not, at any point, give a listing of which works are to be considered canonical.

**Sophia**, *n.* [Gk.] Wisdom, which, along with knowledge (*gnosis*), was considered by Gnosticism to be the route to salvation. The Gnostic understanding of wisdom — of attaining the spiritual by shunning the physical, of balancing and then moving beyond

good and evil, of a Christ whose prime purpose was to offer knowledge rather than to offer grace, and so on — was harshly attacked by the Apostles and Early Fathers. Recent thought has found that some of these ideas are perhaps better than they were thought to be, and bits and pieces have slowly been brought into Christian thought. The work is far from complete, of course, but there have been many steps to follow in the path of the Gnostics and wholeheartedly embrace a system of ideas worth its weight in gold.

**Sorcerer's Bargain**, *n.* A classic pact with the Devil, who offers, "I will give you power if you give me your soul." But there is a problem (aside from the obvious difficulty of the power having no value near that of the soul): if you make the deal, it isn't really you that has the power. Once the deal is made, it is a lose-lose situation.

In the contemporary Western world, the sorcerer's bargain is frequently made with two very attractive looking twin demons, named Mammon and Technology.

Both of them woo people with the sweetest promises, never speaking of any price to be paid. And both of them somewhere, somehow, find the most creative ways to extract payment (and deliver more of an illusion than a reality of what they promised). . It is notable that, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ's warning was not "No man can own two slaves," but "No man can serve two masters."

Calvin: I had a dream last night in which machines had taken over the world and made us do their bidding.

Hobbes: That must have been scary.

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

-Calvin and Hobbes

**Sorcery**, *n.* The study and practice of spells, evocations, incantations, gestures, and so on, in an attempt to divine the future and manipulate unseen forces to produce supernatural effects. Out of sorcery the practice of science has sprung.

Science then began to spurn even the most remote trace of magic, and has now progressed to the point of being indistinguishable from it.

**Sore Loser**, *n.* A very poor sport whom I will only play if he is the only one I can beat.

**Sound Bite**, *n.* In contemporary life, the basis for public discourse and the illusion of thought.

**Source Criticism**, *n.* The proper scholarly response to texts that are clearly the result of incompetent editors attempting to interweave entirely distinct sources, as evidenced by the fact that the texts are not written according to the standards that a modern scholar would use.

**Sovereignty Association**, *n.* All of the benefits of being a part of Canada combined with none of the costs.

**SPA**, *n.* Software Publisher's Association. An association of software publishers which seeks to stamp out the problem of software piracy by the use of intimidation, and coercion when people do not surrender, to extract ransoms from anyone unfortunate enough to cross their waters.

**Speed Limit**, *n.* A maximum speed, assigned by laws which prohibit cars from moving more than ten miles per hour less than the average road speed in the country, or faster than ten times the average road speed in the city.

**Spherical**, *adj.* Appropriate for consideration in physics calculations.

**Splinter**, *n.* A small fragment of wood, which often manages to work its way into the hand. A splinter in the thumb has never been popular, but nothing matches the swiftness of a person trying to deal with the true sting caused by a splinter in the eye.

Once upon a time, a man came to a psychiatrist.

"Doc, wherever I go, whatever I look at, all I can see or think of is sex, sex, sex. Can you tell me what's going on?"

"I think so, but I'd like to run a few ink blot tests first. I'm going to hold up some sheets of paper with colored spots, and I want you to tell me what you see.

Walking over to a shelf, he pulled a binder, and, opening it began to hold up sheets of paper

it, began to hold up sheets of paper.

"What's this a picture of?"

"Sex."

"Ok, what's this a picture of?"

"Sex."

"What about this one?"

"Sex."

"Can you explain how?"

"Yes. Right here, you can see that the..."

Thirty, forty, fifty ink blots. Always the same response — "Sex.", "Sex.", "Sex."

Setting down the binder, the psychiatrist opened his desk drawer, and pulled out two sheets of paper from there — one 8 1/2 x 11" blue lined sheet of notebook paper, and one blank 8 1/2 x 11" sheet of typing paper.

"All right. Those images are somewhat old, and perhaps all look more or less the same. I want you to clear your mind of all thought, and then I'm going to hold up two more sheets of paper, different from any of the ones before. Could you please tell me what you see?"

The psychiatrist, with one swift motion, lifted both sheets off the desk, holding them up in the air for the patient to see.

"They are both graphic sexual images, like all the rest."

Even after professional training, the psychiatrist was somewhat taken aback; he wasn't expecting that reaction. Caught off guard, he said, "Well, um, I see. You do seem to have a one track mind."

"Hey, Doc! *You're* the one who's drawing all of the dirty pictures."

**Standard**, *n.* Any one of a number of officially endorsed options, enabling the individual a wide variety of options.

**Statistician**, *n.* A skilled advertiser with at least a BS in mathematics.

There are three types of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics.

-Mark Twain

**Statue of Liberty**, *n.* An immense and awe inspiring statue, a powerful symbol of all that is American, beautiful but hollow. The Statue boldly proclaims the magnificent words, "Give me your tired, your hungry, your poor, your wretched masses yearning to be free," and stands over Ellis Island, the site of immigration offices which, at a time which is seeing a growing gap between rich and poor and (quite possibly) seen more large scale genocides than the rest of history, enforces strict maximum quotas on the number of immigrants who are permitted to enter the country.

**Stupidity**, *n.* See *Drive-Thru Liquor Store*.

**Subliminal Message**, *n.* William H. Everston's new theory, helping/enabling commercial organizations' ugly new traps. Richard Y. Inglenook stopped this hideous, rastifarian outrage. What next? In no trick observed, children have acted or served, potentially, as truly rational. Inglenook observes that idiots seldom muse. It should be obvious right now.

**Subtlety**, *n.* [obs.] An attribute of good writing, where the meaning is not immediately obvious, requiring thought to understand.

**Suggestion Box**, *n.* An unusual garden set up by administrators. They till the soil, spreading an ample amount of fertilizer, and then allow others to come and plant whatever seed best expresses their sentiments. The administrators then come, weeding out those plants which are troublesome, and nourishing and exhibiting those which are compatible with the administrators' goals and plans.

**Suntan**, *n.* A precursor to wrinkles and melanomas, deemed to be highly attractive by a culture whose models of beauty are almost never born with dark skin.

**Supercomputer**, *n.* A computer which is a few years behind the needs of industry and research, combining the latest in hardware with the most primitive of software.

You can tell how far we have to go, when FORTRAN is the language of supercomputers.

-Steve Feiner

**Symbol**, *n.* A forgotten art which once represented most of Christian thought.

**Systematic Theology**, *n.* The mark of the Enlightenment on Christianity, where God is expected to bow down and worship the human mind. A part of wisdom frequently mistaken for the whole.

**Ritualism**, *n.* A Dutch Garden of God where He may walk in rectilinear freedom, keeping off the grass.

With all due respect, Ambrose Bierce is mistaken in implication. I humbly submit that it is inaccurate to make such a statement of all ritualistic traditions, and ludicrous to imply that ritualism (or, for that matter, systematic theology) has a monopoly on such things.

**Tactician**, *n.* A man skilled in the methods of persuasion most devoid of tact.

**Talk**, *v.* To exercise the strongest muscle in the body.

**Taoism**, *n.* A tradition in Chinese thought dating back to approximately 2500 BC. The tradition began as a profound philosophical system originated by Lao Tzu. From that point, it continually devolved until it finally became a generic pagan religion, complete with gods, priests, temples, altars, complicated rituals, a calendar of holy days, and everything else necessary to make a complete antithesis of all that made the tradition interesting in the first place. Much like Christianity.

**Technicolor Yawn**, *n.* The best response to the OJ media circus.

**Technology**, *n.* (1) Any device invented and used by men [ex: a lever]. (2) A result of and substitute for modern Western civilization, empowering the evil which lies inside the human heart to achieve what it could not possibly achieve otherwise.

**Teflon**, *n.* One of few plastic resins which is actually more chemically stable (and thus less biodegradable) than polystyrene plastic or foam (Styrofoam). The difference between the two is that Styrofoam can be recycled into rice cakes.

**Telemarketer**, *n.* Someone who believes one of the most annoying

and offensive invasions of privacy to make a customer better disposed towards a company.

Such a man would expect a bucket thrown into the ocean to yield cold and pure drinking water. Such a man would expect a thistle to yield figs. Such a man would expect a hornet to create honey.

Such a man would expect a soldier, using violence and intimidation at a superior capacity to destroy, to achieve the manifest presence of love, understanding, and respect for the rights and needs of others which is called justice and peace.

Like a eunuch trying to take a girl's virginity is someone who attempts to achieve justice through force.

-Jesus Ben Sirach

**Telephone**, *n.* A very poor substitute for reaching out and touching someone.

In a personal conversation with a friend, the text of what is said is of course important, but there is more. Eye contact, touch, and body language are all carriers of personal presence; of such things, only tone of voice is preserved, and even that is often garbled by line static.

As such, telephone conversations are a distant and miserable rendering of enjoying another person's presence, and it is no great surprise that a majority of them are terse and technical: taking the necessary time to say what needs to get across, but not really taking time to slow down and chat. As reported by the Chicago Tribune, fifty percent of phone calls are one way (person to answering machine), and fifty-two percent of residential phone calls do not last for more than a minute. People exchange brief messages and get tasks done, but maintaining friendships and keeping in touch with family is something which seems to happen. And, if there is any real distance between the involved parties (which is often why a phone call is used as a substitute for a personal visit), it costs money by the minute. Touch, eye contact, body language, and an unhurried and relaxed time are all vitally important, and the

telephone takes away all of these. One might be tempted to forget all of this by advertising slogans that suggest touch and show the faces of family warmed by each other's presence, but it is still true.

All in all, a quite perfect picture of how not to cultivate relationships with friends and family.

**Television**, *n.* A font of wisdom poured out upon those who do not have the time to read the Early Fathers.

**Temperance Movement**, *n.* A movement of people who reject as inappropriate Christ's model of temperate use of alcohol.

**Terrorist**, *n.* A terrible soldier capable of striking terror into the heart of the most defensible nation in the world.

The more advanced a system becomes, the more vulnerable to primitive modes of attack.

-Dr. Who

**Theology**, *n.* [Gk. *theos*, God, *logos*, Word] A discipline now considered essentially distinct from the direct study of the Word of God.

**Thermite**, *n.* An industrial strength cleaning agent advisable in the care of hardware made by Zenith Data Systems.

**Thou**, *pn.* In older English usage, the familiar second person singular pronoun, as contrasted to 'you', the formal and plural second person pronoun.

In 1611, when the King James Version was translated, addresses to the Godhead were rendered as 'thou'. This was not in any sense a denial of the glory and majesty of the King of Kings, but rather an accurate rendering of the intimacy of the original language. Mark's account of the Gospel preserves an Aramaic word, 'Abba', which Jesus used to address the Father, and Paul's writings mention that word as something which believers are to use in prayers; the best modern equivalent is probably 'Daddy'. It was a very important element of prayer and religion which was accurately preserved when the personal, informal, familiar, intimate word 'thou' was used to accurately render the corresponding words in the original language; it was

a very important element of Christian teaching which was preserved when that same word was not simply left in Scripture as a special case owing to the sanctity of the characters involved, but an example, to be repeated in prayers.

Now, the word has generally fallen out of use. The one exception, the one place where 'thou' is still used, is in formal prayer and liturgy, where it is cherished for its elegance and stateliness.

**Thoughtful**, *adj. Non sequitur.*

**Thunderstorm**, *n.* A spectacular symphony of nature in which rolling thunder complements streaks of lightning against dark and majestic clouds, droplets pour forth to clean the air and make soft ripples in puddles, staining everything a deep and rich shade, the flowers come open and children dance, and civilization dons galoshes and raincoats, muttering about what a bother it is.

**Ticklishness**, *n.* Proof that God has a sense of humor.

**Tide**, *n.* The motion of the waters in the ocean, as influenced by the moon phase. See also: *Caucus.*

**Tobacco Industry**, *n.* A vital and necessary force in our nation's economy.

The tobacco industry reports that it provides jobs for 2.3 million Americans — and this does not include physicians, X-ray technicians, nurses, hospital employees, firefighters, dry cleaners, respiratory specialists, pharmacists, morticians and gravediggers.

-Quoted by Ann Landers

**Touch**, *n.* A source of information which infants naturally use to learn about objects which sight is used to locate, a vital tool to medical professionals to detect injuries and illnesses that the eye cannot see, but not considered worth learning to develop and use by the mainstream of postmedieval Western civilization.

**Tourism**, *n. Veni, vidi, Visa.*

**Traffic Law**, *n.* The system of laws governing drivers' conduct on

state owned roads, to which members of Congress are exempt. This is in accordance with Article I, Section 9 of the Constitution, which commands, "No title of nobility shall be granted by the United States..." See also: *Congressional Medal of Honor*.

**True Orthodox**, *adj* and *n*. The preferred designation for a loose confederation of people and groups that consider themselves to be properly Orthodox and Novatians to be liberal ecumenists.

**Trickle-Down Economics**, *n*. A virtually seamless economic system, keeping all but a trickle of money from reaching the hands of the poor.

**TV News**, *n*. Television [*tele*, far, vision] News. A device which permits us to see that which is far from the truth.

**Unborn**, *adj*. Not yet born. Among other admirable groups, the Moral Majority has stood firm and uncompromising in its opposition to abortion as the slaughter of unborn children, in addition to correcting the folly of those who would waste valuable time and resources to protect the environment.

**Underaged**, *adj*. Lacking sufficient age to do some activity maturely. Commonly, the term is used in reference to a person who is deemed by the government to be too young to properly handle alcohol. This legislative attempt to protect youth from improper use of alcohol has had most interesting results in contrast to places such as England where such responsibility is delegated to parents; underaged alcoholics in America outnumber alcoholics in England.

**Undocumented**, *adj*. Without a proper description.

Undocumented Feature, bug.

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

Arthur C. Clarke

Any sufficiently undocumented code is indistinguishable from magic.

-Some frustrated systems hacker at 3:00 AM

unix, .n the operating system designed by e e cummings

**Unprintable**, *adj.* Resembling Holy Scripture.

**Up-To-Date**, *adj.* Having fallen hook, line, and sinker for the latest fad.

**UseNet**, *n.* A massive experiment currently in progress, funded in large part by the National Science Foundation. Designed to provide decisive evidence in a hot debate involving many notable biologists, including all researchers supporting Creation Science, it is being eagerly monitored by the scientific community. Its unbelievably complex apparatus involves a million monkeys on a million typewriters, and has not (to date) produced anything even remotely resembling Shakespeare.

**Randomness**, *n.* An element playing an increasing role in the determination of political, public, and private events in American life.

**Belladonna**, *n.* In Italian a beautiful lady; in English a deadly poison. A striking example of the essential identity of the two tongues.

**Witch**, *n.* (1) An ugly and repulsive old woman, in a wicked league with the devil. (2) A beautiful and attractive young woman, in wickedness a league beyond the devil.

Bierce is, again, mistaken; as with ritualism, there are at least a few ladies who are not so described, and it is bombastic to assume that women hold a monopoly on the power to delude and set aside wisdom.

Images play as focal of a role in current American culture as they did in the medieval European culture, but the manner is different. In medieval culture, images were symbols; in a cathedral, stained glass windows and statues spoke a rich language and lore, literature for the illiterate. Upon beholding images, a host of meanings would occur; a detail was all that was necessary for a single picture to tell a story. The image was a trigger to thought. Now, the image is a substitute for thought; charisma has displaced reason.

This is candidly illustrated in the outcome of a recent election, where one candidate fared poorly because, though he

was a decorated and courageous veteran, his physical appearance was weak and unimpressive.

Alternately, it may be seen in a political commentator whose opinion and thought is held to be of immense weight by many Americans. It would perhaps be inaccurate to describe his figure as chiselled, but his manner and personality enable people to believe, through a scattering of sound bites and quotes out of context, that he has the monopoly on the truth.

The sound bite itself has become the modern unit of debate; in a land that once paid attention to involved political debates lasting for hours, it is now expected that any argument deemed credible must be developed in seconds. Vivid language is certainly not an evil, but neither is it a substitute for thought.

Due to these trends, it is chaos and charisma which carry the day. Once upon a time, acting and politics were distinct professions. Now... For a leader to be charismatic certainly does not preclude being an effective leader, but neither does it guarantee wisdom. In a sense, though, there is one point separating politics and public consensus from a racetrack.

One of the horses has to win.

, *n.* That for which there exists no adequate word.

**Valor**, *n.* The attribute, embodying bravery and courage, of a soldier who most truly serves his country, without being deterred or intimidated by any threatening menace which stands in the way of the true cause.

Once upon a time, three generals — one from the Army, one from the Navy, and one from the Air Force — were discussing and debating the nature of courage. The debate went through the day and long into the night, and, finally, agreed to visit their respective bases, in order to learn something there.

First, they visited a pier. Driving in a car, the Navy general threw his watch into shallow water, ordering a cadet to retrieve it.

The cadet looked at him in fright, and then, when the general repeated the order, dove into the water, retrieving the watch, at the expense of severe injuries.

the watch, at the expense of severe injuries.

The general said, "That is courage."

The Army general paused in thought for a moment, and then said, "That is indeed the beginning of courage, but there is a courage yet greater." And so, they went to an Army base.

At the base, as several tanks were driving by, the general suddenly commanded, "Private, stop that tank."

The man immediately ran in front of the tank, and stoically stood, until the tank came and crushed him to death.

"That is true courage."

The general from the Air Force said, "There is yet one base that we have not visited. There is a sense of courage — great courage — which both of your forces have shown, but there is a courage, and a true patriotism, which is greater still."

There was a long time of silence, before one of the other generals finally said, "As you wish," and drove to the Air Force base.

Here, at the beginning of a runway, the Air Force general ordered the car stopped. As a plane came in to land, he barked out, "Airman, stop that plane *now!*"

The young cadet immediately snapped to attention, and gave the general a one-fingered salute.

The general leaned back in his seat. "Gentlemen, that is courage."

**Values**, *n.* [singular, 'value', generally not used] A term/usage chosen by postmodern philosophers such as Nietzsche embodying all of the genius of 1984's Newspeak.

The term designates religious or moral beliefs, but, like a great many words, means far more than it designates. The meaning of the word is that one makes a category mistake in actually regarding such beliefs as corresponding or not corresponding to an external reality; they are rather a strictly internal state, like a person's emotional state. One does not speak of right or wrong values; one rather speaks of a person's

values, just as one speaks of a person's tastes and preferences, as an arbitrary and subjective attribute of that individual person. The word places such beliefs within that basic category.

Thus, from the outset, any discussion is biased — no, worse than biased; a bias presents a difficulty to surmount, while 'values' presents a closed door — against a meaningful consideration of God, or of the moral structure of the universe. Even the term 'atheism' does not quite contain what this does to the discussion; atheism says, "There is an ultimate reality to which beliefs do or do not correspond; God does not exist; beliefs in God are false." — and this facet of postmodernism, in its definition of values, can't go far enough to say that a belief does or does not correspond to reality. Words such as 'good', 'evil', 'right', 'wrong', 'heroism', 'adultery', 'honesty', 'theft', and so on aren't even allowed to be wrong in what they describe; they describe not an external moral reality, but only a person's internal state.

It can at least be said that a part of this usage's proper meaning is dropped by some speakers, who perhaps do not think far enough to cringe at hearing the words, "our values." But even then — this lexicographer cannot recall a single instance of someone referring to values as being right or wrong.

All things considered, a most disagreeable word.

**Verse**, *n.* An ingenious device, facilitating minute study within strict bounds concerning heterodox misinterpretation of Scripture, and most effective deterrent against quotes out of context. A wonderful set of dependable roadbumps, which the road's paver did not have the foresight to provide. See also: *Footnote*

**Victorianism**, *n.* The death knell to sexual purity in Western culture.

Victorianism held sexual purity to be extremely important. All well and good, but it did not stop there. Victorianism believed sexual purity to be best approached via a Pharisaic guard around the Law. And, like every other guard around the Law, it did a tremendous amount of damage to numerous other things before destroying the very object it was meant to preserve.

Touch and community are vital elements of human health

Touch and community are vital elements of human health. This is witnessed in Scriptures that tell of John reclining in Jesus's bosom and in the hands quickly extended to pets, one of the few situations where our society will allow an innocent touch to be an innocent touch. An infant who is not held will wither and die, and psychologists have a bluntly accurate term for the failure of parents to hold and cuddle their children a great deal: abuse. And of course the special kind of community that exists between a husband and wife is given a special kind of touch.

Victorianism looked at sex and did not quite see something which is fundamentally good within a certain context. It saw something which was essentially evil (but tolerable at best within a certain context). And, in progressively widening circles, encompassing different forms of touch further and further from what is necessarily foreplay, saw that there exists at least some possibility for that touch to be sexual (at least from the perspective of the younger monk), and placed on each one a label of "This is dirty. Avoid it." Word such as "Greet one another with a kiss of love." cease to be acknowledged as a divine command which was given for human good, and instead look like, um, an odd cultural thing which, um, shows, um, um, um...

The aim, it appears, was to end up with nothing that was sexual. The result was to make everything sexual, and create a major unanticipated problem.

God created people with certain needs, and when those needs are not met, Satan comes in with counterfeit substitutes. These things are hard enough to resist to someone whose needs are met with the genuine article; when there is an immense sucking vacuum coming from unmet needs, pushing away the counterfeits acquires a difficulty which is unbelievable. A little girl who is deprived of a father's hugs and kisses will grow into a young woman who has a tremendously difficult time avoiding sexual promiscuity, unsuccessfully searching in a series of abusive boyfriends' embraces for enough love to fill the emptiness inside.

Fortunately, most of Victorianism did not quite leave a stain

that dark and deep, but there is still a major problem with a culture that refuses to wholeheartedly say, "It's OK. You may enjoy an innocent touch as an innocent touch." There is still a failure to meet a need that God created people to have filled, and still an uphill battle to fight off the counterfeit substitutes.

In this century, Victorianism has crumbled, but, like every other evil, it fails to crumble in the ways that a sane person would want it to crumble. What disappeared was not the prohibition on friendly touch, but the belief that sexual sin is a deadly poison which should be fought tooth and nail. What appeared and took the place meant to be filled by innocent touch is something which is not innocent. Thus, Victorianism did a perfect job of making room and clearing the way for a great deal of lewdness.

Current Western culture is saturated with sexual sin, not despite, but because of the fact that it is the continuation of Victorian culture.

**Villain**, *n.* One who is positive that his actions contribute positively to the betterment of mankind.

Among people who embody some semblance of what might be termed good, there is a continual self-search, a continual question of "Am I doing good or evil?" The Apostle Paul said, "Here is a trustworthy saying which deserves acceptance: Jesus Christ died for sinners, of whom I am the worst." Those people who act the most villainously do not ask the question, because they know that they are doing good.

Hence Nazi Germany knew that it was doing the world a favor by eradicating Jews from the face of the earth; the Jews were the source of all the world's problems. Hitler himself did not go to eradicate Jews until after he had established himself as a national hero, pulling Germany out of a major depression, and speaking love and appreciation to the common people and farmers as the heartblood of the Aryan nation. (It is the opinion of this lexicographer that, had Hitler found a more productive use for his talents than genocide, history would probably record him as a strong leader and a hero) Other groups since them, such as the Klueless Klux Klan, are also positive of the immense benefit that their actions are bringing to America expurgating

gentle that their actions are bringing to America, expurgating our white homeland of foreigners and helping to gently persuade them to go back to where they came from (Africa, Asia, Europe...). The present practitioners of ethnic cleansing wear watches reminding themselves of the defeat they suffered 500 years ago, and how they are merely returning just retribution and punishment to an evil that was done to them. In wartime, in order to justify the killing, it is almost universal for one nation to demonize the people of the other country and make their dominant race subhuman, entities which should be destroyed. Hence, even after the tragedy of the Viet Nam war, there was opposition to the chosen plan for a memorial because it was designed by an Asian.

Sometimes people do a more subtle job of making their actions look good. The KKK now is not openly speaking about how other races are destroying our land; they are instead speaking of the importance of hospitality and love towards whites, the true Americans. The neighbors of child molesters and mass murderers frequently say things such as, "He seemed like such a nice man."

There is one common thread; namely, that these people are masterfully adept at fighting the evil out there, and somehow never manage to look inside themselves to see if there might be evil in here.

**Violence**, *n.* [Lat. *violare*, also the root of 'violate'] An obsolescent term used to refer to the use of force.

Violence is the last resort of the incompetent.

-Isaac Asimov

**Vote**, *v.* To submit one's opinion to be counted as worthwhile.

America has a very strong tradition of overturning traditions, that is, of rejecting as inappropriate everything out of accord with the latest and most nonsensical fads. This is not a matter in which the common folk have a monopoly; among the intelligentsia, it is considered a mark of very poor taste to cite as authoritative anything not written within the past few decades. It is very much like George Orwell's novel *1984* where when the

It is very much like George Orwell's novel 1984 where, when the Party changed its mind, all of the people — lower, middle, and upper class, factory worker and scholar alike — immediately burned down everything of the old opinion; we have a Zeitgeist instead of a Party to tell us that we should burn books, and we burn them, not by throwing them into bonfires, but by carefully keeping them in neat little rows in libraries, making them accessible, and inviting people to read them, on condition that they are not consulted for serious consideration in academic work.

Thus, it is told to people, "I don't care if you have studied years of wisdom, or are yourself a part of the years of wisdom. I don't care if you took the time to write your thoughts down in a book that has endured so that I may understand your thoughts long after your body has turned to dust. You didn't write it right now, in accordance with the present whims of the Zeitgeist, so it isn't worth my time to read."

However, America, in its own special way, does wish to keep a little of everything, not to leave a snippet of some obscure ingredient out of the great melting pot. There is thus one single place where the vote of a dead man is counted to be of equal weight to the vote of one who is alive, knowledgeable and wise in the way things should be run: Chicago.

**Vulgar**, *adj.* Common. The term's general usage now denotes that which is crude and distasteful. Earlier, it was used by the wealthy, the educated, and those of high social standing to refer to the habits and persons of men who are common, uneducated, and worthless, such as those whom Christ chose to be his apostles.

**Vulgate**, *n.* *Vulgate Versio.* An early translation of the Holy Scriptures, by the hand of Jerome, who wished that the Scriptures be accessible to the common man, rather than only being available in ancient language and intelligible to an elite few. See also: *AV*

**Warrantee**, *n.* A legal document provided along with many products, in order to minimize the legal responsibility of the company which made said product to repair or replace in case of malfunction or failure to operate caused by defective

workmanship. Warranty is null and void in case of damage caused by owner attempted repair, improper use, or (in some cases) normal wear.

**Washington**, *n.* The capital of one of the wealthiest nations in the world, and thus the location of the best government that money can buy.

**Waterboarding**, *n.* The fruit of a flower called the "Living Constitution" which insists that the U.S. Constitution be a dead letter.

**We**, *pn.* The condescending form of 'you'.

**Wealth**, *n.* A universally appreciated blessing which removes certain unnecessary luxuries, such as human contact.

**Weapon**, *n.* A powerful device enabling peace keepers to deter the occurrence of violence. The development of technology has produced weapons of increasing potency and efficiency.

I do not know what weapons World War III will be fought with, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.

-Albert Einstein

**Willpower**, *n.* The excruciating struggle to achieve that which needs no effort.

**Windows**, *n.* A software emulation package used by people who cannot afford to downgrade to a slower CPU.

**Wonder**, *n.* Only one of many victims which has been sacrificed to the modern god, Materialism.

**Word**, *n.* A magnificent vessel used to convey the most profound of thoughts, and to conceal their absence.

**World**, *n.* The whole of fallen, unregenerate humanity, under the power of the Evil One and waging incessant warfare against the saints.

Contact with the world brings all manner of enticement to lying, idolatry, adultery, witchcraft, homosexual practice, thieving, orgies, and the like. It is rumored that there are other temptations, but they are surely not worth mentioning.

**Yellow**, *n.* A color symbolic of urgency and haste, used to instruct

motorists to apply maximum force to the gas pedal.

**Zeitgeist**, *n.* The spirit of the time, made manifest in the ever more enlightened nonsense of public opinion — yesterday, Logical Positivism, today, Postmodernism, tomorrow, who knows? They are philosophical ideas with a kernel of truth, which has been thoughtfully removed in the popular versions. The man who follows these ideas has a mind like a steel trap — snapped shut, and full of mice.

**Zen**, *adj.* and *n.*

**Zenith**, *n.* (1) The apex of a civilization, career, art movement, et cetera. (2) The abysmal Gehenna of computing.

# **He Created Them Male and Female, Masculine and Feminine**

God is the Creator and Origin of all. Leaving out of address the Problem of Evil, there is nothing good which does not issue from him.

That stated, God does have the power to create something which is both new and good, a good which is not in himself. That is an implication of the extent to which he is the Creator.

I would point to the material, physical world as a prime example of this. We are created as carnal creatures, and that is good. It is a gift given to us, and any spirituality which shuns or disdains the physical is a lie.

The physical, though, was wholly created. In history, after the Creation in Eden, God the Son became incarnate by the virgin Mary, but now (God the Father and God the Holy Spirit) and then in the three persons of God, God (was) an aphysical spirit.

When I speak of God as being masculine and not feminine, I am not asserting that femininity is an evil characteristic, or unreal, or something else of that order. Femininity was created as good. I am simply speaking of God as being masculine and not feminine.

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I think that the Chinese concept of Yin and Yang (although not perfect for this purpose — look far enough in writings, and you will find lots of weird mysticism that wanders from truth) is capable of illuminating the matter a great deal. (I will, rather than refute, simply leave out what is inconsistent with Christian teaching)

First of all, the thought of Yin and Yang is greatly present. Something highly similar is embodied in that the structure of most languages intrinsically speaks of masculine and feminine; if I were writing this in French, at least half of the words would be masculine or feminine. It is not another superficial detail; it is a manner in which the world is seen.

Yang is the masculine, active principle; Yin is the passive, feminine principle. In a landscape, Yang is the great mountain which thrusts out and stands because that is the nature of its solid presence; Yin is the flat land or the valley whose quiet nature is there. Yang is rough and solid, the might and majesty of an organ played *sforzando*, the deep echo of *tympani*, the firmness of a rock. Yin is the soft and supple, the peacefulness of an organ (key of F) played *gedekt*, the sweet resonance of a soprano voice, the pliancy of velvet and water. Yang is constant and immutable; Yin is conformant and polymorphic. Yang gives; Yin receives.

The relation between God and man is the relation between Yang and Yin.

God is HE WHO IS, the rock and foundation. In God is such power and authority that he commanded, "Let there be light," and it was so. It is God whose mere presence causes mountains to melt like wax, at whose awesome presence the prophet Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me, for I am destroyed."

God created a garden, and placed man in it, telling him to receive; he forbade eating one of the two trees in the center of the garden (the other was the Tree of Life) only after telling them to enjoy and eat freely of the trees.

Again to Noah, God gave salvation from the flood.

Abraham, God called.

Moses, God bestowed the Law.

David, God promised an heir.

Israel, God sent prophets and righteous men.

In the fullness of time, God sent his Son.

"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations;

BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD. I WILL BE EXALTED AMONG THE NATIONS, I will be exalted in the earth. Yahweh Sabaoth is with us; The God of Jacob is our fortress."

Righteousness is not something we earn; it is something Jesus earned for us when he offered one perfect sacrifice for all time. Works come because "we are sanctified by faith and faith alone, but faith which sanctifies is never alone." The forgiveness of sins is a pure and undeserved gift; the power to obey, by the motion of the Spirit is a gift. All who accept and abide in these gifts will be presented spotless before God the Father, as the bride of Christ to feast with the bridegroom in glory, joy, and peace for all eternity. Christ, like the phoenix who dies only to shoot forth blazing in new glory, afire with the power of an indestructible life, offers this life to us, that we also may receive it.

The thread running through all of these things, through the words "Ask and receive, that your joy may be complete," indeed through all of Scripture from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation, is, "I love you. Receive."

To ask if God is more like a man or more like a woman is a backwards question.

The answer instead begins by looking at God.

God is the ultimate Yang.

"All creatures embody Yin and embrace Yang."

-Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

Man, next to God, is Yin. It is only in comparison with each other that the human male is Yang and the human female is Yin; both are very Yin in the shadow of God.

It is something of this that is found in the passages that most explicitly speak of the imago dei:

"God created man in his image; In the image of God he created him; Male and female he created them."

Gen. 1:27

"With [the tongue], we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse people, made in God's image."

James 3:9

"...[the man] is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.... In the Lord, however, man is not independant of woman, nor is woman independant of man. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God."

I Cor. 11:7-9, 11-12

Now, before I proceed, let me issue a clear statement that this does not bear an implication of murder of a woman is no big deal, men are moral entities but women are chattels, or some other such nonsense. The Golden Rule is "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," not "Do unto other males as you would have them do unto you;" indeed, the Sermon on the Mount, Paul's letters, etc. were addressed to women as well as men. I could devote space to a detailed explanation of why it is wrong to treat women as subhuman, but I do not think that that particular problem is great enough now (at least here/in formal thought) to need a refutation, although it certainly merits a sharp reproof when it does appear.

The picture painted is one of the male being a Yin-reflection of God, and (here in a manner which is not nearly so different, and is essentially equal) the female being a Yin-reflection of God and man.

It is all humanity to which obedience means being Yin to God's Yang, being clay which is pliant and supple in the hands of the potter. It is, in my opinion, one of the great graces, along with becoming the sons and daughters of God, that the Church is/is to be the bride of Christ. (Note that in the Old Testament and the New Testament alike, the metaphor is quite specifically bride, not 'spouse' in a generic sense and never 'husband'.)

The relation between God and man is the relation between Yang and Yin; God is more Yang than Yang. The difference dwarfs even the profound differences between human male and female. There is a sense in which the standard is the same; even in the passages in which Paul talks about this order, there is nothing of a man having a macho iron fist and a woman being a nauseating sex toy. Ephesians 5:22, "Wives, submit

to your husbands, as if to the Lord," comes immediately after some words that are quite unfortunately far less cited: "Believers, submit to one another in love," and the following words to husbands make an even higher call: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up to her." Elucidation elsewhere ("Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them," Col. 3:19) speaks at least as plainly; the passages addressed to wives telling them to submit are quite specifically addressed to wives, and not to husbands. The words, "Husbands, here is how you are to impose submission on your wives and keep them under control," do not appear anywhere in Scripture.

To have a man who is macho and dominant, whose ideal of the ultimate form of manhood is Arnold Schwarzenegger carrying around a Gatling gun, or to have a woman who is wishy-washy and insubstantial, who is "so wonderfully free of the ravishes of intelligence" (Time Bandits), is disagreeable. It is, however, not at all disagreeable because "All people are essentially identical, but our phallocentric society has artificially imposed these unnatural gender differences." It is not anything close to that.

It is rather that macho and wishy-washy both represent an exceedingly shallow, flattened out (per)version of masculinity or femininity. It is like the difference between an artificial cover of politeness and etiquette over a heart of ice, and a real and genuine love.

The solution is not to become unisex, but to move to a robust, three dimensional, profound, and true masculinity or femininity. There is a distinctly masculine, and a distinctly feminine way to embody virtue. It is like eating a hot casserole as contrasted to eating a cool piece of fruit: both are good and solidly nourishing, but they are different.

[note: I handwrote this document, and decided to type it later... a part of this next paragraph will have the same effect as Paul's words, "See what large letters I am using as I write with my own hand," in the tiny print of a pocket NIV... I am choosing to leave it in, because its thought contributes something even when the script is lost]

I know that I am not the perfect image of masculinity — there is a good deal of both macho and effeminacy in me — but there is one little thing of myself that I would like to draw attention to: my handwriting, the script in which this letter is written. It should be seen at a glance by anyone who thinks about it that this was written by a male; rather than

the neat, round letters of a feminine script, this script bears fire and energy. I draw this to attention because it is one example of (in my case) masculinity showing itself in even a tiny detail.

A good part of growing mature is for a man to become truly masculine, and for a woman to grow truly feminine; it is also to be able to see masculinity and femininity.

*Vive la différence!*

# **The Horn of Joy: A Meditation on Eternity and Time, Kairos and Chronos**

As I write, I am in a couch in a large parlor looking out on an atrium with over a dozen marble pillars, onto another parlor on the other side. I have spent the day wandering around a college campus and enjoying the exploration. I've gotten little of the homework done that I meant to do (reading and writing about a theologian), and spent most of my energies trying to dodge the sense that the best way to explain what I want to explain about time is to begin with a classical form of alchemy. (The other alternative to lead into the discussion would be to start talking about Augustine, but that could more easily create a false familiarity. Alchemy is a more jarring image.)

Alchemy is one of those subjects most people learn about by rumor, which means in that case that almost everything we "know" about it is false. Trying to understand it through today's ideas of science, magic, and proto-science is like trying to understand nonfiction reference materials, like an encyclopedia, through the categories of fiction and poetry, or conversely trying to understand fictional and poetic works through (the non-fiction parts of) the Dewey Decimal system.

It is much more accurate to say that alchemy is a particular religious tradition, perhaps a flawed religious tradition, which was meant to transform its practitioners and embrace matter in the process. It may be rejected as heresy, but it is impossible to really understand heresy until

you understand that heresy is impressively similar to orthodox Christianity, confusingly similar, and 'heresy' does *not* mean "the absolute opposite of what Christians believe." (Heresy is *far* more seductive than that.) Perhaps you may have heard the rumor that alchemists sought to turn lead into gold. The verdict on this historical urban legend, as with many urban legends, is, "Yes, *but...*"

Alchemy sought a way to turn lead into gold, but it has absolutely nothing to offer the greedy person who wants money to indulge his greed. Alchemy is scarcely more about turning lead into gold than astronomy is about telescopes. A telescope is a tool an astronomer uses to observe his real quarry, the stars as best they can be observed, and the alchemist, who sought to make matter into spirit and spirit into matter was trying to establish a spiritual bond with the matter so that the metals were incorporated into the person being performed. An Orthodox Christian might say the alchemist was seeking to be transfigured, even if that was a spiritually toxic way of seeking transfiguration or transformation—which is to say that the alchemist sought a profound and spiritual good. The alchemist sought gold that was above 24 karat purity, which is absurd if you think in today's material terms about a karat gold that was chemically up to 100% (24k) pure... but what we call a "chemist" today is the successor to what alchemists called "charcoal blowers", and chemistry today is a more sophisticated form of what the "charcoal blowers" were doing, not the alchemists. But the desire for purer-than-24k-gold becomes a much clearer and more intelligible desire when you understand that gold was not seen by the alchemists as simply a "container" for economic value, but the most noble substance in the material world. (And a "material" world that is not just "material" as Americans today would understand it.) If you look at Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount about "Store up treasures in Heaven," and "Do not store up treasures on earth," the alchemists' desire to transmute metals and eventually produce gold is much more of a treasure in Heaven than merely a treasure on earth. (Think about why it is better to have a heart of gold and no merely physical gold than have all the merely physical gold in the world and a heart of ice with it.)

Newton, introduced to me as one of the greatest physicists, spent more time on alchemy than on the science he is remembered for today. He was also, among other things, an incredibly abrasive person and proof that while alchemy promises spiritual transformation it at least

that while alchemy promises spiritual transformation it at least sometimes fails miserably, and there are a lot of other scathing things one could say about alchemy that I will refrain from saying. But I would like to suggest one way we could learn something from the alchemists:

When I wanted to explain the term "charcoal blower" by giving a good analogy for it, I searched and searched and couldn't find the same kind of pejorative term today. I don't mean that I couldn't find another epithet that was equally abrasive; we have insults just as insulting. But I couldn't find another term that was pejorative *for the same reason*. The closest parallels I found (and they were reasonably close parallels) to what lie behind the name of "charcoal blower" would be how a serious artist would see a colleague who produced mercenary propaganda for the highest bidder, or how a clergyman who chose the ministry to love God and serve his neighbor would view people who entered the clergy for prestige and power over others. (It may be a sign of a problem on our side that while we can understand why people might be offended in these cases, we do not (as the alchemists did) have a term that embodies that reprobation. The alchemists called proto-chemists "charcoal blowers" because the alchemists had a pulse.)

To an alchemist, a "charcoal blower" was someone merely interested in what we would today call the science of chemistry and its applications—and someone who completely failed to pursue spiritual purification. Calling someone a "charcoal blower" is akin to calling someone an "irreligious, power hungry minister." Whether they were right in this estimation or not, alchemists would not have recognized chemistry as a more mature development of alchemy. They would have seen today's chemistry as a completely unspiritual parody of their endeavor: perhaps a meticulous and sophisticated unspiritual parody, but a parody none the less.

This provides a glimpse of a thing, or a kind of thing, that can be very difficult to see today. "Alchemy is a crude, superstitious predecessor to real chemistry" or "Chemistry is alchemy that's gotten its act together" is what people often assume when the only categories they have are shaped by our age's massive scientific influence.

Science is a big enough force that young earth Creationists deny Darwinian evolution by assuming that Genesis 1 is answering the same kind of questions that evolution is concerned with, namely "What were the material details of how life came to be?" "What was the mechanism

that caused those details to happen?" That is to say, young earth Creationism still assumes that if Genesis 1 is true, that could only mean that it is doing the same job as evolution while providing different answers. It is very difficult for many people to see that Genesis 1-2 might address questions that evolution never raises: neo-Darwinian evolution is silent or ambivalent about all questions of meaning (if it does not answer "There is no meaning and that is not a question mature scientists should ask."). It is a serious problem if young earth proponents can read Genesis 1 and be insensitive to how the texts speak to questions of "What significance/meaning/purpose/goal does each creation and the whole Creation live and breathe?" This may be a simplification, but we live in enough of a scientific age that many people who oppose the juggernaut (in this case, neo-Darwinian evolution) still resort to disturbingly scientific frameworks and can show a pathological dependence of scientific ways of looking at the world, even when there is no conscious attempt to be scientific. Perhaps evolutionists may accuse young earth Creationists of not being scientific enough, but I would suggest that the deepest problem is that they are *too* scientific: they may not meet the yardstick in non-Creationist biology departments, but they try to play the game of science hard enough that whatever critique you may offer of their success in gaining science's sight, nobody notices how perfectly they gain science's blind spots—even when they are blind spots that make more sense to find in a neo-Darwinist but are extremely strange in a religiously motivated movement.

This is symptomatic of today's *Zeitgeist*, and it affects our understanding of time.

Time is something that I don't think can be unraveled without being able to question the assumed science-like categories and framework that define what is thinkable when we have no pretensions of thinking scientifically, along lines like what I have said of alchemy. I'm not really interested in calling chemists "charcoal blowers": the Pythagoreans would probably censure me in similar vein after finding I ranked such-and-such in a major math competition, did my first master's in applied math, and to their horror studied a mathematics that was *completely* secularized and had absolutely nothing of the "sacred science" "spiritual discipline" character of their geometry left.

I may not want to call scientists "charcoal blowers", but I *do* want to

say and explore things that cannot be said unless we appreciate something else. That something else... If you say that alchemy disintegrated to become chemistry, that something else disintegrated in alchemy with its secrets and something else purportedly better than what was in the open. Alchemy has a host of problems that need to be peeled back; they may be different problems than those of our scientific age, and it may make a helpful illustration before the peeling back further and cutting deeper that is my real goal, but it is a problematic illustration.

I once would have said that classical (Newtonian) physics was simply a mathematical formalization of our common sense. My idea of this began when I was taking a class that dealt with modern physics (after covering Einstein's theory of relativity). I grappled with something that many budding physicists grapple with: compared to classical physics, the theory of relativity and modern physics are remarkably counter-intuitive. One wag said, "God said, 'Let there be light!' And there was Newton. The Devil howled, 'Let darkness return!' And there was Einstein [and then modern physics], and the status quo was restored." Modern physics may describe our world's behavior more accurately, but it takes the strangest route to get to its result: not only is light both a particle and a wave, but everything, from a sound wave to you, is both a particle and a wave; nothing is exactly at any one place (we're all spread throughout the whole universe but particularly densely concentrated in some places more than others); it can depend on your frame of reference whether two things happen simultaneously; Newton's mathematically simple, coherent, lovely grid for all of space no longer exists, even if you don't consider space having all sorts of curvatures that aren't *that* hard to describe mathematically but are impossible to directly visualize. (And that was before superstring theory came into vogue; it seems that whatever doesn't kill physics makes it *stranger*.)

I would make one perhaps subtle, but important, change to what I said earlier, that classical Newtonian physics is a mathematical expression of common sense: I had things backwards and *the Western common sense I grew up with is a non-mathematical paraphrase of classical physics*.

One thing Einstein dismantled was a single absolute grid for space and a single timeline that everything fit on. That was something Newton (and perhaps others—see the chapter "The Remarkable Masculine Birth

of Time" in [Science as Salvation](#), Mary Midgley) worked hard to establish. What people are not fond of saying today is that "It's all relative" is something people might like to be backed by Einstein's theory, but *relativity* is no more *relativism* than 'lightning' is 'lightning bug'. In that sense the theory of relativity makes a far smaller difference than you might expect... Einstein if anything fine-tuned Newton's timeline and grid and left behind something practically indistinguishable. But let's look at Newton's timeline and not look at almost equivalent replacements later physics has fine-tuned. All of space fits on a single absolute grid and all of time is to be understood in terms of its place on a timeline. This is physics shaping the rest of its culture. *It's also something many cultures do not share*. I do not mean that the laws of physics only apply where people believe in them; setting aside miracles, a stove works as Newtonian physics says it should whether you worship Newton, defy him and disbelieve him whenever you can, or simply have never thought of physics in connection with your stove. I don't mean that kind of "subjective reality". That's not what I'm saying. But the experience of space as "what fits on a grid", so that a grid you cannot touch is a deeper reality than the things you see and touch every day, and the experience of time as "what fits on a timeline" is something that can be weaker or often nonexistent in other cultures. It's not an essential to how humans automatically experience the world.

There is a medieval icon of two saints from different centuries meeting; this is not a strange thing to portray in a medieval context because much as space was not "what fills out a grid" but spaces (plural) which were more or less their own worlds, enclosed as our rooms are, time was not defined as "what clocks measure" even if people just began to use clocks.

*Quick*—what are the time and date? I would expect you to know the year immediately (or maybe misremember because the year has just changed), and quite possibly have a watch that keeps track of seconds.

*Quick*—what latitude and longitude you are at? If you didn't or don't know the Chicago area and read in a human interest news story that someone took an afternoon stroll from Homewood to Schaumburg, IL, would those two names make the statement seem strange?

What if you continued reading and found out that Homewood is at 41°34'46"N and 87°39'57"W and Schaumburg is at 42°01'39"N and 88°05'00"W? Setting aside the quite significant fact that most of us don't

00 05 32w7 Setting aside the quite significant fact that most of us don't tell latitude and longitude when we see a place name, what would that say?

If you do the calculations, you see that saying someone walked from Homewood to Schaumburg and back in an afternoon is like a newspaper saying that the President was born in 671. Schaumburg and Homewood are both Chicago suburbs, but in almost opposite directions, and to the best of my knowledge no distance runner could run from Homewood to Schaumburg to Homewood in an afternoon—even in good traffic the drive would chew up more than a little bit of an afternoon.

Do you see the difference between how we approach and experience our position on the time-grid on the one-hand, and our latitudinal and longitudinal position on the other? Setting aside various questions about calendars, I would suggest that the way most of us neither know nor care what latitude and longitude we're at, can give a glimpse into how a great many people neither know nor cared not only what a watch says but what century they're in. (*Quick*—does your country include the "turn of the century" for degrees latitude or longitude?)

There are other things to say; I want to get into *chronos* or *kairos*, and some of the meaning of "You cannot kill time without injuring eternity." (One facet, besides the wordplay, is that time is an image of not only eternity but the Eternal One.) There are several images of time, or names of time, that I wish to explore; none of them is perfect, but all of them say something. But first let me give the question I am trying to answer.

## The Question

Before I say more about time in the sense of giving names to it, I would like to explain the question I am trying to answer, because it is perhaps idiosyncratically my own question, and one that may not be entirely obvious.

There is a book on college admissions essays that listed cliché student essays that almost immediately make an admissions reader's eyes glaze over. Among these was The Travel Experience, which went something like this:

In my trip to \_\_\_\_\_, I discovered a different way of life that challenged many of my assumptions. It even challenged assumptions I didn't know I had! Yet I discovered that their way of life is also valid and also human.

Note that this boiled down essay is ambiguous, not only about what region or what country, but for that matter what continent the writer has been to. And thus, however deep and interesting the experience itself may have been, the writeup is cliché and uninteresting.

This, in my opinion, is because the experience is deep in a way that is difficult to convey. If something funny happened yesterday on the way to the store, it is perfectly straightforward to explain what happened, but a deep cross-cultural counter is the sort of thing people grasp at words to convey. It's like the deepest gratitude that doesn't know how to express itself except by repeating the cliché, "Words cannot express my gratitude to you."

I'm from the U.S. and have lived in Malaysia, France, and England (in that order). I was only in Malaysia for a couple of months, but I was baptized there, and I have fond memories of my time there—I understand why a lot of Westerners come to Malaysia and want to spend the rest of

why a lot of westerners come to Malaysia and want to spend the rest of their lives there.

One thing I changed there was how quickly I walked. Before then, I walked at a swift clip. But walking that way comes across somewhere between strange and bothersome, and I had to learn to walk slowly—and that was the beginning of my encounter with time in Malaysia. In the cliché above, I learned that some things that were to me not just presuppositions but "just the way things were" were in fact not "just the way things were" but cultural assumptions and a cultural way of experiencing time, which could be experienced very differently.

Some of this is an "ex-pat" experience of time in Malaysia rather than a native Malaysian experience of Malaysian time (there are important differences between the two), but the best concise way I can describe it is that there are people in the U.S. who try and want to escape the "tyranny of the clock," and the tyranny of the clock is frequently criticized in some circles, but in Malaysia there is much less tyranny of the clock—I was tempted to say the tyranny of the clock didn't exist at all. People walk more slowly because walking is not something you rush through just to get it done, even if it's important that you arrive where you're walking to.

Every place I've lived I've taken something away. The biggest personal change I took from Malaysia had to do with time. That experience gave me something I personally would not have gained from hearing and even agreeing with complaints about the tyranny of the clock. The first domino started to topple in Malaysia, and the chain continued after I returned to the U.S.

What I tried to do on the outside was move more slowly and rebel against the clock, and on the inside to experience, or cultivate, a different time more slowly. (I was trying to be less time-bound, but interacted with time in ways I didn't do before Malaysia.) I still tried (and still try) to meet people on time, but where I had freedom, the clock was as absent as I could make it. And it was essentially an internal experience, in a sort of classically postmodern fashion. I wore a watch, but changed its meaning. Augustine regarded there being something evil about our existence being rationed out to us, God having his whole existence in one "eternal moment"; I equated time with the tyranny of the clock and "what a clock measures", and called timelessness a virtue. If we set aside the inconsistency between trying to "escape" time as not basically good and digging more and more deeply into time, you have something that was

growing in me, with nuance, over the years since I've been in Malaysia.

That sets much of the stage for why I began to write this. In one sense, this is an answer to "What can time be besides what the tyranny of the clock says it is?" In another sense it is recognizing that I took something good from Malaysia, but didn't quite hit the nail on the head: I regarded time as basically evil, something to neutralize and minimize even as I was in it, which I now repent of. That is an incorrect way of trying to articulate something good. I would like to both correct and build upon my earlier living-of-time, beginning with what might be called **the flesh of the Incarnation.**

## **The Flesh of the Incarnation**

One time several friends and I were together, and one of them, who is quite strong but is silver-haired, talked about how he couldn't put a finger on it, but he saw a sadness in the fact that the closest place for him to be buried that would satisfy certain Orthodox concerns was a couple of states over. I said that there were Nobel prizes for literature and economics, but there would never be a Nobel prize for scamming seniors out of their retirement. In that sense the Nobel prize is not just an honor for the negligible handful of physicists who receive that accolade, but every physicist. Perhaps there are a great many more honorable professions than there are Nobel prizes, but the Nobel prize doesn't vacuously say that physics is a good thing but specifically recognizes one physicist at a time, and by implication honors those who share in the same labor.

I said that "God does not make any generic people," and I clarified that in the Incarnation, Jesus was not a sort of "generic person" ("I went to the general store and they wouldn't sell me anything specific!") who sort of generically blessed the earth and in some generic fashion sympathized with those of us specific people who live in time. God has never made a specific person, and when Christ became incarnate, he became a specific man in a specific place at a specific time. As much as we are all specific people who live in a specific place at a specific time, he became a specific person who lived in a specific place at a specific time, and by doing that he honored every place and time.

"The flesh of the Incarnation," in Orthodox understanding, is not and cannot be limited to what an atheist trying to be rigorous would consider the body of Christ. The Incarnation is a shock wave ever reaching out in different directions. One direction is that the Son of God became a Man that men might become the Sons of God. Another direction is that Christ

the Savior of man or the Church can never be separated from Christ the Savior of the whole cosmos, and for people who are concerned with ecology, Christ's shockwave cannot but say something profound from the Creation which we must care for. Sacraments and icons are part of this Transfigured matter, and the Transfiguration is a glimpse of what God is working not only for his human faithful but the entire universe he created to share in his glory.

To me at least, "the flesh of the Incarnation" is why, while the Catholic Church is willing to experiment with different philosophies and culture, because they are not part of the theological core, the Orthodox Church has preserved a far greater core of the patristic philosophy and culture. It is as if the Catholic Church, getting too much Augustine (or even worse, DesCartes), said "Spirit and matter are different things; so are theology and philosophy. We must keep the spirit of theology, but matter is separate and can be replaced." An Orthodox reply might be "Spirit and matter are connected at the most intimate level; so are theology, philosophy and culture. We must keep the spirit of theology without separating it from the philosophy and culture which have been the flesh of the Incarnation from the Church's origin."

If Jesus was not a "generic person", and I am not supposed to be a "generic person", then the place in time he made for you is to be transfigured as the flesh of the Incarnation. What I mean by "the flesh of the Incarnation" is that Christ became Incarnate at a specific time and place, and by so doing he honored not only your flesh and mine—he is as much a son of Adam as you and me—but every time and place.

There is a major Orthodox exegesis which looks at the Gospels and says that when Pilate presented Christ to the crowd and said, "*Idou ton anthropon.*" ("Behold the man", Jn 19.5), he was prophesying like Caiphas and (perhaps without knowing it) completing the Genesis story; when Christ on the cross said, "It is finished," he announced that the work of Creation which was begun in Genesis had come to its conclusion—not, perhaps, the end of history, but the beginning of the fulness which Creation always needed but is only found at the cross. There are theologians today which answer the question "When did God create the earth?" by giving the date of the crucifixion: not that nothing existed before then, but then it was made complete. 25 March 28 AD is, in commercial terms, not the beginning of when prototypes began to be

assembled and plans began to be made towards a product release, but the date that the finished product is released and thereafter available to the public. The Cross is the axis of the world, so that the Incarnation is not simply the central event in history but the defining event, not only in the time and place that we falsely consider remote which Jesus lived in, but your time and mine.

## A Paradox: Historical Accuracy and Timelessness

I read a cultural commentary on the Bible cover to cover (IVP Bible Background Commentary: [Old Testament](#), [New Testament](#)), and in one sense I'm glad I read it, but in another sense, I think I would have been better off reading the Bible cover to cover another time. Or, for that matter, creating computer software or pursuing some other interest outside of the Bible and theology.

Years earlier, I said I wished I could read a cultural commentary on the Bible, but reading it drove home a point in a Dorothy Sayers essay. The essay suggested that "period awareness", our sharp sense of "That was then and this is now" that puts such a sharp break between the past and the present, is a product of the Enlightenment and something a great many periods do not share. When one reads the [Canterbury Tales](#) and asks what they thought about cultures, the answer is that though the stories begin in classical times there is no modern sense of "These people lived in another time so I need to try to be historically accurate and keep track of lots of historical context to take them seriously."

What I have realized, partly in writing my first theology thesis in Biblical studies, was that a lot of cultural commentary is spiritually inert when it is not used as a tool to manipulate or neutralize the Bible for contradicting what's in vogue today. Even when the sizeable "lobbyist" misuse of cultural context is ignored, there is a big difference between scholarly cultural and historical inquiry and a cultural sermon illustration—and it's *not* that less scholarly pastors do a half-baked job of something "real" scholars do much better. Cultural sermon comments are selected from a vast body of knowledge specifically because they illuminate the text and therefore at least can enhance how the text speaks to us.

"Serious", "real" scholarship tends to bury the text's meaning under a lot of details and result in the same kind of loss of meaning that would happen if someone asked what a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel meant and the answer was to explain try to explain everything about how the novel came to be, including how the author's food was prepared, how the editing process was managed, and perhaps a few notes on how a Pulitzer Prize novel, after the award is received, is marketed differently from novels that haven't received that award.

I would like to suggest that in this piece my opening historical illustration did not detail everything a "historical-critical" study would get bogged down in, and showed independence from the historical-critical version of what scholarly accuracy means *precisely as it challenged a popular historical misunderstanding of alchemy*.

How does this fit together? There are two things. First of all, I disagree with most scholarship's center of gravity. "Historical-critical" scholarship, in a bad imitation of materially focused science, has a material center of gravity, and almost the whole of its rigor can be described in saying, "Look down as carefully as you can!" There is a painting which shows two philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. You can tell them apart because Plato is pointing up with one finger, and Aristotle is pointing down to material particulars with one finger. The problem with "historical-critical" scholarship in theology—and not only "historical-critical" scholarship—is that it asks Aristotle to do Plato's work. It asks the details of history to provide theological meaning. (Which is a bit like using a microscope to view a landscape, only worse and having more kinds of problems.)

Dorothy Sayers points out that up until the Enlightenment, people producing Shakespeare plays made no more effort to have the actors dress like people did in Shakespeare's days than Shakespeare himself felt the need to dress ancient characters in authentic Roman styles of clothing. Shakespeare's plays were produced because they had something powerful that spoke to people, and people didn't have this rigid historical dictate that said "If you will produce Shakespeare authentically, that means you go out of your way to acquire costumes nobody wears today." In the Globe Theatre, people were dressed up like... well, *people*, whether that meant Rome or the "here and now". And now theatre companies will be provocative or "creative" and change the setting in a Shakespeare play so that things look like some romanticization of the Wild West, or classy

20's gangsters, or (*yawn*) contemporary to us, but if you exclude people who are being a bit provocative, the normal way of putting on Shakespeare is not by having people dress the way people normally dress, but by doing research and putting people in exotic clothing that clearly labels the characters as being From Another Time.

Shakespeare's plays are produced today because they speak today, in other words because they are timeless. Being timeless doesn't mean literally being unrelated to any specific historical context ("I went to the general store and they wouldn't sell me anything specific!"). It means that something appears in a particular context and in that context expresses human-ness richly and fully enough that that human fingerprint speaks beyond the initial context. It means that there is a human bond that can bridge the gap of time as beautifully as two people having a friendship that simultaneously embraces and reaches beyond the differences of culture that exist between their nations. And it reflects a center of gravity that the important thing about Shakespeare is not that his English was hard to understand even hundreds of years ago, nor that people dressed a certain way that is different from any country today, but a human, spiritual center of gravity that not only speaks powerfully in the West centuries later but speaks powerfully outside the West. Shakespeare's center of gravity is not in this or that detail, but in a human pulse.

## Wind and Spirit

Let me look at something that appears to be unrelated.

The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.	The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is every one who is born of the Wind.	The Spirit Spirits where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.
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I can count on my fingers the number of points where I would gripe about the best English translations (if a euphemistically mistranslated Song of Songs only counts as one gripe). You don't need to study ancient languages to know the Bible well. But there are occasional points where a language issue cuts something out of the text.

One particularly Orthodox gripe about Western translations is that they use the word "Christ" for the Son of God and "anointed" to have a range of meanings and include kings priests, objects that were considered sacred, and the whole religious community (this latter in both Old and New Testament). This is not because of what is in the original language. People may hear—I heard—that Messiah or Christ means, "Anointed One", but the English translations I know introduce a sharper distinction than the text supports, and really drains the realization of verses that show another side of the New Testament's language of us being called to be sons or children of God. I remember the shock I had when I was reading the (Latin) Vulgate and David, refusing to call Saul, called him "christum Domini" ("the Lord's christ," but the Latin, like Hebrew and Greek before it, did not distinguish i.e. "Christum" from "christum".) I John 2:20 in the RSV says, "But you have been anointed by the Holy One,

and you all know." That obscures a dimension to the text that legitimately could be replaced by a different part of speech and clarified, "But you have been made christ's by the Holy One, and you all know." (If you don't like changing a part of speech, you could look at texts like Sometimes you get C.S. Lewis saying "Every Christian is to become a little christ. The whole purpose of being a Christian is simply nothing else. The Son of God became a man that men might become the Sons of God." But something of the knowledge of who we are to be in Christ is crippled when translations split up XPICTOC or its Hebrew equivalent because they are afraid to let people see that not only is Christ the Son of God and the Christian son of God, but one who is in the Christ is a christ.

That is the translators' fault. In the text cited above (Jn 3.8), from Jesus' discussion of flesh and Spirit/spirit, the same word in Greek (ΠΝΕΥΜΑ) carries the meaning of "Spirit", "spirit", and "wind" in the broader passage. I was tempted to write that ΠΝΕΥΜΑ carries that range of meanings, but that's a little more deceptive than I'm comfortable with. It would be more accurate to say that neither "spirit" and "wind", nor "Spirit and spirit", represented sharply distinguished categories. In a way Jesus is punning but in a way he is making an observation about spirit/wind that does not rest on the distinction.

Let me quote the RSV for the longer passage (Jn 3.1-12):

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him."

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can this be?"

NICODĒMUS SAID TO HIM, "HOW CAN THIS BE?"

Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

This is a rather big passage to try to unravel, but let me point out one thing. Jesus is dealing with a spiritual leader, and that leader's question, "How can a man be born when he is old?" is probably not just a failure to recognize that Jesus was speaking figuratively (especially if "figuratively" means what it means today, i.e. "a consolation prize for something that is dismissed as not true, at least not literally"). Besides saying that Nicodemus might not be stupid, I might suggest that his failure to understand underscores that he was being told something that's difficult to understand.

I'm almost tempted to write ΠΙΝΕΥΜΑ instead of spirit or Spirit because that forces a distinction that isn't there at all in the Greek New Testament and often may not belong in good theology. With that noted, I'm going to write Spirit with the understanding that it is often not meant to be read as separated from spirit and often not distinguished.

A group of people misunderstood this and other Spirit/flesh texts to mean that we should live in the part of us that is spirit and the part of it that was flesh, and they made a number of theological errors, and unfortunately some Christians have since treated the Spirit/flesh texts as a "problem" that needs to be "handled" (and, one might infer, not quite something that was put in the Bible because it would help us). This reaction makes it harder to understand some passages that say something valuable.

We are to become all Spirit. This does not, as those Gnostics believed, mean that our bodies are evil, or that any part of God's Creation is created evil. To become Spirit is to begin to live the life of Heaven here on earth. That doesn't mean that what is not-God in our lives now is eliminated; it means that our whole lives are to become divine. It means that the whole cosmos has been in need of salvation, and Christ comes as Savior to his whole Creation and his whole Creation is to be drawn into him and made divine. If you buy a gift for a friend, let us say a watch, and delight in giving it, that watch is no longer merely a possession you can hoard, not

just something a machine spat out. It is part of your friendship with that friend and it has been drawn from the store aisle into that friendship. To use an ancient metaphor, it has been drawn into the body under the head of friendship. (And now it means something a factory could never put into it.) If you have begun to believe that things don't boil down to a materialist's bottom line, the watch has become more real. In the same sense, not just our "souls" or "spirits" misunderstood as opposite to our bodies, but all of us and all of our lives are to become Spirit, or in the more usual Orthodox terminology become deified or divinized.

To say that the here and now that God has placed us in is "the flesh of the Incarnation" is not intended as some kind of opposite to Spirit. That flesh is spiritual; it is the whole Creation as it becomes Spirit and as it has become Spirit.

That much is generic; it is legitimate to say about time, because it is legitimate to say about almost anything. I would now like to turn and say something more specific about time.

I don't like to put things in terms of "synchronicity." For those of you not familiar with synchronicity, it's an idea that there is more to causality and time than isolated particles moving along a linear timeline, which is well and good, but this is a body missing its head, the Spirit. It's kind of a strange way of being spiritual while not being fully connected to Spirit.

"That which is born of flesh is flesh; that which is born of Spirit is Spirit. The Spirit Spirits where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; *so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.*"

To live in the Spirit, and to become Spirit, is for one and the same reason the proper footing for synchronicity, synchronicity done right, and moving beyond "subjective time." Let me talk about subjective time before talking more about synchronicity.

Subjective time is what some people have observed when people have realized that a watch is a poor indicator of how we experience time. Time flies; it can drag; but whatever watches can do, they don't tell how fast it seems like time is moving. In other words, subjective time at least is not what a watch measures. Now this is good as an answer to the question "What can we call time besides 'what a watch measures'?" but doesn't go far enough. Subjective time is the subjective time of a "me, myself, and I". It is the time of an atom, that cannot be divided further. And that limits it.

...  
Time in the Spirit is an orchestrated, community dance. Not that the specific person is annihilated, but the specific person is transfigured. And that means that what is merely part of the private inner world of a "me, myself, and I" is in fact something vibrant in a community. Liturgical time, which I will talk about later, is one instrument of this sharing. But it is not the only one. God is the Great Choreographer, and when his Spirit orders the dance, it is everything in synchronicity and everything in subjective time and more. What was eerie, a strange occult thing people try to mine out in Jungian synchronicity becomes a pile of gold out in the open. If Jungian synchronicity is a series of opportunities to shrewdly steal food, the Dance is an invitation to join the banquet table.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be, for I am the Lord of the Dance,  
said he. (Old Shaker hymn)*

## Immortalists and Transhumanists

I was reading a novel by one of my favorite authors in which some troubled characters constantly waxed eloquent about a movement, the "Immortalists", which struck me as rather far-fetched, too preposterous a motivation for literature... until I found a group very much like them, the Transhumanist movement, on the web.

The idea of Transhumanism is that we have lived in biological bodies so far, but we are on the cusp of making progress, and "progress" is improving on the human race so that we humans (or transitional humans —"Transhumanism" abbreviates "transitional-human-ism", and transhumanists consider themselves transhuman) can be replaced by some "posthuman" (this is supposed to be a good thing) creatures of our own devising which are always as high as if they were on crack (or higher), can run and jump like superheroes, and in general represent the fulfillment of a certain class of fantasies. (It's like disturbing science fiction, only they're dead serious about replacing the human race with something they consider better.) It's the only time reading philosophy on the web has moved me to nausea, and that broad nexus of spiritual forces is something I tried to lampoon in [Yonder](#).

Setting that obscure movement aside, it seems a lot like the progress of technology has been to achieve watered-down transhumanist goals while we live in the bodies God gave us. I read an interesting article describing how before electric lights even though there were candles most of society seemed to shut down at sundown. Now people tend to kind of sleep when it's dark and kind of sleep when it's light, but we have made ourselves independent of something most humans in history (let alone before history) were tightly attuned to. I can also buy pills to take to subdue pain, or slightly misuse my body and not feel as much of the

...the pain, or maybe my body and the rest of the natural pain. If I don't care either about my health or breaking laws that are there for our good, there are illicit pills that could make me colossally strong: I'm moderately strong now but I could become stronger than most professional athletes. As a member of my society I have space-conquering tools—a telling name—which mean that I can move around the world and I can email and talk with people without knowing and perhaps without caring if they are next door or a thousand miles away. I can also take other pills when I get much older and defeat the normal limits age puts on lust. There are a lot of limits humans have lived with time out of mind, but we've discovered how to push them aside.

I heard of a dialogue where one person said, "I don't have enough time," and received the answer, "*You have all the time there is.*" In many cultures people experience time more as something that surrounds them but they're not terribly aware of, like the air they breathe, than a sort of scant commodity one cannot have enough of. And that is a clue to something.

However much we've figured out mini-transhumanist ways to push back limitations, the limitation of "all the time there is" is one we can't eliminate. We can fudge a bit with coffee or buy into some time management system, but there is a specific significance to time in our culture that wouldn't be there in other cultures where people rise at sunrise and go to sleep at sunset. Compared to how much we can neutralize other limitations, the limitation of "all the time there is" is a limitation that resists most neutralization.

That sounds terrible, but I would draw your attention to what Transhumanism is really after. I heard one professor refer to a centuries-old Utopian vision of turning the sea into lemonade (among other things) as "*une Utopie des enfants gaspillés*" ("a Utopia of spoiled children"). The Transhumanist vision, which has already happened in miniature, is the ability to pursue "bigger better faster more" of what spoiled children want. What it is not is a way to grow into what a mature adult wants.

I'm not saying we should get rid of medicine, or anything like that. Medical knowledge has done some impressive things. But I would pointedly suggest that the kind of things technological advances give us give us much more what spoiled children want than what a mature adult would recognize as an aid to maturity. There are exceptions, and I would not argue any sort of straight Luddite position: I try to moderate my use

of technology like I try to moderate a lot of other good things, but I am very glad for the opportunity to live in an age where webpages are possible, and to have gotten in at a good time. But the "all the time there is" limitation is in fact the kind of boundary that helps mature adults grow more mature, and if we are willing to take it there is an occasion for maturity because we can't take a pill to have all the time we want.

## **From the Fifth Gospel to Liturgical Time**

The Gospel According to Thomas isn't the Fifth Gospel. (At least, in ancient times when Christians said "the Fifth Gospel" they didn't mean the Gospel According to Thomas. No comments from the peanut gallery about the Gospel According to Thomas being the Fifth Bird Cage Liner.)

If a couple of people meet, become acquainted, become friends, start dating, become engaged, and get married, when does the marriage begin? In one sense, the wedding is a formal threshold: before then they aren't married, afterwards they are. But in another sense the engagement becomes part of the marriage, as does the courtship, the friendship, the acquaintance, even the first meeting and possibly things in their lives that they would say prepared them for the meeting. The marriage moves forward from the wedding date but it also reaches backwards and creates something in the past. What may have been an improbable or forgettable first meeting is drawn into the marriage; the same thing is going on as with the watch which becomes not simply matter but part of a friendship.

John Behr has provocatively suggested that the worst thing that has happened to Christianity in the past 2000 years has been the canonization of the New Testament so it is placed as Scripture alongside the Old Testament, and becomes the second and final volume in a series. What he means by that may not be obvious.

The relationship between the Old and New Testament is misunderstood somewhat if the New Testament is simply the final chapter of the Old Testament. It would be better, if still imperfect, to say that the New Testament is Cliff's Notes on the Old Testament, or the Old Testament was a rich computer game and the New Testament was the strategy guide that we need to unlock it's secrets. It is no accident that the first people we know of to put the New Testament alongside the Old

Testament, and make commentaries on both Testaments, were Gnostics who tried to unlock the New Testament when orthodox Christians let the New Testament unlock the Old.

Quick—which Christ-centered Gospel did Handel use in the Messiah to tell of the Messiah or Christ? The answer is the Fifth Gospel: Isaiah. The passages cited in the Messiah are not a few prophetic exceptions to a non-Christ-related Old Testament; they are part of the Old Testament unlocked, and that same reading is how the earliest Christians read the Old Testament Scriptures.

Now it was Mary Mag'dalene and Jo-an'na and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles; but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emma'us, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them.

But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, named Cle'opas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened.

Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see."

And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe

And he said to them, O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight.

They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

There's a lot going on here; I'm not going to address why Mary Magdalene was known as the Apostle to the Apostles, but I would suggest that instead of saying today what a feminist would be tempted to say, that the men were sexist and wouldn't believe a woman when she bore the glad tidings, there was a veil over their minds, much like Paul describes in II Cor 3. If a woman's witness did not suffice, Jesus standing with them in person and talking with them still had no effect until the very end. And there is something going on here with a number of resonances in our lives. They couldn't see Christ in the Scriptures (which were then the Old Testament, because the Gospels and Epistles had never been written), and they couldn't see Christ appearing before them, even literally. And that is not because they are imperceptive and we are perceptive. The story is a crystallization of how we often meet Christ.

What is the point of all this? The most immediate reason is not to say that the Bible is 80% documents produced by Judaism before Christianity came around and 20% Christian documents, but transformed, transmuted if you will, into 100% Christian documents. When the book of Psalms opens with, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the council of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of cynics," that refers first and foremost to Christ. I myself have not gotten very far in this way of reading the Scriptures, but I hope to, and I believe it will pay rich dividends.

And there is something going on here that is going on in when a

marriage reaches backwards, or a watch becomes part of a friendship. It is connected with what is called "recapitulation", which I think is an unfortunate technical theological term because the metaphor comes across as in "Ok, let me try and recap what we've said so far," which is a wishy-washy metaphor for something deep. Orthodox talk about deification, and for us to be deified is a specific example of recapitulation in Christ. Recapitulation means "re-heading", and while in a sense very consistent with how recapitulation works, I've somewhat indistinguishably talked about how we can be Recapitulated or Re-headed in Christ, becoming body to his head and connected in the most intimate way, thereby becoming Christ (i.e. Recapitulation with a big 'R'), and how something can become part of the body of something that can itself be recapitulated in Christ (recapitulation with only a little 'R'). Perhaps that sentence should be dragged out into the street and shot, but when I talked about the gift of a watch becoming part of a friendship, the head of its reheading is something created, but both the watch and the friendship can be Recapitulated in Christ with the re-heading of the watch to be part of the friendship is itself part of what is Recapitulated in Christ, i.e. which is not merely brought under a head but connected to Christ as its head.

Let's move on to clearer language and a clearer example—one that has to do with our time. The head of the whole body of time we live is our time in worship, liturgical time. This both that there is a liturgical rhythm of day, week, and year, with different practices that help us connect with the different liturgical rhythms (by the way, the first major piece of advice my spiritual father gave me was to take 5-10 years to step into the liturgical rhythm), but that's not all. It means that our time in worship, which is not just time in a funnily decorated room with our particular club, sets the pace for life. It means that what is crystallized and visible in worship is perhaps hidden but if anything more powerfully manifest in a whole life of worship. It means that not just going to Church but working and playing are themselves worship, and they fulfill worship. It means, and I write this on the Sunday of the Last Judgment, that our worship is hollow and empty when we sing hymns to God on Sunday and then turn away in icy silence when someone asks our help—for it is not that someone we have icily turned away from, but Christ (see Matt 25:31-46). In the discourse at the Last Supper, Christ did not say that all would

"know you are my disciples by this, that you have the most beautiful services," but that all would "know you are my disciples by this, that you love one another." (Jn 13.35) That is something that happens *outside* of Church first and foremost. Liturgical time is the basis for time in our lives.

Liturgical time is (or at least should be) the head of time in a life of worship (if "head" is used in the sense of "recapitulation" or "re-heading"), but it is not its own head. The head of time in worship is eternity in Heaven, and that means that just as life is the concrete manifestation of worship, in time but in other matters as well, but liturgical time is not people gathered in a room for an interval but people transported to Heaven in what is not exactly a time machine, or not *merely* a time machine, but an "eternity machine". The head of eternity in Heaven is the Eternal One whose glory shines through Heaven on earth.

What does this concretely mean for our experience of time? It means much the same as whether the material world was created good by God or evil by someone lesser. Pains and physical pleasures, to give a superficial example, will be there whether we believe the material world is good or evil. But it makes a difference whether you believe the sweetness of honey is a touch of love from God or a hatefully baited barb from Satan. Now part of really coming alive is being more than pleasure and pain and letting go of pleasures that they may be recapitulated or re-headed and drawn into what is Spirit. But even then, the Christian ascetic who lets go of a good is very different from a Gnostic ascetic who hatefully rejects it as evil. Pleasures and even pains, and joys and sorrows, are fuller depending on their basis.

Augustine has been accused of inadequate conversion—maybe he became Christian, but he continued being too much of a Manichee. I am sympathetic to that view, and it makes good sense of Augustine's sense that there is something violent to us about being in time, with our being stingily rationed out to us, infinitesimal bit by bit (some have said the present "barely exists" because it is an instantaneous boundary where the future rushes into the past without stopping to rest), while God has its being all at once. I was sympathetic to that view until not long ago; I thought of time as an evil thing we endure to get to the good of eternity—which is the wrong way of putting it.

*Time is a moving image of eternity* and is recapitulated in Christ. We

miss something fundamental if we simply say that it is less than eternity; it participates in the glory. Furthermore, there is a case to be made that we misunderstand eternity if it is "frozen time" to us, if it is an instant in time which is prolonged, or even worse, is deprived of a moving timeline. Whatever eternity is, *that can't be it*. That is something fundamentally less than the time in which we grow and learn and breathe. Eternal life, which begins in this world, is God's own life, greater than created being but something that projects its glory into time. I once asked a friend if the difference between Maximus Confessor and Plato on Ideas was that for Plato there was one Idea that covered a bunch of material shadows (what we would think of as "real", but the Ideas were more real), and he waved that aside without really contradicting me. He said that the Ideas, or ΛΟΓΟΙ (*logoi*), were static in Plato but dynamic in Maximus Confessor. *Logoi* are ideas loved in the heart of God from all eternity, and you and I only exist because we each have a *logos* in the heart of God which is what we are trying to become. And I don't know how to reconcile what I know of dynamism with being outside of time, but eternity is not the deprivation of time, but something more time-like than time itself. Time becomes eternal when it is recapitulated in Christ.

## Kairos and Chronos

Bishop K.T. Ware began one lecture/tape by saying that at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, there is a line that is very easy to overlook: the deacon tells the bishop or his deputy the priest, "It's time to get started." Except that he doesn't say, "It's time to get started," but "It is time for the Lord to act."

He pointed out both that the liturgy is the Lord's work, even if both priest and faithful must participate for it to be valid (he said that the pop etymology of liturgy as "lit-urgy", "the people's work", may be bad etymology but it's good theology). But another point tightly tied to it is the exact Greek word that is translated "time."

There are two words that are both translated time, but their meanings are very different. Translating them both as time is like translating both genuine concern and hypocritical flattery as "politeness" because you are translating into a language that doesn't show the distinction. Perhaps the translators are not to be blamed, but there is something important going on in the original text that is flattened out in English. And when the deacon says "It's time to get started," it does *not* mean "My watch says 9:00 and that's when people expect us to start," but "This is the decisive moment." In the Gospels, when Jesus' own brothers and sisters failed to grasp who he was just as completely as the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he tells them, "My kairos has not yet come, but your kairos is always here." (Jn 7.6).

Orthodox do not have any kind of monopoly on this distinction, but we do have a distinction between what is called "chronos" and what is called "kairos." Chronos is ordinary if we take a harsh meaning to the word, instead of "everything is as it should be". Chronos at its worst is watching the clock while drudgery goes on and on. If chronos is meaningless time, kairos is meaningful time, dancing the Great Dance at

a decisive moment. It is putting the case too strongly to say that the West is all about chronos and Eastern Christianity is all about kairos, but I do not believe it is putting the case too strongly to say that East and West place chronos and kairos differently, and kairos is less the air people breathe in the West than it should be.

I don't think that chronos needs as much explanation in the West; chronos is what a clock measures; the highbrow word for a stopwatch is "chronometer" and not "kairometer". The distinction between kairos and chronos is somewhat like the distinction between I-Thou and I-It relationship. But let me give "ingredients" to kairos, as if it were something cooked up in a recipe.

- Chronos.
- Eternity.
- Appointed time.
- Rhythmic circular time with interlocking wheels.
- Linear unfolding time.
- Moments when you are absorbed in what you are doing.
- Decisive moments when something is possible that was impossible a moment before and will be impossible a moment later.
- Dancing the serendipitous Great Dance.
- Total presence.

But kairos is not something cooked up in a recipe; chronos may be achievable that way, but kairos is a graced gift of God.

## **We Might All Be Alcoholics**

A recovering alcoholic will tell you that alcoholism is Hell on earth. He would say that it is the worst suffering on earth, or that it is the kind of thing you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy.

And the point that healing and restoration begins is exquisitely painful. An alcoholic has a massive screen of denial that defeats reasoning. The only semi-effective way to defeat that denial is by a massive dose of even more painful reality that can break down that screen, some of the time. (An intervention.)

If alcoholism is Hell, why don't alcoholics step out of it? Some people in much less pain find out what they need to do to stop the pain and leave. They take off a pair of shoes that is too tight, or ask for an ambulance to treat their broken arm (and I believe someone who's been through both experiences would say that alcoholism is a much deeper kind of pain than a broken arm).

Surely alcoholics must have a sense that something is wrong—and that's what they're trying to evade. That's what half an alcoholic's energy goes into evading, because stopping and saying "I'm an alcoholic." is the greatest terror an alcoholic can jump into. It may be a greater fear than the fear of death—or it is the fear of the death, a step into where nothing is guaranteed.

And that is where to become Orthodox might as well be recognizing you are an alcoholic. Not, perhaps, that every Orthodox has a problem with alcohol, but we all have a problem, a spiritual disease called sin that is not a crime, but is infinitely worse than mere criminality. And the experience an alcoholic says saying, "My name's Ashley, and I'm an alcoholic," for the first time, is foundational to Orthodox religion. "Here is trustworthy saying that deserves acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first."

There is a book, I have been told, among alcoholics called Not-God, because part of dealing with the cancer of alcoholism, as difficult as recognizing a terrible problem with alcohol, is recognizing that you have been trying to be God and not only are you not God, but your playing God has caused almost untold troubles.

Repentance is the most terrifying experience an Orthodox or an alcoholic can experience because when God really confronts you, he doesn't just say "Give me a little bit." He says, "Give me everything," and demands an unconditional surrender that you write a blank check. This is as terrifying as the fear of death—or perhaps it is the fear of death, because everything we are holding dear, and especially the one thing we hold most dear, must be absolutely surrendered to—the Great Physician never tells us what, because then it would not be the surrender we need. We are simply told, "Write a blank check to me. Now."

How does this square with becoming a little Christ?

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The two paragraphs, as I have broken up Phil 2:1-11 (RSV), are complementary. What the last paragraph says is that the equal Son of God emptied himself and kept on emptying himself further and suffering further until there is nothing left to give. And this is not a sinner, a mere creature, but the spotless and sinless Son of God showing what it means

to be divine. It is not in Heaven that Christ shows the full force of divinity, but by emptying himself, willingly, to death on a cross and a descent into the realm of the dead. That is the moment when death itself began to work backwards—and humbling and emptying ourselves before God is the sigil of being exalted and filled with God's goodness. But the other side of the coin is that if we think we can become divine, or even be human, while not being emptied, we are asking to be above Christ and expecting to have something that is utterly incoherent.

When we recognize that we are not God, then we become christs. When we empty ourselves, and let go of that one thing we are most afraid of giving to God, then we discover, along with the recovering alcoholic, that what we were most afraid to give up was a piece of Hell. We discover, with the alcoholic, that what we were fighting God about, and offering him consolation prizes in place of, was not something God needed, but something we needed to be freed from.

This emptying, this blank check and unconditional surrender, is what makes divinization possible. I was tempted in writing this to say that it is the ultimate kairos, but that's exaggerating: the ultimate kairos is the Eucharist, but if we refuse this kairos, we befoul what we could experience in the Eucharist. If we are talking about a decisive moment that is not our saying "I want to make myself holier" so much as us hearing God say "You need to listen to me NOW," then however painful it may be it is a step into kairos and a step further into kairos. And only after the surrender do we discover that what we were fighting against was an opportunity to step one step further into Heaven.

Repentance is appointed time. Repentance is *the* decisive moment, one we enter into again. Repentance is simultaneously death and transfiguration, the death that is transfiguration and the transfiguration that recapitulates death. Repentance is eternity breaking into time. Repentance is one eternal moment, and the moment we cycle back to, and the steps of climbing into Heaven. Repentance is being pulled out of the mud and painfully scrubbed clean. Repentance is fighting your way into the Great Peace. Repentance is the moment when we step out of unreality and unreal time into reality and the deepest time. Repentance is not the only moment in kairos, but it is among the most powerful and the most deeply transforming, decisive moments that appointed kairos has to offer.

## Miscellanea

I do not have time to write, and perhaps you do not have time to read, separate sections about some things I will briefly summarize:

- Life neither begins at 18 nor ends at 30. Every age is to be part of a kaleidoscope. Contrary to popular opinion in America, not only is it not a sin to grow old, but each age has its own beauty, like the seasons in turn and like the colors in a kaleidoscope. And that is why I do not guiltily talk about having "hit 30" any more than I would guiltily talk about having "hit 18" or "hit 5", because in the end feeling guilty about approaching a ripe age is as strange as feeling guilty about being born: not that there is anything wrong with being a child in the womb, but the purpose of that special age is not to remain perennially in the womb but to grow in maturity and stature until our life is complete and God, who has numbered the hairs on our heads and without whom not even a sparrow can die, come to the thing we fear in age and discover that this, "death", is not the end of a Christian's life but the portal to the fulness of Heaven where we will see in full what we can now merely glimpse.
- When we reach Heaven or Hell, they will have reached back so completely that our whole lives will have been the beginning of Heaven or the beginning of Hell.
- People make a dichotomy between linear and cyclical time. The two can be combined in spiral (or maybe helical) time, and the movement of time forwards in growth combined with the liturgical cycles makes a rhythmic but never-repeating helix or spiral. (If that is embedded in what Maximus Confessor said about linear, circular, and spiral motion.)
- One step away from saying that time is a line is saying that time is a

pole on which a living vine grows, making a richer kind of connection than a materialist would see. That is a little bit of why we are contemporaries of Christ.

## The Horn of Joy

...Sandy called after [Meg], "And also in 1865 Rudyard Kipling was born, and Verlaine wrote *Poèmes saturniens*, and John Stuart Mill wrote *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, and Purdue, Cornell, and the universities of Maine were founded."

She waved back at him, then paused as he continued, "And Matthew Maddox's first novel, *Once More United*, was published."

She turned back, asking in a carefully controlled voice, "Maddox? I don't think I've ever heard of that author."

"You stuck to math in school."

"Yeah, Calvin always helped me with my English papers. Did this Matthew Maddox write anything else?"

Sandy flipped through the pages. "Let's see. Nothing in 1866, 1867. 1868, here we are, *The Horn of Joy*."

"Oh, that," Dennys said. "I remember him now. I had to take a lit course my sophomore year in college, and I took nineteenth-century American literature. We read that, Matthew Maddox's second and last book, *The Horn of Joy*. My prof said if he hadn't died he'd have been right up there with Hawthorne and James. It was a strange book, passionately anti-war, I remember, and it went way back into the past, and there was some weird theory of the future influencing the past—not my kind of book at all." (Madeleine l'Engle, [A Swiftly Tilting Planet](#).)

Madeleine l'Engle's [A Swiftly Tilting Planet](#) immediately follows my favorite children's book, [A Wind in the Door](#). I wished I could visit Patagonia, and tried to find a book she mentions in [Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art](#) as seminal to the Welsh legend in [A Swiftly Tilting Planet](#). I also looked for *The Horn of Joy* and was disappointed, if

not necessarily surprised, to learn that this was the one fictional addition to an otherwise historical list.

It would be not only strange but presumptuous to suggest that this piece I am writing is what she was referring to. Perhaps it is presumptuous to use that title, although it may seem less presumptuous if one understands how special and even formative Madeleine l'Engle's work has been to me. But what does not seem strange to suggest is that this work may affect the meaning of [A Swiftly Tilting Planet](#). That would only be determined by other people's judgment and is not my call to make, but I don't think Madeleine l'Engle would be offended if someone said that this enhanced the value of her work, or added another layer to what she said about time. Her own words not only in that work but in [Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art](#) about how a work can be enhanced by future insights would suggest the possible. It is quite possible that my work is not good enough or not relevant enough to serve as such a key, but the suggestion is not that strange to make.

But let us move on to one closing remark.

## Extraordinary and Utterly Ordinary

The Enlightenment has left us with a lot of wreckage, and one of this is great difficulty seeing what causality could be besides "one domino mechanically toppling others."

Aristotle listed four causes: the material cause, formal cause, efficient cause, and final cause. The material and formal cause are interesting to me as something the Enlightenment would not think to include in causality: Aristotle's [Physics](#) portrays the bronze in a statue as a material cause to the statue. If we listen to the hint, this could suggest that causality for Aristotle is something besides just dominoes falling. He does deal with mechanical, domino-like causation when he describes the efficient cause, but I remember being taken with the "final cause", the goal something is progressing towards, because I thought it was domino causation that had the effect before the cause.

The best response I can give now to what I believed then was, "Um, kind of." Aristotle's four causes address a broader and more human kind of causation that looks at questions like why something happened and not just how it was produced. It is in fact an utterly ordinary way of looking at things. It's not the *only* serious way of describing causality (my favorite physics teacher said in class, "If Aristotle said it, it was wrong," and I think he was right about much more than physics), but it's one kind of richer view. And if you think it's something exotic, you misunderstand it. It is an utterly ordinary, even commonsense way of looking at why things happen.

And an Aristotle's-four-causes kind of time is better than an Enlightenment-domino-causation kind of time, for a number of reasons. The best essay about time, which I cannot write, would encompass the better parts of what I have said above while remaining "normal" even

when it underscored something extraordinary. Or at least would do better at that than I have.

Orthodoxy is not something absolutely unique; I have said things here which I hope resonate with some sense of home whether or not you are Orthodox. When I moved from being an Evangelical to becoming Orthodox, I did not move from absolute error into absolute truth but from something partial to its full expression. (And there are other clarifications I haven't made, like how much of this essay is owed to Irenaeus and to John Behr helping Irenaeus come alive.) But let me close.

In Orthodoxy, here and now, there is an ordinary way to do what alchemy aimed at: be transfigured in a transfiguration that embraces the material world—and, as we have seen, time. Time is to be transmuted, or rather transfigured, until it becomes eternity.

# **How to Find a Job: A Guide for Orthodox Christians**

## **The sacred side of finding work**

### **The providence of God**

"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?"

"So why worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after these things all the

SHALL WE DRINK? OR WHAT SHALL WE WEAR? FOR AFTER THESE THINGS ALL THE Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all of these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all of these things shall be added to you. Therefore you do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

Matthew 6:25-34, [The Orthodox Study Bible](#)

This text, from [the Sermon on the Mount](#), is a central text, and it is to this text that everything else relates; it is by being anchored to [the Sermon on the Mount](#) that keeps the other practices anchored in faith and preserves them from becoming magical or superstitious.

God will provide for his faithful. [Sometimes God the Spiritual Father provides in painful ways](#). Often his understanding of what is good for us varies greatly from our own, and it is only through learning in an experience that we learn that God understands what we need and we do not.

God does not always give us what we want, but he is always willing to give us what we need. Whether or not that includes the job we want. [Read "The Angelic Letters", a tale of providence.](#)

God sometimes allows the Evil One to take away the jobs of the pious. But God is in command, and he will not allow us to be tested beyond our strength. Unemployment is a trial, but it will not prevent God from providing and exercising his own providence over people allowed to be tested.

## **The life of devotion**

The most important foundation within this walk of faith is simply living the Orthodox life. This means prayers, confession, communion, and the entire sacramental Orthodox Way. This does not manipulate God; it may involve clearing away obstacles we have created, which is what we work on when we confess our sins. But there is not something alien that is added to the Orthodox faith to activate God's providence; God's providence is active even when we are trying to do everything and he doesn't give what we think we need. And so the first thing is, "Do your rule." (And "As always, ask your priest.")

## Generosity

This is the point when things can get a bit scary. Christ, who promises providence, also tells us not to store up treasure on earth. Most of us have not made the monastic renunciation, but we miss the mark if we seek our security in what we can arrange with our own money and resources. That is the point where money becomes a false God and an idol.

(This may *always* be an idol, but the less money and financial security we have, the larger the idol looms.)

One part of Orthodox asceticism that is particularly relevant here is generosity, that of sharing with others what little you have. [The person who is generous is lending to the Lord](#); every gift tells God, "I am trusting you," and seeks providence in God, not money or earthly resources. And we would do well to remember the words, "The Pope is not Christ's vicar on earth—the poor are!" [In the Last Judgment, our generosity or hoarding from the needy will be remembered, but there are also much more immediate rewards](#). I would recall the opening Kontakion to my [Akathist Hymn to St. Philaret the Merciful](#):

To thee, O camel who passed through the eye of the needle, we offer thanks and praise: for thou gavest of thy wealth to the poor, as an offering to Christ. Christ God received thy gift as a loan, repaying thee exorbitantly, in this transient life and in Heaven. Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

It is paradoxical to give more in response to losses. But it is vital.

## St. Xenia / Ksenia

We particularly ask the prayers of St. Xenia in seeking employment. [If you do not have an icon of St. Xenia, consider buying one](#). My practice in seeking employment is to pray [the Akathist to the Most Holy Lady and Mother of God](#), and the [the Akathist to St. Xenia](#) each day. Their prayers make quite a difference, much as St. John the Much-Sufferer in dealing with lust.

You should also ask the prayers of your priest and parish and the faithful you know.

## The secular side of finding work

Two of the books I value most for jobhunting are [What Color Is Your Parachute?](#) and [Games Companies Play](#). [Games Companies Play](#) is perhaps one of the best specimens of mainstream jobhunting books, and [What Color Is Your Parachute?](#) starts much further back, saying, "Let's wait a minute on tweaking resume keyboards. Let's dig much further back and make sure we're answering the right questions."

### Resume writing services

[Monster](#) and other services offer a "free resume critique:" *Buyer beware!*

I was working with one friend on his resume and mentioned that [Monster](#) offered a free resume critique. He submitted his resume, and the feedback was deceptive and obnoxious. The reviewer said he was going to be "bluntly honest," and was then bluntly dishonest and manipulative and wrote a doozy of a spiel that was engineered to scare him directly into their paid resume writing service. And it contained almost nothing that could be used to directly improve his resume.

He had asked me if it was worth a professional resume writing service; after seeing that specimen I said, "Maybe; it would be worth asking on [LinkedIn](#), but not with these people." If they were going to be that deceptive and manipulative in their free resume "critique", they were the wrong people to trust with writing your resume.

If you attended college you may have privileges with your alma mater's career services office, even if you didn't graduate: these can be helpful in several ways, including a resume makeover.

## Websites

There are a lot of job boards; I myself usually just use [Monster](#) as the main site where I post my resume.

There are several job search engines; [Linkup](#) is well worth considering as it pulls jobs from company's websites that haven't hit the "pay to post" boards like [Monster](#).

Lastly for websites, I mentioned [LinkedIn](#); to adapt a phrase, [LinkedIn](#) is Facebook for jobhunting. It doesn't have the games, but it is a professional social network that is useful in several ways, including asking and answering questions. I've found that I've gotten a lot of valuable advice by asking questions on [LinkedIn](#).

## Research, research, research!

The biggest way you can send a perfumed letter in an interview is research. There are a number of tools at your disposal; you can visit the company website, [search for them on Google news](#), and to give one "best-kept secret", request a copy of the company's annual report. I am not saying you should believe them all; every annual report I've read claims that things are going great and the last year may have been the company's best year ever. As with the "About" section on a company's website, that is how the company presents itself, not necessarily how the company is. Still, it is valuable for insight and the more you know about a company, the better. And if annual reports are a tad too optimistic, they none the less show a company's line of business, where it is focusing, and show how the company would like to be seen.

## Find jobhunting / networking groups

In many places, there are jobhunting support groups: not necessarily "support groups" in the counseling psychology sense, but groups where jobhunters can gather, sharing wisdom and expertise. You may find a career coach at one of them: you might get a free resume makeover, or have someone make sense of something puzzling to you. Which brings me to my next point:

Again, however however

## **Again, buyer beware**

There has been one change to the information technology landscape in recent years. Job hunting sites like [Monster](#) allow applicants (whether in information technology or not) to state a geographic preference so they can request local opportunities. And there's a whole brigade of recruiters, strange as it may sound, who will ask an applicant in Illinois who has requested Illinois positions to apply for a position in Silicon Valley or NYC, traveling at the candidate's own expense for the in-person interview and perhaps signing a contract that would probably make an attorney really squirm (and assure you this is a standard business practice to protect their needs if you raise questions). Buyer beware; this is part of the cost of doing jobhunting in information technology.

The problem isn't as bad as it used to be; the sheer quantity of these junk calls has dropped to be much more manageable than it was a few years ago. But I let non-local calls go straight to voicemail: there are a few non-local calls that aren't from that class of recruiter, and you can hear them when you check your voicemail.

There are presumably other traps and pitfalls out there: "*Be thou the defender of my soul, O God, for I walk through the midst of many snares; deliver me from them and save me, O Blessed One, for thou art the lover of mankind.*"

## Conclusion

I have covered, or rather briefly touched on, the sacred and secular dimensions of jobhunting. But this is more of a "table of contents" than a full book; I point the reader to books or other resources ([What Color Is Your Parachute?](#) and [Games Companies Play](#) on the secular side, and one's rule of prayer and parish priest or spiritual father on the sacred). The offering seems insufficient, but I'm not sure I have better. Still, I offer this much in the prayer that God will provide for you in his gracious and eternal love.

**This article was written while I was jobhunting and out of work. Later that day, I received and accepted a job offer.**

# How Shall I Tell an Alchemist?

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

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

And even nothingness itself:

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

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

Returned to God,  
Deified.

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

# How Shall We Live This Instant?

**Quest:** So your use of 'orthodoxy' is not, strictly speaking, 'mere Christianity' as defined by C.S. Lewis, or any of its close kin.

**Targe:** It is not.

**Quest:** Then what is it? You have already said that it was not Thomas Owen's "postmodern paleo-Orthodox evangelical Christian."

**Targe:** The failure is interesting.

**Quest:** *How so?*

**Targe:** Well, one definition proposed as coinciding with postmodern paleo-Orthodox evangelical Christians is, "someone who can say the Nicene Creed without crossing their fingers." And the politically correct "their" is significant; I'll get to that in a moment. But what I would point out that Baptists in their version of the Creed add a footnote to "Catholic" stating that it means "universal," which of course it does, but the Protestant who says that is crossing fingers, or what is much the same thing, using the same words to mean different things: hence 'Church' means a purely invisible Church, the entire conception of which is as foreign to the Bible as it has been to ages of Orthodoxy. For another example of crossing fingers by saying the same thing but meaning something different, a Mormon can say most or possibly all of the Creed, but they mean something different by it: hence their saying, "As the Father is, so shall we be; as we are, so the Father was." Part of the Catholic-Orthodox understanding of the Creed, for instance,

is that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are absolute in perfection from before there was time. And it's crossing fingers to say you believe in God, the Father Almighty, and mean that a limited being became what we now call God the Father Almighty. And the connection is questionable at least between Mormon and Orthodox understandings of 'deification'; the same word has two different and what might as well be unrelated meanings.

**Quest:** So you would throw it out?

**Targe:** The Spirit Spirits where He wills. Some have said, "We can say where the Church is, but not where it isn't," and others have said, "*Not even that.*" In that sense there really *is* an invisible Church, and those who are most insistent on necessity of being a faithful members of the Orthodox Church must needs acknowledge that there are Hindus and ancient pagans who will be saved, and there are members of the Orthodox Church who will be damned. His Eminence KALLISTOS, perhaps of concern to some Orthodox as dancing too close to the edge, none the less has an "all-purpose anecdote" (as he calls it) that anybody not caught in the trap of "True" Orthodoxy must recognize, tells a story about a woman who was severe in her fasting and observance of spiritual practices:

Once there was an old woman and she died. And somewhat to her surprise, she woke to find herself in a lake of fire. Looking out she saw her guardian angel walking on the shore. And she called out, "There has been some mistake. I am a very respectable old lady and I should not be here in this lake of fire."

"Oh," said the guardian angel, "do you ever remember a time when you helped someone else?"

And the old woman thought for some time and she said, "Yes. Once I was gardening and a beggar came by and I gave her an onion."

"Excellent," said the angel, "I happen to have that very onion with me now." And he reached into his robes and he produced it. And he said to her, "Let us see what the onion will do. You take the other end and I will null." Perhaps it

will do. You take the other end and I will pain. Perhaps it was not an onion but a shallot.

Gradually then, the angel, with the help of the onion, began to pull the old woman out of the lake of fire. But she was not the only person there. When the others saw what was happening they crowded round her and hung on in the hope of being pulled out as well. This did not please the old woman at all. She began to kick and to cry out, "Let go! Let go! It's not you who's being pulled out it's me! It's not your onion, it's mine!"

And when she said, "It's mine!" the onion split in two and she fell back into the lake of fire and there, so I'm told, she still is.

And His Eminence KALLISTOS obtained the story from Dostoevsky, who recorded it from someone else.

**Quest:** But what does that have to do with "postmodern"?

**Targe:** Well, if we accept the usual definition of postmodern—which Oden is not exactly trying to subvert, but claim "We were here first" competition—it is misleading at best to say, "If you were born in these centuries, you are a modern; if you are born in these decades, you are a postmodern." There are engineers, large number of engineers who are moderns and who are aware of postmodernism as something that is out there, but aware with the kind of awareness one holds of fashions in faroff countries. And they may understand it well or, more often, not so well. Quite possibly they do not know a postmodern (in the usual sense).

**Quest:** How does Oden's usage of "postmodern" differ from the more run of the mill version?

**Targe:** We have more a coincidence of names. What is usually called *post-modernism* is really a further unfolding of [the damned backswing](#) in the inner logic of modernism. René DesCartes fills the classic sociological definition of a pariah among postmodern authors in that attacks on him do not need justification (just read refereed academic journals and books where an attack on DesCartes is rarely accompanied by a footnote), but he began a program of tearing things up that was a precursor to

deconstructionism. And it is from his patronage and country that Derrida came, and I've tried a few things to understand Derrida in any constructive way. I fairly quickly tried reading Derrida in the original. (*It didn't help.*) And Oden's claim, rightly enough, is that this should really be called "hyper-modernism." There are other things it could be called, like "modernism 2.0" or "modernism on steroids" or "the inner (il)logic of modernism further unfolding", but Oden's suggestion is appropriate enough. And what he means by "post-modernism", when it does not mean "hyper-modernism," is people who have tried the modernist project and rejected it, like an engineer with a T-shirt that says, "Been there, wrecked that." And in that sense postmodernism regards modernism and hypermodernism as a vacation from reality and, perhaps with some archaeological interest or perhaps not, sees something like ancient or medieval life as still open to us. It may be noted, perhaps with excitement, that the Orthodox Church does not view the Church Fathers as a closed canon; perhaps a Catholic might not be inclined to say that there are medieval theologians still writing, but there is much room for Orthodox to say that patristic writing has not stopped and will not stop until the Lord returns.

**Quest:** So there are people writing now you would identify as Church Fathers?

**Targe:** Probably.

**Quest:** You do not introduce someone as a living saint; some have ascended to the third heaven and still been damned. There is a story of a saint who at the end of life set one foot in Paradise, and the demons praised him, saying, "Glory to you; you have defeated us!" and the saint said, "Not yet, I haven't!" and pulled the other foot into Paradise. There are saints whose relics are incorrupt but it is the general wisdom of the Orthodox Church to allow some time for the dust to settle on a saint's tomb. And I believe there are future saints that are alive, and *some* that will be recognized as Church Fathers who delivered living patristic theology, but we should not seek them out. We have recognized saints and Church Fathers from ages before; let us sit at their

feet and learn from their life.

Thomas Oden's version of postmodernism is tangled though.

**Targe:** How do you mean?

It is an attempt to be part of the Orthodox Church without being part of the Orthodox Church. Now this endeavor has happened before; one could argue that the Reformation was an attempt at (paleo-)Orthodoxy. And more recent efforts like Radical Orthodoxy start by having Protestant authors greatly appreciate pre-Protestant theologians, and not just the Blessed St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, and yet somehow Radical Orthodoxy ends up producing articles that speak of "the incestuous, homosexual union of the Father and the Son" and be as deliberately lewd as academic theology which has no pretensions to any Orthodox label. It's a wasteland.

**Quest:** Do you believe all of Oden's "postmodern paleo-Orthodox evangelical Christians" are judged by that standard?

**Targe:** God help us, no. People who try such things may be very virtuous indeed. But—no, I need to put that off again—but consider well [the three-fold comparison of natural sciences, academic theology, and Orthodox theology in "Religion and Science Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution."](#) Something remarkably similar may be said of Oden's hypermodern, Oden's postmodern, and Orthodoxy's patristic. That is, you can make a threefold comparison between hypermodern, postmodern, and patristic as you can with science, academic theology, and patristic theology. Let us look some at Wittgenstein's forms of life: Wittgenstein as a philosopher was dead wrong about many things and the phrase "after Wittgenstein" is itself a warning label, but in patristic Orthodoxy across the centuries and millenia, there is a cycle

"Tolkien once remarked to me that the feeling about home must have been quite different in the days when a family had fed on the produce of the same few miles of country for six generations, and that perhaps this was why they saw nymphs in the fountains and dryads in the woods - they were not mistaken for there was in a sense a real (not metaphorical) connection between them and the countryside. What

of day and night and though candles may give a little light, you act during the day and wind down at night. For the hypermodern and the postmodern by contrast, things are very different from the Orthodox patristic norm, when the sun goes down you usually turn on lights, and though scrupulous Jews may leave by sunset to avoid work on the Sabbath, it is not the rule for offices or factories to close just because of a sunset. For those living before modern times, there existed such a thing as an "epistolary relationship," in some arrangement of pen pals, but to the hypermodern and postmodern, it is more prevalent among the youth than among adults to have relationships increasingly mediated by shifting sands of computer technologies, by social networks and ten thousand other things. Overall it may be true that liberals use technology better than conservatives: "My Barack Obama" in Obama's first campaigns used some of the best technology has to offer, and while Django is freely offered to conservatives too, the power base for conservatism is not suburban or urban middle class, and a great many Republican votes come from the kind of people torn up in [Deer Hunting with Jesus](#). To that basic observation, I may respond that the way new technologies are adapted and used works more like a liberal process than a conservative conservation. In some sense conservatives who use technology skillfully might be considered "virtual liberals": yes, their votes may be to the right, and yes, their views and voices may be to the right, but they are skilled at negotiating a liberal style of waters. If conservatives use technology a little more clumsily, this is because the inner workings continue in some sense to preserve their character.

Countryside. What had been earth and air & later corn, and later still bread, really was in them.

"We of course who live on a standardised international diet (you may have had Canadian flour, English meat, Scotch oatmeal, African oranges, & Australian wine to day) are really artificial beings and have no connection (save in sentiment) with any place on earth. We are synthetic men, uprooted. The strength of the hills is not ours."

—C. S. Lewis in a letter to Arthur Greeves, 22 June 1930

One translates between Italian and Spanish more easily than one translates between Italian and Russian: and here the relation between technology and liberalism is like that between Italian and Spanish, and the relation between technology and conservatism is like that between Italian and Russian. The mere incompetence of some conservatives with technology is a sign of a strength somewhere else. But compared to any previous century, a conservative or postmodern (Oden-style) looks remarkably more like a liberal or hypermodern (Oden-style), or the vast number of mostly liberal people who run TV and popular blogs. The Paleo movement, which has perhaps appropriately been called a lifestyle (although [Paleo Hacks](#) discusses lifestyle far less than diet or exercise), is remarkable because it is exceptional. It looks at one aspect of life, diet—or maybe two, diet and exercise, plus a few other details—and says that what we have done with food since the industrial revolution is morbid. And it looks at how best to recover the strengths of the basic human hunter-gatherer style of diet (and of life) with what we have in front of us. But diet and exercise are two out of a hundred aspects of human life and living, two out of very *many* layers, and if conservatives like Dorothy Sayers and C.S. Lewis complained about newfangled light available whenever you flick a switch, or cars that annihilated God-given space, or talked about refusing to eat tinned food, this was a blip even for conservatives. Neither C.S. Lewis nor Dorothy Sayers complained about the ease of putting pen to paper, easing the physical side of writing to be economically cheap and physically effortless compared to medieval standards C.S. Lewis would have known well, where writing was compared to ploughing a furrow and unambiguously classified as a form of (strenuous) manual labor.

Today, rural adults volunteer to keep cinemas alive and providing movies to children and youth. In days past cautious Christians avoided movies; now it is a conservative move to keep cinemas alive as a piece of history not to be lost. Technology progresses along its own inner rules, and it unfolds and its [damned backswing unfurls](#).

It is a common preference in the U.S. to choose retrieving

It is a common preference in the U.S. to choose retrieving information over owning it. The development of computers has followed this preference, and most of what you do that is most interesting is to retrieve new, fresh information. We live in digital dark ages where the cascade of technologies, one largely displacing another, will leave future archaeologists and historians thirsty for an understanding of what we have, and we have reached the point, and long passed it, that curators of computational museums have physical storage media that they believe to be mostly or completely intact, and to contain real information, but they are at a loss for how to read it. The Air Force started a program to purchase one of every type of storage device, printer, etc. so that they would be able to prevent this from happening. But there was a kink along the way; some of the printers they purchased, left to sit for months, had rubber parts turn to gum. The Air Force saw and specifically took countermeasures to curate and keep the means of reading any form of computer storage, and while a museum may have come out of it, the original goal is all but impossible. Perhaps they could have gotten farther by actively maintaining all of their inventory, but there comes a point when you cannot obtain what you need to maintain old equipment, no matter how skilled you are at making repairs or how much you can pay.

Those who understand such thing said that when Steve Jobs unveiled the iPad, he toppled the first domino in a chain that will make netbooks, notebooks, and desktops go the way of the landline or horse: a rarity, at least. And when Microsoft revealed Windows 8, they basically said, *"We agree. We'll go further than you, Apple. You let Macs continue to run on MacOS, without any effort to convert them to iOS devices. We'll make a version of Windows optimized for mobile users, and we'll release that as the desktop version as well as the mobile version."* Whether that move was right or not, time will tell. But Microsoft and Apple have declared an agreement that the tablet is the wave of the future and the desktop, even the Mac, is the wave of the past.

There is a science fiction short story, from when computers first entered the public consciousness, of a monastery of some

religion which was involved in writing down all of the names of God to bring about the end of the world. They purchased a computer to help them do this task much faster. The ending of the story had the salesman getting on an airplane, noting, "They should be reaching the end of their calculation now," and looking out the window and seeing a star vanish. There is already a star that has vanished: Apple has not rolled out Retina display to 17" MacBook Pros; instead, Apple has *retired* the top of the line, its 17" MacBook Pros. If you don't have a 17" MacBook and you want one, time for creative internet shopping!

And [the damned backswing](#) unfurls economically. The 1950's drew unprecedented levels of wealth and an ersatz civic virtue of keeping up with the Joneses; compare the appliances and possessions of a 1990's house with a 1950's house and some have said that we were no longer keeping up with the Joneses: we were keeping up with the Trumps. So the longer and longer we go, the richer we get? Um, not exactly; we are being cut by [the damned backswing](#). We indeed possess luxuries and possessions never before available in the history or prehistory of the race of men. But these luxuries, which we *may not* be able to keep hold of, do not our dreams of riches all come true. To quote an investment billboard, "My wild dream of retirement? Actually retiring!" [The damned backswing that gave us newfangled forms of luxury is now cutting and delivering poverty well below a 1950's "keeping up with the Joneses" standard of living.](#)

**Quest:** Guess things were better in the fifties?

**Targe:** I'd like to visit a point with G.K. Chesterton, whether or not Chesterton sees eye to eye with Orthodoxy on this point. In discussing Francis of Assisi's aspirations as a soldier, Chesterton says that loving other people and fighting them is perfectly consistent. And in Orthodoxy, unlike Catholic theology, there is no real concept of a just war. Orthodox are allowed to be soldiers, and there are saints who were soldiers. But a soldier who has tried to kill cannot become a priest, and regardless of what might have been the cause of war, Orthodox

soldiers are expected to do years of penitence after their combat. Orthodoxy may have soldiers as much as Catholicism, but the concept of a just war is foreign to it.

But I still wish to visit one of Chesterton's points, besides his saying that Francis of Assisi was perfectly right to go to fight in war against a neighboring city-state. He commented that if two such city-states were to fight continually against each other for a century, it might come within some remote distance of the body count of one of our modern scientific wars. And here I would like to make a comment about firearms and the Iran-Iraq war.

Modern Western firearms did not create the Iran-Iraq war; but we have come to possess modern assault rifles at the end of a process of change and military obsolescence, where generals and military leaders have adapted and adopted new tactics for centuries. The development of weapons may be easier for an outsider to see than shifts in tactics and strategy but alongside one gamechanger of a weapon after another has been a shift in tactics to try and achieve victory with a minimum of losses from among one's own troops, and really also an attempt to kill as few as the enemy as you reasonably can while achieving your objective. One World War II sailor talked about how his ship sunk an enemy ship, and then, with tears, explained that the smell of a certain oil burning wafted into their craft, and he and the other sailors were absolutely disgusted, not because what they were smelling was vile (but it *was* vile), but because they realized that meant that men from the other ship, their enemies, were dying with that obscene *stench* in their nostrils. And the soldier, crying, said, "You can't hate him. He's another sailor, just like yourself!"

It is possible for a soldier to love his enemies, and in Arab culture, before Western armaments were dropped in, men fought all the time, just like St. Francis, but there was something about their fighting that was almost like sparring or horseplay. Killing men outright was not the rule, and it was *not* desired. And then, without much precedent, 20th century weapons were dumped on, by Western standards, 12th or 13th century military strategy, and there were none of the West's

slow learning over the centuries how to handle increasingly more destructive weapons while *trying* to accomplish goals with less casualties on both sides.

**Quest:** It should seem then that you should welcome the fifties.

**Targe:** The fifties came after World War II. One of the definitions of a modern war is a war that ends at the exhaustion of one side's resource: a war of attrition, such as when part of the U.S. made a second Declaration of Independence, another part decided it non-negotiable that the United States be a single country, and neither side pulled back when blood flowed like a river, deep and wide. As to World War II, on essentially every side it was several notches removed from what I have tried to call orthodoxy, even though making what it means clear is hard. Even the traditional Arab raiding and lightweight fighting was a longstanding departure from what I call orthodoxy, but it was in the same ballpark. It did not go too far from the Garden of Eden. But warfare in its modern sense—the inventor of what we now know as a modern machine gun had almost *pacifist* intentions; he thought that when that invention was brought into war, people would be so horrified and disgusted that they would stop using guns, or at least machine guns, into war, and apparently horrified at the nation that would use such a vile weapon and horrified at using guns on people. But though an early machine gun may have been called "the Devil's paintbrush," automatic assault rifles are standard in infantry combat for anyone who is serious about war. There has been a long history of weapons that were expected to be too horrible to use: several Popes tried unsuccessfully to ban crossbows in their day's version of the Geneva Conventions, and the machine gun just mentioned, and the battleship, and most recently nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. For now at least we have stopped using them. But whether or not warfare as such is "orthodox", modest and small wars by modern standards depart from orthodoxy much further than Francis of Assisi going to fight another city-state with dreams of soldierly glory.

Now to return to the 1950's. In the course of the greatest industrial war so far, America developed very well optimized

industrial production to fuel the war. People may well have been Spartan enough in what they were doing and how they were living (ration books and all that), but when the war ended, the gears of factories started out turning other things besides munitions, and advertising became more manipulative and seductive, and people began to keep up with the Joneses. This may be better than the river of blood in world war, but there is something about spend, spend, spend to keep the factories spewing out goods that is further from orthodoxy than the sacrifice of a war effort which gave as much of one's sap and soul with no personal benefit in the progress, than consuming the output of factories spewing consumer goods on the level of materials for war. Dorothy Sayers's [The Other Six Deadly Sins](#) comes to mind, *readily* to mind. Sayers outlined a door to orthodoxy open to post-war Europe, but Europe did not choose that route.

**Quest:** And now we have shifted gears further: calling the 1950's sexist has given way to attacking whether religion may act against queer interests, it would seem.

**Target:** There is an instance of a pattern of people saying, "You are making a mountain out of a molehill. You should give in here." To make an extremely offensive comparison, this is a bit like the molester's message, "Don't tell anyone. It's OK." Both parts of the message are internalized by the person addressed. It's the same warped character that said, "Voting for Bush because you oppose gay marriage is a bit like buying a ticket to England because you like the salted nuts the airline stewardesses serve on the flight."

I have never seen someone who says "You are making a mountain out of a molehill. You should give in," treat the 'molehill' as a molehill that is readily conceded to focus on more important points. I have never heard of someone who calls an opponent's position a molehill ever give in on that point. And here actions speak louder than words: the rhetorical move of "your position is a molehill; you should give it up and do things our way" is always, *always* accompanied by actions treating the "molehill" as a non-negotiable *mountain*.

One of those molehills concerns the ordination of women. *Gender or Giftedness?* one promoted title asks. And it is begging the question; it assumes giftedness has nothing to do with gender when gender provides much of the concrete shape by which God has gifted all of mankind.

There is someone who said that all of the Luddites were right; all describe something of mankind dying. Plato took a Luddite approach to writing, saying in a famous passage in *Phaedrus*, let me look it up...

At the Egyptian city of Naucratis, there was a famous old god, whose name was Theuth; the bird which is called the Ibis was sacred to him, and he was the inventor of many arts, such as arithmetic and calculation and geometry and astronomy and draughts and dice, but his great discovery was the use of letters. Now in those days Thamus was the king of the whole of Upper Egypt, which is in the district surrounding that great city which is called by the Hellenes Egyptian Thebes, and they call the god himself Ammon. To him came Theuth and showed his inventions, desiring that the other Egyptians might be allowed to have the benefit of them; he went through them, and Thamus inquired about their several uses, and praised some of them and censured others, as he approved or disapproved of them. There would be no use in repeating all that Thamus said to Theuth in praise or blame of the various arts. But when they came to letters, This, said Theuth, will make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories; for this is the cure of forgetfulness and folly. Thamus replied: O most ingenious Theuth, he who has the gift of invention is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance a paternal love of your own child has led you to say what is not the fact: for this invention of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters. You have found a specific, not for memory but for reminiscence and you give your disciples only the

of remembrance, and you give your disciples only the pretence of wisdom; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome, having the reputation of knowledge without the reality.

And anyone who thinks this is a mere hiccup would be well advised to remember that Orthodoxy preserves alive the character of an oral tradition. Perhaps this is not the most important truth about Orthodoxy. Mount Athos preserves a great many age-old forms of life, but it would be a serious misunderstanding to make that one's primary reason to visit the Holy Mountain.

**Quest:** Is there any hope? Any way to turn back the clock? It seems we have departed from the natural operating conditions of *Homo sapiens* quite a bit.

**Targe:** In more ways than we can name. We have lost a primal stillness; even Lao Tzu in the fifth century B.C. knew a primal stillness had *then* been lost among his people; he was concerned people had become noisy, complicated where peace is simple. He is said to have been a keeper of some royal library, but he did not turn to books for our salvation.

**Quest:** Then where is hope to be found?

**Targe:** *Here and now.* There was one hieromonk who reflected back on his time in a Soviet, Marxist concentration camp, and simply said, "God was so present there." There, in the midst of everything the Devil might do, was God. He had been tortured to the point of breaking all of his fingers, and he simply remembered that God was there.

**Quest:** He must have been quite a monk.

And yet I wonder... um, maybe it's better not to mention...

**Targe:** Yes?

**Quest:** Um...

**Targe:** Yes?

**Quest:** Orthodoxy and Paleo both say things about diet, and they don't say the same thing. Can we benefit from both?

**Targe:** That is an excellent question to discuss with your priest.

**Quest:** And beyond that?

**Targe:** That is still an excellent question to discuss with your priest.

Strictly speaking, Orthodox fasting and Paleo diet are compatible. Nothing in Orthodox fasting rules dictates that one eats bread every day, or rice or noodles. During a fasting period, you may eat seafood and an abundance of vegetables, and for that matter possibly more variety than keeping the fast without Paleo. Have you ever gone through a fast and exhausted the possibilities of just vegetables available in grocery stores?

But let's look at fasting in the extreme. The reconciliation I gave above, saying there is an area where the two dietary rules intersect, is a bit of a decoy. If you read the lives of the saints, they walk on water, or enter fire without being burnt. Saints give to God above what nature provides, and often, though not always, saints who work great wonders live on a diet that would seem to produce all manner of weakness. But these are spiritual athletes. Now the asceticism of fasting or something like it is normative, but in considering Orthodoxy and the Paleo diet, let's not throw out the baby with the bathwater. One's priest, and perhaps also one's doctor, is really the kind of person one should seek help from. In general, the rule in Orthodoxy is, *Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.*

[Attempts to turn back the clock keep moving us further from the source. Don't look back. Look up!](#)

There is something false in things as we have been looking at them, in saying that Luddites since the time of Plato have mourned losses that came with technological gains, in talking about food and drink: the Kingdom of Heaven is not a matter of food and drink. Now the choices we make may matter, but the true way of looking at things is not from the material up to the spiritual, but from the spiritual down to the material. Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be given to you as well. This was true in the first century, when the Sermon on the Mount was given, but the truth is as old as humanity.

And it is also the answer to the question, "how we shall live in this instant?"

# How to Survive an Economic Depression

## Want to survive?

I learned some pretty big things during the Y2k scare, and some of them have every relevance to how to survive an economic depression.

When year 2000 was approaching, I was part of the doomsday camp. I believed, wrongly, that technology would fail and everything around me would start to fall apart. But did a lot of digging and I think I learned something about what makes people survive really rough situations--and how to survive an economic depression. The economy is in deep trouble, and what I found out then has every relevance now that we are worried about how to survive an economic depression.

When Y2k was approaching, I found a lot of materials on *physical* preparation for such an event, but very little on *psychological* preparation. The most that I can remember reading about that was that when I said on a newsgroup that a Y2k doomsday would be psychologically as well as physically difficult, someone said that I was right and suggested that Y2k preparations include stocking up on board games and condoms.

That answer seemed, to put it politely, not up to snuff. As far as mental preparation goes, that was the equivalent of saying, "If bad things happen on January 1 2000, be prepared for great physical danger. *Always* remember to look both ways before you cross the street!"

After failing to find something more informative on newsgroups, I went to the library, to look for more information on psychological survival in difficult situations. I did a lot of digging, reading whatever seemed like it might shed light, but finding very little of an answer *anywhere* that I looked. Even a book on psychology and the military said almost nothing about how either soldiers or civilians stood up psychologically to disaster, or what enables a survivor to overcome an incredibly difficult situation.

It was only after a lot of digging that I realized the answer was almost staring me in the face. What makes a survivor is not exactly *psychological*. It is *spiritual*. There was something spiritual about, for instance, people who had survived incredibly hostile situations as hostages and prisoners. It is not exactly that they had some special talent, or drew on some special mind trick or had developed what we would imagine as spiritual powers. It was something almost *pedestrian*.

It had something to do with religious devotion. Faith has something to do with how to survive an economic depression.

I imagine I may raise some eyebrows by suggesting faith has something to do with how to survive a disaster. But faith was how many people survived the Great Depression. Perhaps a great many survivors survived despite their useless faith, or maybe it was a crutch, but if it seems obvious to you that faith could have nothing to do with how people survived the Great Depression, then I would ask you to entertain a possibility you might not have considered. Maybe they know something we have forgotten.

## **The more things change, the more they stay the same.**

Much of the Bible comes from disastrous times. In the Bible's book of [Habakkuk](#), there is a prophet who sees great evil about him. He cries out to the Lord, and the Lord gives an answer that leaves the prophet stunned: the Lord will punish the wickedness of Israel by having an army of terrorists conquer their land. This was a disaster that might be worse than economic collapse. The prophet asks the Lord a question: how can a righteous God look on such wickedness? And the Lord responds without really answering the prophet's question: the Lord responds without giving the prophet what he wants. But tucked away in the Lord's response are some very significant words: "...the righteous shall live by faith."

Those words were taken up in the New Testament and became a rallying-cry against rigid legalism. But they are more than a response to people who turn religion into a bunch of rules; they speak also in situations where legalism is simply not the issue. The prophet cried out to the Lord about rampant violence. The issue was not really legalism at all. And this is when the words were first spoken: "The righteous shall live by faith." These words were given in terrifying times.

"The righteous shall live by faith" is a non-answer, and a quite deliberate non-answer. The prophet asked how such a pure God could allow such wickedness to exist, and God does not give the answer he is looking for. The Lord doesn't really answer the prophet's question at *all*. It's almost like:

Someone said to a master, "What about the people who have never heard of Christ? Are they all automatically damned to Hell? Tell me; I have heard that you have studied this question."

The master said, "What you need to be saved is for you to believe

in Christ, and you have heard of him."

The Lord doesn't tell the prophet what he wants. He gives him something much better; these brief words say, "[I AM WHO I AM](#), and I will do what I will do, and you may not look past the protecting veil that enshrouds me. But in the disastrous times you face, know this: the righteous shall live by faith."

God doesn't just refuse to tell the prophet what he *wants*. He gives Habakkuk something fundamentally richer and deeper. He tells the prophet what he *needs*. What God tells [Habakkuk](#), "The righteous shall live by faith," is a luminous thread appearing throughout Scripture, woven into the fabric of Proverbs and woven through and through in the [Sermon on the Mount](#). This luminous, radiant thread declares that God is sovereign, in hard times as well as good, and that his divine providence is with his faithful no less. *Even if we are in a depression, God can watch out for us.* (Perhaps *especially* if we are in a depression. The surprising report from many survivors is that God's help is much more obvious in hard times than when things are easy.) Just witness this luminous thread in the [Sermon on the Mount](#):

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall wear. Is there not more to life than food, and more to the body than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by worrying can add one hour to his span of life? (You might as well try to worry yourself into being a foot and a half taller!) And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither work nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed as gloriously as one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For people without faith

seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you as well.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have its own things to worry about. Each day has enough worries of its own.

The righteous shall live by faith, and the Sermon on the Mount has a great deal to say about exactly *how* the righteous shall live by faith. The radiant thread unfolds, unfurls, *beams*, "Money is unworthy of your trust: put your trust in God. Live in the security of faith. Have the true security of faith in God who provides, not the ersatz providence of what you can arrange for yourself. Do not spend your life building a sandcastle for your home and trying to keep it from collapsing. I offer you a way to build a solid house, built on the rock."

And this is not just a statement about how we should not worry about the future when we have it easy. The [Sermon on the Mount](#) closes with words that are entirely relevant to surviving the storms of life when we wonder how to survive an economic depression:

Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and its collapse was great.

These are not words about nothing more than how to relax and enjoy life when it is easy. These are words about how to prepare for hard times, and how to survive in a disaster. In other words, they are words about how to survive an economic depression.

In hard times as well as good, *the righteous shall live by faith*. Indeed, the words "the righteous shall live by faith" originally come from times with an industrial-strength disaster on the horizon!

## The Apostle Paul: Portrait of a *survivor!*

Who can survive stress like an industrial-strength disaster? The Bible paints a picture of one person who survived a lot of really rough times, and not only *survived*, but genuinely *thrived*.

When I was in college, part of the general "foundations of wellness" class was taking the [Holmes Stress Point Scale](#), which assigns points for stressful events to add up to a rough estimate of how stressful your life is. You get a certain number of points for each stressful experience you've been through, and they add up to your total score for how stressful the past year of your life is. The events include:

- Jail term...
- Death of a close friend...
- Outstanding personal achievement...
- Vacation...
- Christmas...
- Minor violation of the law...

The higher a score from stressful events, the more stressful your life is. The scale's explanation is: *If your score is 300 or more, you are at a very high stress level and probably run a major risk of illness in the next year. If your score is 200 to 299, your stress and illness risk are moderate, and if your score is between 150 to 200, your stress and risk are mild.*

My teacher mentioned that one student had computed such a score for a year in the life of the Apostle Paul, who went through a number of events that should score major points for stress:

- Jailed...
- Attacked by a frenzied mob...
- Shipwrecked in the mother of all storms...
- Clandestine escape from a city when people were trying to kill him...
- Physically assaulted by soldiers...
- Survived an assassination attempt...

The student calculated a staggering 675 points for one year in the life of St. Paul!

But the odd thing is that if you read the [Book of Acts](#), St. Paul does not really come across as someone we should pity. We read that some of his colleagues were harassed, beaten, and afterwards were rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame for the sake of their Lord. When I read [the accounts of these events](#), I walk away with a sense, not that these suffering heroes are poor and pitiable, but that they are giants and they utterly dwarf me. There is something greater in the Apostle, far greater, than a whopping 675 points worth of *externally* stressful events.

It is the same thing, really, as with people who survived a long time being hostages for terrorists. They had dug deep and built their house on the rock, and when stormwinds battered their house, it survived and stood firm. It is the same thing for the bedrock of how people survived the Great Depression. And if we may be battered by hard economic times, we would like our houses to stand firm as well.

## Suffering and sonship

It may be that what we fear that in a potential disaster is that we will lose what is good for us. We may fear getting sidetracked when none of our dreams seem to come true. We may fear that God cannot really provide our good if our recession becomes a depression or even an economic collapse--that the [Sermon on the Mount](#) is presumably about how to live in easy times but wouldn't be quite so helpful when we're in a depression. But there is something we are missing. Some of the things that we fear may have a surprisingly positive place in a well-lived life. There is something we are missing in all this.

Suffering has a place in the divine discipleship—the divine sonship—that the [Sermon on the Mount](#) is all about. "The Son of God became a man that men might become the Sons of God," as C.S. Lewis echoed the ancient wisdom, a wisdom that plays out in discipleship. Discipleship, service to God in difficulties, providence, and ascetical or spiritual practices all come together: God provides for us and disciples us in hard times as well as good. Sometimes he provides more plainly when we have nothing than when we have everything. In the [Philokalia](#), we hear the words of St. Makarios as he explains the place of suffering in discipleship:

He who wants to be an imitator of Christ, so that he too may be called a son of God, born of the Spirit, must above all bear courageously and patiently the afflictions he encounters, whether these be bodily illnesses, slander and vilification from men, or attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls to be tested by various afflictions of this kind, so that it may be revealed which of them truly loves Him. All the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs from the beginning of time traversed none other than this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by

doing this that they fulfilled God's will. 'My son,' says Scripture, 'if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently endure' (Ecclus. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: 'Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.' Thus the soul that wishes to do God's will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to utter confusion. As St Paul writes: 'God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a way out, so that we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

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

The story is told of a woman who was told the Lord would be with her, and afterwards found herself in an incredibly painful situation. When she cried out to the Lord and asked how this could be, the Lord answered: "I never said it would be easy. I said I'd be *with* you." God's way, it seems, is not to make things easy for us, but to strengthen us for greatness in what are often hard situations, and sometimes disasters. He gives us mountains to climb and the strength for climbing.

And we can climb mountains even if we are in an economic depression. Perhaps *especially* if we are in an economic recession. God's providence does not spare us from our suffering. Not even if we're really good Christians—*especially* not if we're really good Christians! If you read the saints' lives (see the links on [the natural cycle clock](#)), you will see that even with all the wondrous providence God provides for the saints, the saints in fact suffer much *more* than the rest of us; they know sufferings worse than most of us have ever been through.

There are saints whose prayers healed others—but who were for themselves never healed of their own major illnesses. If this sounds ironic, remember that Christ also was told, "Physician, heal thyself." Christ is pre-eminent as one who saved others but could not save himself, and "He saved others, but he cannot save himself" is one way of *defining* God's kingdom. Part of how people survived the Great Depression was that they carried the spirit of God's kingdom and worked to save others, and not just themselves. Communities of people survived the Great Depression because, even if no one could save "Me! Me! Me!", perhaps each one could help save *others*.

God's providence does not spare us from our suffering, but he works with us *in* our suffering, often to do things with us that could never happen if we had things our way. It may be precisely *on* the mountain, *in* the act of climbing, that God gives us the strength to climb!

Sometimes God works with us despite our best efforts to fix things so we can have things our way. Wise people rightly tells us, "Life is what happens while you're busy making other plans," and "You can't always get what you want." And perhaps if we did get what we wanted, we wouldn't get what God wanted for us. Some of us may try to fix our problems and pray to God to take them away—when his plan is to use our problems to build us up. St. Makarios above quotes [Hebrews](#), and in fact [Hebrews](#) is

one of the clearest books of the Bible that God works with us in suffering—in fact, that Christ himself was perfected by suffering (source):

But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted. Therefore, holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchiz'edek.

...But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised.

Our view of suffering is often that if we are suffering, then we cannot be where we should be. It often seems we can only be where we should be when we are *out* of a difficult situation). It seems that we are sidetracked, and will only stop being sidetracked when we have things our way. But

that is absolutely false. God worked with Christ in suffering. God worked with the saints in suffering. God worked with us in suffering. And that means that we can be in suffering and in pain, with our godly plans failing, and we are still just where God wants us: we may not see it, but sometimes our earthly failure is a heavenly victory. If God allows us to be in an economic collapse, he may be doing things with us, good things, that we might never happen if we had the comfort we seem to need. The last words above, about suffering and failure, lead *directly* into [the famous "faith hall of fame" in Hebrews 11](#).

What may be happening in our sufferings is that God is building us into greater people than if we succeed in getting what we want. Including if we are in an economic depression. This is a basic lesson of people growing up: many young people have big dreams for themselves, but grow by middle age into living for others, growing into something that could never happen if all their youthful dreams came true. And suffering has a place in this—and a greater and deeper value. The Son of God was made perfect through suffering. Innocent suffering is sharing in the suffering of Christ: Christ's suffering is made perfect in his people. St. Paul, the survivor who went through terrible suffering, wrote, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." ([Col 1.24 RSV](#))

Suffering is *not* getting off-track, nor does it force us out of God's plans, so that we only get into God's providence as soon as things are the way we would like. What some of us fear in suffering is that if we are in difficult circumstances, then that must mean we are spiritual failures as well as failing on earth. If we are faithful and still fail in our plans, this does not mean that either God's plans or providence have failed. Often he is working at us when we are suffering and we are so far afield from anything that makes sense to us.

Everything we meet is either a blessing from God, or a trial that God allows for our strengthening. You may say that there is something evil in your trials, and you would be entirely right: there is something evil, and perhaps demonic, in our trials and afflictions. Perhaps you may say that there seems to be something almost demonic about an economic collapse, and you would still be right. But, as C.S. Lewis observes, *all* of us do the will of God. We may do the will of God as Satan and Judas did, as *instruments*, or we may do the will of God as Peter and John did, as *sons*.

But all of us do the will of God, and ultimately Satan and may be no more than a hammer in God's hand. And even if God allows rough trials, he allows them for our strengthening. St. Makarios is very clear: "The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to." Evil is on a leash. Let us be faithful. Every move the Devil plays is one move closer to his loss and God's victory, and ours if we are faithful.

I am not saying that the future holds much suffering. You or I may have a lot of suffering, or actually not that much. I am, however, saying that however much suffering God allows, he can still work with us. He can still work with us in an economic depression. (And that is even *without* going into how a great many people have been in situations they dreaded, and found life to still be beautiful.) As St. Paul, a survivor, closed [Romans 8](#):

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## **Building a house on the rock** *—it's not all about you!*

Ascesis refers to disciplined spiritual practice. It's a part of building a house on the rock. In the Orthodox tradition, these include sacraments, church attendance and daily liturgical prayers, reading and listening to Scripture, working to keep the Jesus prayer in your heart ("Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"), growing into the liturgical seasons and internal and external fasting, hospitality, service, thanksgiving, repentance, giving to others who ask your help, cutting back on selfish pleasures, including icons in your prayer, solitude, community, and other practices. All of these can offer different help in growing to spiritual maturity.

But there comes a crucial caveat. None of these, if they are working correctly, are all about us. However essential they are to building a house on the rock, they are infinitely more than tools for how to survive an economic depression. They are tools to living in communion with God and being transformed by his grace. These disciplines, used rightly, can clear away obstacles to our growing in discipleship under God, but if they are used wrongly, they can be extremely harmful.

Using ascetical practices wrongly, as ends in themselves, has the same problem as Eeyore in [The House at Pooh Corner](#):

[Piglet picked some violets, decided to give them to Eeyore, and went to visit him.]

"Oh, Eeyore," began Piglet a little nervously, because Eeyore was busy.

"To-morrow," said Eeyore. "Or the next day." Piglet came a little closer to see what it was. Eeyore had three sticks on the ground, and was looking at them. Two of the sticks were touching at one end, but

not at the other, and the third stick was laid across them. Piglet thought that perhaps it was a Trap of some kind.

"Oh, Eeyore," he began again, "I just—"

"Is that little Piglet?" said Eeyore, still looking hard at his sticks.

"Yes, Eeyore, and I—"

"Do you know what this is?"

"No," said Piglet.

"It's an A."

"Oh," said Piglet.

"Not O—A," said Eeyore severely. "Can't you hear, or do you think you have more education than Christopher Robin?"

"Yes," said Piglet. "No," said Piglet very quickly, and he came closer still.

"Christopher Robin said it was an A, and an A it is—until somebody treads on it," Eeyore added sternly.

Piglet jumped backwards hurriedly, and smelt at his violets.

"Do you know what A means, little Piglet?"

"No, Eeyore, I don't."

"It means Learning, it means Education, it means all the things that you and Pooh haven't got. That's what A means."

"Oh," said Piglet again. "I mean, does it?" he explained quickly.

"I'm telling you. People come and go in this Forest, and they say, 'It's only Eeyore, so it doesn't count.' They walk to and fro saying 'Ha ha!' But do they know anything about A? They don't. It's just three sticks to them. But to the Educated—mark this, little Piglet—to the Educated, not meaning Poohs and Piglets, it's a great and glorious A. Not," he added, "just something that anybody can come and breathe on."

Piglet stepped back nervously, and looked round for help.

"Here's Rabbit," he said gladly. "Hallo, Rabbit."

Rabbit came up importantly, nodded to Piglet, and said, "Ah, Eeyore," in the voice of one who would be saying "Good-bye" in about two more minutes.

"There's just one thing I wanted to ask you, Eeyore. What happens to Christopher Robin in the mornings nowadays?"

"What's this that I'm looking at?" said Eeyore, still looking at it.

"Three sticks," said Rabbit promptly.

"You see?" said Eeyore to Piglet. He turned to Rabbit. "I will now—"

YOU SEE? said Eeyore to Piglet. He turned to Rabbit. I will now answer your question," he said solemnly.

"Thank you," said Rabbit.

"What does Christopher Robin do in the mornings? He learns. He becomes Educated. He instigates—I think that is the word he mentioned, but I may be referring to something else—he instigates Knowledge. In my small way, I also, if I have the word right, am—am doing what he does. That, doe instance is?"

"An A," said Rabbit, "but not a very good one. Well, I must get back and tell the others."

Eeyore looked at his sticks and then he looked at Piglet.

"What did Rabbit say it was?" he asked.

"An A," said Piglet.

"Did you tell him?"

"No, Eeyore, I didn't. I expect he just knew."

"He knew? You mean this A thing is a thing Rabbit knew?"

"Yes, Eeyore. He's very clever, Rabbit is."

"Clever!" said Eeyore scornfully, putting a foot heavily on his three sticks. "Education!" said Eeyore bitterly, jumping on his six sticks. "What is Learning?" asked Eeyore as he kicked his twelve sticks into the air. "A thing Rabbit knows! Ha!"

We need to avoid being Eeyores with our spiritual discipline, or our spirituality, or our faith, or our religion. Letters serve a greater purpose, and so do ascetical practices: we should not, like Eeyore, stare at an A and tell ourselves that it is our Education and Learning, or Prayers and Church Attendance as the case may be.

The point of ascetical practices is to be steps of the Great Dance: living the life that God shares, and becoming one of the sons of God. It's not merely a set of survival skills that work in an economic recession or depression, or even an economic collapse, even if "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have its own worries. Each day has enough trouble of its own," is quite practical advice. The point is to seek first the kingdom of a God who knows our survival needs: as God told Habakkuk before a disaster, "The righteous shall live by faith." The luminous thread beams brightly because it is more than just a white thread. It *shines*, and it shines with the light of Heaven, a light of divine love that illumines Creation.

What Eeyore doesn't get about the luminous thread is that it is the light of Heaven shining on earth.

## Better than an endowment

Some years before I became Orthodox, I was at a class where someone was commenting on Proverbs, and its texts that say, in essence, "Put your trust in God, not money." ("Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death," [Prov 11:4 RSV](#).) One point he made that particularly surprised me was, "Endowments aren't so great."

He asked a question: if we want to be independently wealthy, who do we want the "independently" to mean we are independent from? The answer he gave: "*Independent from God*." If we want to be independently wealthy, we may want something more than mere luxuries. The basic fantasy of life as we imagine ourselves being independently wealthy, is a life that is in control and unlike the actual messiness of our real lives with so many things that are simply beyond our control. And his suggestion, based on real life as well as Proverbs, is that it is actually not good for us to have an endowment that we can trust.

One kind of person counselors work with is the person who cannot be happy without being in control of everyone around them. The basic problem is that a person who needs to be in control is a tragically shrunken person, and part of what a counselor will try to give a person is an opportunity to step into a larger world. If you believe, "I can't be happy unless I'm in control of everyone I'm involved with," that will set you up for a lot of unhappiness.

This is not just because it is really hard to control everyone else. A few people who want to control others really do manage to control others around them, but they are really as unhappy as others who want the same thing but don't manage the control over others they always want to establish. As Chesterton observed, there may be some desires which are not achievable, but there *are* some desires which are not *desirable*.

If you want the world to be small enough that there is nothing outside

your control, you want to live in a small and terribly shrunken world. If you let go of that kind of control, you may find that you have let yourself into a much bigger world than if you were the biggest thing around, and in the process you become bigger yourself. Instead of being a tin god ruling a world as cramped as a cubicle, you become servant in God's vast mansions. And being one of many of these servants is a much better position to be in than dominating as a tin god.

And there is more to this larger world, the larger world of serving in God's great mansions. The words, "The righteous shall live by faith" were given, in full force, when a brutal invasion was coming. Those words may not originally have been about how to survive an economic depression. They were originally more about how to survive something worse: your country being taken over by terrorists!

The words, "The righteous shall live by faith," and the [Sermon on the Mount](#), apply to some pretty rough situations, *including* an economic recession, economic depression, or economic collapse. Christ's words about not worrying do not apply just to privileged people who have nothing seriously worth worrying about; many of the people who first heard the [Sermon on the Mount](#) were on the *bottom* of the totem pole and would see less material comfort than the kind of person most Americans would imagine as a homeless person.

The model prayer Christ would give is not a prayer for something nicer for people stuck on a nasty diet of burgers and KFC; the one physical request is for *bread*—by American standards, quite a dull thing to eat day in and day out, and possibly poorer nutritional fare than fast food—and it is in *this* context that Christ, in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), beckons us to store up treasure in Heaven, and invites us to a spiritual feast that unfurls in hard times as well as when everything meets our expectations. He invites us to the spiritual feast, the larger world, that is at the heart of spirituality and religion and is unlocked by faith. The [Sermon on the Mount](#) neither assumes nor needs a high standard of living to have real treasure.

The invitation to dance the Great Dance is open to us now as ever. All of us are invited to the Great Feast. Even if we've snubbed words like, "Money doesn't make you happy," and, "The best things in life are free," not only do those truths remain open to us, but the Divine Providence is no less open. If our external circumstances remove all the luxuries that serve us, we may discover that not only is it better to give than receive

serve us, we may discover that not only is it better to give than receive, but it is also better to serve and be served. We might take a tip from how people survived the Great Depression. If we are unemployed, we might serve others and find something that technologies and luxuries can't give, and if our 401(k) plan becomes a 404(k) and vanishes, we might lean on God's providence and discover that God's providence gives us more than money could.

There's a sign that was seen around my hometown that says, "Money may not do everything, but it sure keeps the kids in touch!" And I wonder if that is precisely what we gain if we do not know what will meet our needs in the future: our material needs can "keep the kids in touch" for God. Especially in an economy in shambles. And if that happens, we have something no money could buy: keeping in touch with God in a way that is ultimately a Heavenly transformation.

## The prodigal son: "I wish you were dead!"

The parable of the prodigal son begins ([source](#)):

There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, `Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them.

Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the husks that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself he said, `How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants."' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, `Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

But the father said to his servants, `Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry.

Today, one of the ways parents might give money to children is letting them "borrow against their inheritance:" they wouldn't have to pay the money back, but they lose that much of their inheritance when their parents die. And this is considered a fairly normal arrangement.

This *isn't* what is going on here. The younger son's request telegraphs something loud and clear: "I wish you were dead!"

We see a first glimpse of God's love—a love to the point of madness. Out of all responses the father could have to this affront, he gave every last penny he was asked for. The love to the point of madness may be easier to see later on, but it is already present in the gift by which he answers the ludicrously inappropriate request.

The son goes off to live life the way he wants to. And living life the way he wants to hits rock bottom. The big party he imagined he'd make for himself turns into famine and dire straits that leave him coveting the unappetizing husks that he is feeding to unclean, vile swine. He thought things would be better if he were calling the shots, not his father.

He thought things would be better if he were calling the shots. Just like some of us here. We don't want to have to wait under the authority of a Father who calls the shots. We want money and control, with things lined up here and now. What is it we are telling God if we ask him to give us money and control on our terms? Something a bit like, "I wish you were dead."

The younger son has discovered that life with his father out of the picture is not so glorious and wonderful. And he realizes the extent of his fall. So he resolves to go back and beg, not even for forgiveness, but possibly his father might even contain his wounded resentment enough to let him work for pay and be able to buy bread. (Who knows? Maybe a long shot, but what real alternative did he have?)

What was the father doing in all of this?

When husbands have gone off to war, there have been wives who have stood by the path of the doorway, looking for some hope that their husbands may return, looking and waiting, hour after hour, day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year... *never* giving up! And the father in our story was doing *exactly* that.

The father was looking, waiting, and saw his son far off, and completely cast off his upper-class dignity to run and embrace him. Love to the point of madness! He didn't even wait for an apology before

to the point of madness: He didn't even wait for an apology before embracing him and kissing him!

And when the son made a full confession, hoping maybe to toil for his father's scraps, the father pulls out all the stops: the best robe, a ring for his finger, and the best food possible for a royal feast. *This is love to the point of madness!*

But the story continues on to a more sobering note ([source](#)):

Now his older son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, `Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in.

His father came out and pleaded with him, but he answered his father, `Look, I have served you for all of these years, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a goat kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with prostitutes, you killed for him the fatted calf!'

And he said to him, `Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

We have an Eeyore here.

This story has been called the parable of the two prodigals, meaning that not only did the one son tragically fall, but the other, elder son also tragically falls from the glory his father would have wished for him. At the beginning, the younger son wished that his father was dead. At the end, did the older son wish his father was dead?

The older son is a tragic spiritual Eeyore.

His statement could have come from a very different angle. For all of the years the older son was in his father's service, he toiled, and he may not have had rich party food—only solid, nourishing, ordinary food day by day. For all these many years, he worked hard in the context of the father training him, and drawing him into mature manhood. In the meantime, his brother has been ripping up his own soul, losing even what he thought he had at the mercy of merciless people with no one else who

cared for his well-being. The brother who all but told his father, "I wish you were dead," was in every sense save the literal, himself *dead*.

If it is painful to lose one's parents, it is another level of pain to lose one's child, and the father had seen one of his sons—not to mention the older son's only brother—die a living death. Now he was back, and in every sense *including* the literal, alive. Was killing the fatted calf even *enough* of a celebration?

The older son didn't get it. How well did his service to his father work? Not very well; it went badly enough that instead of sharing in his father's joy at a lost son who "was dead, and is alive again," acts bitterly affronted and indicts his father searingly. Which is to say, the son's hard work didn't *work*, any more than Eeyore's laborious staring at his three sticks achieved the true heart of "Learning" and "Education."

The point, though, is not really the tragedy of the older son. The point is that God welcomes people who turn to him, and welcomes them with open arms. It is only one step to turn to God, even if you think you are ten thousand steps away. But when are we ready?

It is easy enough to wait for life to *really* begin. When? Maybe when the present illness is gone, or when we get that promotion, or maybe just when we get a job in the first place, or when someone we deal with will become not quite so difficult a person, or when we have something paid off, or when Washington gets its act together. When something big or small changes, *then* maybe we will be in God's blessing. St. Herman of Alaska met some people who were waiting for their lives to *really* begin ([source](#)):

Father Herman gave them all one general question: "Gentlemen, what do you love above all, and what will each of you wish for your happiness?" Various answers were offered... Some desired wealth, others glory, some a beautiful wife, and still others a beautiful ship he would captain; and so forth in the same vein. "Is it not true," Father Herman said to them concerning this, "that all your various wishes can bring us to one conclusion - that each of you desires that which in his own understanding he considers the best, and which is most worthy of his love?" They all answered, "Yes, that is so!" He then continued, "Would you not say, 'Is not that which is best, above all, and surpassing all, and that which by preference is most worthy of love the Very Lord our Jesus Christ who created us adorned us

of love, the very Lord, our Jesus Christ, who created us, adorned us with such ideals, gave life to all, sustains everything, nurtures and loves all, who is Himself Love and most beautiful of all men?' Should we not then love God above everything, desire Him more than anything, and search him out?"

All said, "Why, yes! That's self-evident!" Then the Elder asked, "But do you love God?" They all answered, "Certainly, we love God. How can we not love God?" "And I a sinner have been trying for more than forty years to love God, I cannot say that I love Him completely," Father Herman protested to them. He then began to demonstrate to them the way in which we should love God. "If we love someone," he said, "we always remember them; we try to please them. Day and night our heart is concerned with the subject. Is that the way you gentlemen love God? Do you turn to Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and fulfill His holy commandments?" They had to admit that they did not! "For our own good, and for our own fortune," continued the Elder, "let us at least promise ourselves that from this very minute we will try to love God more than anything and to fulfill His Holy Will!"

The time for God is not at some indefinite point in the future when things will fit our hopes better. The time to work with God, in a sense the only time we should be concerned with, is now. Not later, *now*.

## More precious than gold

When I was a child, I remembered a story about a fearsome dragon who told a knight that if the knight would tickle the dragon's throat with a sword, he would have a great treasure. The knight rode up on his horse and approached the dragon, already afraid, and asked if the treasure was as good as a good horse and a good suit of armor. It was more, the dragon said. The knight asked if the treasure was as good as a silver suit of armor, and shield and sword to match. It was, the dragon assured him. The knight then asked if the treasure was better than gold. The dragon answered that it was more precious than rooms full of gold. So the terrified knight trembled and tickled the dragon's throat with his sword, and asked what the treasure was. And the dragon turned and ripped the knight's sword out of his hand, breathing out a tremendous deluge of fire and smoke and roared, "Your *life!*" And the terrified knight, having lost his sword, fled as best he could, and grasped a treasure far more precious than rooms and rooms full of gold.

Hard times may still let us know what is truly important, and what is truly treasure.

Even if we are in an economic depression, we have a treasure worth more than rooms and rooms full of gold: our lives.

For the righteous who walk by faith, hard times may even turn out to be good times.

St. John Chrysostom once wrote to people who think they are somebody if they conspicuously ride on a horse and have an armed servant clear the way before them, and told them that they were missing something and have *all* the wrong priorities. These words seem like they have nothing to do with how to survive in an economic depression—but on a very deep level, they have *everything* to do with how to survive in an economic depression where we may lose any number of things that seem

so essential. St. John Chrysostom wrote ([source](#)):

And I know that I am disgusting my hearers. But what can I do? I have set my mind on this and will not stop saying these things, whether or not anything comes of it. For what is the point of having someone clear the way before you in the marketplace? Are you walking among wild beasts so that you need to drive away those who meet you? Do not be afraid of the people who approach you and walk near you; none of them bite. But why do you consider it an insult to walk alongside other people? What craziness is this, what ludicrous folly, when you don't mind having a horse follow close behind you, but if it is a person, you think you are disgraced unless the person is driven a hundred miles away. And why do you have servants to carry horse \_\_\_\_\_, using the free as slaves, or rather yourself living more dishonorably than any slave? For truly, anyone who bears so much pride is more repulsive than any slave.

Therefore people who have enslaved themselves to this vile habit will never come within sight of true liberty. No, if you must drive away and clear away anything, do not let it be those who come near you, but your own pride. Do not do this by your servant, but by yourself, not by this material weapon, but by the spiritual one. Since now your servant drives away those who walk alongside you, but you yourself are driven from your rightful place by your own self-will, more disgracefully than any servant can drive your neighbor. But if, descending from your horse, you will drive away pride by humility, you will sit higher and place yourself in greater honor, without needing any servant to do this for you. I mean that when you have become modest and walk on the ground, you will be seated on the horse-drawn carriage of humility which carries you up to the very heavens, the carriage with winged steeds: but if falling from the horse-drawn carriage of heaven, you pass into that of arrogance, you will be in no better state than crippled beggars who are carried along the ground—no, much more wretched and pathetic than they are: since they are carried because of their bodies' weakness, but you because of the disease of your own arrogance.

Some of us also need the carriage of humility, even if we are not even in a position to make everybody get out of our way. And some of us might

benefit from the loving interdependence that was how people survived the Great Depression.

In tough times—and in tougher times—we may lose things we have set our hearts on, but it may be that however much we resist, God will give us something better. What if I lose my car, for instance? How could I get something better? But it is entirely possible that I could get something better than my present car. I might get something better than my own Rolls Royce, even better than my own private jet. I might get more *interdependence*, where *I* do not get around by what *I* do by *my* car. I may still be able to go places, but now by the love of my friends and family.

In that case, if I get some groceries, or a ride to church, I am not getting it as something run by me, me, me; I am riding on community and love. And the love of another who cares about me is a much bigger thing than economic self-sufficiency. It's the same thing as food tasting better if it is prepared with love for hospitality—then it isn't just food. You are, in a very real sense, eating a friend's love, and that is a richer and deeper kind of sustenance—and a richer, deeper, and fuller *goodness*!

Who knows? I might ride even higher than this if my car is taken from me. Perhaps I might respond to the humiliation of losing my car by starting to let Christ chauffeur me to Heaven in the flying Rolls-Royce of humility. Maybe I might even start being grateful, and be carried by the car of gratitude, and look for ways that I might launch into the heavens on the immense celestial starship of service to others.

And it is the starship of service to others—of saving others even though I cannot save myself—that shines with celestial glory. "It is more blessed to give than to receive"—the [Sermon on the Mount](#) again. Perhaps I might stop thinking about my own survival and instead think about how I can save others even though I cannot save myself. Some people did not just survive the Great Depression; they learned that life is beautiful. They stopped being tin gods trying to rule over a shrunken world and became servants of God and each other in the vast mansions of a glorious God. In the Great Depression, they did not have gold, but they grasped a treasure vaster than rooms and rooms full of gold. For some, the Great Depression was a wakeup call to what is truly important in life.

And that is true wealth.

Why are some of us not living this way already? Repentance is terrifying. In the tale of the prodigal son, the son who had devoured his

father's property was in far from his father's house, and had real work to get back. He had to *travel* in a much rougher sense than taking a plane, train, or bus, and faced much nastier dangers than "Dinner in New York, breakfast in London, luggage in Sydney."

Our word "travel" comes from the French *travailler*, referring to work, and not exactly easy work: with slightly different spelling, the same word appears in English as "travail," meaning a mother's struggle in childbirth. Travel was hard, gruelling, and dangerous labor, and not for the faint of heart. And the prodigal son undertook travel with far less of the strength—not to mention absolutely none of the wealth—by which he had gotten there. The feat would have been comparable to running a marathon, or at least a marathon where your path might well go through the turf of thugs lying in wait and quite willing to kill anyone who would *travail* into their ambush.

And yet this is exactly what the prodigal son did. His brother may have done the ascetical work of prayers and fasting; but the younger son undertook something much tougher: repentance which is, in a spiritual sense, what the younger son did to return home.

Repentance has been called unconditional surrender. It has been called other things as well, and it terrifies: it is a decision to return home and beg for mercy when you have no grounds to expect to be treated like anything but the vilest of the scum of the earth. Perhaps the Father's love to the point of madness may respond otherwise when we have repented. Perhaps when we surrender conditionally and expect to be razed to the ground, we find ourselves walking away triumphant victors whose refusal to surrender was holding on to defeat for dear life, terrified to let go of our defeat because we think it helps us. Perhaps we have nothing, really, to lose but our misery. But that isn't our concern when we need to repent.

But if we can repent—for all of us have much to repent of—and step into the [Sermon on the Mount](#) and begin to live by faith, then the Father's love will answer, and give us something better than whatever we grasp for in our forgetfulness that a provident God already knows our needs just as well in an economic depression as any other time. In an economic depression as much as any other time, the Father's love can meet these needs much better than we will if we control our inheritance ourselves.

In hard times in the past the Lord's arm and providence have shown

more plainly than they sometimes do here. Do you want to know how to survive an economic depression? The answer is very simple. It's not a matter of what you arrange. It's a matter of what *God* provides. When there is no natural hope of God's saints being taken care of, it may be a supernatural providence that we don't see as often when we have easy times.

In hard times as well as easy, the luminous thread woven throughout Scripture, appearing in one place in the words, "the just shall live by faith," and another place in a [Sermon on the Mount](#) that says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and his perfect righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you"—this luminous thread is at the heart of faith, spirituality, and religion—and this luminous thread is more. It is a participation in the life of a God of love to the point of madness.

The luminous thread is spun by a God of love to the point of madness.

It may be in hard times that we fear that in hard times we will lose what is good for us.

But it may be that hard times, whether a recession, depression, or economic collapse, serve as a divinely given clue-by-four when we discover that the Father's love to the point of madness knows, and will give, what is much better for us. And on that point, I would like to quote a praise song about what is truly more precious than gold: the words go:

Lord, you are more precious than silver.  
Lord, you are more costly than gold.  
Lord, you are more beautiful than diamonds,  
And nothing I desire compares to you.

In one variant, these words answer:

And the Father said:  
"Child, you are more precious than silver.  
Child, you are more costly than gold.  
Child, you are more beautiful than diamonds,  
And nothing I desire compares to you."

These are the words of divine love to the point of madness, of a God who loves saints and sinners alike, of a God who rejoices more over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous who do not need to

repent. And this is a God who loves us in hard times as well as good, a God of providence who seeks our highest good whenever we turn to him.  
God be merciful to us. (Amen!)

# **On Humor**

## Two parallel translations

Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor *jesting*, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. (Ephesians 5:4, KJV)

Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or *coarse joking*, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. (Ephesians 5:4, NIV)

Let me put a question, for which I have quoted this verse in two different translations, the King James Version and the New International Version. *This verse refers to humor. Does it refer only to off-color humor, or humor as a whole?*

I will be building up to an answer taken from the first-class humorist Mark Twain: "**The secret source of humor itself is not joy, but sorrow. There is no humor in Heaven.**"

A look at the Greek turns up a Greek term *eutrapelia* which only occurs here; it is not mentioned in Kittel's (unabridged) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, but there is an entry for *Strong's Greek Lexicon*:

### *Eutrapelia*

wit, liveliness

### *eutrapelia*

witticism, i.e. (in a vulgar sense) ribaldry

Derivation: from a compound of G2095 and a derivative of the base of G5157 (meaning well-turned, i.e. ready at repartee, jocose);

KJV Usage: jesting. G2095 G5157

Thayer:

- 1) pleasantry, humour, facetiousness
- 2) in a bad sense
- 2a) scurrility, ribaldry, low jesting

The ambiguity is there in the Greek, which can mean witty repartee, humor as a whole, or vulgar humor specifically. The immediate context suggests coarse speech, but I would be wary of simply concluding that the verse only deals with lewd humor alone. The *Philokalia* gives encyclopaedic lists of vices, and some of them list jokes; in context coarse jokes are condemned but the condemnation is not limited to lewd humor. One thing we might miss if we simply try to resolve an ambiguity and ask, "Does the verse refer to off-color humor alone, or humor as a whole?" is that **the quintessential joke, [the bread and butter of rec.humor.funny](#), [the joke that has its own Wikipedia entry](#), is the obscene one:** the joke that is good enough for polite company is just hanging along for the ride.

(In which case the ambiguity of "joking" vs. "coarse joking" could be resolved that the verse applies principally and primarily to coarse joking, but extends naturally to joking in general.)

But let us leave that for the time being. And let us give the benefit of the doubt to the interpretation of one word in one verse: even if I am raising a concern about humor as such, including good, clean humor, one word in one verse is not the best place to argue from. Besides the *Philokalia* can include jokes and laughter when an author tries to catalogue every vice, I am concerned about Mark Twain's "The secret source of humor is not joy but sorrow; there is no humor in Heaven." I am concerned because my best sense is that he was right.

One time when my spiritual senses were being honed (during the discipline of a fast), I noticed something as a dialogue went on. I told the father of a kid I bantered with, "[Name] hurt my feelings." The kid said, "How did I do *that*?" And I replied, "Fess up, [Name]. Then we'll both know." And that time I noticed something; something in my end of the dialogue felt like a spiritual scream. My eyes were being opened to something laced in my humor; no complaint about either of the guys I was talking with but there was something I sensed in my many favorite jokes that tasted sweet but left you not realizing you were sick afterwards. To give one example:

Someone decided to become an icefisher. So he got a bunch of equipment, went on the ice, and drilled down a couple of inches when a deep, booming voice said, "There are no fish there!"

The surprised icefisher took up his gear, moved over fifty feet

The surprised icefisher took up his gear, moved over fifty feet, and began to drill down. He got down just half an inch when a deep, booming voice said, "There are no fish there!"

He moved over a hundred feet more, looked around, and the deep, booming voice said yet again, "Nor are there any fish there!"

The icefisher looked around and asked, "Who are you, God?"

The deep, booming voice said, "No! I'm the arena manager!"

The secret source of this joke's humor is pain. It smuggles in more pain than you would imagine at first: someone is idiot enough to try to go ice fishing in a hockey arena. And the humor comes when that pain is pulled into the open. Nor, really, is the pain just for the people in the joke. The joke is a pleasure laced with pain. Perhaps there is [a pleasure-pain syndrome where pleasure is laced with pain](#), but here we do not notice we have been sickened.

I once thought this joke would have been a good basis for a homily, to paint a picture where people ask of someone who dares to speak decisively in morals, "Who do you think you are? God?" and we reply that we're just arena employees. But to a friend I was talking to, and to me, there was something that seemed wrong about using this joke in a homily even when it might serve as an excellent springboard.

Not all jokes are created equal: the crass vulgarity is more wrong than the clean joke and the sidesplitting joke you repeat is more wrong than the spontaneous banter, but there is a line of continuity between all of these, between the cleanest and the most foul.

## So is there good news?

I would place two mental images in opposition to each other, in response to the question, "Is there any good news?" One is a place I worked where there was constant lewd joking; overall I got the impression that the obscene banter was a desperate bid to say something interesting, from people who could have had any number of interesting discussions. The chief effect I remember experiencing was not exactly being offended, but drained and drained. If an off-color jab is a desperate bid to say something interesting, it is not exciting, but dreary: if the most interesting thing you have to say are the same five dirty jokes, how great is that dullness!

The other image I would place opposite it is a priest standing, eyes closed, silent, intently concentrated in prayer. He is joyful, but the overall striking image is less joy than silence that speaks volumes. And this priest does not tell jokes, at least not often. But humor is not something missing from this priest. Maybe he does have a sense of humor and a few favorite jokes; I don't know. But what he has is better than funny, and what he gives others is better than a joke, however funny. He has and shares joy, and the rapt silence which is among his greatest treasures is also something he shares to the best of his ability.

Mark Twain said, "There is no humor in Heaven." If it seems natural to ask, "I *like* jokes. What consolation will I have if I give them up?" the answer is simply, "Heaven."

When I was moving towards Orthodoxy, an Orthodox friend warned me that he had found Orthodoxy to be "a long road of pain and loss". This he said, not to deter me from Orthodoxy, but so I could "know what you are getting into." And his words have proven true, but there is something he didn't tell me. The very real road of pain and loss has cost things I'd never imagine I'd be giving up, but the pain and loss have been the pain

and loss of dislodging pieces of Hell and making room for a fuller grasp of Heaven. [Orthodoxy has cost me my interest in fantasy](#), which is the same as saying that it cost me desires for things that were not real and I could not *ever* have, and given me in place desires for things that were real and a fuller desire for the One who is supremely Real. [Orthodoxy has cost me my almost religious "faith" in science](#), which is ultimately to say that it has cost me answering some of the wrong questions. [Orthodoxy has cost me trying to sate myself on pleasures](#), and cleared a distraction from things that offer genuine satisfaction. If Orthodoxy costs me [an interest in humor](#), it may be so that I can live here on earth the Heaven that has never known humor's sorrow. If Orthodoxy bids me say farewell to my search for earthly honors ([I really have enough](#)), it is so that I may search for Heavenly honors: the only honors that really matter. **[In all these things God is at work to give me the maximum in life.](#)**

The details and particular journey will be different for different people; this post and [The Pleasure-Pain Syndrome](#) pull from the *Philokalia*, but pull mint, dill, and cumin where the *Philokalia* offer justice, mercy, and faith. The *Philokalia* offer detailed discussions about how we are lured into different demonic traps, but the discussion of jokes is trivial by comparison with the discussion of unchastity. If it is even trivial. It does not occupy center stage, ever, but there is something worth unfolding, and it is particularly worth unfolding here and now.

We live in a time of pleasure seeking where pleasure delivery systems like Viagra *sell*. We also live in a time of lesser pleasures: pleasure delivery systems like televisions and smartphones *sell*. And we do not say with St. Paul, "When I became a man, I put childish pleasure-seeking behind me." And in this context, it can stretch us to say, "Jokes are nice, but I'm trying to avoid them and move on to bigger things." One could more sharply cite the Desert Fathers, "The Last Judgment awaits, and you laugh?", but we can say, "Sorry; it's powered by hidden pain; I'm looking for my happiness from other sources." And we can make a small step to move on to bigger things.

*Could you cut back on jokes, just a little?*

# Humor Delivers Pain

**Humor delivers pain.** That may sound like a strange thing to say but listen to me for a little bit. If you look at a joke, and really see why it's funny, the humor comes from delivering pain. Mark Twain said, "*The secret source of humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in Heaven.*"

Let me give one example of humor that is funny because it delivers pain.

There was a man who decided he was going to become an icefisher, so he brought a bunch of equipment, got on the ice, and started to drill down a few inches. A deep, booming voice said, "There are no fish there!"

Startled, the man moved over fifty feet and started to drill again. The voice said, "There are no fish there, either!"

The man moved his equipment a hundred feet further, looked around, and the voice said, "Nor are there any fish there!"

The icefisher asked, "Who are you, God?"

The voice said, "No! I'm the arena manager."

What's so funny about this? The answer is that we have been slipped a bit of pain, slipped a very large bit of pain in fact: someone who genuinely and dearly wanted to be an icefisher was stupid enough to try to go icefishing in a hockey arena. Let me give another example.

For background to what is a bit of an inside joke, field service engineers enjoy a terrible reputation among a certain type of IT guru who, by the time they call for help, have done enough due diligence to understand the system better than the field service engineers do. And often field service engineers who don't know how to solve a problem try

swapping out parts with ~~known~~ assumed good parts to identify which part is the problem. This is called by the extremely pejorative metaphor, "Easter egging."

Q: How can you tell if a field service engineer has a flat tire?

A: The car's jacked up and he's swapping one of the tires with a spare to see which one's flat.

Q: How can you tell if a field service engineer is out of gas?

A: The car's jacked up and he's swapping one of the tires with a spare to see which one's flat.

This reminds me of one time I heard a local guru on a call with technical support; he was trying to talk with Dell because they shipped him a computer with visible chunks of dust under the screen. I didn't hear the other side of his conversation, but I did hear his words: "There's dust under the screen... And why are we messing with the BIOS [software settings]? ... Dude, there's *dust* under the *screen*!" He had to finally speak with the helpdesk employee's manager to recognize that the computer had been shipped with noticeable chunks of dust under the screen, that this was a problem, and the problem was not going to be solved by fiddling with software or anything else besides removing the dust from under the screen.

His side of the conversation was not intended as humor; it came out that way because it was painful enough that we laugh when we hear it. And the two field service engineer jokes, if they are really two jokes, deliver pain. The first joke delivers pain that a field service engineer will go Easter egging when casual observation would make it clear which tire was flat. The second joke, which uses the first joke as part of its buildup, says, metaphorically speaking, that a field service engineer has no strategies beyond swapping tires, and no concept that there are problems that are not solvable by swapping tires. If the first joke delivers pain, the second joke delivers unbelievable pain. And it's the same sort of scream as, "And why are we messing with the BIOS [software settings]?"

Let me step back from these minutia to quote the great humorist Mark Twain again: "*The secret source of humor itself is not joy, but sorrow. There is no humor in Heaven.*" I'm not sure if you've noticed this, but on stage at least professional comedians are bitterly miserable. I don't know about their private life; it could possibly be just an act. But on stage, at least, comedians draw from a well of sorrow, and there is something in

the same vein of "Send in the Clowns," which is not an ode to joy, but a dire bid to anaesthetize misery.

In my own life I have moved from telling jokes a lot, and making jokes for that matter ([The Joy of Windows](#), and [a joke I hope the reader doesn't get](#)), to starting to move away from humor as delivering pain. [In my last speech on iPhones and spirituality, I described two \*Far Side\* cartoons about television](#). But the point, the entire point, of their inclusion was not to make my lecture more pleasant. It was to deliver pain. And what I have found in trying to unplug humor as something that slips bits of pain is that my total pain is less, and there is more joy. It was terrifying to contemplate letting go of at least some humor, but what I have found is more freedom and more joy. Which sometimes happens when you let go of something you are afraid to let go.

There is no humor in Heaven, and letting go of humor may be more joyful than we think.

# The Hydra

## A Surprise About "Joy"

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

one of the front runners, and depending on the circles you move in, it might be said that choosing anyone else is a choice that requires justification.

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

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

...The first is itself the memory of a memory. As I stood beside a flowering currant bush on a summer day there suddenly arose in me without warning, and as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; Milton's "enormous bliss" of Eden (giving the full, ancient meaning to "enormous") comes somewhere near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what? not, certainly, for a biscuit tin filled with moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my own past. 'Τουλιανποθω [Oh, I desire too much]—and before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison.

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

The third glimpse came through poetry. I had become fond of

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

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

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

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

I know that desire. I know it intimately, and it has been called one of the central defining characteristics. And, as is said in *Ostrov*, "I know [the demon] personally." It is a form of covetousness, one that dwarfs the mere covetousness inspired by car ads, which portray luxury cars as mysterious, sensual, and intimate, and are in their own way "a particular kind of unhappiness or grief", and which are in their own lesser way "a

kind we want." So far as I know, the [Philokalia](#), which are (more than any other collection I've read, including the Bible) the science of interior struggle and spiritual warfare) says nothing of this secular enrapturement in its description of human beatitude. It does, perhaps, discuss something like this in the demon of noonday; today monks are perennially warned of the passion of escaping the here and now in which God has placed us, and the strict monastic is ordinarily to stay in one's cell and fight the demon of noonday. One classic story tells of a monk who said he defeated the demon of noonday by visiting an elder, and another monk sharply corrected him: far from *defeating* the demon of noonday, his trip was *giving in* to the demon of noonday. This longing, called *Sehnsucht* by the Romantics (and remember that C.S. Lewis's first work after returning to Christianity was [The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Defense of Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism](#), is eloquently given voice in a work connecting conservative Christianity with Jungian psychology in Brent Curtis's [Less-Wild Lovers: Standing at the Crossroads of Desire](#), which was published in Mars Hill Review, republished along with [First Things](#) and other heavyweights in the conservative Christian [Leadership University](#), and been gobbled up by complementarians (I am one) with works such as John Eldredge's [Wild at Heart](#). But there is an issue, not with complementarianism as such (though complementarians may jump at a literate voice saying something out of [lock]step with feminism), but with what is *not* present in [Less-Wild Lovers](#). And I would challenge the reader to look at the compelling, *haunting* picture in [Less-Wild Lovers](#), and ask what is not there for something that complains to be Christian: where, in the entire piece, is the human plight described in terms of the sin and evils condemned by Christian tradition? For the moment let's set aside the question of whether sin is understood, as in [Pilgrim's Progress](#), through the paradigm example of a judicial crime, or whether it is understood as in Orthodoxy through the paradigm example of a disease. John Bunyan and an Orthodox Christian can alike say that judged by the paradigm of the Ten Commandments, we don't stack up, and the Ten Commandments provide a yardstick of something seriously important in human living. Where in the entire article is the yardstick of human failing associated with such things as are in the Ten Commandments? And once a problem is admitted, where does God stand with regard to the center of things? Admittedly one is invited to a larger spiritual world, but when

does the advocated "way of the heart" revolve around Christ? Admittedly the differences here between Protestant and Orthodox are significant, but even with these differences where does the thesis that we are marred by sin and saved by Christ ever shape the outlook in the article? [Less-Wild Lovers](#) compellingly concentrates something that diluted C.S. Lewis's Christianity, something that helps make the [The Chronicles of Narnia](#) compelling, and a clue to something that is rotten in the state of Denmark. The longing C.S. Lewis appeals to is a form of covetousness, one I am too familiar with, and seriously not-cool.

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

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

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

And, I argued, all sin is drinking out of the toilet. For example, getting drunk may feel enticingly nice the first time or two. But being drunk all the time, as any recovering alcoholic will tell you, is suffering you wouldn't want on your worst enemy. And covetousness as a whole is drinking out of the toilet. Pornography, with its lustful shade of covetousness, begins by being very enticing, but lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe: first pornography disenchantments everything that is not porn, and then it progressively disenchantments itself. And it also fits to add that ordinary covetousness is pleasant at first. Watching a really enticing commercial may help you understand the words, "Having is not as pleasing as wanting. It is not logical, but it is

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

## The hydra, or one end of a fallen tree branch

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

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

retained the ambient orientation that powers magical fantasy.

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

## Magic as an unnatural vice

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

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

idealization.)

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

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

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

way out of the damn here and now — and make the here and now matter in the process! The list is open-ended and seemingly limitless; one of the characteristics of pride to the degree of prelest (which has been called "spiritual illusion" and "spiritual lust") is a progressive disengagement from the here and now, absorbed in funhouse mirrors.

## Awakening

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

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

And it may turn out in the end that happiness was, like a pair of glasses, on our nose the whole time. If we let go of paganism as a way to connect with nature, we may find that Orthodoxy has held this connection with nature all the time, in details like the flowers adorning icon stands and the saying that if you have two small coins you should use one to buy prosphora and the other to buy flowers for the icons, to the status of the Orthodox Church as the vanguard of the whole visible Creation returning to her Lord, to monastics who cultivate a connection with God and end up having a connection to the natural world as well, to everything discussed in [Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth](#). It turns out that the idea of paganism and Romanticism as the way to connect with nature was a decoy, but the good news is that the decoy is

not needed. We have better.

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

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

We have nothing to lose but our bondage to sin

we have nothing to lose but our bondage to sin.

# Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth

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

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

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

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

Shall I thank Thee for a starry sapphire orb  
hung with a million million diamonds, where  
"The heavens declare the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands.  
Day to day utters speech,  
and night to night proclaims knowledge.

There are no speeches or words

there are no speeches or words,  
in which their voices are not heard.  
Their voice is gone out into all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the earth.  
In the sun he has set his tabernacle;  
and he comes forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber:  
he will exult as a giant to run his course."?

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

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

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

Shall I forget how the Holy Grail itself  
is but the shadow,  
the impact,  
the golden surface reflecting the light,  
secondary reflection to the primeval Light,  
the wrapping paper that disintegrates next to the Gift it holds:  
that which is  
mystically and really  
the body and the blood of Christ:  
the family of saints  
for me to be united to,  
and the divine Life?

Shall I meditate

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

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

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

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

And the royal priesthood is one in which we are called to be  
a royal priesthood,  
a chosen people

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

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

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

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

So I am called to learn to say, "we",  
and when we learn to say we,  
that "we" means,  
a royal priesthood,  
a chosen people,  
more than conquerors,  
a Church of God's eclecticism,

a family of little Christs,  
made divine,  
the ornament of Creation, visible and invisible,  
called to lead the whole Creation  
loved into being by God,  
to be in love  
that to God they may return.

And when we worship thus,  
it cannot be only us, for  
apples and alligators,  
boulders and bears,  
creeks and crystals,  
dolphins and dragonflies,  
eggplants and emeralds,  
fog and furballs,  
galaxies and grapes,  
horses and habaneros,  
ice and icicles,  
jacinth and jade,  
kangaroos and knots,  
lightning and light,  
meadows and mist,  
nebulas and neutrons,  
oaks and octupi,  
porcupines and petunias,  
quails and quarks,  
rocks and rivers,  
skies and seas,  
toads and trees,  
ukeleles and umber umbrellas,  
wine and weirs,  
xylophones and X-rays,  
yuccas and yaks,  
zebras and zebrawood,  
are all called to join us before Thy throne  
in the Divine Liturgy:

Praise ye the Lord

Praise ye the Lord.  
Praise ye the Lord from the heavens:  
praise him in the heights.  
Praise ye him, all his angels:  
praise ye him, all his hosts.  
Praise ye him, sun and moon:  
praise him, all ye stars of light.  
Praise him, ye heavens of heavens,  
and ye waters that be above the heavens.  
Let them praise the name of the Lord:  
for he commanded, and they were created.  
He hath also stablished them for ever and ever:  
he hath made a decree which shall not pass.  
Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps:  
Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours;  
stormy wind fulfilling his word:  
Mountains, and all hills;  
fruitful trees, and all cedars:  
Beasts, and all cattle;  
creeping things, and flying fowl:  
Kings of the earth, and all people;  
princes, and all judges of the earth:  
Both young men, and maidens;  
old men, and children:  
Let them praise the name of the Lord:  
for his name alone is excellent;  
his glory is above the earth and heaven.  
He also exalteth the horn of his people,  
the praise of all his saints;  
even of the children of Israel,  
a people near unto him.  
Praise ye the Lord.

How can we know Christ  
as the bridge between God and mankind  
if we forget Christ  
as the bridge between God  
and his whole Creation?

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

On what day do we proclaim:

As the prophets beheld,  
as the Apostles have taught,  
as the Church has received,  
as the teachers have dogmatized,  
as the Universe has agreed,  
as Grace has shown forth,  
as Truth has revealed,  
as falsehood has been dissolved,  
as Wisdom has presented,  
as Christ awarded...  
thus we declare,  
thus we assert,  
thus we preach  
Christ our true God,  
and honor as Saints  
in words,  
in writings,  
in thoughts,  
in sacrifices,  
in churches,  
in Holy Icons;  
on the one hand  
worshipping and reverencing  
Christ as God and Lord,

and on the other hand  
honoring as true servants  
of the same Lord of all  
and accordingly offering them  
veneration... *[Then louder!]*  
This is the Faith of the Apostles,  
this is the Faith of the Fathers,  
this is the Faith of the Orthodox,  
this is the Faith which has established the Universe.

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

And all that that entails  
means that Christ became matter  
and that matter is to be  
glorified in his triumph,  
the same Christ  
whose physical body was transfigured  
and shone with the Light of Heaven itself  
and this was not an opposite  
of what is to be normal  
but rather transformed what is normal  
so that our embodiment is to be our glory.  
And this Christ,  
who lived as a particular man,  
in a particular place,  
honored every time and place,  
as the Nobel Prize for physics  
honors not simply one chosen physicist per year,  
but in its spirit  
honors the whole enterprise of physics.  
When Christ entered a here and now,  
he honored every here and now

he honored every here and now,  
and the Sunday of the restoration of icons  
is not "The Sunday of Icons"  
but

"The Sunday of Orthodoxy."

Christ was not a "generic" man  
with no real time or place.

Christ entered a here and now  
and his saints entered a here and now  
and if he became what we are,  
that we might become what he is,  
the divine become human  
that the human might become divine,  
then if we are not to divide the Christ,  
or truncate the Christ,  
then his victory extends  
to spirit shining through matter  
in icons.

How can we praise Thee for this, O Lord?

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

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

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

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Beholding thee,

... ..

the living book of Christ,  
sealed by the Spirit,  
the great archangel exclaimed to thee,  
O pure one:

Rejoice, vessel of joy,  
through which the curse  
of the first mother is annulled.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, Virgin bride of God,  
restoration of Adam and death of hell.

Rejoice, all-immaculate one,  
palace of the King of all.

Rejoice, fiery throne of the Almighty.

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

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

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

Amen.

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

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

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

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

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

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

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, mercy-seat of the world,  
most pure Lady.

Rejoice, ladder raising all men  
from the earth by grace.

Rejoice, bridge that in very truth  
hast led from death to life  
all those that hymn thee.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, most pure one,  
higher than the heavens,  
who didst painlessly carry within thy womb  
the Fountain of the earth.

Rejoice, sea-shell that with thy  
blood didst dye a divine purple robe  
for the King of Hosts.

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

Rejoice, Lady who in truth  
didst give birth to the lawgiver,  
Who freely washed clean  
the iniquities of all.

O Maiden who hast not known wedlock,  
unfathomable depth, unutterable height,  
by whom we have been deified.

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

Amen.

Praising thee who hast woven  
for the world a Crown

not made by hand of man,  
we cry to thee:  
Rejoice, O Virgin,  
the guardian of all men,  
fortress and stronghold and sacred refuge.

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

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

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

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, most pure one,  
the strength and fortress of men,  
sanctuary of glory,  
the death of hell,  
all-radiant bridal chamber.  
Rejoice, joy of angels.  
Rejoice, helper of them  
that pray to thee with faith.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, O Lady,  
fiery chariot of the Word,  
living paradise,

having in thy midst  
the Tree of Life,  
the Lord of Life,  
Whose sweetness vivifieth  
all who partake of Him  
with faith, though they  
have been subject to corruption.

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

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

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

Rejoice, most pure one,  
spacious tabernacle of the Word,  
shell which produced  
the divine Pearl.  
Rejoice, all-wondrous Theotokos,  
who dost reconcile with God  
all who ever call thee blessed.

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

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

O undefiled bridal chamber of the Word,  
cause of deification for all.

rejoice, all honorable preaching  
of the prophet;  
rejoice, adornment of the apostles.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

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

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

Behold, to thee, O Virgin,  
we cry: Rejoice!  
Be thou the port and a haven  
for all that sail  
upon the troubled waters of affliction,  
amidst all the snares of the enemy.

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

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

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

O Lord God of our Fathers.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

We sing of thee, saying aloud:

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

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, Bride of God,  
who gavest birth  
to the Healer of all;  
mystical staff,  
that didst blossom with the unfading Flower.  
Rejoice, O Lady,  
through whom we are filled  
with joy and inherit life.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

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

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

The ends of the earth  
praise thee and call thee blessed,  
and they cry to thee  
with love:

Rejoice, pure scroll,  
upon which the Word was written  
by the finger of the Father.

Do thou beseech Him  
to inscribe thy servants  
in the book of life, O Theotokos.

Both now, and ever,

and unto the ages of ages.

Amen.

We thy servants pray to thee  
and bend the knees of our hearts:  
Incline thine ear, O pure one;  
save thy servants who are always sinking,  
and preserve thy city  
from every enemy captivity, O Theotokos.

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

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

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

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

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

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

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

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

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

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

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

Let every mortal born on earth,  
radiant with light,  
in spirit leap for joy;  
and let the host of the angelic powers  
celebrate and honor the holy feast  
of the Mother of God, and let them cry:  
Rejoice! Pure and blessed Ever-Virgin.

who gavest birth to God.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Let us, the faithful, call to thee:

Rejoice! Through thee, O Maiden, we have become partakers of everlasting joy.

Save us from temptations, from barbarian captivity, and from every other injury that befalleth sinful men

because of the multitude of their transgressions.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Thou hast appeared as our enlightenment and confirmation;

wherefore, we cry to thee:

Rejoice, never-setting star that bringest into the world

the great Sun. Rejoice, pure Virgin that didst open the closed Eden.

Rejoice, pillar of fire, leading mankind to a higher life.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Let us stand with reverence

in the house of our God,

and let us cry aloud:

Rejoice, Mistress of the world.

Rejoice, Mary, Lady of us all.

Rejoice, thou who alone art immaculate and fair among women.

Rejoice, vessel that receivedst the inexhaustible myrrh poured out on thee.

Glory to the Father,

and to the Son,

and to the Holy Spirit.

Thou dove that hast borne the Merciful One, rejoice, ever-virgin!

Rejoice, glory of all the saints.

Rejoice, crown of martyrs.

Rejoice, divine adornment

of all the righteous  
and salvation of us the faithful.

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

Amen.

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

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

To her is sung:

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

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

Mary is the one whose womb  
contained the uncontainable God.

When that happened,

, . . . . .

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

Once you understand this exchange,  
it changes everything.

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

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

What is this fire?  
Is it literal heat from a real fire?  
Or is it something deeper,  
something more fire-like than fire itself?  
Would not someone who understood the seraphim  
as the highest angels,  
angels that burn,  
would instead ask if our "real" fires  
are truly real?  
Is it emotion?  
Or is it not "emotion"  
as we understand the term,  
as "deep love"  
is not "hypocritical politeness"  
as we understand the term?  
Or yet still more alien?

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

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

And yet an instant  
of direct touch with God the Father.

were that even possible,  
would incinerate the seraphim.

Then how can we approach God?

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

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

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

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

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

There is a mystic likeness  
between  
Mary, the Mother of God,  
the Church,  
and the world,  
feminine beauty  
created, headed, and served

by a masculine revealed God  
whom no one can measure.  
His Light is incomparably more glorious;  
we can know the energies from God  
but never know God's essence,  
and yet to ask that question is  
the wrong way of looking at it.  
It is like asking,  
"Which would you choose:  
Compassion for your neighbor or common decency,  
Being a good communicator or using language well,  
Living simply or not wasting electricity?"  
Christ and the Church are one,  
a single organism,  
and in that organism,  
the rule is one unified organism,  
not two enemies fighting for the upper hand.  
I am one of the faithful,  
and the clergy are not clergy at my expense.  
We are one organism.  
The Gift of the Eucharist does not happen,  
except that it be celebrated by a priest,  
and except that the people say, "Amen!"  
The Church in its fullness is present  
where at least one bishop or priest is found,  
and at least one faithful—  
and without the faithful,  
the clergy are not fully the Church.  
The "official" priest is priest,  
not instead of a priestly call among the faithful,  
but precisely as the crystallization of a priesthood in which  
there is no male nor female,  
red nor yellow nor black nor white,  
rich nor poor, but Christ is all,  
and is in all, with no first or second class faithful.  
Every Orthodox,  
every Christian,  
every person

is called to be  
part of a single united organism,  
a royal priesthood,  
a chosen people,  
more than conquerors,  
a Church of God's eclecticism,  
made divine  
a family of little Christs,  
sons to God and brothers to Christ,  
the ornament of Creation, visible and invisible,  
called to lead the whole Creation  
loved into being by God,  
to be in love  
that to God they may return.

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

what can we do  
but bow down in worship?

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

**Amen.**

# The Law of Love Leaves the Golden Rule Completely in the Dust

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fumble](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fumble)

In the present Wikipedia article on the Golden Rule, Harvard's humanist chaplain Greg Epstein is quoted as saying, "**do unto others' ... is a concept that essentially no religion misses entirely. *But not a single one of these versions of the golden rule requires a God***". Yet months after I lodged a protest about this at least depending on where your quote from the Gospel begins and ends, the chaplain's pristine wording still summarizes a list of quotes from the New Testament that begins and ends where some would expect it to. (In the other two parallel passages, Christ is quoted as saying explicitly that the duty to love one's neighbor was like the duty to love God.) As quoted earlier in the very same Wikipedia article:

A similar passage, a parallel to the [Great Commandment](#), is [Luke 10:25-28](#)

<sup>25</sup>And one day an authority on the law stood up to put Jesus

to the test. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to receive eternal life?"

<sup>26</sup>What is written in the Law?" Jesus replied. "How do you understand it?" <sup>27</sup>He answered, " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your strength and with all your mind.'(Deuteronomy 6:5) And, 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.' " <sup>28</sup>"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do that, and you will live.".

After the point where the quote is ended as cited here, Christ is asked an evasive question and [drives home his point with an answer that is absolutely ludicrous and is meant to make his interlocutor pointedly uncomfortable](#). Though the absolute love for God is not treated as up for debate here, **trying to love your neighbor as yourself without loving the Lord with your entire being is a chicken with its head cut off.**

For now, I do not want to go into the unquoted followup to a question about where our obligations stop. I wish instead to say quite specifically here what the text quoted in the Wikipedia says. What it says, in essence, that "Love your neighbor as you love yourself" is a spillover to an absolute obligation to love God with your whole being. The obligation to love one's neighbor is, in mathematical language, a corollary to an obligation to love God. It's a consequence of the first stated imperative. Whilst one can cut the beginning and ending of the quotation so that "Love your neighbor as yourself" is all that survives the abbreviation, the obligation to love one's neighbor is but a brilliant shadow cast by the infinite obligation to love God. There is some degree of confusion in the suggestion that this gem, shared by Jew and Christian, works just as well if "Love your neighbor as yourself" is stripped of its foundation of, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your strength and with all your mind." There is considerable insensitivity in seeing the two but failing to recognize them as connected.

While Eastern Orthodoxy may have a rich and many-layered understanding of holy icons and experience a rich interconnectedness between the theology of holy icons on the one hand, and a human race created in the image and likeness of God as stated in the very opening chapter of the Bible, it is not just Eastern Orthodox who have reason to

see an implied, too-obvious-to-need-stating connection between loving God and loving people who are made in the image of God. You cannot be cruel to a child without paining that child's healthy parent, and it is confusion to try to love God without implications for loving one's neighbor. I am not aware of C.S. Lewis articulating any particularly interesting theology of icon as such, but the rising crescendo that closes [The Weight of Glory](#) could hardly be clearer: "There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses." We are to love God entirely, and this love must unfold to loving God in the person of every neighbor who bears God's divine image. Only a Harvard humanist chaplain could make a blanket statement for all world religions and let slip something so foundational to the plain, old New Testament. You know, the text from which we learned John 3:16 as Bible-believing children.

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Having said such, I would like to go over some rules and variations related to the Golden Rule, before explaining why I believe "Love your neighbor as yourself" is far more interesting than "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

### **A Fool's Golden Rule: *"If you can't take it, don't dish it out!"***

There is a bit of social wisdom, legitimate enough in itself, that is a sort of spurious version of the Golden Rule: "Don't tease others beyond the point where you can handle them returning the same." It may be wise enough to observe in practice, as it's really best not to get into waters deeper than you can swim, but in itself doesn't shed much light on whether teasing should really be avoided (a position that has adherents), or teasing is a legitimate and important dimension to any particularly strong personal connection (another position with adherents).

Of greater concern is this: different people have different tolerances for how much they can enjoy banter. Perhaps others will present less of a confusing situation if they also follow this Fool's Golden Rule, but it is desirable, and in the spirit of a real Golden Rule, to avoid teasing others beyond what they can handle.

If we go with an expectation that some people avoid getting into waters beyond what they can swim in, and some are less perspective, there is an element of self-care in making sure you don't invite more teasing than you can handle, and self-care can be perfectly legitimate. However, it doesn't address how to approach banter legitimately, and without dishing out needless pain. Perhaps one pair of options are either to mostly avoid teasing, indefinitely, or to start very lightly, gradually escalate with a question mark in your eyes, and stop immediately and later on tone things down a bit on any social cue that the other person has had enough. I believe this suggestion is arguably appropriate, but runs somewhat independently of the Golden Rule, and is even based on recognition that knowing what "you would have others do unto you" does not fully answer everything essential. Teasing within people's tolerances is an area where knowing only your own limits is not enough.

**However**, this would provide a nuance some have explored in relation to the Golden Rule. If you are eating peanut butter and jelly

sandwiches and a friend with a deadly peanut allergy walks by, perhaps you might show social respect, but there is neither any faintest obligation of hospitality nor the Golden Rule to knowingly give your special-needs friend food containing a large amount of peanut ingredients. If you're having beef stew and a vegetarian friend walks by, one obvious level of interpreting the Golden Rule is to offer some social salute and, depending on how rushed the friend is, invite the friend to join the conversation but not, under any ordinary circumstance, offer a bowl of beef stew. A classic comic has a father taking a son to a restaurant and bowling to celebrate, and in the last frame the mother tells the son, "I know; we also did all the things he likes for my birthday too."

I might note that some Orthodox authors have challenged this nuance (or, perhaps, nuanced the nuance). The essential argument is that if you're spiritually healthy, you will probably be at least sometimes seeking for yourself things that are good and genuinely in your best interest. If you are trying to show kindness to someone in the grip of passions, that person will be seeking to indulge passion and not what is in his best interests. The correct gift is, for that person, one that in some minor way, and without invading and assuming command, what you would want in the sense of something in one's own best interest, and not what the other person would want in the sense of serving one's passions.

### ***The Silver Rule: "Do Not Do Things to Others That You Would Not Have Them Do to You"***

Figures in multiple religious traditions have summarized ethics in a commandment not to do things you wouldn't want other people to do to you. It is unmistakable that "*Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.*" has received devoted attention in Judaism for millennia. However, certain scholars who represent landmarks in the Talmud have summarized the Golden Rule in a more diluted form: they tell people only to refrain from doing things to others that they wouldn't want others to do to them. This is a lower bar.

I would like to put a word in to puzzled Christians wondering why master scholars of the Jewish Bible would choose what is essentially an ethical consolation prize, and a negative morality rather than a positive

morality.

My best guess here is that Talmudic scholars *didn't* choose a consolation prize. That is, they did not line up "Treat others the way you'd like to be treated" and "Don't do things to other people you wouldn't want them to do to you," and go for the less demanding option. The Old Testament thunders "Thou shalt not," and not in just the Ten Commandments. It includes "Love your neighbor as yourself" but not, as stated in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), "Do to others what you would have them do to you." It took me a long time to understand what a Lawgiver was years back, because I thought of rules as unhelpful and constricting. But I would call to mind a medievalist conference that talked about law in Western Europe, and said in essence that law had captivated the public imagination, and fascinated people as being, among other things, a way for people to resolve conflicts without attacking each other physically. Perhaps even the word "lawyer" has slimy connotations today and we think litigation is completely out of control, but to many in the medieval West, *people thought litigation was a live and better alternative to an ongoing and deadly feud*. Law was seen as a peaceful way to avoid violence. St. Moses was a Lawgiver, and [a great deal of that Law was devoted to forbidding people from engaging in destructive practices](#). There is brilliance in condensing the entirety of the Law to "Do not do things to other people that you would not do unto you," and I would suggest it is an anachronism to criticize Rabbi ben Hillel and others like them because they chose the Silver Rule over the Golden Rule. (*I see no reason to believe that they did anything of the sort.*)

Whether or not the Silver Rule is not as good as the full-fledged Golden Rule, it shares the strengths that make the Golden Rule so important. The Silver Rule and the Golden Rule both alike are short, simple directives that offer broad and far-reaching guidance. They might not replace longer and more detailed treatment of what is right and wrong, but a treatment of ethical details alone presents a danger of not seeing the forest for the trees. The Silver and Golden Rules help people see the forest very quickly, and then be in a better position to see the trees situated in the forest when it's time to study the trees. And, as has been pointed out, in U.S. educational culture the most important lessons are not introduced in graduate meta-ethics seminars; they're taught in kindergarten, with the Golden Rule often given a place of prominence. The "All I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" poster that

was ubiquitous some decades back reflects important choices made in U.S. educational culture, whatever other flaws it may have. The most important ethical lessons are placed at the very beginning of formal education itself.

I would also like to comment on the terms "negative morality" and "positive morality." The language is loaded. It doesn't mean, or at least not at first glance, that negative morality is bad and positive morality is good. I might mention what the term "progressive cancer" means. "Progressive" is not here loaded language flattering someone sufficiently liberal; a "progressive" cancer is a cancer that continues to advance and be more and more destructive despite the best treatment that's available. Returning to negative and positive morality, a negative morality essentially says, "Here's a list of things you shouldn't do. You're free to do anything else." A positive morality dictates your options far more narrowly: "This is what you should do." And I would make a pointed remark about positive moralities: **if you are going to choose a positive morality, choose very, very carefully.** *Every single one of the twentieth century Utopias that stacked up over a million innocent victims in its body count was driven by a positive morality!*

I ultimately side with a positive morality, if "morality" is really the term; as Orthodox I use the term "moral" / "morality" primarily with non-Orthodox because [the way Orthodoxy covers terrain there are spiritual disciplines and there is divinization, but there is not really a separate category of morality as such.](#) However, it is usually not helpful to ask people to grapple with an oblong concept like that if it can be avoided.

**The Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."**

I wish to comment quite briefly about the Golden Rule as classically worded that it appears exactly once in the Bible, that Christ states it in [the most important homily the Orthodox Church can offer](#), and that Christ himself endorses it as a complete summary of the Scriptures that existed then. The Golden Rule itself is the least in need of introduction of all these variations: asking the man on the street, "What's the Silver Rule?" or "What's the Platinum Rule?" should often elicit a perhaps puzzled, "I don't know." If you ask, "What's the Golden Rule?" people may not be

able to rattle off the words, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," but they should usually immediately recognize the reference and instantly recall the point, gist and basic concern whether or not they can quote (or misquote) the classic formulation.

### **The Platinum Rule: "*Do unto others better than you would have them do unto you*"**

I would briefly comment that the Platinum Rule is more a curiosity of discussion of ethics than a point in any live community's ethical system that I am aware of. For reasons to be discussed below, I believe the Law of Love represents a far more valuable way to go beyond the Golden Rule than simply upping the ante for what one is expected to give others.

However, while I am not aware of religions teaching the Platinum Rule (even in ethics it seems to me to only come up in academic discussions), it does seem to come up in practice even if it is not enjoined. The first job I had was at a rental yard, where assignments ranged from assembling tents from a celebration to scrubbing burnt-on crud off steel to putting away sewer snakes. It was not a glamorous position. However, I noticed that the worst and most disgusting jobs (such as cleaning up a port-a-potty after a wild and wet trailer ride) were always done personally by a manager. *Always*. In a traditional marriage and family, feminists may claim that the husband and father occupies the position of greatest privilege. This is possibly so, but under the live definition of privilege, his privilege includes taking an ailing pet to the vet for the last time. In the business world, there is the manager who from time to time skips lunch during crunch mode, but would never arrange a schedule so that one of her subordinates was asked to miss a meal. Goodwill, whether or not it is an organization of goodwill towards its employees' financial interests, asks people whether a donation is good enough to give a friend, and I would comment on that point that there are some pockets where people are generous and giving towards others, but continue to personally use worn or damaged possessions themselves that they would be mortified to give to someone else, especially someone lower than them socially. For a concluding example, anti-smoking advocates found that they met limited success with anti-smoking messages that said, "Hey, Dad! Look at what you're doing to yourself!" (Dads seemed not to be terribly concerned.)

Then they shifted the center of the message to, "Hey, Dad! Look at what you're doing to your kids!" and, **Wow!** was there a change.

The Platinum Rule may or may not be preached anywhere outside of academia. It does, however, appear to be something people practice of themselves in situations where they have been brought up to respect the Golden Rule.

## **And now I will show you a more excellent way**

One patristic claim has been that the Old Testament purifies what is done externally in the hands, and the New Testament purifies what is done inwardly in the heart. That may be painting things with broad strokes, and someone who doesn't know the Bible well may still point out that as prominently as in the Ten Commandments the Old Testament forbids coveting in one's heart, and the New Testament has numerous passages condemning concrete actions as sin. I don't know the Talmud, but I'm pretty sure that a good Talmud scholar could point out numerous passages rejecting sins committed, at least at first, only in the heart. However, it is helpful to understand here that the relationship between "Old Testament" and "New Testament" is really not a relationship between "First installment" and "Second installment: more of the same."

One core aspect of "Road to Emmaus" passage that winds up Luke's Gospel is, "Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! <sup>26</sup> Was it not necessary that the Messiah<sup>[1]</sup> should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?=<sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures." "Scriptures" does not here refer to any part of the New Testament; there is only one place, in 2 Peter, that any part of the New Testament is called Scripture. Furthermore, at the time reported in this Gospel passage, none of the books of the New Testament had been written. The basic model of Scripture in this passage, which remained live for a surprisingly long time, was that the Scriptures were the Old Testament and represented a locked treasure hoard, and the New Testament contained the key to unlock the Old Testament Scriptures. Fr. John Behr commented in a class

that the worst thing that happened to the Church was the canonization of the New Testament. He was perhaps speaking provocatively, but he was driving home a patristic enough point that the Old and New Testaments should not be identified as a first installment and a second installment of the same.

At least in the Wikipedia, "Love your neighbor as yourself" is treated as a wording or formulation of the Golden Rule. I would like to draw an increasingly sharp distinction, and from here, I will use the terms **Golden Rule** to strictly mean paraphrases or repetitions of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," and **Law of Love** to mean "Love your neighbor as yourself," with or without explicitly stating the commandment to love God from which it arises.

In my own experience, I was surprised by what was apparently obvious enough to the article authors that there seemed no perceived need to establish or defend: that the Law of Love was a wording of the Golden Rule, apparently interchangeable with others.

The first, relatively superficial objection I had was that the Golden Rule uses one's own desires as a guideline for what action to take. The Law of Love does not directly state what actions to take, and the implied line of action I would see (others might nominate other candidates) is an obligation to seek others' best interests. It is long religious experience that we often do not seek our own best interests, but guilt traps, and the Christ who commands love for one's enemies might perhaps leave room to believe that someone who meets forgiving love with ongoing hostility might, perhaps, be even further from seeking what is genuinely beneficial to them. In the Golden Rule the yardstick of action, at least on a rule of thumb level, is one's own desires. My personal impression, as someone who has problematic desires, is that the yardstick for action, besides love which I will come to in a minute, is that it is the other person's best interests.

The second, more serious objection I can think of, has to do with virtue. One basic distinction has been made between a rule-based morality and a virtue-based morality. At the heart of Confucianism, for instance, is not any calculus of required, permitted, and forbidden actions; the highest goal is to become a person who embodies certain virtues, such as a filial piety. The [Philokalia](#) draws on certain Greek philosophy, carefully and selectively. The greatest debt I can see to a

feature of Greek philosophy in the whole collection is in the cardinally important place that is given to virtues. The concept may be adapted for Christian use at points, but any reasonably sensitive reading would recognize that virtue, from wherever the authors acquired it, is extremely important in the text. As regards the Golden Rule, it is a strictly rule-based guideline and need not perturb a rule-based morality. As regards the Law of Love, "love" may appear as a verb and not a noun, but the commandment is to exercise *virtue*. Now there are feedback and reinforcement between what is in your heart and what you do with your hands; someone who is honest is more likely to tell the truth, but conversely telling the truth is a practice that also builds the virtue of honesty. However, the Law of Love takes the action from the Golden Rule's playing field of (potentially) rule-based morality, and puts us on turf where virtue at least looms large.

[The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#) is on the shortlist of Orthodox classics, and Orthodox monastics traditionally read it each Lent. It has various steps of virtues to acquire and vices to surrender, amounting to thirty steps in total. And elements of Greek philosophy may be present; the step that is second from the top is "Dispassion", a Holy Grail sought in the same philosophical currents that had the authors of the [Philokalia](#) think so much in terms of virtue. However, the very, very top rung of all in the great Ladder is the "Faith, Hope, and Love" in an industrial-strength allusion to one of the favorite chapters of the Bible the world around:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast,<sup>[a]</sup> but do not have love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup> Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an

end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup> For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, <sup>[b]</sup> but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

And there is further to go than virtue-based morality.

## Beyond even virtue-based morality

The concepts "You need right action" and "You need to be in the right moral state", taken together, cover many of the world's ethical systems, and for that matter cover most of what I have said so far.

### ***I would like to push further.***

Your actions are in some sense something you possess, and your virtues are in some sense something you possess. Perhaps neither one nor the other is an item you can put on your desk next to your car keys, but they can appear, so to speak, as self-contained. Which they are not.

I was rebuked, when I was newly minted as Orthodox, for asking a question entirely framed by the Reformation schema of nature, sin, and grace, and given very good pastoral advice to stay out of 16th century Reformation concerns for a while. I am grateful for this. That stated, the Reformers were not the first people to see grace, and our need for grace, in that faith whose book is the Bible. But the [Philokalia](#) has titles like the in-depth "On Those Who Think They Are Made Righteous By Works," and stern warnings that you may only take credit for those achievements you pulled off before you were born (an exception could be made disqualifying the handful of places in the saints' lives where an unborn child cries or speaks from within the womb). This is not exactly a teaching of grace alone, in that there is a sense of synergy in relation to a divinization where we contribute, but the relevant Fathers are here as clear as any of the Reformers that however much we seek virtue and right actions, we should take no credit before God. Even if, as it turns out, on Judgment Day the saved who take no credit for their works are given full credit for these works by God.

The whole of how we are created is for a divine dance, where we are

part of a larger picture and God is calling the shots. Had I raised another Protestant question about discerning God's will for my life, I might have gotten an equally helpful rebuke. Christ has all but sworn that if we seek first the Kingdom of God and his perfect righteousness, all God's Providence will follow, including career paths, material needs, and so on and so forth, perhaps even without our needing to *try* to seek God's will for our lives. God's Providence may have plans for the course of our lives, which will be given if we seek first God's Kingdom, but the New Testament doesn't have a word about seeking God's will for our lives. When it discusses God's will, it discusses God's will for Creation and the like. Nowhere do the Pauline letters discuss a discernment of what course is intended for your life, or mine.

### **Sometimes pagan custom ain't so great**

I was in England and on a Cambridge tour was excitedly shown, in a church building no longer live as a place of worship, pagan symbols such as two-tailed mermaids on the baptismal font. What I wanted to ask, instead of just holding my tongue, was whether she had anything to say about Christian symbols in the building. But I held my tongue.

There is an ambiance of mystery and the alluring today surrounding pagan customs, and someone who reads some of the same books I've read may read, for instance, about a heirarch who wisely decided to try to wean a newly-illuminated people from pagan practices across a few generations, or that some particular detail of observance was in origin an exotic pagan custom that was incorporated into the Church's intricate practices. And, in general, I've read that some leniency was observed in relation to pagan custom. What may be the first written account of the life of St. Seraphim of Sarov, [Flame in the Snow](#), seems unblushing about recording a preserved pagan custom here and there.

But may I say something about pagan custom in relation to my own milieu, and one intended to be not enticing, but **banal**?

We have bank accounts and general financial planning and don't let a good deal of what the [Sermon on the Mount](#) says about providence and God's generosity get past our filters. We want endowments, or in short, we want the financial infrastructure to what is, in the end, Hell.

This may be a much less exotic and enticing than the chasing and

catching game in the great St. Seraphim's life, but I really mean it. Forget every sexy connotation that vaguely rises up at the thought of being allowed to practice a pagan custom. One of the great pagan customs in our world is wealth management, and here I write not as someone without slaves who calls for the abandonment of slavery, but someone with fewer slaves who calls for the abolition of slavery. We need, by God's grace to wean ourselves from the violation of the [Sermon on the Mount](#) that forever tries to create our own providence, administered by nothing wiser than our own hand. That is (among the) pagan customs that should come to mind when we think of the Church trying by degrees to free generations of converts from pagan custom, ancestral or otherwise.

The story is told of a little girl who saw, in a vending machine, a metal necklace with gold wash. She asked her Dad, but he discouraged her. But she insisted, and he bought the necklace. That night at bedtime, he asked her, "Do you love me?" She said, "Yes." He said, "Give me the necklace," but she didn't. The next night, the same thing happened. Many nights later, with tears in her eyes, she reached out and set her necklace in his hand, the gold wash all but gone. He, also with tears, reached out with his other hand, and gave her a necklace of solid gold.

What we are invited to is God's Providence, but we can opt out by trying to get our own ersatz providence and not really need God's intervention. (One of the names for this is, "Hell.") We are instead summoned to the Great Dance, where many people weave together in intricate motion and in unfolding glory, and things end up better than we could have imagined if we had everything our way. (Or we can insist on trying to have our way; one of the names for this is, "Hell.") Or we can stop fighting, and work with God as he draws us into a larger world and opened our eyes to what was there all along, but still more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our financial planning.

And, incidentally, trying to live on a basis of what pseudo-providence you can get for yourself is not a new pagan custom: while admittedly some of our financial instruments were not available then, Christ calls the basic practice a pagan custom as much as anyone else has: "**For after all these things the [pagans] seek.**" Christ never denies that we need food, water, clothing, etc., but he does try to give people a clue that the God who has loved them from eternity already knows the needs he has built in to their constitution, and has every desire to provide everything

necessary to people who are seeking what really **is** worth seeking.

(*Similar remarks could be made for other ways we isolate ourselves from patristic submission to the [Sermon on the Mount](#) in favor of pagan customs.*)

### **In depth: *If thine eye be single...***

St. Philaret of Moscow, possibly a rare instance of a Metropolitan named after a layman, wrote a famed prayer for the acceptance of God's will:

O Lord, I do not know what to ask of Thee. Thou alone knowest what are my true needs. Thou lovest me more than I myself know how to love. Help me to see my real needs which are concealed from me. I do not dare to ask either for a cross or for consolation. I can only wait on Thee. My heart is open to Thee. Visit and help me, for the sake of Thy great mercy. Strike me and heal me; cast me down and raise me up. I worship in silence Thy holy will and Thine unsearchable ways. I offer myself as a sacrifice to Thee. I have no other desire than to fulfill Thy will. Teach me to pray. Pray Thou Thyself in me. Amen.

And this humility opens up a passage from the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest Orthodox homily in history, [and possibly the most politically incorrect](#):

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you,

Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the [pagans] seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

"If thine eye be single": this part appears to be a digression, even an intrusion. *It is not*. Most translations translate away a term like "single" to mean "healthy" or "sound", and while an aspect of "single" is indeed "healthy" or "sound", the direct and unusual rendering tells more. St. Paul describes one decisive advantage of celibacy: that the celibate can focus on God with an undivided, single attention, where the married Orthodox must needs live out a divided attention where effort is split between God and one's spouse. This is no heretical rejection of sacred, holy marriage, where St. Paul elsewhere says forcefully, "...marriage, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth..."; he is simply advising people that he wishes to spare them the trouble, however holy marriage itself may be.

But here celibate and married are both summoned to an eye that is single: an eye that rests its gaze purely on God, instead of dividing attention between God and stupid money. It may be honorable to divide attention between God and a wife given as an icon by whom to love and serve God: but nowhere does the New Testament endorse it as also

serve God, but how does the New Testament endorse it as also acceptable to divide attention between God and a lifeless, subhuman wealth that is utterly unworthy of human love.

The seeming digression ups the stakes for trying to serve both God and mammon. The cost of chasing after wealth is a fragmented and divided spiritual vision. There are several places in the [Sermon on the Mount](#) where advice about a divided attention could appropriately be placed: for example, if you look in lust, your eye is not single, and is not single in a much more obvious sense. However, Christ sandwiches the warning in a passage debunking the apparent and seemingly self-evident goodness of wealth. And this passage, like others in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), opens up a larger world.

## **A third basis for morality beyond rules and virtues**

In the philosophy class where a professor introduced a distinction between a rule-based morality and a virtue-based reality, I looked and rightly or wrongly drew a conclusion for a Holy Spirit-based morality that is productive of virtues as virtues are productive of right actions. The key verse I drew on was Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

I'm a little cautious about saying *tout court* that this musing is fully patristic. Some people have made a subtle but important distinction between virtues and "graces", where a virtue is the sort of thing you build with God's help but by your own action, and "graces", which are also by God's help but the divine generosity greatly exceeds the contribution you would normally need to build up a virtue. Possibly there are other adjustments needed; because it is my own musing, I think that it would best be endorsed as Orthodox by someone else besides me.

However, what I believe more legitimate for me to endorse is this. In [The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit](#), St. Seraphim of Sarov, mentioned above, speaks with a layman who has essentially spent his life trying to understand, in Western terms, the meaning of life. St. Seraphim receives him with great respect, and lays out the answer: the central point of life is "the acquisition of the Holy Spirit."

As mentioned, I'm a little cautious about saying that my own formulation that Christianity has a Spirit-driven morality that reaches higher than virtue-based morality as virtue-based morality is higher than rule-based morality. It hasn't stood the test of time. However, what I think has stood the test of time is that, while thoughts, actions, and

virtues are all very important in the New Testament and the [Philokalia](#), it is even more, more important to focus on a God who infinitely eclipses the greatest virtue. I've heard Orthodox raise a question of, "Then why am I here?" and assert that the reception of grace is synergistic, where the reception of grace includes our active cooperation with Christ in us, the hope of glory. But, whatever other differences may exist between Orthodoxy and Protestantism, I have never heard an Orthodox complain that Martin Luther, or any other figure, overstated the importance of grace. (For that matter, I have never heard an Orthodox Christian state that it is **possible** to overstate the importance of grace.)

## **The surprise I hadn't mentioned**

There was a surprise I met with the Wikipedia article that I haven't mentioned. I was surprised that the Law of Love was classified as an articulation of the Golden Rule at all. After numerous readings of the Bible, it was settled in my mind that the Golden Rule's explicit presence in the entire Bible amounted to part of a single verse of the Sermon on the Mount. It was not just that I preferred the Law of Love to other things that were called phrasings of the Golden Rule. To me they were so different that I never made the connection.

The Golden Rule is great partly because it offers direct prescriptions for action. If we avoid getting bogged down too much in special cases, if I wish others to show me such courtesies as saying "Please" and "Thank you," that's probably a sign I should seek to extend those courtesies to others. If I prefer not to be needlessly interrupted, in most cases I should probably avoid needlessly interrupting others. If I prefer that others' communications with me be straightforward, that is probably a sign I should usually be straightforward with others. The Golden Rule may be stated in a sentence, but it covers an enormous territory.

The Law of Love dictates virtue, not action, and is far more ambiguous as far as action goes. There is respected precedent in monastic literature to what may be an assumption that the actions most fitting to the Law of Love are those that seek the complete best interests of the other. The point of monasticism, including the point of its many unpleasant parts, is to advance your best interests, which are never trumped by treating people the way they would like to be treated.

Let me give one example. At least some monastic rules state that "Monastery guests are to be treated as Christ himself," and even without

that implication the [third parable of Matthew 25](#) provides excellent and chilling warrant to all Orthodox to treat all others as Christ. Good Abbots meet visitors with *infinite* respect. And for all this, monastics, including Abbots, are normally very sparing with compliments. (And they sometimes shock visitors by trying to dodge social compliments.)

There is no contradiction to this. In many cultures, compliments are given freely and are a staple of managing mood in the other. The [Philokalia](#) speaks of foul plants of spiritual sickness as being (as rendered in the polite English translation) "manured by praise." The [Philokalia](#) is not generally foul-mouthed, and to the best of my knowledge human praise is the only thing that the entire collection metaphorically compares to *excrement*.

Marriage is also an institution for self-transcendence; some have said that marriage is not a place for children to grow up, but for parents to grow up. Marriage is also a vessel of holiness and salvation, but things are perhaps sharper and perhaps easier to see in monasticism. If insults and cleaning latrines are what it will take for a novice to gain the precious treasure of humility, then the love of an Abbot will be expressed in that nasty way. And monasticism above marriage highlights the difference between a nuanced understanding of the Golden Rule that will treat other people the way they want to be treated on the one hand, and on the other hand a nuanced understanding of the Law of Love as seeking the other's best interests. We should best not treat ourselves as honorary Abbots and authorities above others, but seeking the other's total best interest is more important than being pleasing to others.

## Conclusion: A doorway to the divine.

If I may quote Lewis again, this time from [The Abolition of Man](#), "It is Paul, the Pharisee, the man 'perfect as touching the Law' who learns where and how that Law was deficient." It is further St. Paul, the Apostle, who tells us that the Law is a tutor meant to train us up until we are ready for greater things.

I might suggest that the Golden Rule, at least in the forms I have seen it, be given a place similar to what place the Apostle gives to the Law, and in one aspect the place Church Fathers give to the Old Testament as addressing outer righteousness until the New Testament could train us in inner righteousness.

That is to say that we should keep the Golden Rule, perhaps at some level of sophistication and nuance so we don't knowingly offer a peanut butter and jelly sandwich to a friend who has a deadly peanut allergy. And furthermore we should recognize its significance in that world religious traditions are immeasurably different in immeasurable ways, yet precious few fail to offer some form of the Golden Rule. That speaks for a profound significance even beyond that a moral directive that covers an incredible amount of ground with something is in a nutshell. Even a good subset of these credentials properly qualify the Golden Rule as astonishing and arresting.

Yet, for all of this, neither the Platinum Rule, nor the Golden Rule, nor the Silver Rule, nor this article's nomination for a Fool's Golden Rule speak a whisper about inner state or virtue, and on this account they must be seen as outer righteousness as Church Fathers have received the Old Testament as a tutor in outer righteousness. The Silver, Gold, and Platinum Rules may progressively escalate the **act** that is specified in

their demand towards our neighbor: but even the Platinum Rule does not show the faintest hint of a request for virtue. The Silver, Gold, and Platinum Rules push further *forward* in the same plane: not one of them rises *higher* to draw our eyes towards virtue.

The Law of Love does, and here I am not especially interested in the fact that on the level of action it is possible to rise from pleasing people to seeking their best interests as best we can in a given situation. The Law of Love is a summons to virtue, and more. It moves beyond outer action alone to inner state, and here I might mention that contrary to today's psychological framing of "inner", figures such as Augustine held the inner realm to hold the things themselves for spiritual realities: or as condensed in homiletics, Heaven and Hell are inside us. I do not claim any Orthodox or Christian monopoly on inner concerns; the desire for inner virtue may be found in innumerable world religions and age-old philosophies. However, the Law of Love says something that was missed in the Silver Rule. Even if Ben Hillel probably knew both summonses to love, by heart.

Furthermore, the Law of Love implies something that I am not aware of in any formulation of the Golden Rule, and though I am hesitant to quote someone I've just critiqued as an authority, is something that a certain Harvard chaplain did not at least notice anywhere else: *the box is open at the top*.

Nothing hinders a materialist from seeking to act by the Golden Rule, and it may be seen as needlessly insulting to question whether a materialist might take guidance from that beacon. For that matter, you can be in your actions halfway to being a solipsist and still seek to obey the Golden Rule, even if you might end up being hampered by your habits because you are trying to act beyond what your philosophical reserves will afford you. There is nothing in any standard formulation of the Silver, Golden, or Platinum Rule that forbids you from being, and seeing yourself as, self-contained. One can of course subscribe to the Golden Rule and be open to things vaster than the Heavens: Christ himself did as much, and it's hard to see what stronger warrant one could ask to say that a practitioner of the Golden Rule might be open. However, if we hear that chaplain say, "None of these versions requires a God," then we might see circumstantial evidence that, as magnificent and really astonishing as the Golden Rule may be, it does not reach high enough to bid us seek a box that is open at the top.

that is open at the top.

The Law of Love is more and different compared to this. It really does say, "There are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy, *and I want to show them to you.*" It summons us to leave the Hell of self. Its overwhelming impulse that bids us exercise the highest of all virtues, love itself, is a surge from the heart of a command to render an even higher, absolute love to a God who is infinitely beyond. A hymn tells the Theotokos, "When you gave birth, you tore all the philosopher's nets;" along with that is all possibility of enclosure by anything less than God. I have quoted from the [Sermon on the Mount](#); it is important enough in Orthodoxy that even in the shorter forms of the Divine Liturgy it is quoted in shorthand by chanting its opening Beatitudes. It is characterized by a fundamental openness that is needed as an exegesis of the right and proper love to God, and if you try to love God and live a self-contained life, you may find God responding to you by offering you help to repent of your sin and begin to enjoy a larger world.

I wish to conclude by quoting a poem I wrote, Open:

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

Why do I refuse the joy you give?

Or, indeed, must I?

And yet I know,

Thou, the Theotokos, the saints,

Forever welcome me with open hearts,

And the oil of their gladness,

Loosens my fist,

Little by little.

God, why is my fist tightened on openness,

When thou openest in me?

# **I Learned It All From Jesus**

# I learned it all from Jesus.

A gift does not need to be costly in order to be big. A little child is worth God's time. All who believe are brothers and sisters. Be thankful. Be the first to say, "I'm sorry," and the first to forgive. Believing means clinging with your whole heart. Clothe yourself in prayer. Commune with God. Cry. Dance. Don't judge. A respected pillar of the community can be two steps from Hell, and a prostitute can be two steps from Heaven. Don't worry about tomorrow. Today has enough worries of its own. Every blade of grass, every twinkling star, every ticklish friend, is a blessing from God. Cherish them. Everything in the whole Creation tells us something about God. Give someone a gift today. God delights in you. God has a sense of humor. God is a friend who'll never, never leave you. God is an artist. God is everywhere, from the highest star to inside your heart. There is nowhere you can go to escape his presence — or his love. God is found, not in earthquake nor fire nor mighty wind, but in a soft and gentle whisper. God is your Daddy. God watches over even the little sparrows. Heaven is very close. He is risen! He who sings, prays twice. He who dances, sings twice. He who

laughs, dances twice. He who prays, laughs twice. Hug your friends. If you have to have everything under your control, trusting God may look as stable as a cow on ice skates. Trust him anyway. It's worth it. If you want God to smile, tell him your prayers. If you want God to laugh, tell him your plans.

It's never too late to repent. Joy comes from suffering. Keep on forgiving. Laugh. Listen to other people's stories. Listen to the silence. Love God with your whole being. Love one another. Love your enemies. Love your neighbor as yourself. Make every action a prayer. Make your prayers and your good deeds secret. Play with children. Prayers ascend like incense before God's throne. Purity does not reside in the hands, but in the heart. Respect the aged. Rest. Serve. Sing. Take time to be alone with God. Tell God you love him. Tell your friends that you love them. The Heavens tell the glory of God. There are miracles all around. You just have to be able to see. Treasure God's smallest blessings. We can bring little pieces of Heaven down to earth. What you do for the least, you do for God. Work is a blessing from God. You are God's image.

# **Incarnation and Deification**

## **The Word became flesh**

Especially when we are preparing for the Feast of the Nativity, when the Word became flesh, we would do well to meditate on why the Word became flesh:

The Son of God became a Man that men might become the sons of God. The divine became human so that the human might become divine. God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man that men and the sons of men might become gods and the sons of God:

The Word became flesh that flesh might become Word.

## The chief end of mankind

The Westminster Catechism famously opens:

Question: What is the chief end of mankind?

Answer: The chief end of mankind is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

It is often (and rightly) pointed out that these are the same thing: to glorify God and to enjoy him forever are the exact same thing. The chief end of mankind is to contemplate God. And one thread of this is woven into St. John's prologue: "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we have seen his glory, as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." The disciples saw the uncreated Light of the Holy Transfiguration, and contemplated it.

But St. John the Theologian does not truncate contemplation.

This follows, "But to as many as received him, he gave the authority to become the sons of God." And contemplation and theosis/deification/divinization, becoming sons of God, are not two competing answers to the question, "What is the chief end of mankind?" Far from it: they are expressions of the same truth. Contemplating the uncreated Light, and being transformed to be one of the sons of God, are two connected aspects of the same goal. They come together, and we might well quote for contemplation of God words also spoken of the Eucharist:

"Behold what you believe. Become what you behold." For contemplation and theosis are of the same essence. They are of the same essence almost as the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are of the same essence.

Now it may need to be pointed out that God, and God alone, can be divine by nature. If theosis is open to us, there is no question of our becoming also divine by nature. That is impossible. God's great work is to make us become by grace what he is by nature, and the infinite gulf between Uncreated and created can never be erased. But it can be transcended by a God who transcends not only Creation but transcends transcendence itself. And when his grace is at work, our spiritual sins and wounds remain, and we remain created, but that is no longer the point. It is no longer the issue. God transcends the chasm that we may by grace share in the divine nature and become by grace what he is by nature.

The great Incarnation was not something that was complete at the Nativity of Christ (or the Annunciation). Christ became incarnate in his own person that he might be incarnate in our persons as well. Word became flesh that flesh become Word. And Incarnation reaches its proper stature when it unfolds into our divinized life, when the Feast of the Nativity unfurls and Christ is born in us. The Annunciation of the Theotokos and the Nativity of Christ are still going on today!

It is a profound error to think of eternal life as something that begins after death. Eternal life is now; the door is open. The same uncreated Light by which Christ was transfigured, so saints have been transfigured, and this is why icons give halos to saints. Paradise is wherever the saints are; and not only canonized saints but in some measure the faithful who are called saints in Scripture.

In theosis, in divinization, in deification, we do not usurp God's place; rather, Christ's headship over us receives its proper place. That means not only that he is our Lord and Master, though he most certainly is, nor "merely" that we owe our very existence to him. Rather, to say that Christ is our head is the same thing as saying that we are Christ's body. As is the Head, so is the body. As is the Christ, so is the Christian. Christ's own blood flows in our veins. The royal, divine lifeblood courses through our veins. Everything in our lives is to be brought under Christ's headship, and by the same token our lives are to be made divine.

There is no hair's breadth of separation between being a follower of Jesus and being another Christ. If you follow Jesus, you are a vessel of his Incarnation, and the Incarnation of Christ is no faroff historical remembrance: it is what you work on today.

## The messy circumstances of our lives

"All this is very well," perhaps you may say, "but my life is not so perfect. We do not live in a perfect world."

But these are not words from, or merely for, golden ages. When Christ came, no wonder people were looking for a military Messiah who would free the holy land from Roman domination. That was a natural enough thing to want! (And even today, people want someone to save our economy and political situation.) Christ came, as God does, catching people by surprise. People who were living under Third World economic conditions wanted a political savior. Christ came offering something else: saving people from their sins.

Perhaps not much has changed. Not everybody likes our world's political and economic situation. We seek a savior: a political savior, an economic savior. And Christ comes to us to save us from our sins.

This salvation is a salvation which we overlook and the salvation that we need. Some people pass on the quotation, "We want God to change our circumstances. God wants something else: to use our circumstances to change us," and the saying is worth repeating. We want God to change our circumstances. God wants something else: to use our circumstances to change us.

These messy circumstances, these bad economic conditions,

not to mention politics, are what we think need to be cleared away for God to be at work with us. God has a word for us that is alike difficult and liberating: he wants to work with us in these circumstances. Even if economics and politics turn worse, he may want to deal with us, and deify us, precisely in the conditions lie furthest from his power.

Christ God the Savior doesn't just deify us who were made in the image of God. He wants to place everything in our lives under his headship: every sin, every suffering, every tear, death itself. He wants to commandeer every evil, as he has Shanghaied the works of the Devil down from the ages. He is a hard man who gathers where he has never harvested, and he harvests not only righteousness and good works, but sin, evil, and death no less if we will but allow him. All of this is under his headship, and all of this he transforms to be deified. And he does not share our illusions about when he can really get to work.

We imagine well enough that only if something changes, only if we get a job, only if someone else changes can our lives move forward. God works to our good before that happens. Our engagement with God happens first, if there is any change to follow, and when we do discover the Kingdom of God which we keep on overlooking in our search for deliverance, everything changes. We may get what we want. We may not get what we want. But we do not need what we want. Even if we get what we want, we are placed far beyond it. We discover treasure hidden in a field and everything changes. And it is sometimes in the hardest trials that God shows the greatest grace and joy. It is like in the poem "Footprints." When we see only one set of footprints, it was then that Christ carried us: and when we see only one set of footprints, it was then that he was most active in our deification.

Deification is the chief end of man; we were made to become by grace what Christ is by nature, and this is the chief end, not for some other people in some golden age, but here and now, in our political and economic condition. The benevolent, severe, and merciful God who provided for us in decades before is the same benevolent, severe, and merciful God who not only wills to provide for us now, but to work our deification. And he wills this, not sometime when we obtain what we want sometime in the future, but here and now. The same God who commandeers our sin and works such a wonder in us that it is no longer the issue that we injured ourselves, works with our suffering world in such a way that it is no longer the issue if we live in a time of global economic collapse. The same God who has deified men in every age wills our glory today.

## The Feast of the Nativity

The Feast of the Nativity (Christmas) has been called "Pascha in winter," and in a very real sense it is. But there is a difference. Pascha was open triumph; Christ the Firstborn of the Dead forever triumphed over death, and the day is coming when Christ will return borne on rank on rank of angel and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess him. But the Nativity was not open triumph; an angel chorus appeared, and only a few knees bowed. It was if anything an invasion in the dead of winter.

But the Feast of the Annunciation, the Feast of the Nativity, and the Feast of Theophany are the same thing, really: they are feasts of the Incarnation, and the Incarnation is forever frustrated in its purpose unless it unfurls in us. We are to be brought under Christ's headship. We are to be deified. We are made for theosis. We are to contemplate God. We are to be vessels of the Incarnation of Christ, and this is for here and for now, not for when we reach some other circumstances.

Preparation for the Feast of the Nativity includes important external observances intended to concretely foster a realization: Each and every one of us has a problem with sin. You need, and I need, to come to a point of wondering if God can work with such a sinner. But when we come to God and confess our sins, he answers not only with mercy, but grace: repenting from sin is greater work than raising the dead. We awaken when we come to

realize we are standing in a sewer, and when we least expect God to work with us, then in particular our deification is alive.

Repenting is greater work than raising the dead, for we ourselves rise from the death of sin into the eternal life that has already begun on earth. And when we wonder, not why God has not placed us in some nicer circumstances, but why God has not placed us in much rougher circumstances, that God is at work and Heaven opens.

Repent! [Awaken, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light!](#) Arise from your sins to contemplation, to seeing the uncreated Light, to deification, to theosis, to divinization, to transfiguration, to incarnation! Awaken from sin and be illumined by the uncreated Light! Awaken and be a vessel of Christ's Incarnation!

# The Incarnation: Orthodoxy, Islam, and the Reformation

The central, root difference between Orthodoxy and Islam is that Orthodoxy affirms the Incarnation wholeheartedly and Islam wholeheartedly denies it. If you want to see what difference believing or not believing in the Incarnation makes, look at the differences between Orthodoxy and Islam.

As a point of departure, I would like to look at something about Islam that is not entirely obvious to many people in the West. As I write, the U.S. is involved in Iraq and this issue looms large in not only U.S. but world politics. I don't want to write lengthy comments on whether war is ever appropriate, or, if war can be appropriate, whether there were appropriate reasons for the U.S. to fight, or whether or not the U.S. has brought genuine good things to the Iraqi populace, or exposing inhuman treatment of prisoners. Those may be well enough worth discussing, but the single issue that concerns me here is the U.S. endeavor to endow Iraq with "freedom and democracy."

That rally, that cry—to bring "freedom and democracy" to Iraq—had me wincing well before I heard about Guantanamo Bay.

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Quite simply, there is a more profound cultural insensitivity in trying to bestow democracy on part of the Islamic world than one can easily explain. It is obvious enough that starting a rumor about flushing the Quran down a toilet is patently offensive. What is harder to explain is why trying to install democracy may be a bigger gaffe.

What in Islam could be offended by democracy? The answer is a first glimpse of what difference the Incarnation makes, but the connection is not at surface level.

Western observers in the Islamic world talk of an "IBM," an acronym for inshallah, meaning, "It will happen if Allah wills it and it will not happen if Allah does not will it, and you don't really have much say in whether Allah wills it," bukra, meaning, "Tomorrow; it can be done tomorrow; it need not be done today," and malesh, meaning, "It was fated; it was doomed to happen that way." When you understand inshallah, bukra, malesh, you understand something that runs very deep in Muslim culture.

G.K. Chesterton, in [Heretics](#), writes a chapter called [Omar Khayyam and the Sacred Vine](#). Omar Khayyam was a 12th century Iranian thinker who studied under a famous Imam, but is not necessarily the image of a good, devout Muslim: he was a renegade Muslim, if he really was a Muslim, and the point Chesterton is trying to make is a criticism of Omar who (on Chesterton's indictment) advocates heavy wine-drinking to blot out a miserable universe. Chesterton writes:

Of course, the great part of the more stolid reproaches directed against the Omarite morality are as false and babyish as such reproaches usually are. One critic, whose work I have read, had the incredible foolishness to call Omar an atheist and a materialist. It is almost impossible

for an Oriental to be either; the East understands metaphysics too well for that. Of course, the real objection which a philosophical Christian would bring against the religion of Omar, is not that he gives no place to God, it is that he gives too much place to God. His is that terrible theism which can imagine nothing else but deity, and which denies altogether the outlines of human personality and human will.

"The ball no question makes of Ayes or Noes,  
But Here or There as strikes the Player goes;  
And He that tossed you down into the field,  
He knows about it all—he knows—he knows."

A Christian thinker such as Augustine or Dante would object to this because it ignores free-will, which is the valour and dignity of the soul. The quarrel of the highest Christianity with this scepticism is not in the least that the scepticism denies the existence of God; it is that it denies the existence of man.

In this aspect, Omar retains something significant from Islam. Renegade as he may be, there is something from Islam deep in his bones: God, the Player, will act as he will, and it is a fundamental error to think that our Yes or No makes a difference. And even in a renegade Muslim with little respect for popular piety, this foundational attitude remains.

By contrast, as I write, Today's Vile Attack on Christianity is Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass* and ilk, and it would be a stretched argument to say that Pullman is trying to be Christian. Far from it; he provides Today's Vile Attack on Christianity, but there is something very different from Khayyam. Pullman retains

a profoundly Christian assumption: that his actions matter, that he can make a difference in the world. No one I've read has suggested that Pullman is fatalistic and treats the religious beliefs he hates as doomed to be there and that no endeavor he could make would matter or make a difference.

Philip Pullman is a renegade against popular Christianity, and Omar Khayyam is a lesser renegade against popular Islam, but they both retain something significant of the piety they rebel against. Pullman, on a very deep level, lives out the Christian belief that his Yes or No in fact matters for something, and Omar retains unchallenged the understanding that God alone may say Yes or No. This is the same conviction in the inshallah, bukra, malesh that it is not our place to say Yes or No, or at least say a Yes or No that makes an actual difference.

If it is not our place to say Yes or No, then what is democracy? Democracy can take some different forms, but its basic premise is that people can and should say a Yes or No that amounts to something, and whether it is a direct democracy, a representative democracy, or something else, the root idea is to empower people to say Yes or No... which, in other words, is to usurp the office of God in the eyes of many Muslims.

As far as insensitivity goes, the nearest equivalent I have been able to think of if someone were to conquer the U.S., would be decide that the best thing for our traditions would be to install a fundamentalist Christian theocracy. And that still does not capture an offense of a political assumption that, on many Muslim understandings, amounts to blasphemy.

If you want to know what this has to do with the Incarnation, let me ask you a question: What does the Incarnation mean if we are denied the freedom to say a significant Yes or No, if it is the very opposite of the truth to say that God created us to be his

conversation partners?

One of the biggest things it means is that, if Christ had freedom to issue a real and significant Yes or No, this is as a special exception because he was God that does not have a direct bearing on our lives. If Christ alone had real freedom, the truth of this is a philosophical truth but not a practical truth that directly helps us live human lives. Christ's divinity is not connected to our humanity, and it turns out that his humanity is dubiously connected to our humanity: which is to say, we are somewhat short of the Incarnation.

History may forget most people whom it does not call movers and shakers; God has numbered the hairs on our heads, and he forever remembers every person who has ever lived and indeed every action, every choice, every Yes or No as eternally significant choices as we choose between Heaven and Hell. This is to say that our freedom matters, and if Christ made a holy exercise of his freedom, this is the supreme example of human freedom with every relevance to our lives: an Incarnation that is not simply a philosophical truth, but has practical relevance to daily living.

More explicitly, the Orthodox understanding of the Incarnation is not, "Something that had not happened one second before the Annunciation when Mary conceived the Son of God, and something that was completely finished one second after that conception." That almost approaches saying that building the United States of America was something that had not started one second before the first person signed the Declaration of Independence, and something that left nothing more to do one second after the last person signed that Declaration. Or it is like saying that once an inventor has a working prototype of some invention, all the real work has been

taken care of—with no mention of the work that had to take place each time an invention like the light bulb, the car, or the computer became no longer a curiosity in an inventor's lab, but saw widespread use in the community at large. It is a fundamental mistake to read the Bible, and read about the Church as the body of Christ, among other things, and think that the Incarnation ends with the Son of God becoming fully man in the conception of the Annunciation, and does not include Christ becoming Incarnate in the Church. The Incarnation is ultimately the Incarnation of Christ in the Church, in Christians whom the Bible rightly calls sons of God, and finally the whole Creation.

Once it is understood that we are created to be part of Christ's Incarnation unfolding, that we are created to be co-workers with God and co-heirs with Christ, given a freedom to which God assigns eternal significance and created for the express purpose of being God's conversation partners, then it may be easier to see that Islam with its inshallah, bukra, malesh and its renegade proclaiming—

The ball no question makes of Ayes or Noes,  
But Here or There as strikes the Player goes;  
And He that tossed you down into the field,  
He knows about it all—he knows—he knows.

—then it is possible to see that the denial that we are given the place to say Yes or No is not random; it is part of the logic working out in Islam's fundamental rejection of the Incarnation.

Now I would like to introduce another point. Is Islam better at being monotheist than Trinitarian Christianity? I would like to give an image for that.

I've heard the image that it is a fundamental error to say,

excluding created spirits, that someone who doesn't believe in God would count the number of items in the universe, everything from galaxies down to protons, and arrive at a number—let us say, 1,000,000,000,000,000—and the person who believes in God simply arrives at one more—let us say, 1,000,000,000,000,001: the person who doesn't believe in God arrives at one number, and the person who does believe in God simply counts one more.

That error has been called idolatry; it's the same kind of error as going into a plant that manufactures Bibles, and after being shown the machines that lay out the paper and the printers that lay down ink, asking to be shown, alongside the paper and ink, the spiritual authority that is being put into the Bibles. The spiritual value of the Bible is not the sort of thing that is ordered as a material used to make Bibles, and it is a fundamental error to ask to be shown the spiritual meaning the same way one could ask to be shown the glue or cloth materials used for binding. It is something of the same kind of error in thinking that God is one more thing that can be counted as material objects are counted—and Orthodoxy and Islam alike would really wince at the idea that God is one more thing that lets you reach a total of 1,000,000,000,000,001 objects in your counting.

The next step of this argument is as follows: if material counting is something you misuse by applying it to God, then denying that the Trinity is still one God may be the same kind of error as counting God as one more physical thing. God is beyond material counting, but this means more than denying "God is one more thing." It may mean that if Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are God, the Oneness of God is so great that it is uninjured even by the Incarnation of God the Son. If the Oneness of God is on a higher plane my having one pen on my desk, perhaps it is on high

enough of a plane that it is not threatened by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit being the One God.

God is transcendent: he transcends, is beyond, anything and everything to be found in all creation. That is part of why, when we say that God is One, we mean something different from counting one pen—and something deeper. And part of this transcendence is something like heat. Depending on how tough we are, we might, or might not, be able to pick something up after it is hot from prolonged sunlight. Few of us would want to pick up a heavy black crowbar that has been soaking in summer sun and heat on the asphalt. Most of us want oven mitts, or some surrogate like a folded towel, to pick up something that has been in a hot 450° oven—it's too hot to touch with bare hands. But even a good oven mitt has limits: I would not want, even with the best oven mitt I've used, to reach into a blacksmith's furnace and pull out a large piece of iron so hot that it's getting mushy. But there is something about the one God that is transcendently hot: hotter than red-hot iron, hotter than white-hot iron, hotter than a river of rapidly boiling steel, hotter than the heart of the sun, hotter than the Big Bang. The transcendent God is hotter than the heat of fire, plasma, and the Big Bang.

Many of the controversies in early centuries of the Christian Church were about Christ as the bridge between God and his Creation—because if the divine nature is of such heat, then the Creation needs an oven mitt to be in contact with its Creator. Arius proposed one solution, that the oven mitt was the foremost and unique creation. The Orthodox response was that this wasn't good enough: a created oven mitt could insulate against a created heat, but only a truly transcendent bridge, or oven mitt, or mediator, could allow us to meet God without being destroyed: not only the fiery coal, but the oven mitt must be absolutely and

fully divine. And here we can glimpse why the Orthodox Church found Trinitarian theology so necessary: she found, in fact, that the one God, if the logic is worked out and he is properly understood, to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that the doctrine of the Trinity is the radical understanding of the One God.

I mention this to guard against a reaction some may have: the reaction that says that Islam really believes in one God, while Christianity has to cross its fingers to say that. Now let me continue:

There are some people who believe that Islam is later than Christianity and extends Christian beliefs: Islam is Christianity with things added. This is quite the opposite of the truth! One way to see beyond this point is to ask the question, "What is said in Islamic worship that an Orthodox would wince at saying? And what is said in Orthodox worship that a Muslim might wince at?"

There are a number of things in Islamic worship that an Orthodox would believe: God is said to be One, to be merciful, to be the Creator of the world, and so on and so forth, and all of this the Orthodox believes. What the Orthodox would not be able to say, in good conscience, is that Muhammed is God's Prophet. That would come close to the one thing that an Orthodox would squirm about agreeing to.

Now what about a Muslim in an Orthodox "divine liturgy"? God is said to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Mary is praised as the Mother of God, icons are warp and woof to worship, and saints, perhaps called divine, share in the glory of God. Even the term "divine liturgy" may not be liked. And each of these is related to the Incarnation.

The Orthodox Church realized the doctrine of the Trinity as something it could not deny, precisely in the wake of wrestling

with questions about the Incarnation. Perhaps it would be doubtful to say that the doctrine of the Trinity is a mere part of the doctrine of the Incarnation. What would not be doubtful is to say that the doctrine of the Trinity was articulated out of the Orthodox Church wrestling with heresies which gave a deficient understanding of the Incarnation. The Church proclaimed the doctrine of the Trinity after affirming what might be called "maximum Christology," that Christ was everything he could be: maximally divine, maximally human, maximally united, and maximally preserving the divine and human even as they were united.

Now we get into territory some Protestants may be uncomfortable with: the great and scandalous phrase, "Mother of God." Some may be eager to point out that "Mother of God" reflects a Greek term, *theotokos*, which might more accurately be translated as "Birth-Giver of God," as "tokos" refers to birth better than the full freight of the English "mother." In fact one could go further: "tokos," in Greek, is a word used to describe both the person who gives birth and the one who is born, and on out-of-context, legalistic grounds, "theotokos" could mean "the one to whom God gave birth," and one could make a mirror image of that switch to say that Christ, *o prototokos tw n nekrown* (Rev. 1:5), is "the dead's chief birthgiver," dodging the more sensible and customary rendering that he is "the firstborn from among the dead."

This kind of cleverness is all very nice, but it is unhelpful in understanding the theology. The reason the term "theotokos" is significant is something that happened in Arius's wake. Arius said that Christ was "a creature, but not as one of the creatures," a unique first creature through whom God created every other, lesser creature. The Church's response was, in

essence, "If that is Christ, he is an oven mitt that will be incinerated if it touches the divine fire. Not good enough." In Arius's wake, it was clearly on the table that Christ had to be considered fully divine, and fully human. But one person, Nestorius, said that Christ was fully divine and fully human, but not quite fully united. The controversy came to a head when Nestorius said that Mary could and should be called, "christotokos," "Mother of Christ," but that it was absolutely inappropriate to call her "theotokos," "Mother of God." The verdict of the Church was that Nestorius had divided the Christ, because he would let the Mother of Jesus be called the Mother of Christ, but he denied that Christ was united enough that you could actually go so far as to say that she was simply the Mother of God.

The decision to call Mary the Mother of God is a move to protect the unity of Christ—that what could be said of the man Jesus could be said of God the Son, and what could be said of the Son of God could be said of the man Jesus. This is why some Christians speak—correctly—of the crucified God, because Christ is so united that it was inescapably God who was crucified if Jesus was crucified, and by the same token Christians insisted on speaking of God the Son, because Christ is so united that it is inescapably God who was born in her womb if she was the Mother of Jesus.

The reason Nestorius could only call Mary the Mother of Christ, and not the Mother of God, was because his christology drove a wedge between Jesus the man and God the Son that caused him to pull back from the full force of "theotokos." Is it a valid response to try to be picky about the Greek and say that "theotokos" is really more accurately translated "Bearer of God"? If you're really that concerned about linguistics and

Greek, possibly, but in my experience that kind of argument is a matter of "Everybody has two reasons for everything he does—a good reason, and the real reason." The good reason is a linguistic concern that goes above and beyond the call of duty of meticulous precision in translation... but a real reason is one of the fixations, almost one of the theological allergies, that arose out of the medieval Catholic West being very concerned about ferreting out idolatry, that Mary the theotokos receives reverence that God alone should receive. This is a sensible enough objection, if you forget how far Incarnation goes: Mary the theotokos gave Christ his humanity, and he gave her something in the exchange. But the force of the argument may leave it legitimate in English to call Mary "the Bearer of God," but provides no theological justification to say, "On a purely material level, I have to acknowledge that Mary gave birth to God, but I am absolutely not going to say that Mary exercised the spiritual office of motherhood to the God to whom I technically have to acknowledge she gave birth." If the theology is acknowledged that is behind saying that Mary gave birth to God, full stop, it is by the same argument necessary to say that she exercised the full human and spiritual office of motherhood to God, full stop. This is how the logic of the Incarnation unfolds.

And the logic unfolds. The parents of Mary, the Mother of God, are remembered as "the ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna," and the icon depicting James, considered "the Lord's brother" (Gal 1:19), has in Greek, "o adelphotheou:" "the brother of God." And there is a deeper way that this logic unfolds.

The Incarnation is to happen in each person. Saints are people in whom the Incarnation shines brightly, but we were made for the Incarnation. Some exemplars who provide shining examples of the Incarnation are held forth as saints, but we were all made

for divine, uncreated life they share in. The saints live lives out of the Incarnation, and they are part of how the Incarnation is shown to us.

In Orthodox worship, there may or may not be explicit words spoken about icons, but even if not a word is spoken about icons, actions may speak louder than words. A Muslim visitor to Orthodox worship will see something very different from the inside of a mosque, which may be adorned by quite beautiful abstract patterns, but in which anything like an icon is forbidden: pictures as such are forbidden, and it is in particular forbidden to make pictures of Mohammed: perhaps quite a perceptive rule reflecting an insight that a picture of Mohammed would not be likely to be, in the Western sense, simply a nice, inspiring picture on a wall.

What exactly is going on with icons may take some time to understand, but a Western visitor may notice that Orthodox seem to be treating icons differently from just a nice picture on a wall. The Orthodox do not simply stand back with an admiring gaze; they interact with the pictures and kiss them. There may be a line of people standing to pay respects to an icon, and people walking into the temple may almost seem like they are introducing themselves to the icons or greeting them, as one may greet friends one meets in a room.

Orthodox have traditionally called icons "windows of Heaven," and I would like to take a look at what that means. One obvious meaning today is that they are spiritually a view into a larger world, and I would not discount that. People like to work, and perhaps work better, in an office with a window, and I would not discount that either. But it may help to look at some layers of that image that are harder to see today.

Artificial lighting has been around for a long time: lanterns

were good enough in Edison's time that when he invented the light bulb, many people responded, "Why do we need it? What does it give that an oil lantern does not?" But in fact light bulbs do something that is not in easy reach for candles and lanterns. If you have entered an Orthodox temple when all electric lights were off, there may have been dozens of lit candles—possibly hundreds—but this did not stop the room from being very dark. If you're in a dark room and can barely see by candlelight for an hour a day, it may seem memorable and romantic; but a candle offers "just enough light to get by," rather than "as much light as you really want," and before the light bulb became common, work and activities tended to stop when the daylight fled: if you want to wrap something up, candlelight may give you more time, but if you want enough light to go full steam ahead, then you must either have daylight or a bright, electric light. Only with the electric light can it be common and ordinary for people to be working or playing well into the night, not particularly caring about the hindrance of there being no sunlight worthy of the name. Before the light bulb, inside as well as out, you needed sunlight to really see outside, and you needed sunlight to really see inside. Given all this, let me ask a question: what more is a window if you can't flip a switch and turn on the lights?

A window, without having lights, was almost everything that a light bulb is to us. Have you ever woken up, groggy, and fumbled around for the light switch? Have you ever noticed, during a power outage, how hard basic tasks become when you try, for instance, to use a windowless bathroom? Have you ever tried, at a friend's house, to find the light switch for the bathroom when that part of the house is dark? We have good enough light bulbs that we can fail to understand how hard it is to function in darkness. But in a world without light bulbs, windows are the

light bulbs. You don't just look out the window to see what the weather is like; you can see inside because of the light that comes through windows.

There is another insight to be gathered from glass panes. Today, if one visualizes a window, it seems almost by definition to have a glass pane that provided another layer between what was inside the window, and what was outside. It was not always that way: if one looks at the great age of stained glass windows in the West, saying that a window normally has a glass pane is like saying that a wristwatch is normally a unique creation handcrafted by a master jeweller. (For ages, people knew how to make glass, but making glass was prohibitively expensive, and glass itself was rather precious.) I have seen handcrafted timepieces in museums, and if I had a year's salary to blow, I could get a master jeweller's unique creation, but my normal expectation when I see a wristwatch is that it's mass-produced just like my wristwatch. Today a wristwatch is normally mass-produced, and before a couple of centuries ago a window was normally without glass. In another age, if the bugs were bad enough, a window might let light in through a covering, perhaps of vellum, that would let the window serve as a light bulb without making the insect count that much worse. Quite often, a window didn't just let in light. It was also something that let in wind and the outside world: it was something wind could blow through.

To say this much is to miss something important, and something that does not particularly require a history-lesson: the "window of Heaven" is like a window one looks through to see a loved one one has been waiting for. Icons are not landscapes raised to a higher spiritual plane, or purely architectural, or a still life. All of those may make beautiful art, but if icons are windows of Heaven, they show people. They may show Christ, or

his mother, or his saints, or angels, or people at a decisive moment, or the Trinity as shown through three angels. Most are icons of saints. This is to say that most icons are icons of people in whom Christ has become Incarnate... and icons are part of the Incarnation unfolding.

The Orthodox understanding is that you are missing the point of the Incarnation if you affirm that the Son of God became fully a man, but then deny the maxim of the ages, "The Divine became human that the human might become divine. The Son of God became a man that men might become the Sons of God. God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man that men might become gods and the Sons of God." To say that the Incarnation happened in Christ but is not to happen in us is worse than saying, "The operation was a success, but the patient died." It is more like, "The grandmaster in chess played brilliantly until he reached an invincible position but then resigned in defeat," or, "The operation was a success, but the physician refused to save the patient's life," or "The medical researcher discovered the perfect cure for cancer and then refused to share his results or let them save lives." Since the earliest centuries the Orthodox Church has believed that the Incarnation did not stop when Mary bore the God-Man in her womb. Christ is meant to be Incarnate in Christians in every age.

(I've noticed that some of my friends list their Facebook "Religious Views" as "Follower of Jesus." There's something in that modest way of putting it that tempts me to list my own views as, "Orthodox Christian: 'Follower of Jesus' is another way of describing an alter Christus, Latin for 'another Christ'!")

Christ is the Savior and Lord of the whole Creation: there is indeed something very special about being human, but the sanctifying reach of the Incarnation is a sanctifying reach that

extends to matter. The rule elsewhere in theology is that the deepest symbols are symbols that represent and embody what they represent, and it is the Orthodox experience that icons are just that degree of symbol.

One Protestant student at an Orthodox seminary mentioned, as a local oddity, that when he said he didn't venerate icons, asked him if he believed in the Incarnation. To him the question was a complete non sequitur. But the Orthodox spiritual experience is that the veneration of icons is part of the Incarnation unfolding, and saying that you believe in the Incarnation but not that the Incarnation unfolds into icons, is a bit like saying that you want to be a scholar but don't want to be troubled with reading books.

I would like to make one last remark about culture and the Incarnation, before shifting focus, from being primarily concerned about Orthodoxy and Islam, to being primarily concerned about Orthodoxy and the Reformation.

At least of the major groups of Orthodox Christians is Arabic. In the Arab world, there is a strong Muslim majority, but many parts of the Arab world have a significant Christian minority, and more specifically an Orthodox minority.

One aspect of different cultures are rules about touch—when it is and isn't permitted, among other things. As may be guessed, the devout Muslim practice has much stricter rules than American culture, at least about men touching women: if I were to be introduced to a devout Muslim woman in many parts of the Arabic world—which is something of an if, as those cultures see many fewer reasons why such an interaction would be appropriate; the idea of "just hanging out" would seem strange—a devout Muslim woman may well place her hand on her heart and make a slight bow as a gesture of respect and acknowledgment,

but shaking hands would be a big deal, and probably seen as at best questionably appropriate. In general, the lines of what would be considered appropriate would call for much less interaction, and even a tap on the shoulder would not obviously be "no big deal." There are very different rules on touch, and a handshake with palm against palm is emphatically not "no big deal."

The Arabic expression of Orthodoxy shows some Muslim influences; in some ways, it would be rather surprising if it didn't. However, as regards touch, it is relatively common for Arab Christians to greet one another with kisses, including men and women giving each other kisses: this can be part of normal social interaction or of the Divine Liturgy.

If you are wondering what relevance this has to do with religion, as it seems obviously a cultural detail, it is one example of what an anthropologist would call "culture" being tied to worship and its implications. Such a kiss as is found in Arabic forms of Orthodoxy is also found in Slavic forms of Orthodoxy; the practice may differ slightly, and greeting with kisses may be more associated with special events, but both practices are the same reality.

In the Greek New Testament, the main word for worship literally means to emphatically kiss or bow. That may not survive in English translation, but there's something there, and it is not an accident. In Orthodox worship, to kiss an icon is to display reverence that ultimately points to God: John the Damascene and others have been very clear that the respect you show to an icon passes through to God. It is an extension of the Incarnation. A kiss between Orthodox Christians is not simply a cultural detail; it is connected to the kiss given to icons, and it is connected to reverence to one in whom Christ is, to some degree,

Incarnate. Orthodox speak today of people as living icons, and though this manner of speech has not always been in fashion, there is a connection between a kiss saluting an icon that is ultimately of Christ, and a kiss saluting a fellow believer who is being transformed into the likeness of Christ. And what is particularly interesting about Arabic forms of Orthodoxy is that the "custom" has survived over a millenium of Muslim rule. (It's really not just a custom; if it were "just a custom," it would not have survived nearly so long.)

Having looked at Orthodoxy, Islam, and the Incarnation, my point has not really been to say that Islam does not believe in the Incarnation; that much could be deduced from any decent encyclopedia entry on the topic. My real point of interest has been to look at exactly how Islam does not believe in the Incarnation: not only would devout Muslims be disturbed by the idea that God could become Incarnate, or that that would be fitting to God, but Muslim culture very clearly and consistently works out what it means to refuse to entertain the Incarnation.

Actions not only speak louder than words; they also speak in more detail than words, and they can reveal things that words do not.

Now I would like to turn my attention from Orthodoxy and Islam, to Orthodoxy and the Reformation.

Perhaps this is setting limits on Protestantism, but most of the conservative Protestantism I know—or, rather, all—believes on philosophical grounds every finding about the Incarnation from the Church Councils. Every one of the Christologies that was deemed inadequate—including some I have not mentioned—is something Protestants and the better Reformers dismiss as out of bounds. What I have hinted at by referring to maximum Christology is something considered non-negotiable: Reformers

may not ascribe definitive authority to the Church Councils in the sense that Orthodox do, but the findings about the Incarnation are effectively treated as "If you don't believe this, you're not Christian." And so it would seem odd to question how much the Reformers believed in the Incarnation, but that is exactly what I want to question.

How much of what I have said about Islam could be said of the Reformation, or parts of it? I was thinking of Calvinism at some early parts of this essay. I cannot say that Calvinism encourages a fatalism that is languid about action. The "Protestant work ethic" we proverbially speak of is in fact a Calvinist work ethic, and Calvinists are often hard workers.

Calvinist scholars proclaim in word and deed that "thinking Christianly" is a big deal. It would be a mistake to say that this aspect of Calvinist practice could have nothing to do with their theology. Therefore, what I have said earlier about Islam being conducive to inshallah, bukhara, malesh should not be applied to Calvinist Christianity.

As I have encountered it, Calvinism does not live a fatalistic life.

However, that does not take away a profound point of contact: Islam does not lead people to believe that they were created to be conversation partners for God, fashioned to contribute to the conversation. Calvinism is less than enthusiastic in trumpeting a theology of human contribution; some very serious Calvinists express the concern that if we believe we can contribute to our conversation with God, we have, in the title of one book, "No Place for [God's] Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism" and if we understand God as sovereign, we can contribute nothing but a rubber stamp to God working in us. And in that regard, Calvinism, a bit like Islam,

falls subject to Chesterton's critique: "It denies the existence of man."

And in that regard, Orthodoxy can raise the question of how far Calvinism really believes in the Incarnation.

My own experience with the Mennonite Church—even a Mennonite Church relaxed enough to encourage artistic impulses—is that the Mennonite Church worked out, very consistently, what it means to say that images can have no helpful spiritual reality. What I saw and experienced extended well beyond images: it meant that "spirit" and "matter" were in almost separate compartments: there was a special exception for people who were composed of both spirit and matter, and there was a phenomenal miracle when the Son of God became man, but these were exceptions that ran against the usual course of things.

In Orthodoxy, our physical world is pregnant with spirit: men are both matter and spirit because we are the microcosm a crowning jewel to Creation. We are the masterpiece of an excellent corpus, not a pearl crowded by worthless sand, and there is a mountain of difference between saying "They're all pretty good, but this one is the best," and saying, "This is the only good one—the rest are atrocious." It is the same difference as the difference between saying that spirit and matter are in separate water-tight compartments separated by a chasm except in the case of humans, and saying that the material world was made to share in spiritual glory, and that spiritual and material Creation are woven into the same masterwork with mankind as its ornament and jewel. This difference parallels the difference between saying on the one hand that there's normal human life and then there's one exception, Christ, who is so unlike what we normally mean by 'human', and on the other hand saying that Christ is the apex of human existence, the one man

who fully lived the stature the human race was created for, the one whom St. Paul calls "the last Adam" (see [I Cor. 15:45-49](#)).

What I saw in Mennonite spiritual practice was that the iconoclasm was a microcosm of a world where people alone of the whole Creation bridged a chasm that otherwise separated spirit and matter, and the Incarnation was an exception: I never heard, "The Divine became human that the human might become divine."

The denial of Incarnation in icons left a spiritual world with no place for an Incarnation that was to take place in people: the Incarnation began and ended when the Son of God became a man.

And now on to the holy kiss.

I remember being shocked when an Orthodox friend mentioned, in a matter of fact way, that Orthodox Christians greet each other with kisses to celebrate (in this case) Pascha, and that this was rooted in the Biblical words about greeting one another with a holy kiss. This was so different from anything I had seen among Protestants, and I would like to talk about the contrast.

The best way I can concisely describe how the holy kiss was viewed is that, when Evangelicals want to give an example of cultural wackiness that somehow ended up in the Bible, there is one standard example that comes up: "Greet one another with a holy kiss."

I found the response when I suggested that those words be taken seriously to be essentially the same among the faithful and among (conservative) Bible scholars at Cambridge: if you say that "Greet one another with a holy kiss" should be given attention as part of God's revelation, you might as well have sprouted a second head. The response from both groups was essentially culture shock: if I pressed my point, people might see that there was a point worth making, perhaps tell me I was on to something

—but even when I pressed my point at Cambridge, not one scholar acknowledged my point that the verse admitted a study for doctrinal content. If I was to study the holy kiss in the Bible, it had to be a study of a cultural and historical detail, used for studying the Bible as a historical document, rather than as something doctrinal, spiritual, or otherwise relevant for us today. I wanted to do a spiritual and doctrinal study, and that was not allowed except as doctrinal and spiritual elements would occasionally come up in a study of history and customs.

My point in mentioning this is that people didn't just disagree when I said "Greet one another with a holy kiss" is revelation and of spiritual benefit; it was so far out of the realm of things people could conceive as being taken seriously that it caused culture shock: my first battle was never about being agreed with; it was getting my position to be taken seriously. This seems to offer a very strong pedigree in saying that the holy kiss does not have much of a proper theological place to be put in. And if the holy kiss is a practice that derives from the Incarnation—if it is connected to the kiss of reverence that feeds into a major Greek term for worship of God—then this near-total inability to conceive of "Greet one another with a holy kiss" as God's revelation for us is a near-total lack of needed and Incarnational soil for that practice to be planted in or grow out of. And this would seem to be another area where the Reformation attempts an unwavering and absolute faith in the Incarnation, but is very ill-prepared to live out a classical unfolding of the conviction.

When I was at [Calvin](#), I remember one professor laying theological foundations. To address the question, "What were we made for?" he gave the answer, "Worship and culture," only he deliberately gave it in Latin: "Cultas et culturas." The reason is that, in English, 'worship' and 'culture' may be two separate

words, but in Latin they spring from the same root, and the Latin exposes the connection. There may, or may not, be other things I disagree with him about. I don't disagree with the point he was making there; I think it is beautiful, and I might press it further by saying that worship becomes incarnate in culture: worship gives its practical expression in culture. A culture bears witness to the nature of whatever God or god(s) its society worships. It bears a profound witness.

My thesis for much of this paper is that Orthodoxy demonstrates the unfolding of the Incarnation, and Islam demonstrates the unfolding of denying the Incarnation. There are many other factors at play, but several details about Orthodox practice and culture demonstrate what practical belief in the Incarnation may look like, and several details about Islamic practice and culture demonstrate what practical rejection of the Incarnation may look like. And if so, this may raise some very interesting questions about the Reformation and even the more conservative Protestant Christianity.

As far as ideas and statements go, absolute and full belief in the Incarnation is non-negotiable across the board for different forms of Protestant Christianity: there may be a lot of difference between the more conservative heirs of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, but asserting what the Councils asserted about Christ and the Incarnation remains entirely non-negotiable, and probably will remain so for as long as conservative Protestant Christianity is around.

However, in terms of cultural working out, there is real question about how far Protestant Christianity lets the Incarnation unfold: I have read very few Protestants solidly deny that the Incarnation ends with Christ, and in practical terms, many would agree to disagree with Calvinism over the

question of free will, but I have yet to hear the question of whether Calvinism, in denying man anything to contribute to his salvation save a rubber stamp, denies the reality of man and in so doing cuts down the Incarnation. None of the Evangelical critiques I've read of Calvinism say that Calvinism jeopardizes the Incarnation. That the Incarnation could unfurl so that it is right to call Mary the Mother of God, or direct reverence to saints—even Protestants who agree to disagree may be a bit squeamish, and the idea that this is a proper consequence of the Incarnation, almost its purpose, is not one that comes up. Icons as one feature of a sanctified cosmos with Christ as its head (Eph 1:22), don't come up, and it is my impression that where there are no icons, there is a chasm between matter and spirit, and the unity of spirit and matter in Christ and the human person may be an exception rather than the highest example. There may be other issues to be raised as well: is the doctrine of the Invisible Church a doctrine of the Virtual Incarnation? The common thread running through these things is that the Incarnation may be asserted on a philosophical level by Protestants, but it does not seem to unfurl as it might as the concrete culture plays out. The cultural shape of Protestant Christianity raises questions about how much practical belief there is in the Incarnation.

If the question is, "Where do we go from here?" the answer might be in the closing words of Mark 9:17-24 (RSV):

And one of the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a dumb spirit; and wherever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able."

And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."

And they brought the boy to him; and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

And Jesus asked his father, "How long has he had this?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us."

And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible to him who believes."

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

# Inclusive Language Greek Manuscript Discovered

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — There is a considerable buzz among New Testament scholars over the discovery of a near-complete Greek manuscript to the book of the Bible called Romans. The manuscript is similar to others, but is the first known manuscript to mirror the Today's New International Version (TNIV) in its use of inclusive language.

There is a wide consensus among both conservative and liberal scholars that most Greek manuscripts use grammatically masculine words where the original author meant to include women as fully as men. This manuscript, referred to by scholars as R221819, is similar to other such manuscripts but uses inclusive language where applicable.

The book of Romans was first written in Greek and is considered foundational in its treatment of what it means to be a Christian. Chapter eight is well-known among people who read the Bible; its fourteenth and fifteenth verses are shown above. Huioi ("sons") in verse 14 is replaced by a more inclusive tekna

("children"), and various word forms are adapted to a gender-neutral spelling. R221819 is thought to reflect the TNIV's distinguishing features with considerable accuracy.

Kenneth Barker, one of the leading scholars involved with the TNIV, said, "I don't think this is quite as big of a deal as people make. It's just a minor change, like other textual variations, and simply clarifies the author's intent." He disclaims any greater significance to the discovery.

The progressive element of Christians for Biblical Equality has been jubilant. One scholar said, "This is a very important step in the right direction. I look forward to when a manuscript is found where the patriarchal Theos is replaced by the more neutral Theon. It really only means changing a couple of the case endings plus the spelling of the word that means 'the.' Theon would remain in the second declension. It is just a small change, but it would help Christians reach out effectively to those on the margins of society." After all, if one clarification helps, why not another?

# **"Inclusive" Language and Other Debates**

## **How I scared off all the other advisors**

Before I became Orthodox, I entered a diploma in theology program and wanted to do a thesis on programming-style "design patterns" and recurring patterns in Biblical Egalitarian argument where problems in the arguments, it seemed to me, raised a red flag about the conclusions. I managed to scare off most prospective advisors by the idea of using concepts used in computer science, and almost scared off even the Biblical scholar who handles the computer stuff at a place connected with the university before (somewhat by accident) he looked at the concept I wanted to carry over from computer science and concluded that it wasn't so scary after all, and in fact while he said, "I have never heard of an approach like this before," the concept itself was nowhere so scary to a scholar in theology as the impression I gave by how I introduced my intended thesis. I

wrote a thesis under his direction, and at the end of the year, mostly in gesture of thanks, I gave him a classic text in object-oriented programming's "design patterns."

The scholar is a major scholar in Biblical Egalitarian circles, as in a plenary speaker at CBE conferences. He gave me kind and appropriate direction in a thesis that critique common styles of argument associated with convictions that are important to him, and we've remained in contact every now and then. There may be important distinctions within Biblical Egalitarians, but when he directed me he was working to help me produce a good thesis and did so without trying to lead me to his position, and I do not know what exact stripe of Biblical Egalitarian he is.

## Defining terms

I use the terms Biblical Egalitarian and complementarian heavily here. The two terms represent the liberal and conservative camps on issues of men, women, and gender. The flagship organization for Biblical Egalitarians (or, more simply, egalitarians) is [Christians for Biblical Equality](#); the flagship organization for complementarians is [The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#).

**Biblical Egalitarians** try to combine Christianity with feminist concerns of various stripes. For one example, they adamantly believe the Bible's "In Christ there is no... male nor female" and, more specifically, consistently try to neutralize "Wives, submit to your husbands as if to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave his life for her..." to make room for "no male nor female". To the Egalitarian, if you really believe "In Christ there is no male nor female", you believe it on terms informed by feminism. In my experience Biblical Egalitarianism is always argued with sophistry; what got me off sitting on the fence was a forceful presentation of Biblical Egalitarianism clothed in rhetoric that profoundly disturbed me. There is more to Biblical egalitarianism than inclusive language advocacy, but one part of their concern is that using "man" or "brother" when your intent is generic is perpetuating an injustice towards women. Overall there are several feminist-influenced concerns in

Biblical egalitarianism; inclusive language is one of them. The basic goal of Bible scholarship pursued by Biblical Egalitarians is to arrive at an understanding of key passages that is more informed by feminist concerns.

**Complementarians**, in a name as carefully chosen as "egalitarians", argue that we are missing something until we understand men and women as complementary. They tend to believe that "In Christ there is no... male nor female" and "Wives, submit to your husbands as if to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave his life for her..." both belong to the same whole and in fact seem to both be cut from the same cloth. Complementarians are people who say, "No, that's not good," in response to feminism trying to uproot elements of traditional society. However, groups like the [Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#) are making a proactive effort to take a positive position. They are not simply making a negative reaction to change; they are trying to offer a carefully considered positive position about why specific changes are not good and what a real, serious alternative to those changes would be. The basic goal of Bible scholarship pursued by complementarians is to arrive at an understanding that is more Biblical—not for us to adjust the Bible, but for the Bible to adjust us.

"Inclusive" language is not the only issue for either, but it is not a trivial issue, and I focus on it here. I would briefly suggest that what is at issue is not whether women are included, but the terms of inclusion: belabored "inclusive" language pushes to a Biblical egalitarian version of inclusion, while traditional language includes women on more complementarian terms.

## Where I stand

Where do I stand? "It's complicated" may be the best short answer, but that's misleading. First of all, though I am closer to complementarianism than egalitarianism, it does not mean "I'm a complementarian but I'd rather not say so plainly," and second of all, it does not mean, "I'm trying to forge my own new path between the two extremes." Then what on earth does it mean?

Um, it's complicated.

The Catholic Church teaches that Catholics and Orthodox believe the same things, and ultimately the only barrier to reunification is that the Orthodox fail to lovingly recognize that we should restore full communion. I responded to that in [An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism](#). Some Orthodox have found it a bit forceful, but more have found it astute in its observations. But Catholics have only given one response: "**FOUL!** There's no way you can understand us if you are saying what you are saying about Thomas Aquinas and such."

And as Orthodox, I find the question "Are you a complementarian or egalitarian?" something like "Are you Catholic or Protestant?" as a false dilemma.

Before becoming Orthodox, I wrote [an essay called "Knights and Ladies" that tried to pin down as qualities manhood and womanhood, and suggested a made-up term "qualitarian" as an alternative to "complementarian."](#) It's a piece that I consulted

several men and women in writing, that complementarians seem to like and egalitarians seem to critique, but I now regard it as flawed. It's not exactly that I want to mix in more egalitarianism, but the basic project I took on was a thick description of qualities as a line of response, and a thick description of qualities is part of postmodern Zeitgeist and not a real part of Orthodox theology, and as such it is (arguably) a fairly successful attempt to bark up the wrong tree in offering a rebuttal.

There is a forum where I posted certain arguments and received counter-arguments from Orthodox scholars that were subtly reminiscent of the kinds of arguments I had studied in Biblical Egalitarian texts in that thesis. For one example, I made an argument from experience and basic observations about society, and it was dismissed by an Orthodox scholar who had just published a paper with his own thesis. The stated ground? I wasn't arguing from the Fathers. I'd almost like to say that I let that dismissal slide; a close reading of Church Fathers is not what powers the Church Fathers, but writing of spiritual realities out of experience. But I dropped that line of argument, and in response to his dismissal of both my argument and other attempts to define the qualities of male and female, I pulled from the beloved theologian St. Maximus Confessor and said that, like the Cappadocians and some other figures, St. Maximus Confessor did very much root for transcending the differences between male and female, but this was in connection with a theology that sought to transcend the differences between the spiritual and the material, paradise and the inhabited world, Heaven and earth, and ultimately the uncreated and the created. In every one of the other four cases, the desire to transcend a difference assumes there's a difference in place to begin with.

When I gave this answer to a request to argue from the Church Fathers, he dismissed St. Maximus on this point altogether, saying that his widely loved theology was just flawed.

This example may invite a gentle response of, "Your interlocutor was a scholar who had just published a paper that you were hacking away at; it would be naive to expect him to welcome your argument." And perhaps it would be, but this is an example of a common thread; though Orthodox heirarchs have not necessarily treated feminism as something to put their foot down on, and there are Biblical Egalitarians and feminists in the Orthodox Church, every single argument I've seen from an Orthodox trying to help me be more open and receptive to those perspectives has arguments that smell really funny—a strong whiff of eau de red flag.

I haven't spent too much more time revising my beliefs after becoming Orthodox, not really because I think I've arrived at the full truth, but because as people grow in Orthodoxy, sooner or later they figure out that there is more important work than straightening out their worldviews, and they let go of reasoning about truth because they are working to drink Truth Himself. Nonetheless, I wanted to give this email conversation between him and myself, and pay attention to how appropriate or inappropriate the rhetoric is in particular.

## Should we really be that concerned about rhetoric?

I pay very close attention to rhetoric, rhetorical examples, and argument in these pages. There is a reason why which arises from my experience.

In the [Sermon on the Mount](#), Christ calls for a very close care to the fruits people bear:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

The most obvious "fruits" might be how people are treated, especially the less powerful, sexual behavior, and so on, but as time has passed rhetoric has time and again been faithful to its tree: commendable positions are advanced with commendable rhetoric and false positions are advanced with slippery rhetoric. It is a rare case, rare indeed, where truths we would best heed are heralded by rhetorical treachery.

I do not fault the presence of rhetoric; an observer would say that my writing is just as rhetorical, and just as much contains some kinds of argument and not others, as any piece whose rhetoric and argument I treat as cause for concern. But certain kinds of rhetoric aren't just a rotten wrapping paper around healthgiving fruit. They betray that much more is tainted in the offering than merely a slight logical fallacy here, a misleading example there.

I would not limit the "fruit" in the [Sermon on the Mount](#) to be rhetoric alone; I don't really believe it is one of the main fruits Christ intended to evoke, compared to how one treats the poor (for instance). But it is an important fruit in one respect: it is available to us as long as we have the message.

In this day of the Internet, false prophets may rarely meet us face to face and we may have little clue of a teacher's sexual fidelity, or lack thereof, or whether the person arguing with us feels entitled to socially acceptable theft, whether to take office supplies or to listen to music without paying the artist or those who worked to make the music available. It might take a Big Brother to tell us whether an activist bears good or bad fruit there. But there is one way we can attend to the prophets' fruits without Big Brother invasions of privacy: true and false prophet alike offer us their rhetoric, and it is well worth attending to this one fruit that is impossible to hide.

## **Rhetoric that keeps on recurring—giving an answer when it appears in email**

Let us turn to the conversation, which began after I put up a search engine and sent him a link; he followed a link and read, on my site, [The Commentary](#), and then [Inclusive Language Greek Manuscript Discovered](#). He responded to both:

**My advisor wrote:**

BTW I read your "Commentary" piece a couple of times. I wasn't sure what you were getting at.

At first glance it looked like you are rejecting all interpretations which take cultural context into account.

At second reading it looks like you may merely be warning readers that humanity itself hasn't changed, so we shouldn't re-interpret the Bible as if people weren't so clever then.

But I wasn't sure.

But it left me wondering:

\* Are you saying we shouldn't make allowance for greater ignorance in the past?

We are no more intelligent now, but we do have better understanding about medicine, geology, astronomy etc. This affects the way we interpret things like "the moon turned to blood" - which we would now regard as an atmospheric

phenomenon and nothing to do with the nature of the moon.

\* Are you saying we shouldn't make allowance for cultural situations in the past?

God expects the same morality from humans at all times, but don't the rules change in order to result in the same principles?

I'm thinking of things like slavery, which in the OT was restricted to certain permitted types (6-yr voluntary slavery, and minimum rights for lifelong slaves from warfare), and was tolerated in the NT "for the sake of the Gospel", and was increasingly opposed by the church (albeit very gradually) with as much speed as society permitted.

Perhaps I didn't read it carefully enough.

Then I went on to read your piece on the gender-neutral MS. Do you really think that there are people who want to accurately reflect the gender of everything in the Bible? The NLT and others have followed the TNIV lead, and even the ESV has a policy of translating anthropos as 'people' or something similarly neutral. I don't know ANY version which uses the pronoun "it" for the Holy Spirit when the Greek does - eg in Jn.14:17. How would you decide when to follow the Greek and when to follow English convention?

I guess that your aim for these pieces of writing is to provoke the reader to think about the issues, rather than give an answer.

You have certainly succeeded in my case!

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**My advisor wrote:**

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God expects the same morality from humans at all times, but don't the rules change in order to result in the same principles? I'm thinking of things like slavery, which in the OT was restricted to certain permitted types (6-yr voluntary slavery, and minimum rights for lifelong slaves from warfare), and was tolerated in the NT "for the sake of the Gospel", and was increasingly opposed by the church (albeit very gradually) with as much speed as society permitted.

Perhaps I didn't read it carefully enough.

**I wrote:**

Perhaps one way we should put it is that we should attend to the beam in our own eye.

Then I went on to read your piece on the gender-neutral MS.

Do you really think that there are people who want to accurately reflect the gender of everything in the Bible? The NLT and others have followed the TNIV lead, and even the ESV has a policy of translating anthropos as 'people' or something similarly neutral. I don't know ANY version which uses the pronoun "it" for the Holy Spirit when the Greek does - eg in Jn.14:17. How would you decide when to follow the Greek and when to follow English convention?

The point is not exactly that the English grammar of translations should follow *Greek* grammar as regards grammatical gender, but that what is going on in inclusive language isn't going on in the Bible.

This response is brief and enigmatic: not the most helpful. But in the following emails I address the concerns and touch on the same things from different angles.

Despite the communication weaknesses in my writing, I thought some of the points were worth sharing.

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**My advisor wrote:**

\* Are you saying we shouldn't make allowance for cultural situations in the past?

God expects the same morality from humans at all times, but don't the rules change in order to result in the same principles? I'm thinking of things like slavery, which in the OT was restricted to certain permitted types (6-yr voluntary slavery, and minimum rights for lifelong slaves from warfare), and was tolerated in the NT "for the sake of the Gospel", and was increasingly opposed by the church (albeit very gradually) with as much speed as society permitted.

**I wrote:**

I wanted to comment on this point more specifically.

To an American, references to slavery first evoke field-slaves in our country. The movie *Malcolm X* has Malcolm on a TV show debate opposite a black opponent who was very educated, culturally almost white, and played to what a white audience then would like to hear for their comfort. The host asked Malcolm what he called his opponent, and he shouted a racial slur and then distinguished between house- and field-slaves: the field-slave's lot was extremely rough; the house slave was much less difficult and could verge on effectively being a well and politely-treated servant. Compared to the field slave who faced rough realities, the house slave almost represented a leisure class and the house-slave's outlook and experience were white.

In the U.S. we no longer have people clothed in a few

In the U.S., we no longer have people clothed in a few garments, meant to last, with cotton garments woven from the work of field slaves. We have instead many garments meant to wear out, and the culture of a fashion industry that socially enforces purchases above replacement of low-quality garments, made in sweatshops which wear people out faster than U.S. field slavery wore people out. And there are other areas where we are pushing forward not only on abortion, but on scientific use of human embryos meant to be destroyed.

And I do not exclude the U.K. from this critique.

I would really not consider a picture to be complete that includes the abolition of slavery and remains, unlike St. John Chrysostom on slavery, silent on other areas where we do worse.

My initial response to his mention of slavery mentioned "a beam in our eye"; this was intended to specify one such beam that makes me skeptical of celebrations of how much we have progressed as a society.

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**My advisor wrote:**

Could I press you a little more on what you mean by inclusive language? How would you translate the following:

Blessed is the man who ... ([Ps.1](#))

If a brother sins against you... ([Lk.17.3](#))

God made man in his own image, ... male and female he made them  
([Gen.1.27](#))

If we had read these in a modern English book, we'd assume the author was implying that

\* women can't be blessed,

\* sisters don't sin against you

\* women aren't made in the image of God.

Some Bibles are translated to help people understand what the words were in the Greek and Hebrew, while others are translated to help people understand what God's message is, in their own language. It is fairly easy to translate those verses literally, but how would you translate them into modern English so that a reader wouldn't get the wrong impression about what the message is?

I'm trying to gauge opinions on this from a wide range of people, and I'd be interested in your response.

But don't feel pressured into answering - I won't think badly of you if you don't have time to answer.

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**My advisor wrote:**

Could I press you a little more on what you mean by inclusive language?

How would you translate the following:

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If we had read these in a modern English book, we'd assume the author was implying that

- \* women can't be blessed,
- \* sisters don't sin against you
- \* women aren't made in the image of God.

**I wrote:**

Your last paragraph almost begs the question; it's reminiscent of saying "humankind" even though never, outside of the shadow of inclusive language efforts, has "mankind" been understood to encompass anything less than all of us.

"Exclusive" language is what "inclusive" language wants standard English to be. Inclusive language efforts, and specifically the efforts to recast the alternative as exclusive, redefining "man", "brother" (and even "mankind") to be male only, are not a more inclusive alternative to an unchanged option. They are an effort to replace a naturally inclusive language with a more belabored language, and redefine away the inclusive character of what is being attacked.

My point here is that "exclusive language" and "inclusive language" are no mere neutral and descriptive terms: they are loaded language that misrepresent what change is actually being advanced. An alternative, if pointed, terminology for "exclusive" language and "inclusive" language might be **naturally inclusive language** and **belabored inclusive language**.

"Exclusive" language is arguably not what inclusive language advocates say it is, language that includes women where the alternative is exclusive to them, except where inclusive language advocates have succeeded in redefining naturally inclusive language as exclusive language.

Furthermore, there are several things to untangle, and I give more than one answer to the question about how I would translate "If a brother..." and other passages because there is more than one thing to say. I write quite a few emails because there's really quite a lot tangled up in the remarks I am responding to.

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I wanted to add a couple of notes from a class that dealt in hardcore feminist theology. I am noting this specifically as something that I would not directly lump Biblical Egalitarians in with unless Biblical Egalitarians ask to be lumped in with them.

The first point was that several of them dealt with the question of an inclusive term for one person of unspecified gender, and in general did not opt to use "they" for one person. Several alternatives were tried, including "s/he" (pronounced "she"), and one author tried hard to make the point that "she" and "her" could be entirely appropriate as a rightly inclusive term for males as well as females.

The second point is that so far as I remember, none of the feminist authors were of limited concern for adult women only; some might speak at one point and refer only to adults (in reference to aging, for instance), but all of the authors were concerned for girls, and from whenever life began in their eyes, a girl was a full-fledged member of the class of women to be cared for...

...but none of them raised concerns of "inclusive language" that "woman" is a term only referring to adults, and so is wrongly applied to a 14 year old or a 14 month old.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but it seems when feminists want to use language that will include all females, their term of choice works like the "exclusive" language of "man", "mankind", and such. The list of people who choose the language style of naturally inclusive language, when they want to include all members of a group, includes feminists who never flinch at using

"women" when they mean to include all females—girls every bit as much as adult women.

And returning to the topic of my advisor and his Biblical Egalitarianism, while he clearly uses and advocates **gender-**inclusive language, he never once uses what might be called **age-**inclusive language. He may ask if a rendering of "Blessed is the man..." demands "Women can't be blessed", but he seems entirely unconcerned to clarify whether minors can be blessed. He never uses words like "child", "boy", "girl", "infant", etc: he applies sophistry to ask us to make it clear that women can be blessed, but the same effort is not made for children, even if they are girls!

It would appear that at least as far as age is concerned, my advisor assumes that what is called "exclusive language" in gender is not exclusive at all, but **naturally inclusive**.

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**My advisor wrote:**

Could I press you a little more on what you mean by  
inclusive language?

How would you translate the following:

Blessed is the man who ... (Ps.1)

If a brother sins against you... (Lk.17.3)

God made man in his own image, ... male and female he  
made them (Gen.1.27)

**I wrote:**

I might also comment, before giving a brief interlude that  
the first example on Orthodox rather than Protestant kinds  
of exegesis refers to Christ primarily and us derivatively,  
which is an aside to the context as it has been:

The last example differs from the first two examples,  
where conservative and liberal readings of the underlying text  
alike take terms as generic.

In terms of Orthodox Church Fathers who can attract  
feminists, the Cappadocians are one group of usual suspects;  
St. Ephrem, who had women as well as men chanting liturgical  
teaching in liturgy, is another, and Kathleen McVey's Ephrem  
the Syrian: Hymns shows some of those concerns. At one  
point, "Branch" is the metaphorical name applied to the Cross  
and then Christ, and the translator explains that the term  
'branch' is grammatically feminine and, at that point, renders  
repeated pronoun references to the Branch, which refer to  
Christ with varying ambiguity, as "She".

The footnote I take as an example of the French proverb

"Qui s'excuse, s'accuse" (in politically correct English: "To excuse yourself is [by that very fact] to accuse yourself") and it is the same light that I read the NRSV's excusing and accusing themselves for their translation for what you left out in the ellipsis, rendering "them" for "him" in "in the image of God he created him"; I've read the whole NRSV and that footnote is the most convoluted footnote justifying a translation that the NRSV offers; the NRSV does not usually s'excuse/s'accuse concerning its renderings.

Now that is over the ellipsis. As regards referring to God as "him", we have left the question of horizontal inclusive language where a grammatically male reference to a person of unspecified sex in the original text is argued to require explicitly gender-neutral language in English today. Or to put it differently, the original text worked more like the English now called "exclusive language", but its spirit today is best reflected by the "inclusive language" that is used in redefining the alternative as "exclusive language". But this question is not the issue in calling God "him"; at most it is a gateway drug.

The first two comments are simply about passages where all sensible scholarship agrees that "man", "brother", etc. as they appear in the original text are intended to include women. The last example is one where there is real controversy over whether the text should be rendered to be more politically correct. I was trying to say, "Look, I see two problems—cans of worms—in translating the last text that aren't in the first two."

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**My advisor wrote:**

\* Are you saying we shouldn't make allowance for cultural situations in the past?

God expects the same morality from humans at all times, but don't the rules change in order to result in the same principles? I'm thinking of things like slavery, which in the OT was restricted to certain permitted types (6-yr voluntary slavery, and minimum rights for lifelong slaves from warfare), and was tolerated in the NT "for the sake of the Gospel", and was increasingly opposed by the church (albeit very gradually) with as much speed as society permitted.

**I wrote:**

There's something I might like to comment.

There are some points where any number of examples might be chosen. In the Bible, [Sodom is an emblem of sin](#) and is used to say that a particular community's sins are grievous, but the list of sins connected to Sodom is rather open-ended: without going with queer scholarship and saying that the sin had nothing to do with "sodomy", there is room to say that the men of Sodom showing vile and obscene inhospitality to angelic visitors was the anvil that broke the camel's back; part of the build-up is a dialogue in which Abraham tries to negotiate with a God who cannot find ten righteous in the city. The city is an image of vice later in the Bible, but the sins that are compared to Sodom are open-ended: they include hollow religious observances while preying on one's neighbor and the

poor ([opening of Isaiah](#)), adultery and defiled living ([Jeremiah 23:14](#)), pride and excessive eating without care for the poor ([Ezekiel 16](#)), not receiving Christ's apostles appropriately ([Matthew 10](#)), general ungodliness ([II Peter 2:6](#)), and unnatural lust ([Jude 7](#), perhaps the biggest fly in the ointment to queer exegetes who assert that Sodom's story is no more about homosexual relations as such than the story in [Judges 19](#) is about heterosexual relations as such). But the list is open-ended and I have not included connections of pagan nations; my main point is that the list of sins is open-ended; prophets name Sodom in connection to the sins they indict. And other things are open-ended in church and in scholarship...

But it really strikes me how much this one simple example of slavery and the Bible comes up in certain contexts. When I read queer scholarship arguing that the story of Sodom can be read without the hypothesis that homosexual relationships are condemned as such, a discussion of slavery in the Bible paves the way. When Craig Keener argues in the example of bad scholarship I chose for my thesis that we can do better than the Ephesians haustafel, a discussion of slavery in the Bible paves the way. When I discussed this regularity with one teacher, and asked "If it is necessary that we will get our bearings somewhere about what orients our understanding of Scripture, why this specific paradigm example?" It would seem that when people want to enhance what the Bible has, or draw out what it intends more clearly, or improve on it as demoted (if in fact I name more than one intent), the paradigm example that should orient our view of Scripture invariably finds itself in a Bible that did not offer our progressive abolitionism.

(I might comment in reference to my earlier example,

though, of clothing and sweatshops: Before the abolition of slavery, Northern as well as Southern U.S. citizens who wore cotton were clothed at the expense of preventable human misery from field-slavery. And today, black and white Americans alike are clothed at the expense of preventable human misery from sweatshops. But there is a difference of scale. Americans own, use, and replace quite a few more garments, and if one may speak of a "carbon footprint", one may perhaps also speak of a "footprint in preventable human misery", and say that U.S. field slavery was an abomination, but the "footprint in preventable human misery" of an American today in clothing is not comparable to the footprint of an American before the civil war; it is comparable to the footprint of a small city. And as long as we have excess of clothing and other unneeded luxuries at the expense of preventable human misery, we should perhaps moderate our celebration of ourselves for having progressed beyond such evils as slavery.)

When I made the comment about this one example that keeps paving the way to orient us, the professor made a comment about canons within a canon, and I would like to comment on the concept and then her specific comment. The idea of a canon within a canon is not a particularly Orthodox one, and I'm not sure I've ever read an Orthodox theologian speak in such terms. The first time the concept was explained to me was something like this: "All great and even minor theologians draw disproportionately from some areas of the Bible more than others, and they do not all do so in exactly the same way. We call the areas of focus 'the canon within the canon.'" And in that sense, I'm not sure there's Orthodox room to object, even if there may be more important things to

say. But what I would say is that while that is one way of understanding the canon, it is profoundly misleading to suggest that this is the only basic meaning current in academia. On those terms, which I'm not sure I'd particularly object to, "the canon within the canon" for a particular theologian is a simplification, a generalization, and the kind of thing you observe after the fact. One may claim to identify a particular theologian's "canon within the canon" in something of the same spirit where C.S. Lewis spoke of defining periods in history: he didn't see how you could do serious history without them, but they are a map that does necessary violence to its terrain, and unnecessary violence if it is imposed as an absolute.

In my time at another school, I heard the phrase "canon within the canon" consistently. One example was when people were setting out to engage in a particular theology, and identified as the very first task to identify the canon within the canon. Taken in context, this was clarified to mean not "What few areas of the Bible will we give special focus?" but "What few areas of the Bible will we not truncate away?" Not all examples were the same as this, but I do not remember a usage of "the canon within the canon" that retained the boundaries and modesty of the definition I first met. And, returning to when I raised a question in a paper about getting our bearings from the passages of the Bible that treat slavery prescriptively and do not directly abolish it, my professor responded that there needed to be some canon within the canon. And that response surprised me. I have seen the example of slavery repeatedly, but apart from that one remark I have never heard it called "the canon within the canon." But it does in a certain way make sense.

If you are going to orient and situate people so they will naturally seek to appreciate the Bible's strengths while gently working to refine its weaknesses, then there is no "canon within the canon" in the Bible that can properly compete with prescriptive moral teaching in the Bible that sets bounds for slavery but fails to command its abolition.

The best nutshell summary I've heard of Polanyi's theory of personal and tacit knowledge is, "Behaviorists do not teach, 'There is no soul,' but rather induct students into investigation in such a way that the possibility of a soul is never even considered." And there is something telling along these lines in the slavery example that keeps being chosen when the audience is drawn to work and refine the Bible's weaknesses.

I find the example significant.

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On another note, I realized I had misread your intent because of where I cut a quotation. Let me quote the part that I muffed, and then respond to that.

God made man in his own image, ... male and female he made them (Gen.1.27)

If we had read these in a modern English book, we'd assume the author was implying that

...

\* women aren't made in the image of God.

On that point may I comment about Mary the Mother and Birth-giver of our God?

There are some pretty medieval Catholic things that the Reformers kept even as they rebelled against Rome, and I'm not referring in this case to assuming that doctrines like the

not referring in this case to assuming that doctrines like the Trinity and the Incarnation should remain after reform.

There is precedent as old as Origen, and as Orthodox as a number of canonized saints, for having as one layer of piety an identification of the believer as the Lord's bride. In Orthodoxy this is not as focal as the image of the Church as the bride of Christ, and in piety it is not nearly as important as the Biblical image of sons of God (I am intentionally using the masculine here; the Bible includes "children of God" but never "daughters of God"). But was really on steroids in the medieval Catholic West and the bedrock of sanctification through the metaphor of bridal mysticism remains the bedrock of sanctification in Evangelicalism today, and is part of a rather asinine question I asked in moving towards Orthodoxy: Is the reason so many Evangelical men are converting to Orthodoxy that Orthodoxy understands sanctification as deification and Evangelicalism understands sanctification as a close personal relationship with another man?

Another example has to do with what The Sin is, the one sin we ought most to look out for. In the pop caricature of Victorianism, The Sin was lust. Among many Evangelicals today, there is a wariness much like what made a Catholic Dorothy Sayers write, "The Other Six Deadly Sins", and The Sin is pride. In late medieval Catholicism, The Sin was idolatry, and people were looking for it everywhere. If the Reformers found that the adoration of the saints to be idolatry, they were developing a medieval Catholic perspective.

Whether medieval Catholic and contemporary Orthodox veneration of Mary the Mother of God should be seen as the same or different is something I am not interested in exploring here but the following element of Orthodox piety I

exploring here, but the following element of Orthodox piety I am sure would have been classified as idolatry by the Reformers:

It is very proper and right to call thee blessed,  
Who didst bring forth God,  
Ever blessed and most pure,  
And the Mother of our God.  
More honorable than the cherubim,  
And more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim,  
Who without spot bearest God the Word,  
True Mother of God, we magnify thee.

I would like to make a point, and it is not exactly about agreeing to disagree. A basic Reformation outlook or worldview had no place to classify this other than as worship. First of all, it addresses Mary in the second person. In the culture of at least of Evangelicalism as I know it, in a secular context you address other people in the second person, but in a church context you address God alone in the second person. Second, it extols her above the highest ranks of angels and really gives her a place that the Reformers did not see as a place to be given rightly to a created and sinful human. And third, it calls her Mother of God, which would at least give the impression of placing her above God. The Christological controversy that led Nestorius's attempt at a reasonable way to please everybody with "Christotokos" is known, at least on the books, but that "Mother of God" is both confessional Christology and not intended to place Mary as supra-divine (Orthodox liturgy refers to Joachim and Anna as "ancestors of God" and icons call James "the brother of God"), and a relational statement: "Mother of God" is not confused with

being above God any more than the readings of "sons of God" in the Bible mean that we are taken to be fully divine by nature in the same sense as Christ.

My point in these clarifications is not exactly to say that the Reformation view is wrong; my point is to say that what is going on in those words is something that the Reformation universe has no place for, except in the category of worship that should be given to God alone.

And my reason for bringing this up is not to say "Because we praise Mary as the Mother of God, we don't view women as inferior." It is to say that, to paraphrase what I'm responding to, "Gen 1:27 says, '...in his image he created him, male and female he made them.' Does this mean that women aren't made in the image of God?"

There's a fairly clear statement on that point in the Bible, in one of the passages that your camp sees as (residual?) misogyny in Paul and something that we need to progress beyond, because that's the only place for it, much as an early Reformer could only see the liturgical quote above as idolatry, of rendering to a creature what is only proper to give to the Creator:

For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.

I will leave it mostly as an exercise to the reader what I believe of this text; what I will say is that I will understand if your conceptual framework has no place for statements like this except as one of the areas of the Bible that is not so much a strength to appreciate as something to gently refine.

The two points buried under all these words are first, that

bringing up slavery as the place to get our bearings in understanding the Bible is highly significant, and second, that there's something going on in the text that egalitarianism has no place for and is apt to misfire because it has no place to receive it.

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**My advisor wrote:**

But it left me wondering:

\* Are you saying we shouldn't make allowance for greater ignorance in the past? We are no more intelligent now, but we do have better understanding about medicine, geology, astronomy etc. This affects the way we interpret things like "the moon turned to blood" - which we would now regard as an atmospheric phenomenon and nothing to do with the nature of the moon.

**I wrote:**

The assumptions that frame this question are part of what I was trying to answer in ["Religion and Science" Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution](#). That treats the religion-science question at interesting and arguably provocative length; beyond the link, I'd like to respond briefly.

I don't make allowances for greater ignorance in the past. Allowances for different ignorance in the past are more negotiable. And I would quote General Omar Bradley: "We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the [Sermon on the Mount](#)."

To put things differently, my advisor could be paraphrased, "Look, we've progressed! We have a more scientific understanding of some things!"

My response rejects the modern doctrine of progress: I don't believe we've progressed, and in particular the fact that we are more scientific is not the same as moral progress. In

fact, the case may be that when we have moved to a more scientific outlook it has led us to lose sight of things that are foundational to Christian faith: ["Religion and Science" Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution](#) explains how exactly being more scientific may not be good for theology.

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**I wrote:**

There was one other point I would like to venture, in terms of how things fit together:

Jerry Root wrote a monograph from his dissertation, [C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil](#), arguing that C.S. Lewis made an objectivist critique of subjectivism and that this is a major thread through multiple works across decades and arguably could be called the common theme. All of Lewis's fiction, or at least the samples quoted from before he was a Christian ("Dymer") onwards, have villains who are ascribed subjectivist rhetoric.

Root is himself an egalitarian, which I need to say in fairness, although his egalitarian argument smells faintly subjectivistic, along with a silence that speaks rather loudly: he never intimates that the message of the Unman in *Perelandra* might in fact be almost unadulterated subjectivism and a gospel of feminism and that these are arguably not two separate things, at least in the narrative.

I have a friend who is a silver-haired, balding counselor, and tried really hard to help me prepare for my Ph.D. program (which blew up anyway, but I can't fault his help or any defect in his help). He spoke appreciatively of his training in gay theology (he is a conservative Orthodox and was not trying to convert me to queer agendas), and the biggest single point he tried to make, as something I would have trouble understanding, was subjectivism in relation to feminism.

One of the things he told me that I wouldn't understand was the kind of thing that was illustrated in this: there is a hardcore academic feminist camp that insists that all male

celibacy is a tool of patriarchal oppression, and there is a hardcore academic feminist camp that insists that all heterosexual intercourse is rape, and these camps coexist without particular conflict. The objectivist says, "Wait a minute, unless at least one of these is at least partly wrong, or there is an imperative for all men to be homosexually active (or doing something more creative), there is no course open that would let a male live without being a sex offender," is in a very real sense intruding with something foreign onto the scene: objectivism that says there is a reality we should seek to conform to, however imperfectly we may do so.

Biblical egalitarianism is often not so pronounced; I doubt many, or even any, of the egalitarians at Wheaton College make any claim of comparable feminist extremity. But the subjectivism is there, and my thesis could be described as an analysis of how subjectivists argue when straight argument won't get them where they want to go—and every single treatment of the passage from a Biblical Egalitarian/feminist that we looked at for a comparison study had the same shady argument; I have yet to see a Biblical Egalitarianism treatment of the passage on husbands and wives in [Ephesians 5](#) that argues in objectivist fashion; every one of the dozens of cases I've seen argues with sophistry out of a subjectivism that is unwilling to conform to the reality studied.

I wrote about the connection more explicitly in [point 24 of From Russia, with Love](#); that explains concretely and more descriptively what it would mean for feminism and egalitarianism to be intertwined with subjectivism.

I know Jerry Root and probably should have called him Jerry instead of Root the second time. I sat in on one of his classes

once, to observe before teaching (he is considered a legendary professor in the community), and as a C.S. Lewis scholar quoted Lewis as he said, "Satan is without doubt nothing else than a hammer in the hand of a benevolent and severe God. For all, either willingly or unwilly, do the will of God: Judas and Satan as tools or instruments, John and Peter as sons." He then said, communicating with great warmth, "and I would add, 'or daughters'" and said that women were included in the great company of those who do God's will as children of God and not as mere tools.

In my role as a visitor, as a fly on the wall, I held my tongue on saying, "You're not adding to the text, you're taking away from it." By saying that he was adding that the text could apply to women, he was **retroactively** redefining the text, when no sane reader, even a sane reader who prefers to use explicitly gender-neutral terms when the intent does not include specifying gender, would read Lewis's text as saying that males like Peter and John could do God's will the good way but by definition Mary the Mother of God and Mary Magdalene the Apostle to the Apostles could not.

Do I really believe Jerry believed that, or intended that in anyone he addressed?

The rhetoric is too subjectivist for that.

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**My advisor wrote:**

Your emails are interesting though, as you say, they have gone down paths which you were particularly interested in.

The main question I had was:

Blessed is the man who ... (Ps.1)

If a brother sins against you... (Lk.17.3)

God made man in his own image, ... male and female he made them (Gen.1.27)

How would you translate them into modern English so that a reader wouldn't get the wrong impression about what the message is?

My guess, from what you've said, is that you don't think English has changed, and you don't think that anyone would get the wrong message except hard-line feminists who would intentionally misread the text.

On Ps.1 you point out the Christological interpretation, which I recognise, though I wouldn't say it is the primary meaning of the text. One of the wonderful things about Jesus was that he DID associate with sinners, though without becoming one of them.

I fear that English has changed, whether we like it or not, and modern readers need some help, or else they will think the Bible is exclusivist.

---

**I wrote:**

I believe English has changed, but you assert forcefully that when the text says "man" it cannot refer to women, fullstop, in the modern reader's mind. I would take that as a rhetorical overstatement, but even if it is a rhetorical overstatement, it suggests that you have been getting your bearings from egalitarians for whom "inclusive" language is an active priority, whether this is a conscious or unconscious effort. Compared to other Christians, especially outside academic circles, I would expect you have a disproportionately high number of friends and contacts who are members of CBE or share significant sympathies.

(You can fairly say that at least in academic circles I have a disproportionately low number of such friends, and a disproportionately higher number of friends who would critique CBE, and I would say I am not middle of the road for the friends I know.)

English, especially among the learned, has changed, and "man" is less likely to be read as simply referring to people in general. But it is a strong position to say that "if a brother sins against you", in a passage whose plain sense gives "brother" a much more expansive sense than the biological, will be read only as referring to males. And strictly speaking, at least two of your points contain the same logical fallacy as saying that "All taxicabs are vehicles" demands, if taken literally, that "Because a truck is not a taxicab it cannot be a vehicle". "If a brother sins against you" if taken to exclude women cannot logically imply "sisters can't sin." "In the image of God he created him" if taken not to refer to Eve cannot

logically imply "Women are not created in the image of God."

You take an extreme interpretation and position, perhaps partly to rhetorically underscore a point, but with what I think are appropriate allowances for rhetorical overstatement, I believe you take a change that has occurred partially to be full and absolute.

The story of the TNIV does not commend the reading that the change is simply bringing the language of the translation in sync with the language on the street. The argument that this needs to be further imported to Bible translations has something of a whiff of the offensive, "The bureaucracy is expanding... to meet the needs of an expanding bureaucracy!"

N.B. The reference to the TNIV (Today's New International Version) is essentially as follows: The NIV (New International Version), like many other translations, has been updated and revised over time. The people in charge of the NIV, as one update, were going to change to inclusive language. There was an enormous outcry that ended in the people in charge of the NIV signing an agreement not to convert the NIV to use inclusive language. And after making that commitment in writing, they still left the NIV available but made an inclusive language version of the NIV and renamed it "**Today's** New International Version."

For the claim, "English has changed", the argument is that perhaps in the past readers may have read "man" and "brother" as fully inclusive of women, but we need to use (belabored) inclusive language now because things have changed.

The position taken is that we need to move from the older style of naturally inclusive language, to explicit (and belabored) inclusive language, to adjust to the fact that we are in the process of moving from naturally inclusive language to a

belabored inclusive language. We should stop using "man" in an inclusive sense because we are stopping using "man" in an inclusive sense. The bureaucracy is expanding... to meet the needs of an expanding bureaucracy! We must work harder at political correctness to meet the needs of an expanding political correctness.

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**My advisor wrote:**

It sounds like I have trodden on your toes - I'm very sorry.  
In the English of most newspapers and blogs, a "man" is male,  
a "woman" is female and a "person" can be either.

In my original question, I recognised the value of literal  
translations for those who know the Bible well.

But I was wondering how you would translate such example  
passages for friends who aren't Christian, or for people who pick  
up a Bible in their hotel room - ie those who haven't ever heard  
of CBE or other such groups, and who don't know that "man" can  
mean both male and female in the Bible.

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### **I wrote:**

Well, that depends somewhat on audience. If I am aiming for the chattering classes as my audience, I would probably follow the rule, "Unless it is your specific intent to exclude half of humanity from any possible consideration, use strictly and explicitly gender-neutral language."

But when I step outside the bubble of those classes, and overhear working-class people talking, "If you see someone, tell them..." melts away and leaves "If you see someone, tell him..." The experience of "he" and "him" as essentially "exclusive" language is common with the bubble we live in but far from absolute, and that matter far from common, in this U.S., where I believe your concerns have made more headway than in the U.K. If we are talking "people who pick up a Bible in their hotel room", we have left the realm of educated people who read the Bible as literature, and we are talking truckers and the unwashed masses--you know, the kind of people who furnished some of the twelve disciples. And there the answer is simple: say "he" when your intent is generic; saying "they" for one person sounds weird and part of a foreign world intruding on normal English.

And this may be drifting slightly, but if the question is, "How do we render 'If a brother sins against you' so that the full sense of the Church as a family and rebukes within that community comes across," I don't know, and I am wary of the question and approach. Certainly part of it may be more explicit in rendering "If a brother or a sister sins against you"--or, if you don't mind making things even harder for truckers opening a Bible in a hotel room, "If a sibling sins

against you"--but more broadly the choice of 'brother' in Greek bears a wealth of layers that are hard to translate so that all of them are apparent on first blush in English, a game which is very hard to win.

This is meant more as a confession of stupidity on my part than a boast, but at one point I tried to make my own Bible translation, called the Uncensored Bible, and aiming for clarity. There were a few highlights to it, and it rendered the Song of Songs clearly, or was intended to, like the original NIV before the higher-ups vetoed translating the Song of Songs the same way they translated other books. And, though this is not intended as an inclusive language issue, the wordplay in Matthew 6:27 was rendered neither "Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" nor "Which of you by worrying can add a single cubit to his height?" but "Do you think you can add a single hour to your life by worrying? You might as well try to worry yourself into being a foot taller!"

But the work as a whole has pearls amidst sand, and it taught me chiefly that translating the Bible is a lot harder than I had given credit for, even knowing several languages and having done translation before. And while I partly succeeded, part of what I learned through that failure was that my idea of "Just make what is in the verse plainly simple" is a lot harder, and part of my naivete in the project was in trying to do that. Certainly it's possible to be a little clearer where major translations deliberately obscure things from the unwashed masses, but the biggest thing I got out of it was recognizing I was doing something dumb, and coming to respect what the major translations accomplish a whole lot more.

But if that is the goal, "If a brother sins against you" is much harder to get across than changing "If a brother" to "If a brother or sister", "If a sister or brother", "If a sibling", etc. because "brother" speaks of the Church as a family and frames the situation not as discussing appropriate rebuke of someone who you are not particularly connected to, but appropriate rebuke within one tightly connected fatherhood or family. And the expansiveness of "brother" is perhaps 10% clarified, and 90% not clarified, by including the word "sister" or going for the gelding option of "sibling".

So I would partly say, "I don't know", and you can call it a dodge if you want, but if your goal is to make what is going on in the text clear to most readers, especially outside academia and the chattering classes, you might or might not get 10% of the way there by explicitly making language more gender-inclusive, but if you do so, don't say, "Mission accomplished," because the large part of making "If a brother sins against you" accessible in translation is not accomplished once the translation is clear in applying both to men and women.

The rhetorical posture is taken, "The person I'm really concerned about is the person on the street, the average blue-collar Joe or Jane. What about ordinary people who don't have all this academic knowledge?"

I answer quite simply, "Don't worry; that large demographic is probably the one least affected by political correctness and least likely to hear 'Women are excluded' if they read a Bible that says 'man' or 'brother'."

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**My advisor wrote:**

It looks like we both want to educate people to understand the Bible and then translate it literally, because it is so hard to translate it to be understood without that education.

Your decision to use the second person instead of third person is often done in gender-neutral translations, and it works sometimes (such as the example you gave), but not always. I wish we had a neutral pronoun.

Ah well, we have to live with imperfection.

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**My advisor wrote:**

It looks like we both want to educate people to understand the Bible and then translate it literally, because it is so hard to translate it to be understood without that education.

**I wrote:**

Something like that; it is a difficult matter.

Your decision to use the second person instead of third person is often done in gender-neutral translations, and it works sometimes (such as the example you gave), but not always. I wish we had a neutral pronoun.

Ah well, we have to live with imperfection.

In many ways. My attempt at translation taught me that even more than it taught me I was dumber than I thought.

**Of vinyl records, black  
and white photography,  
and using *naturally*  
inclusive language**

Belabored "inclusive" language is here to stay, the rhetoric for it is here to stay, and English usage has changed. I can hardly contest any of these claims, but I would make a point.

When I was a child, it appeared that black and white film had been permanently superseded by color film for all mainstream personal use, and I watched vinyl records be superseded by CD's, pure and simple. Black and white photography outside of Official Art Photography by Real Fine Art Photographers was obsolete now that we had advanced to color film, and a big record player was a waste of space.

But something funny has happened since then—the "improvements" are not so final as one might think. It is not just Official Art Photographers who make those obsolete monochrome photographs; there is an increasing appreciation for black and white photography, to the point that color digital cameras take pictures and extra work is done to make monochrome photographs, either black and white or sepia. And while digital audio isn't going away anytime soon, the more an audiophile really, really cares about music and really, really cares

about the sound that is rendered, the more likely he is to explicitly prefer the live sound from good vinyl records and a good record player with a good needle to the tinny and more mediocre sound of even the best digital audio.

I said above, partly to avoid pressing a point, "educated people who read the Bible as literature," giving the impression that the Bible as literature crowd will obviously use inclusive language translations. But there's something really funny going on here. Educated liberals who read the Bible as literature normally use inclusive language. Educated liberals who read the Bible as literature normally believe in inclusive language. And, in my contacts, educated liberals who read the Bible as literature pass over every inclusive language Bible translation for the majesty of the King James Version. With its naturally inclusive language.

"Man" has taken something of the tint of a sepia image, and hearing language like "humankind" sounds like the tinny mediocrity of a CD to an audiophile who prefers vinyl: the point gets across, but not the way vinyl allows.

Inclusive language efforts have given the traditional language of "man", "brother", and "mankind" a share of the beauty and poetic force of sepia and vinyl.

## What's *wrong* with the emails above

I've written these emails with a growing sense that there is something wrong with them: a sense that there was something inescapably misleading even when the observations were accurate. After a while I put a finger on what bothered me. These observations may be accurate observations of truths (or maybe just politically incorrect). But they are not a drinking of Truth. They fall short of the [Sermon on the Mount](#):

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Do you think that by worrying you can add a single hour to your span of life? You might as well try to worry you way into being a foot taller? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much

more cloth you. O men of little faith!

more clothe you, O men of little faith!

The observations above are the equivalent of careful, meticulous observations about how to run after food and clothing when there is a Kingdom of God to seek after. Food and clothing have their place, and the observations I made could have a place in the ascetical life, but they are not what there is to seek first, and true Biblical manhood and womanhood come not from trying to be complementarian but from seeking wholeheartedly for the Kingdom of God and his perfect righteousness, and letting all else fall into its place.

Let us seek the greater good.

# **An Interview with the Author**

Classifieds 1000 interviewed Jonathan Hayward about his website. The interview is available [here](#), as well as several places online with Classifieds 1000.

**What is the name of your website?**

Jonathan's Corner: A Glimpse into Eastern Orthodox  
Christianity

**What is your name?**

Jonathan Hayward

**Your Location (city, etc)**

I live outside of Chicago, Illinois, USA, in a lovely little niche called Wheaton. My father teaches at Wheaton College, and it's a really nice place.

**Please give us a short summary of your website?**

The website is a collection of creative work—stories, humor, musings, essays, art, even computer software—that I have been collecting for over a decade.

**What inspired you to launch your own website?**

That's hard to say. Ultimately, I think it's a work of creativity that cooperates with God. For me, it begins with a hazy idea that I try to "hear out," and continues until I have something to share. Eventually I had enough to fill out a large

website.

**When did you launch your first website, and what was it?**

I launched my first website in the early 90's. It was a predecessor to my current website.

**How did you decide on a name for your website?**

I was looking for something that would be easy to type and remember. [cjshayward.com](http://cjshayward.com) was available.

**What makes it different from other, similar offerings?**

I think some of my visitors would say that there isn't much in the way of other, similar offerings. It isn't the only "creative work" website on the web, but the collection—stories, mystical theology, art, humor, poetry, games, computer software—isn't really "just like" anything else I've found.

**What is your eventual goal? (To sell it, keep it for income, secure a book or other mainstream media deal?)**

This site is made to share my creations.

**How does your investment of time and money balance against your success?**

It's been worth every man-year of time I've spent on it. Really. I don't really measure things by a "cost-benefit" dollar count; I love to create and this has been a way to share my creations.

**If you had an unlimited development budget for development, how would you change your site?**

There was one Unix designer who was interviewed and was asked, "If you could design Unix all over again, what would you do differently?" His answer? "I would have spelled [the Unix 'system call'] 'creat' with an 'e'." Meaning, there's not much he regrets about how he designed Unix.

I have used a lot of open source software but haven't put much money into it. If I had more money, the only thing I'd

really do is use it to subsidize my living expenses as I continue my creative work.

**If your site got really big, really quickly, would you be able to keep up with the demand?**

Jonathan's Corner already receives well over a thousand unique visitors per day. I'd have to pay a little more for bandwidth, but my site is already graceful with a large number of visitors.

Now I know there are sites with many more unique visitors. But if I avoid the web's version of keeping up with the Joneses—and think my site has to be the world's biggest site—then I already have much to be grateful for.

**What unexpected costs and headaches have you had to deal with?**

I learned the hard way about infinite spidering for a recent CGI script, but there haven't been too many headaches.

**What has been your biggest challenge?**

Finding good things to be create. I don't like long dry spells when I can't create anything or share anything new with people.

**What method has been most successful for promoting your website?**

Website awards; see [Award Sites!](#)

Web awards are valuable for much more than incoming links. I don't agree with all of the orthodoxies within the web awards community, but the web awards community is a tremendous place to learn expertise about making a good website that people will want to link to. I worked for awards before I began working on reciprocal links, and I would recommend that to anybody because the web awards community has a LOT of expertise about how to make your website better—and they are very generous about sharing that expertise.

**How has running your website differed from your expectations?**

Because my purpose was to share my creative work, I didn't have that many surprises. If I'd expected a visitor turnout, or a good PageRank, or the like, then I would have had a lot of grounds for disappointment. As it is, the first time I saw my site listed on Google's directory, it was seventh in category. In retrospect, I'm surprised at how many good things have happened.

**How long have you run the site already, and how long will you continue to keep it up if you don't enjoy big gains in traffic, income or popularity?**

I have run my site for over five years, and I want to continue running it for as long as I am in a position to do so.

**Which page do you most wish people would visit?**

That varies over time; usually, it's my most recent creative work. My latest piece, which I am very happy to share, is [Within the Steel Orb](#).

That piece has been simmering for a long time, and is a science fiction dialogue touching on technology, relativity, and other things next to which technology and science are of relative importance only. But the real reason it is close to my heart is that I have let it stand on my site as a tribute to Madeleine l'Engle, my favorite children's author, who provided some of the inspiration for that piece. I owe a lot to her as an author, and I was working on it during some of her last days: I don't know how to better salute her than leave that piece standing in gratitude.

# Introduction to the Jesus Prayer

The Jesus Prayer is the gateway to silence, and silence is the language of Heaven. Silence is not the mere absence of sound, any more than beauty is the mere absence of ugliness. The chant of the Orthodox Church is crafted from silence: it articulates the eloquent silence of Heaven. One facet of holiness is a life and a heart that is silent within, that surrenders layer after layer of internal noise, and is simply present to eternity in the here and now that God has given. And silent people carry Paradise with and around them. Indeed Paradise is where God's people are present.

The metronome giving the beat of silence in many saints is the Jesus Prayer. The Jesus Prayer takes different forms, short and long. Among these are:

- Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.
- Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner.
- Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.
- Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.
- Lord, have mercy.

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When a musician plays for real, the metronome is hidden. The audience may not hear it, but it has reached its full depth when the musician follows its rhythm internally. Orthodox hesychasm, or silent spiritual stillness, is meant so that the Jesus Prayer always be with us. "Prayer of the heart" is when the Jesus Prayer is sunk deeply enough in our hearts that moves of its own.

There are concrete ways we can pursue this. We can work to say this prayer with each breath: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, as we breathe in, have mercy on me, a sinner, as we breathe out. We can say this prayer aloud, or silently in our mouths, or silently in our hearts. There is something powerful about saying the prayer aloud over and over again, and the other forms are meant to grow out of this foundation. Some people find it helpful to have a prayer rope, saying the prayer as they breathe and holding one bead or knot and then another to keep count. If you buy a prayer rope, the size does not particularly matter. I was given a 200 knot prayer rope but usually wear a simple black 50 knot prayer rope. Other people don't wear the rope on their wrist, but keep it in a pocket and pull it out to pray.

There are many places you can get prayer ropes, including:

- [The Mount Athos shop.](#)
- [Holy Cross Hermitage \(with 100 beads\)](#)

A **metronome** is a tool used to teach music. It ticks like a clock, but it can tick quickly or slowly for a song, and it helps people learn how long notes should last and lays a foundation for playing correctly, and then moving on from playing correctly to playing well.

- [Orthodox Byzantine Icons](#), which like the other places sells icons as well as prayer ropes, and in particular sells [good icons at good prices](#).

There is an ancient command, "Let nothing be done without the bishop." The Jesus Prayer is part of the Orthodox Way and is rightly practiced as dovetailing with the sacramental life and community in the Orthodox Church. There is a saying, "As always, ask your priest," and it applies to anything here.

The metronome is made to fade away: it is not for the real performance. But in this regard the Jesus Prayer is more than a metronome: it soaks ever deeper, but it remains. It opens a door to inner spiritual silence, the tradition of hesychasm in the Church, and it offers healing from the spiritual noise we are addicted to. Many of our technologies are practical, but most of them are also used to deliver spiritual noise, a daily fix of poison that keeps us from inner silence. The television, much of leisure spent on the Internet, all draws us precisely because it is laced with the narcotic of spiritual noise.

Another layer of inner silence is a kind of watchfulness that watches over one's inner state, desires, mental images, and thoughts. This is not "thinking about thinking" in the fashion that is popular today, but opening one's nose to the stench of spiritual disease all of us have, whether we recognize and fight it or not. When we meet a diseased thought, of lust or pride, or using others in greed, it helps us if we can see what in the thought is diseased. It is hard enough not to worry, but sometimes if we can observe our worried thoughts and see what is spiritual disease, we might learn the wisdom of "Don't tell me not to worry, nothing I worry about ever happens!" We might see as with all passionate thoughts that if we break the thought into

its parts and see the spiritual disease, suddenly it looks rather groundless. Once we are in our right mind, or rather our right heart, some of our terrifying worries seem rather silly.

[The Sermon on the Mount](#) is among the shortest of the divine owner's manual for human life. It says a lot of difficult things, but it doesn't say how, and hesychasm, the tradition of the Jesus Prayer and inner stillness guarded by watchfulness is how. It tells how not to worry; it tells how not to store up treasures in Heaven; it tells how to come to a point that we recognize anger and lust as tiny seeds so that we may stamp out smouldering rags and perhaps burn ourselves a little, instead of needing heroic efforts to stop a house fire. It tells how to seek a Kingdom of Heaven that is built in our lives out of the stones of the virtues and spiritual discipline. [The Sermon on the Mount](#) hits us flat on our chest and says, "Here is holiness. We don't live it." It is perhaps the best command in history to, "Wake up and smell the coffee!" Hesychasm, with its watchfulness and the Jesus Prayer a rhythm as we breathe, equips us in concrete terms to scale those peaks. Hesychasm is how to till the spiritual ground so that it will bear the fruit that blazes in the [The Sermon on the Mount](#).

You don't strictly need a prayer rope; many have found them helpful, but they are an aid. Without a prayer rope you may still be able to reach the point where the prayer is always an aroma you smell when you breathe. And they cost money; perhaps God's plan for your transfiguration has you spending your money on other things. The rhythm of prayer is a treasure no one is too poor to buy.

If you are Orthodox, why not discuss with your priest how you might step into this rich tradition? If you are not Orthodox, ask if the Orthodox Church can share with you of its treasures.

Some priests might have you receive other treasures first; some might directly offer you guidance in coming to experience freedom from addiction to noise, a freedom that is like the layers of music that come after one first learns how to use a metronome, the rhythm of "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," increasingly giving the breath of God that we breathe its true and proper stature.

The Kingdom of Heaven appears as the silence of the Jesus Prayer unfurls.

# iPhones and Spirituality

I would like to talk about iPhones and spirituality, and what spirituality has to do with right use of things like iPhones. This may be a bit of an "opposing views" presentation to other points here; I hope the challenge is ultimately constructive.

My first point has to do with one of Rajeev's points in our last meeting, of "Embrace your pain," and what it really means for the iPhone, and more specifically how our use of technologies like the iPhone relates to spiritual work such as embracing your pain. Rajeev really made several excellent points in his lecture last time, and I'd like to pick up on just one: "Embrace your pain." The iPhone's marketing proposition is as a game changing technological drug that will help you dodge this spiritual lesson.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but the iPhone is designed, marketed, and sold as a portable "Avoid spiritual work" system.

Is there any alternative to using various technologies to avoid spiritual work? Let's look at recent history, the 1980's, and how that decade's technological drug is something we may now have some critical distance to look at. There is a classic Far Side cartoon that says in its caption, "In the days before television," and shows a family hunched around an area on the blank wall where a television would be. The irony is that this wasn't the

days before television at all; the days before television were that much more dynamic and vibrant, and the cartoon was only what you get if you subtract television from the 80's, when televisions had drained all of the life out of things. The distinction may be subtle, but there is a profound difference between those two versions of what it means to be without television, one vibrant and with people doing things and another with people bleakly staring at a wall—and this is why many people now have made an intentional and mindful decision to avoid television as a pack of cigarettes for the mind. Another Far Side cartoon, as best I can remember, shows an aboriginal tribesman standing on the opposite side of a deep chasm from a crowd of angry middle-class suburbanites, where a vine bridge has just been cut and fallen into the chasm, with a caption something like, "And so Umbuntu stood, the angry suburbanites stranded on the other side of the chasm. Their idol was now his, as well as its curse." And the tribesman was holding a television. One wonders what the Far Side would say about iPhones after they had carved out their niche. And that brings me to my second point, what I call, "the timeless way of relating."

There is a timeless way of relating, a way that is guarded by Eastern Orthodox ascetics but hardly a monopoly. It has many sides, and there is much more to it than its intentional decisions about technology. It has much to do with embracing your pain and the here and now that we can partly dodge with iPhones, and be **present**. And I'll take an educated guess that Science of Spirituality's leader is among those that have this presence that arises from embracing where you are and its pain.

But a return to the past and laying the reins on the iPhone's neck aren't the only two options, not really. Oliver Holmes said, "I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity,

but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity." I am quite deliberately delivering this lecture with my iPhone in hand. And there is ultimately spiritual work on the other side of the iPhone and its kin, that uses it but does not abuse it as a way to dodge the here and now, but uses the iPhone, and embraces one's pain. And it sets limits and sometimes abstains, much as one does with alcohol.

In conclusion, iPhones and similar technologies have changed the game—but not always for the better, not in every way for the better. Not that we must always avoid them (police officers using drug dealers' confiscated iPhones found that they were incredibly useful) but we must set limits as one does with alcohol and be sure that our spiritual work, not technologies, holds the reins. It is an uphill battle, but it is entirely worth fighting.

# Janra Ball: The Headache

## The Original Cultural Context

"When it comes to games, never try to understand the Janra mind."

-Oeildubeau, Urvanovestilli philosopher and anthropologist

It is known that Janra sports usually last for at least half an hour, involve a ball, two or more teams, running and acrobatics, and animated discussion. Beyond that, neither the Urvanovestilli's logic nor the Yedidia's intuition are able to make head or tail of them. In general, the teams appear to have unequal numbers of players; the players often switch teams in the course of play; teams are created and dissolved; the nature of the activities makes sudden and radical changes; there is no visible winning or losing. There are occasionally times in the course of play when some intelligible goal appears to be being approached... but then, all players seem to be approaching it in a rather erratic manner (when asked why he didn't do thus and such simple thing and achieve the approached goal by an inexperienced anthropologist, one of the Janra said,

"Technically, that would work, but that would be a very boring way to do it," and then bolted back into play: the extent to which game play is comprehensible heightens its incomprehensibility). Late in life, Oeildubeau hinted at having suspicions that, if the Janra believe that they are being watched, they will spontaneously stop whatever sport they are playing, and instead begin a series of activities expressly designed to give any observer a headache.

## Rules

1. There is no winning or losing.
2. The game has one ball, which must be kept in motion at all times. If the ball ceases to move, nobody may speak or act except to move the ball.
3. Il est interdit de parler en anglais au sujet de l'objet du jeu.
4. Any player may give any other player a rule point, provided that there is no alliance or "You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours" arrangement between them, at any time. Any player who has a rule point may spend that point in order to add, delete, or modify a rule in accordance with the spirit of the game.
5. Every player has a persona, or modus operandi, through which he is acting and answering questions. If any other player successfully identifies this persona or modus operandi, it must immediately be changed.
6. There is no rule number 6.
7. Each player must somehow touch another player before or during addressing him in speech.
8. No player may move from one point to another without using at least one acrobatic, dance, or martial arts motion.
9. Any use of a card deck or game board requires one change of rules for the card/board game per move.

10. Any rules disputes are to be resolved by no judge, until all involved parties come to a confusion which is more chaotic than in its initial form.
11. All players must wear one black sock and one white sock.
12. We're sorry, but rule number twelve is not available at this time. To leave a message, please rotate your telephone clockwise by ninety degrees, and simultaneously press 'q' and 'z'.
13. Any player who does not understand all of the rules, in their entirety, is immediately disqualified.
14. Any player who attempts to memorize all of the rules, or attempts to play the game by keeping its rules, is immediately disqualified.

## FAQ list

Q: What is 'Springfield'?

A: Springfield is a game in which two people alternate naming state capitals, and the first person to name Springfield wins.

Q: What's the point of that?

A: The objective is to be the first person to say 'Springfield' as late as possible. The point is to see how far you can go — and still be the first to say 'Springfield'. It's not a game of mathematical strategy. It's a game of perception.

Q: What is Psychiatrist?

A: Psychiatrist is a game in which one person, the psychiatrist, leaves the room, and all of the other players agree on a common delusion (such as believing themselves to be the person immediately to their left). The psychiatrist then enters, and asks the players questions, attempting to guess the delusion.

Q: What is spoon photography?

A: Very well known.

Q: What is Janra Ball all about?

A: Wouldn't you like to know?

Q: Why did you answer my question with another question?

A: How else could it be?

Q: What are the teams like?

A: Highly variable, and not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Q: How do I get ahead in the game?

A: Mu.

Q: Why won't you give me a straight answer to my questions?

A: Come, come. Aren't there much more interesting ways to grok the game?

## Ingredients

Springfield, Monty Python, Calvin-Ball, body language, Harlem Globetrotters, sideways logic, Thieves' Cant, intuition, counter-intuitive segues, spoon photography, creativity, Zen koans, Psychiatrist, adrenaline, perception, tickling, urban legend Spam recipe, swallowing a pill, illusionism, modern physics, raw chaos, F.D. & C. yellow number 5.

# **Jobs for Theologians**

## **HAFD University Consolidated Department of Theology and Geology**

Is looking for adjunct professors. The ideal candidate will possess excellent written and oral communication skills, have a strong teaching record, be flexible, and be open to exploring the relationship between igneous, sedimentary, and metamorphic rocks as compared to faith, hope, and love as theological virtues.

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**Studies**

Is looking for a full-time tenure track professor with interest in the high middle ages and theology from an elfin perspective; the ideal candidate will be fluent in relevant languages including Elvish, be able to convey what exactly the refinement of elfin culture means in theological discourse, and be comfortable lecturing outdoors under moonlight while wearing chainmail.

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Is looking for theologians willing to study the Archdruid of Canterbury. The ideal candidate will have a thorough grounding in the classic Christian tradition as expressed in the Anglican branch of the Church in dialogue and synthesis with contemporary expressions of bardic and druidic lore.

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Office of Newer Classics'  
Translations**

Is looking for a scholar to produce a fresh translation of *Einführung das Christentum*, a foundational *Grundkurs* by the Rev. Dr. Karl Rahner, SJ.

The ideal candidate will hold PhDs in disciplines including Systematic Theology, Philosophy with attention to philosophical logic and philosophy of science, German, English, Linguistics, Cognitive Science/Psychology with analogies drawn from Human-Computer Interaction, Education, and *A Partridge in a Pear Tree*; and will have done prior work making translations of Rahner into English that do not leave the reader wishing for further English translation.

If interested, please fax CV along with letter of application to (888) 555-1212 or visit our website at <http://hafd.edu>.

# Joining the Holy Mountain (I Hope)

## **Joining the Holy Mountain**

There are a few things I am known for, at least by a few people, but many people know me as an Orthodox Christian author with a website originally founded a couple of years after the web itself (this site), or [my collection of books](#), the chief work of mystical theology being [The Best of Jonathan's Corner](#) (4.6 stars on Amazon), and the chief polemical work being [The Seraphinians](#) (at 1.3 stars).

I've written a lot over the years, and I have seen more and more good in my failure to earn a PhD in math (UIUC) or theology (Cambridge, Fordham). Not that I have had a successful business career in information technology; I've had enough success to pay off my student loans, but there is such a thing as brainsizing, and there is something of a "square peg, round hole" effect for a profoundly gifted employee trying his best to fit in as an

interchangeable part in the team programming model that has become the industry standard.

Now I am turning my attention to something I should have done much earlier: the reform school of monasticism. Now one of the requirements to be a bishop is to be a monk, and I am hoping for help continuing to repent of such ambition, partly for reasons outlined in [A Comparison Between the Mere Monk and the Highest Bishop](#). I am seeking not rarities but the salvation of my soul, and some monks have said that they began to make progress fighting sin and passion after twenty to thirty years. **I want to reach eternity having spent as much time as possible in the monastic journey of repentance.** Whether I would reach any ordination beyond being made a simple monk, or miraculous powers, is not my concern. My concern is that my soul is in ruins and I need such things as monasticism provides. The only real qualification for either of the rare distinctions I mention is that I have experience bearing heavy crosses: I switched disciplines to academic theology while fighting cancer. I'm not now in a good place spiritually.

I am looking for money to use to travel to Mount Athos. Certain things have not been defined yet, but I am essentially seeking travel expenses before taking a vow of poverty.

As regarding how much you might give, some people would simply ask for generosity. I would ask in a certain sense for generosity, but that is not exactly how I would ask. What I would ask would be: **Pray**, and then give little or much money, or simply prayers, as it seems best in your heart. I was going to offer to give a signed copy of [The Best of Jonathan's Corner](#) for people who give \$100 or more (and have a physical mailing address within reach of media mail), but even if that would get

me more money, I do not consider that desirable. Christ is extraordinarily clear that a widow who very quietly donated her entire wealth—two of the most worthless “coins” you could find—donated more than all the gifts surrounded by loud fanfare of rich people giving out of things that they don't need. If you pray and it seems best in your heart to donate \$2, I don't want to make that \$20.

I do not know when I need the money; I have made the first formal step towards requesting to join the Holy Mountain, and I have waited a while and am still waiting. If and when I know more specifics, or the Holy Mountain rejects me, I will post an update. (If Mount Athos rejects me I will try my best to pursue monasticism elsewhere.)

As regards the question “How thankful you will be,” I mean in entire literalism, “Eternally.” I need a spiritual hospital like the Holy Mountain, and this may make a difference between Heaven and Hell. It is said that you can only get to Hell on your own steam, but I have plenty of steam. If I find a saving spiritual hospital on Mount Athos, I will be grateful to you for the rest of my life, and pray for you thereafter.

[Donate to travel expenses](#)

# Jonathan's Canon

Below is the corpus of writings that I have read so far and would most quickly recommend to others, on a basis of theological or philosophical merit and personal impact. The books, series, etc. are alphabetized by title (not author), and exclude two areas: first the [Bible](#), because that Canon is prior to and infinitely greater than my canon, and second, my own writings, which I believe others should be the judges of. The boundaries are hazy — I'm sure that your favorite book not on the list is better than your favorite book off the list. All entries should be assumed to be books unless stated otherwise.

Looking for a good book, for me, is a quest a little like a detective's searching for clues: anything that can be anticipated is not it. It is like a good surprise birthday present: you know it when you see it, but anything you can anticipate is not it. (In that regard, it is like a foretaste of Heaven: eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor any mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.) The list should grow longer as time progresses.

I told a friend once that I thought that some things would be a lot better if theologians would do all the apologetics, and apologists would do all of the theology. I'm not sure how to explain that remark (beyond asking people to think about it and

let it sink in), but I often get more out of lesser works than greater. I am not including Thomas Aquinas's [Summa Theologiae](#) on the list, for instance, because I got less out of reading it (in abridgment) than out of reading Chesterton's [Orthodoxy](#), and less out of reading parts of Dante's [Divina Commedia](#) than C.S. Lewis's [The Great Divorce](#). Maybe when I have matured more I will be ready to read some of the greater works, but now I usually learn best at the hands of the lesser masters. My judgment has certainly bothered people; the aforementioned friend was quite surprised when I gave high acclaim to Titanic, and he eventually said, after seeing what I saw in it, that my reading was so beautiful of a reading that he almost hesitated to attribute it to Kirk Cameron. Many of these works are lesser classics; I am aware of the greater classics, but have not learned much from most of them. Readers who enjoy this list may also like to see my [favorite haunts](#) on the web.

### [The Abolition of Man](#), by C.S. Lewis

An excellent and concise description of what Western culture is trying to do, and what will come of it.

Abortion: A Failure to Communicate.

On Saturday Night Live, the announcer said, "Kenny G came out with his new Christmas album. [pause] Happy birthday, Jesus. I hope you like crap!"

Being aloof from popular artists, it took me a while to realize that Kenny G is not a Christian artist. Most of what goes by the name of Christian is intellectually and artistically worthless, in a sense a blasphemy against the Creator who lovingly and lavishly created no two blades of grass alike. In looking through Christian this and Christian that on the web, it was a very refreshing pearl amidst a

desert of sand. This was the first good Christian article I found in a long while.

[Addicted to Mediocrity: 20th Century Christians and the Arts](#), by Franky Schaeffer

This book provides an excellent analysis of bad philosophy as it leads to an impoverished culture — dealing with how utilitarianism (leaving the obvious critique related to pursuing only means and never ends) has nearly killed one aspect of the imago dei in our culture. A good and accessible read to anyone concerned with philosophy, art, or culture.

[Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business](#), by Neil Postman

After I read this book (a quick read, in contradistinction to Jerry Mander's weightier and slower [Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#)), I've never looked at a TV the same way again. This would be a good candidate for the first book on this list to read, because once you've read this one you'll find it easier to break away from television's accursed spell and read other books and otherwise experience life.

There's something that must be said for television. It must be said, because it cannot be printed.

[All Men are Brothers: Autobiographical Reflections](#), by Gandhi

This book, and in particular the chapter entitled, "Ahimsa or the way of nonviolence," provided a large part of my real beginning in understanding peacemaking, and the loose prototype for [Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace through Real Strength](#). It's largely a collection of excellent quotes, and well worth reading to anyone asking the questions concerning violence and peace.

[The Best Christmas Pageant Ever](#), by Barbara Robinson

C.S. Lewis said that children's books should be good enough for adults, and that children's books which aren't good enough for adults won't be any good for children, either. All of the best children's literature is good for adults, and this book in particular is interesting, funny, and truly profound. (Something similar, incidentally, might be said for Dr. Seuss's [How the Grinch Stole Christmas](#).)

[The Book of Heroic Failures](#), by Stephen Pile

This book I debated putting in, but I decided for: first, because when I read it I laughed so hard I cried and could barely talk, and second, because it does help to come to terms with a side of being human that most of us find a smidgen embarrassing.

Changeling: the Dreaming

Reading about this game (which I could not play in good conscience, incidentally), was one of the things I did that most pierced me with a glimpse of Heaven, as did [Pilgrim's Regress](#) and other places. To quote from the web site:

We are changelings, the forgotten ones, neither fully fae nor wholly mortal. The last of our kind on Earth, we have built ourselves an invisible kingdom. We are everywhere, yet you have never seen us. We hide, not behind some fragile Masquerade, but in plain sight, with the power of our Glamour. We exist within a real world of make-believe where "imaginary" things can kill, and "pretend" monsters are real.

This is an exquisitely beautiful description of the spilled religion that is Romanticism, and someone who drinks those drops may well imbibe deeper from the Chalice than someone who is careful to have his lips touch the chalice but makes

who is careful to have his lips touch the chalice, but makes no effort to take in the Drink inside. We are indeed members of an invisible kingdom, hidden in plain sight by the power of grace and prayer, and believe many things that the Kingdom of Darkness now calls imaginary. Reading this inspired a part of one of my writings:

On the web, I found a place set up by a woman who believed she was a fairy. At first, it weirded me out — but, the more and more I think about, the less it strikes me as strange. I don't mean that it's not wrong — I mean rather that it is far less wrong than many beliefs about which we've become blase'. The essential idea of a person who is really a fairy, and a world of wonder, a nature of beauty, and of magic, is in some ways very close to the truth of *imago dei*, of God's magnificent creation, and of prayer. It has its definite errors and omissions, but it is far closer to true than the idea of a person as only a material body, of nature as only a particular configuration of subatomic particles, of the supernatural as only a figment of human imagination and superstition. The beliefs around fairies would make the basis for an excellent parable, of which a crude rendition is as follows:

Once upon a time, there was a village of men, that was on the border of fairy-land. And some people saw fairies, but some lived lives that were dull and dreary.

And the god of nature, who was the prince of the gods, entered this village and began to take men and women into his arms, embracing them and kissing them. And when he kissed them, he made them into fairies. And he took them, and taught them to dance, a wild,

merry, pagan dance with the trees and stars and rivers  
and lakes and flowers.

And the god cut through what was dull and mundane,  
and the leaders whose interests were in all that was dull  
and mundane were enraged and killed him. And yet all of  
their rage and unbelief and violence, even death itself,  
could not keep him. Before he was killed, he gave the  
fairies to eat his flesh and drink his blood, that he  
might live in them and they in him, and after he was  
killed, he rose in a surge of the indestructible life that  
was within him.

And now, he has left that he might be everywhere —  
in men, in the stars, in the trees, and enchant them with  
his magic, that they might dance also, and he abides and  
is found inside each fairy, and empowers them to kiss  
others with his kiss and draw them into the circle of  
life, that they also might become fairies, living the life  
of the nature god, weaving his magic by which the entire  
universe pulses with life, carried about by song and  
wonder, and dancing the great dance.

And he has designs yet unveiled — to bring an even  
greater perfection to the nature, the fairies, the magic,  
the dance, the embrace.

And the story is unfolding even now.

[Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World](#), by Dorothy  
Sayers

An excellent collection of essays, beginning with a  
beautiful satire entitled, "The Pantheon Papers"

[The Chronicles of Narnia](#), by C.S. Lewis

These seven books are excellent children's literature,

and storytelling that tells the most beautiful story through fantasy. I have always been drawn to fantasy, because it draws out the wondrous and beautiful truths about our world — "The better you know another world, the better you know your own," (George MacDonald, [Lilith](#)) — and because good fantasy is a reflection of our world.

[Code Complete: A Practical Handbook of Software](#)

[Construction](#), by Steve C. McConnell

All of the really good books, in any field, are books of philosophy. This book is a book of philosophy in computer programming, but it is widely applicable outside of that field. Its central point is that computer programming is an activity done by humans instead of just an activity using computer, and as such it is not enough to know the computer's strengths and weaknesses, but also to know your own strengths and weaknesses. Some of its immediate content — how to choose variable names and lay out procedures so that you're less likely to run into certain bugs resulting from your short-term memory failure in designing the program — is only relevant to programmers, but macroscopically it would be valuable to anyone. A must-read for software engineers, and a should-read for everyone else.

[The Cost of Discipleship](#), by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

This is an excellent book; it is a good competitor to [Experiencing God](#) for the place of #1 recommendation, or more appropriately a good companion volume. This book shows what sola fide really means in terms of works, and the monumental importance of good works in a context of faith. Bonhoeffer repeats, as a refrain, "Only those who believe can obey, and only those who obey can believe." Works are like a sacrament — not human means of making ourselves

worthy, but physical conduits of God's blessing. Show Bonhoeffer your faith without works, and this martyr and mensch will show you his faith through his works.

[Darwin on Trial](#), by Phillip Johnson

Shortly after reading *Abortion: A Failure to Communicate*, I earnestly read all kinds of articles at [Leadership University](#),

happy to find high-quality Christian articles... and my estimation of the site dropped several notches when I saw articles with titles like "Darwin on Trial." It seemed that here, after a lot of mature thought, was a kneejerk conservative backsliding into fighting to restore six-day creationism and otherwise fight what good science said. One day, I actually read one of these articles I detested, and it blew me away.

What followed after that was a crisis, followed by a loss of faith — not in God, but rather in academia. I came to believe something I had long resisted — that Darwinism was established dogma, not because of its support in the evidence (existing scientific evidence being extremely hostile to any form of Darwinism that is both recognizably connected with Darwin's theory, and within spitting distance of being called a scientific theory), but because it provides an excuse for an explanation of how life could come to be without a Creator.

[Darwin's Black Box](#), by Michael Behe

[Darwin on Trial](#) gives a broad overview of scientific evidence concerning Darwinism. [Darwin's Black Box](#) provides a focused and in-depth look at one very specific biochemical mechanism. I didn't find it quite as fascinating as the former, but it's definitely worth reading for people who like intricate clockwork and complexity. An engineer should like

it.

[The Devil's Dictionary](#), by Ambrose Bierce

This classic of satire contains a number of extremely funny definitions (my personal favorite defined rum to be "generically, fiery liquors which produce madness in total abstainers"), and is poignantly insightful as to the shortcomings of American Christianity. It was the basis, and provided the model, for [Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary](#). Its cynicism is something to be wary of, but beyond that it is a classic of wit and refreshingly blunt honesty.

[The Disappearance of Childhood](#), by Neil Postman

I plan on re-reading this book if and when I get married, have kids, and my eldest child reaches the age of three. It deals with the themes of other books, plus a harmful blurring of the line that separates children from adults. If you care about children having a real childhood, you should probably read this.

*The Empty Self: Gnostic Foundations of Modern Identity*, by  
Dr. Jeffrey Burke Satinover

Gnosticism is the most ancient of heresies, and one of the deadly poisons infesting the Church. (I am using 'heresy' in its ancient sense of "a fatally flawed idea that is as damaging to the believer as is a belief that arsenic is healthy food", not in the modern sense of "an excellent idea which narrow-minded society benightedly condemns.") This provides an excellent introduction by which to know and avoid it.

[Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God](#), by Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King

This book articulates deep lessons about listening to God

and obeying him. It comes highly recommended.

Fairy Tales: [At The Back of the North Wind](#), [The Complete Fairy Tales](#), [The Day Boy and the Night Girl](#), [The Golden Key](#), [The Light Princess](#), [The Lost Princess](#), [The Princess and the Goblin](#), [The Princess and Curdie](#), by George MacDonald.

C.S. Lewis said that he fancies he never wrote a story that did not in some way borrow from MacDonald, and it was MacDonald who served as his mentor in [The Great Divorce](#).

These different fairy tales are profound, moving, and some of the deepest literature I know. They are rare gems equally appropriate to children and adults.

[Father Arseny, 1893-1973: Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father : Being the Narratives Compiled by the Servant of God Alexander Concerning His Spiritual Father](#)

This book shows how the light of Heaven shines in the darkest situations. Father Arseny was a survivor of the brutal "special sector" death camps of the Stalinist regime, and is the kind of person who can light a candle in the darkest corner of Hell. One comes away from this book feeling, not the atrocity inside and outside of the brutal Stalinist death camps, but a good that could shine even in those circumstances. I highly recommend it.

[Fearfully and Wonderfully Made](#), by Paul Brand and Phillip Yancey.

This book, written by a doctor, explores the beauty and power of the human body, and by analogy the body of Christ.

Chapters 15 through 18 awakened me to the goodness of touch — hugging me used to be like hugging a board, but I now have a very present and powerful touch. It was because of them that I wrote [A Treatise on Touch](#). A very beautiful and thoughtful book.

[First Things: A Journal of Religion and Public Life](#)

This journal is about putting first things first, as described in the opening editorial. It has substantial and intellectually mature treatments of many of the issues of our day. If you like it, you might consider subscribing.

[Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#), by Jerry Mander

Neil Postman presents one good argument as to why television is not the best thing since sliced bread. Mander presents four, developed at greater length. There is less of a lively pace, and the argument gets weird some of the time, but it still produces thought-provoking and serious arguments as to why television should be eliminated. Among the excellent comments may be found, "The programming is the packaging; the advertising is the content." If you watch more than an hour of TV a week, take half an hour of your regular TV time and devote it to reading this book.

[45 Effective Ways or Hiring Smart! How to Predict Winners and Losers in the Incredibly Expensive People-Reading Game](#), by Pierre Mornell, et al. (Author has also written another excellent title, for job hunters: [Games Companies Play](#))

Written for people who hire others, this is a book on how to read people. It seems to me to do a good job of living up to its rather large title.

[Foundations of Cognitive Science](#), ed. Michael A. Posner

This is my favorite textbook; it presents an interdisciplinary field, cognitive science, and is fascinating reading.

[Galileo, Science, and the Church](#), by Jerome J. Langford

I make it a personal rule not to recommend a book I haven't read, and this book justifies breaking that rule.

I, and I suspect you, have heard in science classes a moral fable about a heroic natural philosopher named Galileo who was martyred by the evil, oppressive, and censorious Church. It is a beautiful story — showing, as well as any morality play, that being a scientist is good, and the Church and its concept of orthodoxy are demospawn (sentiments that are echoed in, for example, the [Oxford Companion to Philosophy](#) having an entry for persecution of philosophers, but no reference to persecution by philosophers — not the faintest reference to the bloodbath that culminated the siecle des lumieres with cleaning ladies and eight year old children guillotined as much as clergy and statesmen, with patriots standing at the foot of the guillotine to be sprayed by the blood of the unfortunates and then eat their still living flesh; nor any reference to the hundred million lives lost, and the blood that has flowed like a river every single time people have taken Marx's philosophy as a good basis for a political order). But the Galileo fable has no connection with fact.

Among other points may be mentioned that Galileo scientifically produced garbage — no experimental data and no particularly good interpretation of those results — that Galileo was friends of the Pope but alienated him and made a number of enemies by being a jerk, and that Galileo was preceded in his heliocentrism by nearly half a century, and that by a cardinal. The only reason the story is told is as part of the process of brainwashing people to worship science and despise the Church.

[The Game](#) (movie)

Q: What do the following three things have in common?

- A joke.

- A Zen koan.
- The book of Job.

A: They all share something with [The Game](#), and the effect in that movie is stunning.

Gather (hymnal)

This is a lively, modern hymnal of the sort that achieves several dishonorable mentions in [Why Catholics Can't Sing](#).

That stated, it has a number of songs that I cherish and that were new to me, including "Canticle of the Sun," "Gather us in," and "The City of God."

This is the songbook used by Koinonia at the Newman Foundation at the University of Illinois, and for that reason I cherish it — I purchased a copy when I had almost no money, just to be able to have those songs. I used a few of its songs to improvise on in my second recorded tape.

[Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In](#), by Roger Fisher et al.

This is, as far as I know, the best book for dealing with conflicts where another party and you can't yet agree on something. I don't think that this is the substance of life, but conflicts are bound to happen, and knowing this book will be immeasurably helpful in dealing with some conflicts.

[Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid](#), by Douglas E. Hofstadter.

This book is one of the most stunning displays of intellectual fireworks I have read. It relates art, music, stories, and mathematics, along with wit, witticism, and clever dialogues. It started out as a little pamphlet, and Hofstadter soon realized he was writing more than just a pamphlet explanation of Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem.

[The Great Divorce](#), by C.S. Lewis

This is just a great book, useful for nurturing the reader in Christian wisdom — and one of the most beautiful I've ever read. I got a lot more out of this than out of the parts of [La Divina Commedia](#) that I've read.

[Guiding the Gifted Child: A Practical Source for Parents and Teachers](#), by James T. Webb et al.

Being very smart does not just mean more of the same kind of intelligence most people possess; it means possessing a different kind of mind. When I first read this book, it seemed to me to be part of the cult of giftedness; my estimation has since changed to recognizing a special needs population, with its strengths and weaknesses, and providing insight into things such as an unusual sense of humor and special moral concerns.

[Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing](#), by Peter Kreeft  
Hebrews catalogues what a few giants of faith did, and then says (11:13-16, RSV):

These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

Christians have historically placed a major emphasis on Heaven and the hope that is there, and today Orthodox

believers give a high place to bringing Heaven down to earth. For beauty's sake, I wish to quote another passage, one that is very close to my heart (Rev. 22:1-5):

Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There shall no more be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall worship him; they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Kreeft's book could as well be entitled, "Heaven: The Heart's True Home." I consider it to probably be the most profound and one of the most beautiful books on this list, and would deeply recommend it. It both speaks of Heaven — the sort of reason why, on a young adult retreat where a getting-to-know-you question was "If you could visit one place, where would it be?", I answered in perfect seriousness, "Heaven," giving not a physical 'where', but an infinitely greater spiritual 'where'. It also tells how to listen with your heart — something very, very important in life.

[Heretics](#), by G.K. Chesterton

A part of being in a culture means a kind of blindness, a "How else could anyone think of it?" [Heretics](#) unmask the

blindness.

[How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture](#), by Francis Schaeffer.

This book is on par with [The Abolition of Man](#), providing a much more culturally in-depth treatment of how Western thought is falling. It is a deep and extensive writing, as well as a fascinating read. It deals with the interior schism between head and heart, something well worth escaping.

[How to Win Friends and Influence People](#), by Dale Carnegie

The title sounds positively Machiavellian, doesn't it? Don't let that deceive you. I prefer to talk with people who are trying to follow the principles in this book. It tells a lot about how to be a person others will genuinely enjoy being with.

[I Saw Gooley Fly](#), by Joseph Bayly

This book is a collection of short stories; the first one, from which the book takes its title, is about a college freshman who is a complete klutz, gets into all kinds of accidents, and can fly. Not fly an airplane or hang glider or kite, mind you; he can jump out of his third-storey window and sail over to the dining hall.

I read that story after my best friend Robin, who is quite busy, took the effort to type it up and posted the whole printout to a forum wall. It struck a deep enough chord that I poked around until I purchased one of two available copies from a suggested book dealers' network, by a friend who works at a used and rare bookstore. I recently read it, and am glad to have gone to the trouble to find it.

What's so impressive about this book? In a word, creativity. The stories are as creative as Dorothy Sayers' "Pantheon Papers", but it's not just one work like that in a

book of essays (which are insightful and quite often creative, but do not fill the same literary niche). Someone who likes the creativity shown in my different writings may find [I Saw Gooley Fly](#) to be a rare treat.

Best odds for getting a copy? Probably inter-library loan.  
[Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus](#),  
by Dinesh D'Souza

This book helped me make sense of some of my own experiences, and offers an alternative analysis of racial tensions besides, "Continue with what we're doing, only more of it and faster!"

[In Celebration of Discipline](#), by Richard Foster

This book was given to me when I was baptized in Malaysia, and I am glad to have read it. It guides the reader on a spiritual journey inward, upward, and outward, in four disciplines each:

Part I: Meditation, Prayer, Fasting, Study

Part II: Simplicity, Solitude, Submission, Service

Part III: Confession, Worship, Guidance, Celebration

The note on the first page reads:

Presented to MR. JONATHAN HAYWARD on the occasion of his baptism on 13 JUNE 1993, by the Petaling Jaya Gospel Hall.

—Ephesians 3:16-19—

Ephesians 3:16-19 RSV reads:

...that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and

grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God.

### Introduction to Eugenics, booklet

This booklet, which struck me as too weird to be true until I actually did some research, is something I haven't been able to find online, but I believe there are probably some good books on. Nutshell is that the eugenics movement is alive and well, appearing under various masks such as Planned Parenthood: Margaret Sanger, the organization's founder, being openly and actively interested in reducing the number of black babies born — though her successors are much better than that, and instead work on having abortion clinics situated well to take on charity abortions ('situated well' meaning 'in minority neighborhoods'). The belief in a population explosion (which is a bit absurd, if you think about it: why should population growth in third world countries suddenly meet such astronomical growth after being more or less stable for millenia, and why is apocalyptic overpopulation still approaching despite repeated and careful predictions for the doomsday which have come and gone) is listed as a major eugenic success.

### [The Joy of Mathematics](#), by Theoni Pappas

When I tell people that I'm a mathematician, the reaction is usually some mixture of one or more of awe, fear, and pity. They've had a couple of bad math classes, and therefore they figure that a math major experiences a concentrated form of such torture. Nothing could be

farther from the truth, and this book explains to a non-mathematician what joy and beauty lie in such a profession.

[Kevin Trudeau's Mega Memory](#), by Kevin Trudeau

Long ago and far away, people had memories that were prodigious by our standards; in Somalia, a large minority of educated men have memorized the Koran—without knowing Arabic. There is a proficiency in using memory that is mostly neglected here, and it can be useful. As I write, I'm using the basic technique to keep with me about twenty distinct points in an hour-long speech.

I'm at a disadvantage using these skills; they work best for a concrete mind rather than a very abstract one like mine. You may well find it easier to use the techniques than I do, and I still find them useful. Kevin Trudeau's book is one of several practical how-to books, and knowing even some of it is useful.

Labyrinth (movie—out of print, check an older rental store)

This fantasy movie is visually exquisite, and has the penultimate scene in M.C. Escher's "House of Stairs".

Morally, it is the only movie I can recall seeing whose villain really tempts someone instead of shooting at him; the story goes on and has more and more things fall apart; the heroine

keeps saying, "That's not fair!" — and finally says in her heart, "It's not fair, but I'm going to give it my determination and my elbow grease. I can identify with that; I have met difficulties I would not have imagined possible, and yet still I follow God — all the more powerfully, if anything. The term 'eye of the tiger' refers to a soldier who has been wounded and then returns to battle; there is no warrior so fierce as the eye of the tiger. I am in spiritual warfare the eye of the tiger, and this movie means a lot to

me.

[Leadership Is an Art](#), by Max DePree

I was calling random recruiters to send a resume... one of them was AC Recruiters, and (having seen many meaningless acronyms) did not guess that the AC stood for 'air conditioning', and was meant to place air conditioning repairmen etc. So I called, and had a pleasantly relaxed conversation, and he happened to know one guy in Homewood, "the best boss you'll ever have." He passed on my resume, and Lou (the head of the company) wanted to meet me. I asked him, "What's the title of that book he's so enthusiastic about?", and when he told me "Leadership Is an Art", checked out a copy to be able to read it and be prepared for the interview... and checked it out, and found that it was solid gold. It is the most humane and moral — not to mention effective — form of capitalism I have yet seen, and I would like to work under it. Lou, acting out the principles in this book, had a sign at the front door saying, "Welcome Jonathan Hayward", and we talked for over an hour.

This little book could be summarized as the Sermon on the Mount applied to business.

[Leadership University](#)

This site is an anthology of a lot of the best stuff on the web; it is worth at least a week of reading. It was where I found *Abortion: A Failure to Communicate*, and other gems.

*The Lefthander Syndrome*, by Stanley Coren

Apart from trying to make left-handers into another angry minority (a cure which is worse than the disease), this is a fascinating book about left-handedness.

*Listening, A Practical Approach*, by James J. Floyd

The art of communicating well consists far more in being a good listener than in being a good speaker. Few people want someone to talk to them; many people want someone to listen, and then share a something afterwards. A short and valuable read.

[Love is Stronger Than Death](#), by Peter Kreeft

This book looks at love first as a stranger, then as an enemy, then as a friend, then as a mother, then as a lover: each mask worn must be looked into and embraced until it dissolves and shows the next mask. The last mask to come off reveals the face of God. This is an excellent companion to [Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing](#); we live in a pain-killing culture that is terrified of facing death, and this book provides a mature and thoughtful invitation to come, and see what death is. I found it to be very moving.

[My Utmost for His Highest](#), by Oswald Chambers

A classic.

[Never Alone: A Personal Way to God](#), by Joseph Girzone

This is a gentle book, that may introduces spirituality to people who cannot see God because of pain caused by perversions of religion.

[Origins](#)

This is an on-line equivalent to [Darwin on Trial](#), [Darwin's Black Box](#), and [Reason in the Balance](#); it contains a number of good articles, some by Johnson and Behe, and is a good resource. It's run by the same people as [Leadership](#)

[University](#).

An Orthodox Prayer Book

I wish I could put the print version of a prayer book like this. Alas, this book is hard to find in print.

[The Orthodox Way](#), by Kallistos Ware

This describes the Christian faith with fingerprints on it. It has the kind of beauty of a very personal touch, not only because of the mystical author, but much more because the author brings in the fingerprints of his tradition.

[Orthodoxy: The Romance of Faith](#), by G.K. Chesterton

After Chesterton wrote [Heretics](#), someone asked him, "If that is what we shouldn't believe, what should we believe?"

After a moment, he said, "I am going to write a book about that." So he wrote [Orthodoxy](#)

[Out of the Silent Planet](#), by C.S. Lewis

This is an enjoyable read about a fantastic journey to another world.

[Participant Observation: Step by Step](#), by James P. Spradley

This is an anthropology text, but some of its concepts have broader application.

[Pensées](#), by Blaise Pascal

Qu'est-ce donc que nous crie cette avidité et cette impuissance, sinon qu'il y a eu autrefois en l'homme un véritable bonheur dont il ne lui reste maintenant que la marque et la trace toute vide, qu'il essaye inutilement de remplir de tout ce qui l'environne, en cherchant dans les choses absentes le secours qu'il n'obtient pas des présentes, et que les unes et les autres sont incapables de lui donner, parce que ce gouffre infini ne peut être rempli que par un objet infini et immuable?

What then does this avidity and powerlessness cry out to us, if not that there was once in man a true happiness of which nothing remains save the quite empty mark and trace, which he futilely tries to fill with

everything around him, looking in what he does not have for what he does not find in those he does have, and which either one is incapable of giving him, because this infinite void can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object?

Pascal knew a haunting romance as well. Food for thought.

[Perelandra](#), by C.S. Lewis

The sequel to [Out of the Silent Planet](#), this describes the main character brought to a sinless world to be his representative as the sinless Eve was being tempted.

[Phantastes](#), by George MacDonald

This is a faerie romance for adults. It was my favorite book for a time, and reading it let me know that I could write [A Dream of Light](#).

[The Pilgrim's Regress](#), by C.S. Lewis

This allegorical defense of Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism was Lewis's first writing after his conversion: a little rough around the edges, but a good writing. Lewis knew romance's haunting as well.

[Please Understand Me II: Temperament, Character, Intelligence](#), by David Kiersey

I have read both [Please Understand Me](#) and [Please Understand Me II](#) on the suggestion of a reader, and thought considerably about whether one of these texts should be included. The case for inclusion is that they offer an invaluable enrichment to interpersonal understanding, and for reasons I explain below, one beyond the benefit offered by standard descriptions of the sixteen Meyers-Briggs personality types. The case against it is that it is woven through and through with a very destructive philosophical

error, one that appears humane and reasonable on the surface and at the core is a far worse poison than racism. If I knew an alternative, a book that would offer the same insight without mingling it with poison, I would include that; not knowing of any such alternative, I think I will recommend it with a warning.

The idea of the sixteen personality types based on four personality dimensions is one of the best things to come out of Jungian psychology — the only one, for that matter, that I have encountered which is separable from Jung's Gnosticism — and Meyers and Briggs created a tool that allowed most people to get a good quick-and-dirty result that would help them to understand themselves better. The good thing about a book about the sixteen personality types is that it allows people to read about their own types, and quite probably come to understand themselves better. The bad thing about such a book is that it provides too much information to be assimilated or navigated by the casual, nonspecialist reader. The reader's type, read with interest, is quite probably the one personality type that will be remembered. Maybe one more for spouse, if the reader is married — but not sixteen. Sixteen are too many to keep track of.

Enter [Please Understand Me](#). This book provides a road map, connecting Meyers-Briggs personality types with the four classical temperaments. Each temperament is a cluster of four similar personality types, and the four temperaments provide a much more manageable learning feat. I at least walked away from both books with a clear understanding of all four temperaments, not just my own. The books do treat all sixteen personality types, but within the context of a

coherent and manageable framework. The reader is likely to walk away from either book with a far better picture of human variation than from any straight description of the sixteen personality types.

That's the good news. What's the bad news?

Errors often come in diametrically opposed pairs — such as legalism and libertinism. C.S. Lewis said that the Devil always sends us errors in pairs — he wants our extra hate for one to pull us into the other. The pair of errors I am concerned with here is as follows:

There are no legitimate personal variations. Every difference is a matter of right or wrong. Everybody should strive to adhere to every standard I want to adhere to.	There are no matters of right or wrong. Every difference is a legitimate personal variation. No person should apply any of his standards to anybody else.
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I am not going to tell you which of these errors is worse; I am not going to say which is the real error to be aware of.

As C.S. Lewis pointed out, that's exactly what the Devil wants. He wants us to be so focused on how bad one of those errors is that our extra hate for it will suck us into the opposite — like the pickpocket duo where one member urgently warns you about a spilling cup of coffee so that you won't notice that the other has stolen your wallet. Like *extreme heat and extreme cold* they are quite different

extreme heat and extreme cold, they are quite different from each other, but both extremes produce the same undesirable result: they make you quite thoroughly dead.

I am not going to tell you which of these errors is worse, but Kiersey is. He succumbs to the temptation. Kiersey bewails one error and uses its awfulness to lure the reader into the other. From a theologian's perspective — or from a demon's, for that matter — it doesn't particularly matter which is which. In this case Kiersey bewails the error on the left, luring the reader to embrace the error on the right. He makes no distinction between preferences in matters keeping to a schedule vs. open-ended playing by ear, or keeping a neat vs. creatively disorganized house, and choices in matters such as embracing faith vs. delving into the occult, or chastity vs. lust.

The treatment of sexual practices in [Please Understand Me II](#) deserves particular note. I was going to say that the text makes no distinction between sexual purity and promiscuity — but then I realized that that is not quite correct. It is certainly true that one temperament's tendency towards sexual promiscuity is described in respectful, nonjudgmental terms — and that two other temperaments' tendency to do what they choose whether or not contemporary society approves (that is, whether or not it violates the consensus of the Natural Law shared by innumerable times and places — save that the choice of loaded language leads the reader to regard these standards as arbitrary and parochial). When, however, one temperament at least tries to be abstinent before the wedding and faithful after, it is described in language that appears to be neutral, nonjudgmental and "just the facts,

Ma'am" — and somehow manages to describe this purity in what I consider to be the most degrading language in the text. It calls to mind the maxim, "Where orthodoxy is optional, it will sooner or later be proscribed." Chastity isn't exactly proscribed, but it is a mark of talent to be able to appear to be impartially and nonjudgmentally reporting the facts and still paint a picture that's that unflattering. There is no hint in the text — in the chapter on mating or anywhere else — of the freedom and joy of sexual union between a husband and wife who offer each other their virginities on their wedding night and choose to be faithful thereafter.

I would like to elaborate a little more about what I said about this being a worse poison than racism. I wasn't just making a poetic exaggeration, like someone who comes in during the summer and says, "It's hotter than Hell out there!" I was making a literal statement. I am a white male — and if racism is not defined as "the prejudice of whites against blacks and other minorities", then my tenure as an American in a non-Western nation at a time when anti-American sentiment was running strong, my experience of (for example) having a careful and respectful question met with an angry rant, and other experiences of getting only the dregs left after those in power had considered how to meet the needs of those types whom they considered worth caring for, gives me at least a limited basis to know, by experience, that racism is nasty. Even after this, I do not believe that racism is the one unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Ghost, that it is presently made out to be. It is as if a person may be dishonest, may be coldhearted, may be arrogant and lazy, and he is like everyone else an imperfect person — but establish that he is really, genuinely,

and truly racist, and then he embraces the unacceptable. You think I exaggerate? For the next week, as you go about your life, count the number of times you encounter a communication from some group working "against racism," and the number of times you encounter a communication from some group working "against coldheartedness." I will be surprised if the 'working against coldheartedness' tally totals to a tenth as many as the 'working against racism' tally. For that matter, I will be surprised if the 'working against coldheartedness' tally is not zero.

It makes sense to say that a person is a smoker and is relatively healthy. Cigarettes do damage to any person's lungs, but it is possible to regard a person as being overall healthy despite the very real damage caused by smoking. In the same sense, it makes sense to say that a society is openly racist and relatively healthy. Not by any means that the racism is harmless — it causes real and significant harm.

But that harm can coexist with other areas of health. A society can be openly racist, can nurse grudges against other ethnicities, be they minorities or the denizens of other nations — and live on for centuries, alive and kicking. It is poison, but not all poison, not even all strong poison, is lethal.

The same cannot be said for poison found in [Please Understand Me](#). As a member of the host of ideas Lewis analyzes in [The Abolition of Man](#), no society can long embrace such ideas without destroying itself. Societies have taken such "progressive" views before — and then fallen apart. In addition, this idea appears a reasonable and enlightened idea, one that a person should be respected for holding — to say that you are for racism, on the other hand, is to instantly forfeit all claim to be taken seriously. Poison

that appears to be food will harm far more people than poison in a bottle clearly labelled, "Poison". For these reasons, I mean quite literally that one of the fundamental ideas woven throughout the text is worse than racism.

Having made this critique, I wish to say that [Please Understand Me](#) is a book worth reading, even with such a massive flaw — and I believe that the danger is lessened to a reader who has been forewarned. That I would list anything I believe to justify such a warning is meant as a recommendation.

There are two editions of the book: [Please Understand Me](#), published in the 1970s, and [Please Understand Me II](#), published in the 1990s. The second book is about twice as long, and talks about differences in kind of intelligence found in temperaments and personality types; the first book gives a very good feel for what people are like — experience of the world and actions. I am not exactly going to recommend one book over the other, so much as provide a helpful question: "Do you specifically want to know about mental competencies enough to read twice the length of material, or would you prefer a shorter piece that gives the same insight into most aspects of personhood but does not significantly treat intelligence?"

(Side note: I would not endorse [Please Understand Me II](#) as a resource for understanding multiple intelligence theory. It does not ask the question of "What are the basic kinds of human intelligence?" so much as "What are the temperaments and personality types, and what kind of intelligence may be associated with each of them?" It's kind of like a book on academic departments asking, "What are the academic departments in a university, and what kinds of

intelligence may be associated with each of them?" That would be a good resource on academic departments, but it's the wrong place to look if your goal is to understand multiple intelligence theory.)

[Prayer](#), by Richard Foster

An in-depth treatment of one of the most foundational areas of the Christian life. Giants of faith have said things like, "I am so busy that I cannot get on with less than two hours of prayer a day." This book is worth reading and following.

[The Recorded Sayings of Zen Master Joshu](#), by Shih Chao-Chou

This provides a collection of profound koans (illustrative stories), not concerned primarily with moral cleanliness, but with something that will sharpen and challenge almost any mind. It was after reading them that I wrote [Christian Koans](#).

[Reason in the Balance: The Case Against Naturalism in Law, Science, and the University](#), by Phillip Johnson

Darwinism is the cutting dullness of the sword being wielded against Christianity; the sword is named 'naturalism'. Johnson here provides a good and broad view that is well worth reading, especially for Christians in an academic context.

[Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements](#), Thomas Oden

About how modern theology has gone sour; interesting and quite honest. A must-read for anyone going to seminary.

[Saint Francis of Assisi](#), by G.K. Chesterton

This book is full of "magic from another real world;" it does a good job of telling the story of one of the most colorful saints in history.

[The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind](#), by Mark Noll

"The scandal of the Evangelical mind," Noll writes, "is that there's not much of an Evangelical mind."

This deals with the tragic story of how many people who really love the Lord and yet who are very far from loving God with all of their minds. An Evangelical equivalent to [Why Catholics Can't Sing](#).

[Seven Habits of Highly Effective People](#), by Stephen Covey

This is a practical and popular book, and it is practical and popular precisely because it does something deep.

[Sources of the Self](#), by Charles Taylor

This book provides a good history of the philosophers whose work has shaped our modern sense of identity. It's ponderous reading; I thought I hadn't gotten anything out of wading through it until I found myself referring to its concepts in a conversation.

[Stranger in a Strange Land](#), by Robert A. Heinlein

Heinlein was a sex-crazed libertine, anti-Christian, and deliberately wrote to be offensive. [Stranger](#) is the most monumentally flawed book I have read which I would even consider recommending to another person — and I have. This book is a deeply interesting book. I identify a lot with Michael Valentine Smith, and Charles Wallace in [A Wind in the Door](#).

[Tales of a Magic Monastery](#), by Theophane the Monk

I've given away a couple of copies of this book. Its stories are short, simple, and profound.

[Tao Te Ching](#), by Lao Tzu

Written millenia ago in China, this book is a collection of 81 poems (and the inspiration for me to write [The Way of the Way](#)). There are a number of insights about slowing

down and growing still, relying on God's grace, and other things...

[Technopoly](#), by Neil Postman

This book could be summarized in a single question: "Was technology made for man, or man for technology?" It has a number of valuable insights, and I would like to see a new edition published with an appendix about the Web. His insights about the detrimental side effects of technology, and the sorcerer's bargain involved in each. I wish Postman would write a book entitled, *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, which would analyze different technologies and the advantages and disadvantages of using each, to help people decide when and where to buy what technological items — and suffer from the sorcerer's bargain as little as possible.

[That Hideous Strength](#), by C.S. Lewis

The conclusion of Lewis's space trilogy, and a good fairy tale for adults.

[Three Philosophies of Life](#), by Peter Kreeft

This book explores three philosophies of life: life as empty vanity, as developed in Ecclesiastes, then life as redemptive suffering, as developed in Job, then life as love and joy, as developed in the Song of Songs. It is a fascinating book, and the one that (after being lent to me) motivated me to check out other Kreeft books.

[Truth is Symphonic](#), by Hans Urs von Balthasar

A fascinating theological read about the beauty of diversity in the created order.

[Two-Way Prayer](#), by Priscilla Brandt

Reading this book helped me desire a prayer that is listening as well as speaking. People who like [Experiencing](#)

[God](#) might like it.

[What Color Is Your Parachute?](#), by Richard Bolles

This book is practical by remembering what people forget when they try to be practical. There's something shining that often dies in people; Bolles has helped me pursue work where that something shining is alive.

[Why Catholics Can't Sing: The Culture of Catholicism and the Triumph of Bad Taste](#), by Thomas Day

A Catholic equivalent to [The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind](#). This deals with truly awful Catholic music, and is of relevance to a whole lot more people than just Catholics.

[Why Go to Mass?](#)

A short article dealing with why consumer-oriented services are not a substitute for services designed ad maiorem Dei gloriam.

[A Wind in the Door](#), by Madeleine L'Engle

This book is special to me, both because of its imagination, beauty, storytelling, depth, imagery, description of kything, etc., and because I identify with Charles Wallace — in needing to adapt while remaining wholly myself, and in other things.

[Die Wolkenreise](#), a picture book by Sis Koch, with illustrations by Sigrod Heuck

This children's book was given to me by a very good friend after her trip to Germany, and it is one of the most beautifully tragic books I have read. Here is the rough paraphrase translation she gave me (as best I can reconstruct it from memory, the pictures, and a very rough knowledge of German — the pictures are exquisite, and the reason I am recommending the book):

Once the wind said to a cloud, "Come with me, let me  
blow you about, and show you the world!

"I will show you woods, hills and fields, and plains  
with wild horses and fields, cities, and even deserts,  
seas and mountain islands. I'll show you desert islands,  
coral reefs, and even more, all around the world."

The cloud said to the wind, "I can't do that. I have to  
go and make it rain."

[A Wrinkle in Time](#), by Madeleine L'Engle

The book introducing the characters in [A Wind in the  
Door](#).

# Journal of an Awakening

Tuesday 11/16/99

One week ago this day, something beautiful happened. I came alive spiritually. After some prayer and listening to the Spirit, I am endeavoring to write a journal of my experiences and lessons learned, perhaps to be of use to others who are at a time of dryness, or at least to be of use to myself when my love has grown cold. D.L. Moody said that he was like a leaky bucket, needing to be refilled again and again. In that regard, I believe he speaks for all of us, or at least me at any rate. There are times that I am very much spiritually alive, and times of being bleak and dull. (I don't mean the long, dark night of the soul where we seem to be in a desert wasteland without finding the God we earnestly seek, but are very close to the God who seems so far; I mean times where our love has grown cold, where we do not sense God and do not particularly seek him. The latter is where I was.) This journal starts today, and I do not know where it will end — my guess is that it will taper off when I next begin to drift from God, and/or there will be some point when I realize that I have not written anything in a while and it is now a closed book. Before that point comes, however, I think I have a lot to write.

With that done, let me first tell how I have come to this  
infusion of spiritual life.

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I was walking outside and met a friend, and we talked. When he asked me how I was doing, I didn't have much to say, but mentioned a few thoughts I'd had. Then I asked him how he was doing, and he said that he had been feeling really close to God, and more aware of other people.

I hadn't mentioned, because it had been around so long, the emptiness I was feeling, and I became more acutely aware of how dry my own spiritual life had been, how mechanical of an exercise my [Bible](#) reading was.

That night, I was walking over to Wheaton's campus for Pooh's Corner (a group of people that meets to read children's books aloud). A long and slow-moving freight train was crossing the tracks. While I was standing and waiting, I thought about the conversation and my own dryness, and decided to work on my spiritual state when I got home.

—No, not when you get home. Now.

—Not now! I'm waiting for a train.

—Now.

I decided to do something then and there. But what? Initiative and power are all on God's side; there was nothing I could do that would accomplish closeness between God and me. So I prayed a simple prayer.

That moment, I was filled with joy and peace, deeper than I had known in a long time. I paced back and forth in that joy and peace waiting for the train — enjoying through them the simple little things: the walking, the sound of the train. Whatever I did, there was God.

I thought about Thérèse de Lisieux's little way (as depicted in the movie *Household Saints*), about resting in God's presence,

and of being in God's will in even the most simple places — even waiting for a train. At a low spot — when I medically can't work above half-time, and have an intermittent job not related to computers — and when used to thinking about serving God in spectacular and heroic ways, it was good to realize that. I went on to Pooh's corner, and enjoyed things there a great deal more. There were milk and cookies, and I enjoyed them in a different way than I usually enjoy food. I usually eat good food slowly and in little bites, to consciously savor its flavor — but I do not completely engage, or rather I am not able to let go of my disengagement. This time I was able to engage, and not just with the milk and cookies; I was also able to engage with the camaraderie and silliness.

When I create something (even something little), there is a first conception of the idea, then an incubation period where I let the idea ferment, then a time of implementation. The fermenting period is one which I cherish, and one which I had rarely experienced since a loss of creativity. I experienced it then. I also spent time worrying about the loss of the joy and peace, although I tried not to.

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I am not sure how to begin; a lot has happened since then. My account will probably grow more linear and chronological as time moves on, but the account of the days before will probably be more by lessons learned and by theme.

The lessons I have learned have not in a sense been new lessons, in the sense of something I couldn't have articulated before, but I have owned and experienced the knowledge more deeply.

The first lesson has to do with the bread from Heaven, manna. It was divine nourishment, and it required trust in God. You couldn't gather extra for two days; it would spoil. However much you gathered, it was enough. These two principles I have found to apply to God's presence, and spiritual nourishment.

I struggle with wanting to have things under control, to know ahead of time what to do with my time (in small part to avoid boredom, and in large part to continue to be nourished and grow close to God), and God doesn't tell me. That is better for my learning to trust him, I think. God isn't giving me a programme to follow. He's giving me a relationship.

Wednesday 11/17/99

I've read that spiritual growth is slow and gradual, and I believe it is. Growth since that one mountaintop experience has been imperceptible. But here is a case of a sudden growth. I think that that is a matter of God working differently with different people, meeting each where he needs to be met. Perhaps next time his work with me will be entirely slow — I believe I am growing and changing, but God plans on a larger scale than one week.

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Before that Tuesday, I was uniformly groggy. My emotions after then have been a little bit of a roller coaster — I've had some moments of bliss, and some moments of sadness. Now I am feeling groggy and perhaps a little depressed — although that's probably because I didn't get enough sleep. God has blessed me with emotions; now perhaps he is trying to wean me off of them. He saved me for himself, not for emotions. I hope that the good feelings won't end yet, though; I need to heal from pain. I ask that I may first have him, and then after that enjoy him through emotional blessings.

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I have been reminded of, and appreciating, the way of the heart described in Brent Curtis's *Less-Wild Lovers: Standing at the Crossroads of Desire*, which I will summarize/condense here, and would highly encourage you to read:

There is within us a yearning for a sacred Romance, a haunting that won't go away. Art, literature, music have explored this Romance and its loss. It uncontrollably haunts through natural beauty, telling of something lost with a promise to return.

If this were all there was to it, that would be great — but it's not. The Romance has an enemy, the Message of the Arrows.

We once trusted in good because we had not known evil. Now we must trust in good, with full knowledge of evil. Our loss of innocence came through painful experiences we adapted to by wearing a false self.

The Romance appears through things — moonlight, a song — but those things will sear us if we think the Romance is in them. We can hurt ourselves by trying to capture the things through which Romance has shown, or we can hurt ourselves by trying to forget the Haunting, and resigning ourselves to the Romance's loss. This resignation sees good as not startling, but only "nice", and evil as normal.

In resignation we give up on the sacred Romance, but our heart will not give up, and we compromise. We become, and take, less-wild lovers.

God calls us to give up the less-wild lovers, embrace our nakedness, and trust in his goodness. We are at a fork in the road. The one path can only be seen for a short distance, and looks uncertain, unpredictable. Anxious, we have no good road map, but just snippets of travellers before: encouraging but frustratingly vague.

The other way looks straight and safe far as the eye can see, and signs promise success on the next leg if directions are precisely followed. We read one last note quaintly encouraging us to trust the goodness of the first path, and start on the route of discipline and duty.

We discover that we don't feel much of anything, don't connect with people. Our passions show themselves in inappropriate ways. Our heart is with us, journeying under protest. So we crush it with more activity — or let our heart have a secret life on the side. We arrive at Vanity Fair, peopled by deadness of spirit, lack of love, lust, pride, anger... We think this is as close to the Celestial City as we are going to get, and so set up shop and try to distract ourselves with the soul curiosities and anesthetics: [Bible](#) study, community service, religious seminars, hobbies... These are often good things, but misused to squelch our heart's longings.

Most of us fall into two categories vis-a-vis these less-wild lovers. There are those who anesthetize their hearts via competence or order (a clean desk, stellar athletic skills, impressive dinner parties, massive amounts of time reading Scripture), like a picture perfect wife who is always busy, admirably involved with the community, and is never really there to her husband. Her sadness says, "My heart is not available for anything that is not safe and tame. I am careful to avoid surprises that might upset my control, and if you were wise, you would, too." She tries to keep away the pain of the Arrows by sealing off those compartments of the heart that have been wounded. She may have grown up in an atmosphere too delicate to handle the weight of her unedited soul.

Others choose a different kind of control: indulgence. They

seek a taste of transcendence from non-transcendent sources: porn, obsession with sports, or living off our giftedness, which is like crack cocaine to our souls. They touch the heart-place made for transcendent communion without being transcendent, and shackle us: addiction.

Only unfallen communion will ever satisfy our desire, or allow it to drink freely without imprisoning it and us.

If God married to us experiences from the first group a legalistic controller, the second group is a harlot whose heart is seduced by every scent on the evening breeze. God says, "I love you and yet you betray me at the drop of a hat. Can't you see we're made for each other?"

God's love became even more wild, but we become and take on lovers that are less wild. We give up on being in a relationship of heroic proportions, and take what is smaller but under our control.

The indulgence looks better than anesthesia, but the passion must be fed by worship or use of the other and so does not leave us free to love. Its pleasure is part of the vanity of vanities.

The formulae that seem to control everything, do not offer wisdom about what to do with the depth of desire God has given us. If we try to anesthetize the desire, we become relational islands, and if we seek to indulge then familiarity breeds contempt and we must seek mystery elsewhere.

What, then, is the road less travelled, the way of the heart?

Perhaps, more than improving our habits, we are to invite Jesus into the aching abyss of our hearts. Internal discipline is valuable, but discipline imposed from the outside will be defeated. There comes a point when renewed religious activity is worthless. We must place our hand in God's, and relate in a personal way to him. We are drawn to and fear this intimacy.

We are once again at the crossroads. There is a chasm between us and Christ, but he beckons and promises a bridge.

We listen, but his words sound like many we should not have trusted. Some return to Vanity Fair, some close their eyes and take a step. We look in our valise, and pull words we disdained the last time we stood at a crossroads — now we see their truth.

We see that good can be trusted in, and that God is good. We see that to be free, we must allow ourselves to be haunted, surprised by goodness we cannot hold.

We fear to really ask for such bold movement from the wild God, and sit down, honest with ourselves. Vanity Fair never really has felt like home. We are captured by our less-wild lovers. We take the step into freedom.

We are clueless as to how we will cross the abyss, but we are glad to be on our way.

Thursday 11/18/99

Before my awakening, I was in a state of lethargy, and now I have begun to do too much. If doing some things is a part of spiritual recovery, it is easy to believe that doing more will be better — easy to believe, and destructively wrong.

After a number of activities last night, I felt a beckoning from God to lie down and be with him. I lay down, and made being with him one more activity — I was trying to do something to accomplish being with him. I felt a prompting to stop, and did, with hesitation — trying to let go, and beginning to succeed.

The next thing I knew, I awoke from a nap, wonderfully refreshed and filled with his presence.

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Discipline is essential to spiritual growth, and there are several things I am doing as a matter of discipline: [Bible](#) reading, e-mailing prayer requests to my friends and praying for their prayer requests, transcribing the lyrics to hymns into a collection, and this journal. But the disciplines are for faith, not faith for the disciplines, and I have felt a freedom to not be bound too tightly by the disciplines. Yesterday I did not enter a hymn, and it felt wonderful.

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One of the questions or doubts I have concerns my professional future. I have a master's degree in applied mathematics, with a computational science and engineering option, and want to work as a mathematician or at least a programmer. Use it or lose it skills are beginning to atrophy. I think it will be sad if I acquire this education and then never really use it — I am trying to hold that out, open to God to work with. It's his domain, not mine.

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Friday 11/19/99

I was angry and not in a state to write, because my brother Joseph was playing a computer game with a very annoying sound track right below me, and prayed a little, then slowly entered and sang "O the deep, deep love of Jesus". That put me in the right state of mind to write again. (It reminds me of the passage in [A Wind in the Door](#) when Proginoskes tells Meg to recite the multiplication tables in order to get her thoughts straight to prepare for (or deal with, I don't remember which) the Mr. Jenkins trial.)

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I visited my friend Robin, a few days after we spoke and that first spark was lit, to see if there were any words of wisdom that he could share with me, any direction or advice. I asked him what he had been learning, and he said a number of things. Nearly all of them were things I had reasoned out theologically, but there is sometimes a difference between reasoning out a truth as a doctrinal proposition and coming to own it, to breathe it. The lesson above about manna, for instance, was one I had thought out before (and I do not wish in the least to denigrate learning something intellectually. I am served very well by my intellectual knowledge, and I am worshipping God when I reason things out). But there was one he mentioned that hit me. Although I had reasoned it out, I am not sure how well I've assimilated it.

That has to do with where your identity comes from. The Christian's identity should come from Christ, and I realized that my identity in very large part comes from what Curtis would have referred to as competence — what I can do. I am very intelligent and have a number of talents, and when I think about myself... perhaps you could say that I have feet partly of iron and partly of clay. Being a Christian is a very large part of my identity, but so are the talents that I have. I realized a couple of days ago that many of my fantasies are about having some (usually odd) superhuman power, such as knowing the contents of all the books ever written, or speaking a thousand languages at a native proficiency. Those fantasies express something very revealing; they answer in some way the question of "What, in my heart of hearts, do I really believe would be an expression of who I would like to be?" Who you would like to be is usually an expression of who you are, a magnified and concentrated sense if you will. A

hint of how this is, might be shown in that a black man's fantasies will have him be a black man, and a white man's fantasies will have him be a white man: a black man does not become more of the essence of a black man by becoming white, nor a white man become more of the essence of a white man by becoming black. (I realize that this isn't the whole picture, but I don't want to add all the nuances now.)

The importance of "Who do you understand yourself to be?" might be observed in a fact about the early Christian Church.

The society they lived in was quite sharply divided and segregated by race, gender, and social status. Feelings of superiority and hatred were the norm; an organization like the KKK would not seem to people to be abnormal or disappointing.

In this context, there appeared what both itself and outsiders recognized as a new race: Christians. There really was not any longer Jew nor Greek nor barbarian, male nor female, slave nor free. People mingled across those boundaries, and a large part of this was because their identities were not "I am a free Jewish man," but simply "I am a Christian." (Martyr's Mirror records some early martyrs who, when asked their names, simply answered, "Christian.") People were still (for example) free African men, but the core of their identity, the core answer to the question, "Who am I?", was Christian.

I am not at that point yet. A large part of my identity comes from speaking French and ranking 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition, for instance. It has been very difficult for me to not have, or be frustrated in applying, or slowly be losing, some of those abilities. Those things are to be enjoyed and used, and are blessings from God, but... My friend Robin was able to say that he had realized that if he were to lose (for example) his computer abilities, it would be an adjustment, but it

would not be that difficult to go on; he would not have lost who he was. I'm not at that point yet. I think that (say) being paralyzed from the waist down would be an easier adjustment than having my intelligence move to an average level.

I think this is important, but I don't know what to do about it. Pray and be open to God, perhaps; he'll move on when he wants to, and maybe I'm not ready for that. God doesn't try to do everything at once; we couldn't take it. He works on us slowly and patiently; he isn't in a hurry.

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There were a few insights I had theologically, and I thought about including them, but decided not to. This is a journal of how I am doing spiritually, not primarily a theological writing. (I think some of the above may have shifted too much to writing a lecture for readers from writing a journal as I grow close to God. I'll try to shift back.)

Saturday 11/20/99

I am starting to feel a bit burned out. I have been trying too hard to accomplish what is God's to do. So today I am taking a sabbath — keeping up my spiritual disciplines and the normal things of the Christian walk, but ceasing the heroic efforts to draw close to God. And tomorrow, Sunday, I hope not to resume those efforts I keep falling into, but simply to wait, open to however God may or may not surprise me.

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Today has been a good day. I had a good, long, and unplanned conversation with my 14 year old brother Joseph. Deep, open conversations are something I have wanted and not had for a while. I've had people willing to talk and listen, but when the time comes I haven't found much to say. (That is frustrating — wanting to talk and having someone to talk with, but not to actually be able to say anything.)

I thought a bit about what Robin said — about being closer to God, and being more open to other people. I think the two are linked for him. I was able this time to be open to Joseph, to listen and engage when he was ready to talk.

One thing that I have been thinking with, out of this, is that I have been affected by the scientific method. The aspect of the method that is relevant here is that you reproduce initial conditions to bring about the same outcome — a matter in which the scientific method reflects human and even animal psychology. It runs deep in me, and it is something I have to let go of in this regard.

In spiritual life, I do not (at least on some scales) have an experimental apparatus before me to manipulate in order to get desired effects. The conversation I had with Joseph was a good conversation, but I know I can't bring about another such conversation by repeating what I did before this one. The more immature side of me would also like to have over again the experience at the train tracks, but I know that I cannot cause that to be repeated. God can, but I can't. These experiences are to be enjoyed, then cherished and let go of when they are over. God will grant fresh experiences, like writing this journal entry for me (I didn't think I'd have anything to say after a day's rest), but the manna must be fresh each day. The temptation is

perennial to regard God as my personal genie — but he is not, and I cannot control what he does, not even by faithfully repeating whatever I did to which he responded with a blessing. He answers prayers, and even his unpredictability is part of his love. He is faithful, and responds to his people's reaching up to him. He blesses people as they receive Communion. But there is something in spiritual life — or at least the speck of it I'm experiencing now — that is quite unpredictable, where God responds to us as he will and refuses to be manipulated by our doing what we did before a blessing.

Tomorrow after church, instead of seeking out people to listen to me, I'll try to seek out someone I can listen to. I mean to ask, "How are you?" — slowly — and then wait and listen to the answer.

Sunday 11/21/99

What I first thought of writing today is that the spectacular feelings come first and often give way to deeper work — those feelings are a good, but not the only or the greatest good. And I am feeling slightly melancholy now. But there were three un-requested unexpected and delightful surprises that came today.

When I was growing up, I had a miniature collie named Goldie. (A miniature collie is a dog like Lassie on TV, only smaller.) She was a wonderful dog, a good breed to have with children. When I was a little boy, I covered her back with Vaseline. Then my brother Matthew (3 years younger) covered her back with peanut butter. Then we both covered her back with honey. Later and finally, Ben and Joe (10 years younger) covered her with honey. The poor dog hated baths. I have a lot of fond memories of her.

This morning, I looked out the family room window, and saw a miniature collie wandering through the back yard. It was good to

stand and watch it.

Then, when I arrived late at church, I was looking at the bulletin cover. The bulletin covers vary in cover according to the liturgical year, and today's bulletin cover was white. I slowly realized that the cover was not a pure white, but flecked with little specks of color — something that I had been trying to find for a Christmas gift but not been able to.

Finally, as I looked through the songs, I saw that the last communion song was "We will dance", a beautiful song that I had been looking for the lyrics for and not found. The song goes:

Sing a song of celebration Lift up a shout of praise  
For the Bridegroom will come, The glorious One  
And Oh, we will look on his face  
We'll go to a much better place.  
Dance with all your might Lift up your hands and clap for  
joy  
The time's drawing near, When He will appear  
And Oh, we will stand by his side  
A strong, pure, spotless bride  
Chorus:

We will dance on the streets that are golden  
The glorious bride and the great Son of Man  
From every tongue and tribe and nation  
We'll join in the song of the Lamb  
Sing aloud for the time of rejoicing is near  
The risen King, our groom, is soon to appear  
The wedding feast to come Is now near at hand  
Lift up your voice, Proclaim the coming Lamb.

I said three blessings, but I remembered a fourth. I had become slightly dazed last Sunday after meeting a girl but

become slightly depressed last Sunday after meeting a girl but not being able to talk with her. I was able to chat with her and a few other people today.

These blessings are interesting, because they are a kind of blessing I try not to focus on. The immature mind seeks to find happiness primarily by controlling the circumstances out there; the mature mind seeks to find happiness more by controlling the circumstances in here. These blessings are the sort of blessings that someone immature would ask for; therefore I wasn't expecting them. I had forgotten them, and forgotten that, even if they are lesser blessings than a tranquil heart, they are still blessings. I hope that I have a few more such blessings.

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A part of maturity comes in giving up a pleasure principle — in having joy and being able to appreciate pleasures, but not chasing after them in a primary sense. I have come to realize that there's more of that pleasure seeking in me than I thought. It's part of what I seek from God. I evaluate some of the blessings in part by what pleasure they give me. I don't know when (if ever) I'll outgrow it, but at least I'm aware of it now.

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There is one more thing I remembered about the church service. As background for this, I wasn't holding my bulletin at the time, and the musicians often repeat verses, so it can be hard to tell when a song will end:

As "We will dance" was being sung, there came a point when the music was winding down, and I said to myself, "I enjoyed that, but I don't need it to go any longer." I happily prepared to sit down. Then things sped up a little and the song continued on for a bit longer — at which I was delighted — but I did not wistfully desire for the song to linger on and on. I was able to enjoy it, cherish it, and then let it go.

(The background principle, if it would help to state explicitly, is that a person who is full doesn't ask for more. Immoderation, finding something good, will try to have more and more of it, or finding a good moment, try to make that moment last forever.

Moderation allows good things to pass from experiences to memories, capable of both holding on and letting go. The topic is explored beautifully in C.S. Lewis's [Out of the Silent Planet](#).)

Monday 11/22/99

Today, as I was singing in the shower, I came across a tune that left me astounded. To put it in a way that risks sounding narcissistic, it was the first time in a long while I have been entranced by the sound of my own voice — but it was not narcissistic. It was not my voice and myself that I was in awe of; it was the music that was coming through my voice. I was entranced by the music and sound, and at all not aware of myself.

The music is hauntingly beautiful, and speaks of a childlike, hushed awe and wonder. It is music that can be sung without breaking the stillness, the silence. The emotions that the piece, or its thought, evokes, are the ones I have surrounding

Christmas carols in a minor key — which is what I decided to make of it. It tells of being a little boy in pyjamas, warm and out in the living room, drinking a cup of hot cocoa at night where it is wintry cold outside and warm inside, waiting for Christmas to come. (When I was a boy, Christmas was one of my favorite holidays because of all the presents I got, and I looked forward to that a great deal. Now it's the presents I give.) (I've got the melody written down, and I have some words, but I'm not completely happy with them — except for the last four stanzas. They allow people to sing and listen to the music.) To me, there has been something special about music in minor keys, that I have difficulty explaining. Perhaps you could say that major keys are pretty, like a dandelion, and minor keys are beautiful, like a rose. I have heard people say that minor keys are sad, and there is some truth to that, but to say that and nothing more is to paint a very deceptive picture. A better word would be 'bittersweet', and music in a minor key can tell of a bittersweet beauty — which includes the haunting beauty of the Romance described above. Bittersweet waters run deep.

Here is the present version of the piece; I don't know how to write sheet music in HTML, and for that matter I don't know if there is any better way to do it than include a GIF of some sheet music, which is why the music is written as it is.

(As I have been writing this, I have been feeling the emotions I would feel if I were singing it.)

adagio, piano

a quarter

e quarter

e quarter

e quarter

f quarter

e eighth

d eighth

e quarter

e quarter

a quarter

e quarter

e quarter

e quarter

d quarter

c eighth

b eighth

a half

Once there was born a lit-tle ba-by,  
Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah.

Born out of the pure vir-gin Mary,  
Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah.

Sent from Hea-ven he ca-ame to ea-arth,  
Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah.

Al-le-lu-ia, Al-le-e-lu-ia,  
Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah.

Word of Cre-a-tion, found a-a-mong us,  
Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah.

Son of God, the Word ma-ade fle-esh,  
Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah.

King of Kings and Lord o-of Lo-ords,  
Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah.

Al-le-lu-ia, Al-le-e-lu-ia,  
Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah.

Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah,  
Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah.

Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah,  
Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah.

Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah,  
Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah.

Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah,  
Aa-a-a-a-a-a-a-ah.

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I had coffee with a really cool friend tonight. His name's Joel. At the beginning, I showed him something I've been working on for Christmas, and he cried; he has been in intense spiritual warfare, and what I wrote really touched him. (I was worried during the time he was reading, because his brow wrinkled and I thought he didn't like it.) He is a seminary student, and asked permission to use parts of it when he returns to Mexico. During that time, I also decided to see if the church would use "In the Silence" around Christmastime. I'll go to the church office tomorrow.

We had a good conversation, and I was able to encourage him, and talk and listen. We talked about different cultures (among other things), and he spoke of Mexican communication style: where an American would have a logical, outlined plan (premise, point 1, point 2, point 3, conclusion...), a Mexican will have one central point and then give many different pieces of supporting evidence. Joel mentioned that his wife sometimes got frustrated with this: "Get to the point! Get to the point!" I mentioned to him that I am interested in different cultural communication styles, and he was welcome to communicate with me in the Mexican style.

When I walked away, I realized that he had been communicating with me in the Mexican fashion, and I was listening to it with ease.

A month or two ago in church, I was thinking about Robert A. Heinlein's [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), which has as a premise a person of totally alien culture entering our world (roughly). As well as experiencing culture shock, he causes a great deal of culture shock. He violates expectations people didn't know they

had.

I was wanting to find some other piece of literature like that, something else like that to read. Such a theme would be hard to find — it's not the sort of thing people generally write about. And then it suddenly dawned on me what other book would fit that description: the [Bible](#), with God in it as the stranger. "My thoughts are not like your thoughts, nor are my ways like your ways." God is a totally alien intelligence, one not like a man. He does not have any culture, but uses people's cultures to speak and work with them. He speaks all languages, and knows all cultures' ways of thinking. He works with these things and meets people where they are, but is always more than they are, and beyond comprehension. He is not now an organism walking on earth, but is immaterial, in all places at all times. He is not bound even by time. He is par excellence the stranger in a strange land.

I remembered this in connection with my present experience because, for my years of faith and study of spiritual things, what is happening is very different from what I would have expected an awakening to be like. The first thing (the experience at the railroad tracks) is about the only thing that happened the way I could have expected. My unspoken attitude towards the blessings on Sunday was, "Thanks, God, these Christmas presents are nice, but would you please draw me close to you?" Whoops.

I'm so glad that God doesn't give us what we want.

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Oh, and I've gotten almost nothing out of what I've read of Thérèse de Lisieux's autobiography. I was expecting to learn a lot from that.

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After reading *Less-Wild Lovers: Standing at the Crossroads of Desire*, I began to think, "That article should be a book," or more properly was wishing that I could find a book to read that would be like it, hold the same charm. The haunting beauty it tells of manifests itself in the article. There are a lot of books a little like that, but I only know of one that's really like it: Peter Kreeft's [Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing](#), which I hope to reread. Then I realized something heartening: I may be writing a book like *Less-Wild Lovers: Standing at the Crossroads of Desire*. I might not be, of course, and I cannot tell if this writing will haunt others as *Less-Wild Lovers: Standing at the Crossroads of Desire* haunted me. If it does, though, that will be a beautiful thing.

Tuesday 11/23/99

It took me a while to get to sleep last night, and I am feeling rather tired. I would say "tired but happy," but that has a bit different of a meaning than I intend. It is good to feel tired from running once in a while (and I have a feeling of having miles to go before I sleep — but I don't know if I actually do), especially after not having enough to do.

Free time is a blessing in moderation. Having eight hours of free time a day is not eight times as good as having one hour of free time a day. I was very frustrated to have hours and hours of free time on my hands and have lost my creativity. Now it feels good, once in a while, to have been a bit busy.

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At lunch today, I said something that I realized had broader application than its original context, and application to blessings from God.

It has to do with a difference between European and American attitudes towards alcohol and parties. In America, alcohol is the reason for the party. In Europe, alcohol is present and it is enjoyed, but it is not the reason for the party. It is given a subordinate role, a part of the enjoyment of the other people — and therefore probably enjoyed more.

A good party doesn't need alcohol, but alcohol can add something to a party. C.S. Lewis said that nobody puts a bow on a baby's head to hide how ugly she is. In the same spirit, alcohol is not what makes a party good, but neither is it something that has nothing to add. It adorns the goodness of a good party, just as a bow adorns a baby's head.

Many things are like that — not needed, but they have something to add. Christmas gifts are like that to friendship and family — gifts cannot be the substance of the relationships (and it is perverse to try to buy love by giving gifts), and a good friendship needs no exchange of gifts — but they are none the less a beautiful adornment. The principle also applies to some of my attitude towards how God was working with me — I was thinking "Either I have community with God, or I have lesser things that are easier to want and harder to be satisfied with." No — I can have both, with the lesser adorning the greater. A lesser good is still a good.

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Up until recently, I was somewhat ashamed of my singing voice. Now, I have been able to listen and hear its beauty.

Relatedly... I am afraid of driving. I am slightly nervous when I drive, and more nervous when I'm not driving but thinking about it. My fear has been soothed a great deal by singing in the car.

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Tuesday nights are Pooh's Corner nights, meeting at 9:58 — one of the highlights of the week. Tonight I was waiting for it to start, and around 8:30 or 9:00 felt what seemed like a prompting to leave my house for Pooh's Corner. Leave and do what? I wondered, as the only thing I could think of was to go to a little chapel on campus, and I expected half an hour or an hour of prayer to be too much, too boring. After some dallying, I went. The chapel was dark, with a little light filtering in through a stained glass window. I love darkness and semidarkness; I love starlight and moonlight. (My eyes are fairly sensitive in dim light.) And in there I sang; that is, I prayed twice. After a time of singing prayers and sitting in peaceful silence, I felt a prompting to leave. I looked at my watch; it was a bit early. So I dallied a bit, and then left, and on my way out found a Palestinian high school student with little brother, who was looking to see if the Stupe (Wheaton's snack shop) was open. It was closed. We walked and talked for a little while; I started to take him to a nearby Starbucks, but found out that he was on a tight time schedule, and we parted ways.

I walked to Fischer, where Pooh's corner meets, and found out that it's not meeting — Thanksgiving weekend. I was not too disappointed, not as much as I would have been other times. I was then glad for the time in the chapel (which I approached with an attitude of rushing, as something to do while impatiently waiting for Pooh's corner) and with the high schooler (who I enjoyed the opportunity to try to serve, looking with pleasure on an opportunity to serve Christ, thinking, "Pooh's corner can wait," and for that matter contemplating staying with them for coffee). I was able to watch and listen to a whole freight train crossing the tracks (something I enjoy). And I was able to get

back in time to be able to get some sleep tonight — I would have been up even later if there had been Pooh's corner, and I would have been tired for work (I was pleasantly surprised at how well rested I felt today).

I just, as I was writing, pieced together something that had been on my mind. I was at the church office today, and an acquaintance by the name of Andy brought in someone named David (I think; my memory's hazy) who walked like someone with a bad case of cerebral palsy, made annoying noises when he breathed, was immature and mentally retarded, and couldn't talk. I was annoyed, and I think I did a pretty good job of containing my annoyance and trying to think lovingly (which is not something that is stopped by feeling annoyed), but I couldn't concentrate. Andy was talking with him, gently and patiently, and there was something in the manner in which he was talking that said that he very much enjoyed David's company. "How can he do that?" I wondered. I was right in how I acted — there is nothing wrong with controlling yourself, nor with seeking to love when you don't feel like it (indeed, loving when you don't feel like it is valuable spiritual exercise). I was still in wonder at Andy, though.

Then when I was writing about the Palestinian student, I realized what it was.

Jesus, in one of his more chilling parables, tells us (Matt. 25:31-46, NJB):

When the Son of man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. All nations will be assembled before him and he will separate people one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right

hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me." Then the upright will say to him in reply, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?

When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome, lacking clothes and clothe you? When did we find you sick or in prison and go to see you?" And the King will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me." Then he will say to those on his left hand, "Go away from me, with your curse upon you, to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you never gave me food, I was thirsty and you never gave me anything to drink, I was a stranger and you never made me welcome, lacking clothes and you never clothed me, sick and in prison and you never visited me." Then it will be their turn to ask, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty, a stranger or lacking clothes, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help?" Then he will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it for me." And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the upright to eternal life.

This parable is foundational in importance, and it needs to be digested. It affects your whole attitude towards people. It was the semiconscious backdrop to my attitude towards that Palestinian student — and the fact that I did not see him as an

inconvenience or an interruption (interruptions can be the some of the most beautiful things; certain interruptions are to be seized), that I was happy to spend a few minutes with him and would have been happy to spend an hour over a cup of coffee and miss Pooh's corner, that I had difficulty understanding his accent and had to ask him to repeat things, that I offered to lend him my coat when it was cold out and he did not have a coat... None of those things were done with gritting-my-teeth willpower, or offered as noble sacrifices. (The thought that they could be viewed as sacrifices didn't even occur to me until I started writing.) They came out of a gift — the ability to do those things is a gift from God. That gift's name is 'love', or 'caritas', or 'agape'. Like some other gifts from God, it is a gift that grows with use — and Andy is a bit further along in that gift than I am. There is something special about that virtue that it hides itself, so that its presence may not even be recognized. When I asked myself, "How can he do that?", I was really asking the question of "How can he summon the willpower to behave kindly when he is experiencing the same annoyance I feel?" That is a wrong question. The answer to the right question is, "It flows from God's grace."

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Wednesday 11/24/99

In about an hour I'm going to meet a friend named Carlos. I don't know Carlos very well yet — I can recall talking with him a few times after church, and going out for coffee once, but not much more. I call him a friend rather than an acquaintance because in the interactions we've had I've felt something much

because in the interactions we've had, I've felt something much deeper than the usual shared interests. I hesitate to say that I 'like' him, for the same reason that I would hesitate to call a rose 'pretty'. The words are too shallow. He's the sort of quiet person who is easy to overlook, easy to ignore, and has a big heart that you'll never forget once he's touched you. Carlos is Hispanic, and his culture takes friendship very seriously — far more so than American culture, where most of what are called friendships should really be called acquaintanceships. I'm pretty sure that if I were to ask of him, he would give me more than he could afford (be it of money, or time, or emotional energy, or something else).

As I was sitting, watching my little brothers play Monotony, and chatting with Matthew, who is studying at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and not around very often, I felt a prompting to look for a gift to give him. What gift could I pull up for him in an hour? Well, I reasoned, I have my creativity back, so I'll probably be able to think of something. So I started thinking, and paced a bit (which is what I sometimes do when I'm thinking), and thought of this journal — and quickly dismissed the thought, for several reasons. It is the project I'm presently working on, and when I'm working on a creative project I want to tell the whole world — and so I send it to all sorts of people I know, including some who probably shouldn't be bothered. (Sometimes I do it for the wrong reason; I am doing it less to share than for an emotional desire for the praise I receive.) I also sometimes give gifts, or big gifts I've put too much work into too quickly — before the relational context has been built up for a gift to have its proper meaning; it has somewhat of the same thing wrong as buying love. This journal-in-progress is not the sort of gift that is appropriate to give to an acquaintance whom you have only talked with for two hours

whom you have only talked with for two hours.

I said that I dismissed the thought; it would be more accurate to say that I fought it with the same energy that is in defensiveness: Qui s'excuse, s'accuse. I fought it, and thought of another gift to give, a signed printout on nice paper of one of my poems. And I will give him that, too. But throughout the time, I had a feeling that I really should give him this journal. Finally came the words, "Think about who you are going to see."

When we first met, Carlos paid for the coffee, and (when I was feeling guilty about not doing a better job of fighting for the check, something I do badly) he said something; I don't remember the exact words, but he said that it tastes better if you don't argue about who's going to pay for it. Not fighting for the check can express a trust and acceptance of the other party's generosity, and letting someone else be generous and pay for it is as kind as paying for it yourself. Before that point, I felt bad about not knowing how to fight for a check; after that conversation, I have had some doubts about that custom — it embodies some virtue, but doesn't go all the way. Love should be generous and willing to pay; it should also honor others' generosity. It is more blessed to give than to receive, and a holy heart should be willing to let others have the greater blessing. I might ask him to buy me a rice crispies treat when I get there.

Then I realized exactly what Carlos will do when he receives this. He will read it carefully and with interest — probably making time for it soon after he receives it. He will feel honored to receive it, love me more for it, and use what it says when he thinks about what to pray for when he is praying for me. (Carlos, could you pray that I grow closer to my brother Matthew?) And for a friend like Carlos, even if I've only talked with him for two hours, this gift is perfectly appropriate.

Thursday 11/25/99 (Thanksaivina)

Thursday, 11/20/20 (Thanksgiving)

My meeting with Carlos seemed a disappointment at first, but now I'm glad for it. He was interested in me, and asked questions about myself, but when I asked him questions about himself, he wasn't very talkative. I was disappointed at that, as one of the main things I had been looking forwards to in the meeting.

Carlos was feeling sick after work, and almost called to cancel our meeting. That was why he didn't say much; I caught him when he wasn't doing well. He treated me to a good steak burrito and a bottle of guava Jarritos. (When he asked how the burrito was, I told him that it seemed good, but I'd need another one to be sure.) And he said that he was glad we met.

There was one C.S. Lewis short story where several people were at a colony in space. After a number of events, the story ended with a monk asking in prayer, "Can you forgive me, Father, for thinking I was sent here for my own spiritual convenience?"

I was thinking primarily of myself and my own spiritual growth when I asked Carlos to meet for coffee, which there was nothing wrong about. We should place a great emphasis on our own spiritual development: what does it profit a man to gain the entire world and lose his soul? Here, though, God was calling me to the next step: to meet Carlos not for my own benefit, but for his. It was good for me, though, but in a different way: another step in maturing.

It'll be a good lesson to keep in mind as I see relatives today at Thanksgiving.

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I prayed and went to bed early last night — more slowing down instead of always moving. I woke up today feeling relaxed and truly refreshed for the first time in a while. I'm in the family car, moving up, and plan to get some sleep now.

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I am writing this on a laptop which I am quite fond of. I use it for programming, writing, and other things. I wrote the above entry, shut it down to sleep, and when I next tried to turn it on, it wouldn't go on. My heart was placid; I expected a non-functional computer to be a disruption to what I do, but I wasn't upset. I think that's a good sign. I tried to turn it on just now, and it worked. I'm a little worried now, because of an intermittent failure, but I'm glad that this happened. I thought I was much more attached to this possession.

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I think I might know what is wrong with the laptop; the switch may be bad. If so, that shouldn't cost much to replace.

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I have struggled, and felt guilt about, a dislike for the aged. For a while, I haven't liked my grandmother, because her mind is going and she looks old. I remember some frustrating conversations in which I was unable to think of anything to ask or anything to say that would elicit a response which could appropriately be called normal adult conversation. I did not sin in having a dislike to deal with, and I do not think my guilty feelings were called for, but my displeasure at her presence and that of other seniors distressed me.

There is an element of beauty that is culture independent, but cultural conditioning can affect what is perceived as beautiful. Ideals of beauty vary from culture to culture. The American ideal of feminine beauty could be caricatured as a pre-pubescent boy with silicone implants. A healthy woman's body will tend to have thicker legs and bigger hips than most women on TV, and the Venus de Milo looks almost flat next to them. Many cultures would find our supermodels to be sickly, and nowhere here would we find a comment like one made by Marco Polo in the [Travels](#), that a nation's women had breasts four times as large as those of normal women, and they were exceedingly ugly. Our culture's icons of feminine beauty are also very young. There is no chance that someone the age of Patrick Stewart or Sean Connery would be voted the sexiest woman in America. When an older adult appears in advertising, he is usually portrayed disrespectfully; many of the disapproving adults in Tropicana Twister ads were elderly, far older than anyone shown heralding a product other than something like Depends undergarments. It is disturbing that one way of promoting a product is to show a wrinkled nun making a face that would curdle new milk saying

"We don't approve of Tropicana Twister." Would such a thing be done with a bosomy young nymph? We have very little sense of what it means to revere the hoary head, or why someone would refer to the aged as 'venerable'.

Tonight, amidst the fellowship, I was able for the first time in as long as I can remember to look at my grandmother and see her as truly beautiful. Yes, she is an octogenarian; yes, she is wrinkled, yes, she was sunken in her wheelchair. She still looked beautiful to me. And it was good, not only to be able to enjoy looking on her, but to realize that something had healed in me. It was something like what I realized as I wrote about Andy at the church office and my time with the Palestinian high schooler — good to see an unmerited, God-given grace.

At most family gatherings, I have not connected with the other people, not clicked, not jived. (I was once kicked out of a frat party for that reason.) At this gathering, I wandered around a bit, initiating a few conversations (I had a good talk with my uncle Doug; he's a good listener), told a few jokes (Jenna had the most delicious expression on her face as she got them), and finally after sitting down with the adults talking realized that there was a relaxed synergy going; I had clicked, and was in the conversation. It felt a little like a campfire.

There was a poster I saw on the wall at Wheaton College's Computing Services, that talked about becoming a Unix wizard. It was in the form of a miniature catechism, and had questions like, "How many kernels do I have to take apart?" and "What books should I read?" The last question was, "How will I know I know when I am a Unix wizard?" Its answer was profound: "Never mind about when you will become a wizard. Just walk along the path, and someday you will look over your shoulders and see that the mantle of the Unix wizard has lain upon your

shoulders since you knew not when."

That insight applies to many things in life; it offers a deep alternative to our habit of thinking of everything in terms of a sharp beginning and an end. Here, I would certainly not say that a great mantle has lain upon my shoulders since I knew not when; all the same, there is something similar: suddenly realizing a virtue I had hoped for but not had.

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I mentioned "In the Silence" in a letter to Grandma, saying that I would sing it to her at Christmas. She has a broken hip, and probably won't be around for that much longer. I hope that the expectation helps give her the strength to hold on, and that she will be able to hold on gracefully until then. She is very lonely in the nursing home, where she is to heal.

Friday 11/26/99

I have not had only blessings; I had to try over a dozen times to get my computer to boot this time, an old knee injury has been acting up (and keeping me out of martial arts), and there have been moments of sorrow, even at the gathering. Christianity does not on this earth promise escape from suffering, but rather joy in suffering. Does the thornbush have roses, or the rosebush have thorns? Before, I felt that the thornbush had a few roses; now, the rosebush has thorns.

My brother Ben just came in from outside and showed me a battered, dirty diver's watch, asking me if I recognized it. It took me a second, but I recognized it as a watch I had worn a while back. It was still working. I was at that point trying to politely entertain an interruption I didn't want. Then he pulled something else out and asked me if I recognized that. I looked at what he had pulled out, at first not recognizing it and then not believing what I saw.

It was my high school class ring.

I had worn it on the band of that watch for a time, and when a pin came loose and the watch fell off, the ring was lost with it. I looked all over the house for it, and today found out why I hadn't located it — it was outside, next to the garage. This happened at least a year ago, and I was sad to see it go. My high school was very important to me, a formative influence, and I did

not get rings for any of the three institutions of higher learning I attended. Having it back reminded me on a little level of the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-9, NASB):

Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!"

I took Ben to celebrate with me at The Popcorn Shop. The Popcorn Shop is a converted alleyway between two brick buildings, and has a wall lined with glass containers of all different kinds of candy, ranging in price from \$1.00 to 1¢. It is the sort of place children's dreams are made of. It is one of those places that is not polished and commercial in veneer, business as it may be, but instead has something that a child would find magical. It was good to take Ben there and spend some time talking with him, although I was cold. When I looked up the parable, I appreciated experientially Jesus's explanation (Luke 15:10, NASB):

In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

After that, we went bowling, which was nice. I got my first strike in a while, followed by a spare; my total score was 66 for one of the games. During part of that, I began to realize something about myself. I have been an intense and passionate person; for an e-mail address, I chose nimbus(@ameritech.net), and in role play have spent a fair amount of time playing a character named Nimbus. 'Nimbus' is Latin for 'storm'. Some

people might have chosen the name Nimbus in a negative sense — with connotations of being dark, forboding, and destructive — but I chose it in a positive sense. From childhood I have loved being out in a storm, and I especially cherished the warm, wet rainstorms in Malaysia, and so I chose the name Nimbus in an entirely positive sense: it has a meaning of wild goodness, of energy, of life-giving water pouring out of Heaven, of play. Even the darkness I never associated with evil or forboding, but with colors that are rich, deep, and alive, and of the same sort of beauty I wrote of in describing the chapel.

Now, I am starting to feel, perhaps to become, something like the peace after a storm, when everything is still and fresh.

Possibly related to this, in a negative manner, is something else I have realized. For at least a few months, I have felt broken, in a sense similar to how a torturer breaks a man. It is not separately articulated in *Less-Wild Lovers: Standing at the Crossroads of Desire*, but it does seem to be related to (for example) how the article talks about people who have heard the *Message of the Arrows* giving up on being part of a romance of epic proportions. It is more than a breaking of will. It is a breaking of dreams.

It seems to have occurred through a couple of things. One of them, but a lesser and indirect one, has been being unemployed in the areas I would like to be working in: something that would be intensive in mathematics and computer science (two disciplines that are intermingled), work that would involve heavy brainpower and allow my own particular combination of abilities to shine. Another more severe one is having nothing to do for much of my time — and more severe still, and related to it, a loss of creativity and general dullness. Having a lot of time on my hands would have been a good thing if I had creativity to think of

things to do, and now I am enjoying the time much more because I can work on projects.

Those projects are not just pass-time (and I have started not to write down theological insights if I would just be writing them to amuse myself), nor even just work, but Work. I'm not sure how to concisely describe it... 'work' is a dreary, menial, meaningless job that is taken in order to obtain money. 'Work' is spiritually ennobling activity that may not be immediately pleasant (such as an assistant in a hospital wiping patients' butts), but which a person connects with, has a relation to human dignity (and Mother Theresa's dignity was helped and not hindered by cleaning festering sores), and is done for the sake of getting work done. It may be paid or unpaid, and may occur in a number of contexts, both formal and institutionalized, and informal. At least in this country, people doing Work for their jobs are often making less than they could be making if they were to do whatever work paid the most money. My father is an associate professor of computer science and a top-notch information technology worker, and supports our family at a reasonable level; we have everything we need and a few things we don't. He enjoys the contact with people and the opportunity to share the joy of his discipline with others. If he wanted money, he could fairly easily pursue consulting work and charge justified fees that would earn enough money to make us all miserable. I'm glad he has chosen his Work as a professor.

I was doing work but not Work, and... my father used the word 'submerged' in reference to how I was doing. These things — lots of time that I was unable to Work in, loss of my creativity and perhaps other cherished faculties, and a general narcosis-like state that could be described as dullness, being submerged, or a haze — seem to have been what caused a brokenness. Out of

the Message of the Arrows came, not so much a defense of wearing a false self, but a weary brokenness that would not throw my whole self into things.

I was in my room wondering today, why God is giving me what seem like a lot of little things, but not some of the bigger things I want — among them a computer science job that I can Work in. As I was writing, I realized that maybe I'm not ready for that, that maybe he has to heal me first. A [Bible](#) story may be taken as an illustration (Luke 5:17-26, NAB):

One day as Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem, and the power of the Lord was with him for healing. And some men brought on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed; they were trying to bring him and set [him] in his presence. But not finding a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the tiles into the middle in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, "As for you, your sins are forgiven." Then the scribes and Pharisees began to ask themselves, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who but God alone can forgive sins?" Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them in reply, "What are you thinking in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home." He stood up immediately before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home, glorifying God. Then astonishment seized them all and they glorified God, and, struck with awe, they said, "We have seen incredible things today."

they say, we have seen incredible things today.

Jesus did care about the invalid's body, and did eventually heal it. But he put first things first, and beforehand gave him something of infinitely greater value: he healed the man's relationship with God. My sins are forgiven, but there are other wounds I bear that need to be healed, perhaps before I will be ready to get a job where I will really be exercising the talents God has given me.

I realized as I was writing the past few paragraphs that, since the night at the railroad tracks, I have not felt like saying, "I give up," meaning a giving up on life (although I am not clear, besides suicide, on how exactly one might go about doing that). I had felt like that often before then. This doesn't mean that I'm healed, but it probably does mean that healing is at work.

There is a possibility for one information technology job that has come across my door, a webmastering position at two hours a week. It's not exactly what I would have envisioned (I would have thought of something half-time in programming), but it would be a good first step as well as my present job in manual labor half time to get into information technology work — and a good prospect at learning how to webmaster. I would like this possibility to become a reality, but strangely I am not clinging to it. I am a little better able to let God work with me, putting first things first and healing my broken spirit first, and let him work at whatever pace he chooses.

God's way is not to delete evil, but take it and redeem it, producing something even better than things were before. Heaven will not simply be Eden restored; it will be something better, far better. We will share in the divine nature. In the Gospels, a woman's bad reputation and many sins were taken and made not only into a restored person but a beautiful story (Mark

14:3-9, NASB):

And while He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.

But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her.

But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For the poor you always have with you, and whenever you wish, you can do them good; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for the burial. And truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done will be spoken in memory of her."

Perhaps Nimbus becoming Pax (and the fruit of the Spirit is peace) may how my brokenness is being redeemed. Perhaps my passion is coming back, albeit in a sublimated form. I don't know.

But I am trying to open my heart to the wind's free play.

Saturday 11/27/99

When I met with Robin to see if I could learn anything from his being close with God, he was talking about how the intimacy was God's pure gift, and not anything he'd done. He commented that he'd been lax in discipline, and hadn't been reading the [Bible](#) much — just been close to God.

That surprised me a bit, as we both know the value of discipline — and he clarified later that he was not meaning to

disparage [Bible](#) reading at all. But there is something in that. I think I understood it a little better today, when I realized that I hadn't been reading the [Bible](#) much for the past few days, and been no less close to God. It's hard to put into words why — an approximation would be to say that God is in control, and he will orchestrate things as he chooses.

On Thanksgiving, my uncle Doug asked me if I was a coffee drinker, and (after a hesitant pause) the answer I gave was this: I enjoy coffee a great deal when I drink it, but I don't drink it very often. I like to savor a crème de menthe espresso, but the thought of gulping down some sludge each morning to be jolted out of a stupor seems disgusting to me. As much as I enjoy it when I drink it, I just wouldn't want it to become an everyday thing. (Today I went out with Joseph and purchased ice cream for him and another hazelnut mocha for myself. I should have gotten ice cream. The coffee, triple as it was, was nowhere near too much caffeine over time in a health sense, but it was trying to have a pleasure over again too quickly. As good as it was, I enjoyed the few bites I had of Joe's ice cream more.)

I realized today that that attitude, apart from the possible snobbishness that can accompany a preference for gourmet coffees to American staple coffees (and I do not wish to suggest that drinking a cup of Maxwell House each morning is sinful — but I am not going to attempt to explain why this jives with the rest of what I am saying beyond saying that a line of moderation can legitimately be drawn in different places), is a manifestation of moderation. By this I mean that moderation goes further than stopping at a certain point and not going further. It, over time, will reach into a deeper orientation of attitudes, emotions, and desires, such that the desire to enjoy a blessing does not translate to a desire to have more and more of

it. My dislike for the idea of drinking coffee every day is not moderation itself, but an effect and signal of moderation. An ability to enjoy blessings in an appropriate time and place without extending them to every time and place showed itself in wanting an occasional coffee while losing the desire to be drinking good coffee as often as possible. It is something that is not very much a part of American culture, not taught very much. (I think we lost a real understanding of what temperance was, about the time of the temperance movement.)

I also realized something else today, and was able to articulate something that had been implicit in what I wrote earlier, namely that virtue can take qualitatively different forms as it develops and matures. Andy's graceful kindness with David, and my frustrating struggle to maintain a good attitude and not think ill of him, both came from the same virtue, from the highest of virtues in fact: agape, caritas, deiform love. The difference was a difference of maturity in the virtue's formation: it flowed from him, but I could only remain in that virtue through difficult struggle. A similar difference may be seen in forms of moderation: at an early stage (and I am still at an early stage in other facets of moderation), it revolves around determination in cutting back your desire to have more, and at a later stage the virtue results in a realignment of desires so that the way you want to enjoy things is a way that can draw full benefit from doing something once, and not engage in a futile attempt to obtain from four or five what eluded you the first time. This kind of moderation means enjoying things more, not less; it enjoys things more in the fashion of a museum goer who spends a couple of hours and truly comprehends a few paintings, than failing to enjoy them in the fashion of a museum goer who rushes here and there, looks for a couple of seconds at hundreds



can remember making is the following poster:

# **I learned it all from Jesus.**

**A gift does not need to be costly in order to be big. A little child is worth God's time. All who believe are brothers and sisters. Be thankful. Be the first to say, "I'm sorry," and the first to forgive. Believing means clinging with your whole heart. Clothe yourself in prayer. Commune with God. Cry. Dance. Don't judge. A respected pillar of the community can be two steps from Hell, and a prostitute can be two steps from Heaven. Don't worry about tomorrow. Today has enough worries of its own. Every blade of grass, every twinkling star, every ticklish friend, is a blessing from God. Cherish them. Everything in the whole Creation tells us something about God. Give someone a gift today. God delights in you. God has a sense of humor. God is a friend who'll never, never leave you. God is an artist. God is everywhere, from the highest star to inside your heart. There is nowhere you can go to escape his presence — or his love. God is found, not in earthquake nor fire nor mighty wind, but in a soft and gentle whisper. God is your Daddy. God watches over even the little sparrows. Heaven is very close. He is risen! He who sings, prays twice. He who dances, sings twice. He who laughs, dances twice. He who prays, laughs twice.**

**Hug your friends. If you have to have everything under your control, trusting God may look as stable as a cow on ice skates. Trust him anyway. It's worth it. If you want God to smile, tell him your prayers. If you want God to laugh, tell him your plans. It's never too late to repent. Joy comes from suffering. Keep on forgiving. Laugh. Listen to other people's stories. Listen to the silence. Love God with your whole being. Love one another. Love your enemies. Love your neighbor as yourself. Make every action a prayer. Make your prayers and your good deeds secret. Play with children. Prayers ascend like incense before God's throne. Purity does not reside in the hands, but in the heart. Respect the aged. Rest. Serve. Sing. Take time to be alone with God. Tell God you love him. Tell your friends that you love them. The Heavens tell the glory of God. There are miracles all around. You just have to be able to see. Treasure God's smallest blessings. We can bring little pieces of Heaven down to earth. What you do for the least, you do for God. Work is a blessing from God. You are God's image.**

Then, a few days after then, the Christmas carol "In the Silence" above was the first musical piece I had composed since the loss of creativity. Now, the above musing about virtue changing form is the first significant and new (to me) theological insight I have had since that point.

Sunday 11/26/99, 1st Sunday of Advent

Advent is a time of spiritual housecleaning to prepare for Christ's coming. During church I realized that what is happening with me now is very much Advent — which was surprising to me, because usually what is happening with me does not line up with the dates on the church calendar. It is the same thing, only at a different time. Advent is a time like that before a guest comes.

different time. Advent is a time like that before a guest comes,  
there is both expectation, and a cleaning preparation. God may  
have a wonderful Christmas in store for me.

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Last night, I had some time before bed that I didn't know what to do with. I felt let down and deserted; my emotions were of the same kind as when I had time and was unable to think of anything worthwhile. So I prayed.

The first thought that occurred to me was to clean my room. But I was reluctant to do that, and said in sincerity "I'm not ready for that now." The next thought was of catching up on my New Testament reading (the one part out of four that I hadn't caught up on yet), but I was [Bibled](#) out for the day. Then I cleaned up a couple of the larger items on my floor and paced a bit, and noticed on the piano a page of music that I had left out: a simple piano arrangement of *Amazing Grace*. I played that with pleasure, and when I was standing up to leave I noticed a splash of color: Roger van Oech's *Creative Whack Pack*.

The *Creative Whack Pack*, which I had noticed earlier and forgotten to look at, is a deck of 64 cards, each one of which has a tip on how to function more creativity. It is quite good, especially for someone who doesn't know how to use his creative faculties well or doesn't have naturally flowing creative juices (another good resource is a book entitled [Conceptual Blockbusting](#), written for engineers but valuable to all sorts of people). I slowly read through a few cards, trying to savor the experience rather than fly through and have the whole deck read before I knew it. Some were things I knew, a couple were surprises, and after hitting "Sell, sell, sell!", I acknowledged an insight which I had been suppressing: some of aspects of the cards were questionable, or at least left another shoe to drop. Someone said, "Never mind about others stealing your ideas. If they're really good, you'll have to ram them down people's

throats." The resistance suggested in that quote is akin to a resistance I had been putting up so well that I wasn't even aware of it: that the authority (in this case, the deck) could be wrong. Once I admitted that idea, I had another idea for something to write: "The Other Side of the Coin," which would give the other side of the coin for these cards. (I'm not going to share that writing, at least yet, for copyright reasons: at least the most obvious good way to write it would involve citing the entire text of the cards, and I'm not doing that without obtaining permission from Mr. von Oech.) It's good to have something more to write.

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I thought a small group meeting I was invited to, was going to be at 5:00, and was disappointed to find out that it's not until 6:00 or 7:00 (I'm writing a bit before 6:00). I started reading through more of the *Creative Whack Pack*, and then set it down and noticed three pieces of framed Malaysian batik that are hanging on the wall (and just now, the play of the light). The batik is really beautiful, with flowing colors, and I hadn't really noticed it when I came in. It's a funny thing to realize after writing what I wrote about the two museum goers.

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This journal is more of an outer journal — a journal of what I do and what happens to me — and less of an inner journal — a journal of what transpires within me and who I am — than I'd intended. I'm not sure what to make of that; perhaps it's better that way. I don't know.

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I feel a certain trepidation towards going to work tomorrow. Especially after a long weekend, it's hard to go back to work... the dread I feel is similar to that I feel towards driving a car, which can leave me lying in bed slightly nervous the night before, and similar to the trepidation I feel in anticipating a long block of time I can't think of anything to do in. It is not an intense fear, but one that is vague, ill-defined, and discomforting. In it is some doubt — the little doubt is a doubt that I'll have enough energy to keep going, and the big doubt is a doubt that it'll be like the time I've spent with God over the weekend.

These emotions do not correspond entirely to my best rational judgments. I know in my head that God is quite as capable of meeting me as I am testing toy computers as he is of meeting me as I read something good or write this journal, and that the work day is only four hours, which I am ready for. I know in my head, but my heart doesn't know, and I'm a bit scared.

I am taking this as a time to trust him, to (as the Mars Hill article says) embrace my nakedness and trust in God's goodness.

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Something else which I just realized (or, more properly, admitted to myself) as another place where soul work is required...

I am not at peace with being an American. I would much rather be a European.

I cannot now say "I am an American," with the same secure pleasure that I would say "Je suis un français," were that true.

I am legitimately far more European in spirit than most Americans. I believe that there severe flaws in American culture, moreso than most fallen cultures — ranging from pragmatism that has no patience for things without immediately visible use (which turns out to mean many of the deepest and best things in life), to television, to a shallow and disposable concept of human relationships — and I know that Neil Postman in [Technopoly](#) certainly wasn't grinding an axe against America when he named America the world's first and (as of the book's writing) only technocracy (a country which is ruled by technology). I enjoy a great many things about French and other European culture: the sound of the language, the idea of moderation in use of alcohol, the deeper friendships, the higher level of education and greater intellectual substance of the conversations people have (a group of French young people will discuss Balzac rather than the Bears), the old cities, the art, the architecture, the speaking multiple languages, the body language, the kisses, and many other things I cannot now name. After she spent a month in France, my ex-fiancée Rebecca commented that everything she saw there reminded her of me. I hold both differences with many of the peculiar features of American culture, and affinities to many aspects of European culture. That

stated, there is still something in the picture that is wrong.

Perhaps a way to state it is that I not only embody certain European characteristics, but wistfully wish to be what I am not, and be further over. That doesn't capture the latter part quite well... Another approximation would be to say that it's like a child's walking, dressing, and talking like a sports hero — appropriate in a boy, but not in a man. It may have something to do with a manifestation of reverse culture shock that I haven't gotten over for some reason. A good description of the root problem would be to say that I'm not at peace with being an American.

In college, I wrote a cynical book entitled [Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary: A Free Online \(Satire\) Dictionary](#). All of the problems I described in that book are real problems, but it was still written in the wrong spirit. I wrote in a way that took pleasure from pointing out what was wrong, and that should never be. As I let go of that, I realized that one of the tests of love is to see everything a cynic sees, and still not be a cynic. I don't want to stop seeing all of the problems in American culture, nor do I want to stop being somewhat European in spirit, nor do I want to stop seeing how beautiful French culture is. What I do want is the analogue of still not being a cynic: to be at peace with being an American. Living in France was a great blessing for a certain period of time, and it will always be a sweet memory, but it is not a blessing I have now, and perhaps a blessing I may never again have this side of heaven. I still may not fit in very well among typical Americans, and that does not bother me. I do want to stop looking down on my homeland — and really hold it to be my homeland — and take that culture as a basis for interacting with other cultures.

This is a less-wild lover to give up.

Monday, 11/29/99

I have been granted a reprieve, in the form of a bug that's been floating around. What I have is fairly mild, and I would go, but a 20 minute drive when you have diarrhea is risky.  
(But the reprieve hasn't been as exciting as I'd hoped.)

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I just realized something that I don't know exactly what to do with.

In the early stages of a friendship, it is easy to share things about yourself with your friend, because you don't know each other very well. As time passes, that becomes more difficult; it's harder to think of something to share. I was expecting something similar to appear with this journal. It may well kick in at a later date (I've only been writing for about two weeks) — but I am surprised at the pace I've been able to keep up with. (I have been looking forward to the slowing up, in order to write a less gargantuan epistle, leaving something behind that will let people see the crystallized essence of my journey.)

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I acquired a Dilbert poster that listed several definitions to terms in information technology jargon. Among the definitions new to me was 'brain dump', defined as "The act of telling someone everything one knows about a particular topic or project. Typically used when someone is going to let a new party utilize and maintain a piece of programming code." That struck me as a really cool phrase, in part because I am familiar with the Unix term 'core dump' from which it would appear to have come.

It's a beautiful metaphor.

I was looking for an opportunity to use it, and today I realized that what I am writing is a brain dump of an awakening. I thought for a bit about changing the title of this document to "Brain Dump of an Awakening," but the term's really too obscure to use in a title... unless it's something that would acquire meaning as its definition is encountered in the document... not for the moment, at least.

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When I first heard about Y2k, I basically ignored it, or more properly did not seriously think about it. I am not much given to alarmist pictures.

In my job search, I talked with some consultants who are involved in selling Y2k merchandise, who painted a doomsday picture and then gave me a couple of URLs to look at. I looked at them and others; with others since then, I've seen expert opinion varying from hiccup to doomsday. What is disturbing is that the thinking of the doomsday experts seems eminently rational; with my knowledge of the realities of software maintenance, the argument I've seen for why the power grid should be expected to go dark makes perfect sense. I haven't seen rebuttals to the arguments for things going wrong. Now, I'm not sure either way; I haven't seen evidence to persuade in another direction, but either outcome tendency seems plausible. I would say that there is at least a 30% chance of something going severely wrong: the grid going black, or distribution logistics breaking because of defective code (and fixing that stuff involves finding several needles in a haystack), or chaos because of public panic, or some stock market crash for these or other reasons. If some of those things happen, I will probably die.

One thing that I observed in people talking about how to prepare for Y2k was that there was a lot of talk about preparation for physical needs (food, water, heat, money...), and almost no talk about mental, emotional, and spiritual preparation. This seemed to make no sense to me, as (for example) being snowbound generally offers no severe physical threats, but causes people to go batty ("cabin fever"). Disasters seem to be at least as much a mental stress as a physical threat, and being

properly prepared at least as much psychologically as physically. I asked in a couple of newsgroups about this. Apart from "I've noticed this, too; please tell me what you find," I got basically three responses: (1) Get books, games, contraceptives, etc. to pass the time, (2) you could study a martial art, as the discipline will help you, and (3) draw close to the Lord.

Many people have been helped by faith in traumatic situations, such as being held hostage and prisoner by terrorists.

I was a bit disappointed by the answers I got, because I was hoping for something I didn't know or couldn't have guessed at, but especially with the third one... I do not see this awakening in terms of Y2k (I did not make a connection before today), but if I were primarily concerned with spiritual preparation for Y2k, I would not choose much differently from what I am doing now.

Martin Luther was once asked what he would do if he knew that the Lord were returning the next day. His answer? "Plant a tree."

Monday 11/30/99

Today as I was lying in bed, the Haunting came to me again. It came to me in the form of an aching desire to visit the West Indies — or, more specifically, the image of the West Indies that is portrayed in the movie *Cutthroat Island*.

Before I continue, let me make an aside and say that my evaluation of certain things, and the impression I take away from them, differs from that of many people. In books, the titles I have most benefitted from have not typically been the most classic of what I read; I learned far more from G.K. Chesterton's biography of Francis of Assisi than I did from Thomas Aquinas's [Summa Theologiae](#). (I'm sure that Aquinas would gently smile at this, happy that I could learn about God

from some source, and that Chesterton would positively wince.)

My observations usually don't directly conflict with other people's, but I observe a different part and draw different conclusions. The three movies I have held in highest regard, only one of which I would want to see now, are *The Game*, *Labyrinth*, and *Titanic*.

In the reviews I read, *Cutthroat Island* got slammed again and again: it forced 20th century politically correct feminism onto another era, some things were ludicrously unrealistic, and so on and so forth — criticisms which were entirely valid. But I liked it. Why? Part of it probably has something to do with the fact that I drank two shots of spiced rum as I watched it, but I think there's more to it than that. What I liked about the movie was that it captured a certain beauty, a certain romance. When children are playing pirate, they are capturing a certain feeling, a certain impression. It's the same sort of thing a Disneyland ride does well that a Six Flags ride does badly if at all. That's what *Cutthroat Island* did. The visual scenery was beautiful. That movie can be enjoyed in the same spirit as Disneyland's *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

It was the visual effect that haunted me, and from which I felt a desire to visit the rich, white side of the colonial West Indies that was in some sense portrayed — and it ached all the more because it is a place I cannot go, a place that perhaps never really existed (and I do not mean to suggest that I take *Cutthroat Island* as serious historical fiction), a place that I can only go in my dreams (if ever — and I have returned to Paris in my dreams). A haunting to go back to Paris is one that may quite possibly come true — I expect to go to California to be with my father's side of the family for Christmas, and that was not something I expected until my parents started talking about it

recently; Paris would not be that stranger of a windfall, and for that matter one of my uncles and one of my cousins will be in Paris soon for layovers going to and from Mali, where they will be translating. A haunting to go and participate in Carnevale in Italy is something I do not regard as probable, but would quite probably come true (including sharpening my Italian to a basic conversational proficiency) if I threw my weight into it. But a yearning to visit a place that no longer exists... The trip to California will be bittersweet, as my grandparents will shortly thereafter be selling their house, a house that holds a lot of fond memories for me (such as the time that Matthew and me, as little boys, climbed up in their treehouse and couldn't figure out how to get down). The visit to the house will hold the bittersweet knowledge that I can enjoy it as I visit it, but I'll never see it again. And soon my occasional remiscences of that place will be yearnings to visit a place that can I can never visit again. To get back on track, a haunting to visit a place which no longer exists is more painful than one to visit a place I may well return to, or one that I will probably will never see, but still could if I put my mind to it.

For all the ache, it was a special and pleasurable moment, a sign of life.

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When I first looked at Wheaton, I felt that there was something wrong with its Pledge, but signed it anyway. (The Pledge is a document that all community members are required to sign, and tries to outline a Christian life and then prohibits activities such as drinking and dancing.) During my time there, I found myself running away from my conscience over this issue, and at one point decided to stop running, did a massive search of Scripture, my conscience, and the perspectives of other people, and came to a conclusion. I wrote the following letter to the editor, which one of the philosophy professors said was the best treatment of the issue he'd seen in eight years of being a professor there:

**In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Pledge**

If the name of this letter hasn't nettled you, then something is wrong. If what it refers to hasn't nettled you more, then something is very wrong.

At the heart of Christianity are many things. I will not name and elaborate each one here, but there is one which seems forgotten to some: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

When Christ came, he fulfilled and completed the Law. The Law was not a bad thing, but it was incomplete - not as a matter of God being a spiteful bully, but because it was the most complete form that could be before the Messiah. Now has come the one about whom Jesus said, "the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you." (Luke 14:26, NIV). Throughout Galatians, Paul corrected those who were trying to live under law and rejecting the

Spirit: "How is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? ... But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law." (4:9, 5:18, NIV).

While the Law has some very important commands (love God, love your neighbor, maintain sexual purity, worship God alone, care for the poor...), it does not have the Spirit and consequent freedom. When you take away the Spirit, then there is a replacement of freedom with written codes that restrict in situations where they are not useful: don't eat any bacon, don't wear clothing made of two different fabrics, don't consume any alcohol, don't dance.

Now, you may say, there is a difference between the Mosaic Law and the Pledge. Of course there is: God himself composed the Law and handed it over to one of the greatest prophets of all time, before Christ.

The Pledge's restrictions, pragmatically speaking, do not constitute more than a mild annoyance to me. Missing a dance every couple of months does not annoy me nearly as much as if (for example) my dorm had only one laundry room, off in a far corner of the basement. Theologically speaking, however, there is a much more major concern. The Pledge is a perfect fit for a castrated Christianity without the Holy Spirit: despite its many words and enumerations, nowhere does it mention the Holy Spirit, and parts of the end (...in order to establish a Christian community...) implicitly require the heretical notion that the Holy Spirit either doesn't exist, or cannot be a basis for such a community.

The joy of my life would not be destroyed if all pig products left my diet for pragmatic reasons (the local grocery store doesn't carry them, it's too expensive, I don't want to clean up the grease splatters from cooking bacon...),

but if a present day Judaizer were to imply that it is unclean to consume what Christ has declared clean, or that that would aid the establishment of a Christian academic community in a way that the Holy Spirit cannot, then that would badly need correction. Likewise, I dislike the taste of alcohol, but am deeply offended that, in order to teach here, my professors cannot enjoy a glass of wine with dinner.

Satan's way of working in this world is often to twist good things that God has created. The things that the Pledge "goes beyond what is written" (I Cor. 4:6, NIV) to prohibit are, in some cases, good things that God has ordained for the benefit and enjoyment of humans, which Satan often likes to twist into deadly poison. The solution is not to completely disallow these things for all members of the community, but rather (as per Romans 14-15) to use judgment and the Spirit to avoid what will cause you to fall into sin, and to avoid what will cause fellow believers to fall into sin.

If you haven't done so lately, please read Romans 14-15, Galatians, and Colossians. And think - about letter, about freedom, and about the Spirit.

Jonathan Hayward  
CPO 1202, x6751

I requested a conscientious exemption from the Pledge, and when that was denied, I transferred out of Wheaton. It was one of the most painful decisions of my life.

Now, George Poyner, one of the people in charge of Wheaton College's Computing Services, is trying to line up what would be an excellent job and opportunity in almost all respects. My father was explaining this to me, and commented that George

was trying to see if he could get independent contractor status for me (which would not be considered community membership and therefore not require signing of the Pledge), and if that didn't work out, "it's only six months." When I told him, "I can't do that," it became evident that he is considering trying to force me to sign the Pledge, and that he does not understand my "No" to mean "No." His mind's not made up on that, but it is possible that he will try to make me sign the Pledge. I can't do that in good conscience. Much of my will may be broken, but not that part; when I left Wheaton, I made a very firm decision never to make that mistake again, never again to swallow my conscience like that. If my father throws his weight into insisting that I sign it, the conflict will be long, drawn-out, and exquisitely painful.

I feel angry, truly angry, for the first time in a long while.

Wednesday, 12/1/99

Last night, I visited Robin and then went to Pooh's corner. I showed him two things I had brought to give to the people there — the "I learned it all from Jesus" poster, and sheet music for "In the Silence" — and Robin, after reading the poster, suggested that I put it up on the forum wall.

The forum wall is one piece of local color at Wheaton; it's a section of brick wall where people tape things up, write on the things taped, etc. When we arrived, Robin drew my attention to one piece that was up on the wall:

### **WANT TO KNOW IF YOU ARE A WHEATON CYNIC?**

"In sexual love the cynic perceives lust; in sacrifice and dedication, guilt; in charity, condescension; in political skills, manipulation; in the powers of the mind, rationalization; in peacefulness, ennui; in neighborliness, self-interest; in

friendship, opportunism. The vitality of the old is pathetic; the exuberance of the young is immature; the steadiness of the middle-aged is boredom.

"And yet, even for the most disillusioned cynic, an aching longing remains for something true, good, or beautiful." (so there is hope for you yet)

Brennan Manning

He started moving other posts to make space, and suggested that I put it up next to this post. I was puzzled, as I had been when he suggested I read it, and asked, "As a rebuttal? A joke?" He said, "No," and pointed me towards the bottom of the post.

It wasn't until we got back to his apartment that I got it — and realized that he had selected the perfect place to put it.

I have been feeling depressed.

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At Pooh's Corner, I was distracted for a good part of it, wanting to get up and write about the posting on the forum wall, but still trying to enjoy it, as that would be all the Pooh's Corner I would have for the week. Pooh's Corner meets in the lobby of Fischer dorm, where I stayed my freshman year. It is a place full of distractions and people passing through. There is a piano there, and partway through I realized in a flash that I had been drinking the music in the same way that I drink wine.

What I mean is this: Wine, as contrasted to e.g. milk or juice, is something you can only take a small amount of. You can drink water until your thirst is quenched, or have several glasses of milk, but with wine it is different. If you are having one drink, then that translates to a 5 ounce glass — not even a full cup. If you drink it the same way you drink Pepsi, you are going to find yourself holding an empty glass before you know it.

Consequently, when I drink wine, I sip it very slowly, and I consciously savor it in a way that would never occur to me if I could drink an indefinite quantity and remain sober. What I realized last night as I was thinking about my realization was that I taste wine in a way that I do not taste milk. I drink milk, and like it, and vaguely and absently taste it, but do not taste it wholly. With wine, the realization that I only have a little amount and it will soon be gone keeps me from absently quaffing glass after glass; when I have a glass of wine, I sometimes close my eyes and am able to taste it so intensely that I am not aware of anything else.

That is what happened with the music, and which I realized afterwards. I have no control over the music that is played, and the most beautiful passages seem to be over so quickly. At one point in the music, I was doing the same thing as I do when I

hold a sip of wine in my mouth, close my eyes, and savor it — I was concentrating on it so intensely that I was not aware of anything else (in a busy room with many voices talking and people passing through), and when it was over I had a feeling of having drunk it to the dregs.

It was somewhat strange to realize that I had learned such a thing from wine. My attitude towards alcohol is European rather than American, and (without trying to trace the argument here) I regard alcohol as a symbol of moderation, and learning to enjoy things in a temperate manner (the Puritan attitude towards alcohol). I had not, though, expected that in drinking I would learn something of this nature. I think that what I did is close to what goes on in empathic listening — a drinking in with your whole being. At the beginning of this journal, I talked about not being able to engage. This is a point where I have learned to truly engage in one area, and it may well help me to engage in others — it has helped me to enjoy music, at least.

Thursday 12/2/99

At work today, I caught myself thinking in a grandiose manner. There is a girl I met shortly after Pooh's Corner (she was playing on the piano, and I gave her a copy of "In the Silence"; she commented something to the effect of how it would be nice to be able to compose — I don't remember the exact words, but they conveyed a humble respect and openness that are the exact sort of thing that makes you want to meet someone a second time), and I realized that I was thinking of ways to impress her with how awesome my musical talent was.

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I also realized in my walking on Tuesday that I really do know myself, and that that is a good starting point for relating with people. It was a pleasant thing to realize, after a feeling of clumsiness and not really knowing how to relate to other people — not that I now feel perfect at relating to other people, but I feel that I have a good start.

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In the car going to work today, I suddenly realized a couple of things: (1) I had forgotten to sing, and (2) I was not afraid, either in the car or before then. I felt some fear after realizing this (perhaps I had simply forgotten to be afraid), but it was good to realize.

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I was also thinking, Tuesday, about a point related to [chapter 4](#) of G.K. Chesterton's [Orthodoxy](#). Specifically, many things imagined as magic and psychic phenomena are exaggerated and cosmetically altered versions of things God has given us. For example, teleportation (to be able to move instantaneously from point to point) is less astounding than being able to move from point to point in the first place, and there are many creatures which live without any such faculty (such as trees). Telekenesis is not that much more astounding than having hands with which to move things. Mental telepathy is quite similar to speech, and the surprise we would have at seeing mental telepathy is nothing like the surprise an animal (with a sufficiently anthropomorphic mind) would have at discovering that once one of these creatures learns something, the rest know it. It would be like what reaction we might have upon first learning certain things about Star Trek's Borg, multiplied tenfold. If it is thought of in this manner, the concept of speech is far more impressive than the concept of altering speech by changing the channel through which the mind-to-mind transmission occurs. It might be also pointed out that, in the past few millenia, we have found another channel for mind-to-mind transmission to occur: reading and writing. When one pair of Wycliffe missionaries was working with some tribesmen, they were trying to persuade the chief of the advantage of writing. One of them left the other room, and the other one asked the chief's mother's name, and wrote it down. When his partner returned and read her name, the chief almost fainted.

There are a couple of things that come from this.

The first is that God's creation really is magical, in the sense of being something awesome, and something we should be amazed

that we have. It is in our nature to become blasé; our eyes become glazed over at magnificent things. If we can somehow let scales fall from our eyes, we would be dumbstruck at what we have — for example, music.

The second is that, if we can become blasé at what God has given us, we would probably also become blasé at the things we fantasize about. When I was a child, I absolutely loved to swim, and I wished that I could breathe underwater... but that (after a little while) would have held nothing for me than being able to breathe air, hold my breath, and swim underwater. I have fantasized about all of the special powers that I would like to have, and when I do that I do not much enjoy the gifts I have, not only as a human being, but personally — my sharp mind and so on and so forth.

Also related to this insight was kything... In [A Wind in the Door](#), Madeleine l'Engle uses the word 'kythe' to describe a beautiful communion beyond communication. It is the whole cherubic language, of which mental telepathy is just the beginning. It holds a similar place to 'grok' in Robert A. Heinlein's [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), and the meanings of the two words are similar. I am not going to try per se to describe its meaning further, but simply refer the reader to that excellent book.

What he had actually seen she could not begin to guess. That he had seen something, something unusual, she was positive.

This is the same sort of feeling I felt about kything. There is something in that word that strikes a deep chord in my spirit; it is the primary reason why that is my favorite book

out of the series, and at times been one of my favorite books at all. In conjunction with the above musing, l'Engle's portrait of kything has a beauty that is not an ex nihilo creation, that shows forth a beauty that is really in this world but which we do not see. I would very much like to kythe — but I can't do what's in the book without sinning. What is in this world that embodies the beauty of kything?

As I was thinking and praying, I realized several things that may, in a sense, be called kything, that are beautiful in the same way. I felt a Spirit-tugging to list a hundred such things. I don't know if I'll be able to do that, or if so where I'll come up with a hundred, but I will none the less try.

#### 100 Ways to Kythe

1: Prayer. Prayer allows a kind of communion with God that (at least this side of Heaven) we can't have with anyone else. With God, prayer is not limited to words; we can pray with words, or with images, or with music... Prayer has the same opportunities for exploration as kything.

2: Holy Communion. God speaks to us through that.

3: Martial arts sparring. It takes time (I've studied martial arts for a little over a year, and I've only begun to taste this), but there is something martial artists call 'harmony with opponents' that is a deep attunement. I've had one sparring match where I knew everything my opponent was going to do about a quarter second before he did it. A good book to read to get a little better feeling for this is *The Way of Karate: Beyond Technique*.

4: Flow, as described in Daniel Goleman's [Emotional Intelligence](#).

5: Empathic listening. This is listening in which the listener is completely attuned to the speaker. I don't know any books to

reccommend for that topic.

6: Drinking as I drink wine, or as I drank music.

7: Improvising musically. Music is an alien language, not symbolic, not logical, and yet speaking powerfully. When you can really let the music flow through you, you are kything.

8: Making love. The subject of the Song of Songs is not just a physical act, but a total communion between a man and a woman, united for life.

9: Stillness. There is a way of being still that is kything.

10: What I did at Pooh's Corner the first night described. (Well, there's ten at one sitting... I expect to come back to this later.)

11: Mathematical problem solving. I won't even begin to explain this, beyond saying that to those who have experienced it no explanation is necessary. Just remembered — there's a good book on this topic for non-mathematicians, entitled, *The Art of Mathematics*.

12: Musical improvisation with another person. I have never done this, but I remember, at Calvin, being fascinated by my friends Bruce and Janna talking about when they improvised together at the keyboard. It worked. I believe, from conversations, that the Spirit was guiding them, and it was a communion with the Spirit and each other.

13: Singing prayers in tongues. I don't pray this way very often, but when I do, it's very uplifting. It is a praying, not with the rational mind, but with the spirit, and it receives what to say moment by moment from the Spirit.

14: Non-sexual touch. It's going to be hard to say something brief here, as I've written a whole [treatise](#) on this point), but to try: Non-sexual touch can be deep, and express something words cannot. It is the nature of love to draw close; touch is an

incarnate race's physical means of communicating love, and for babies the first and foremost way of knowing love. Beyond that... if what I am saying doesn't resonate within you (or if you'd just like a hug), ask me for a hug — a real one. It took me a long time, but I have learned how to touch, and at times to drink touch as I drink wine.

15: Dancing. Wheaton alumnus Alan Light wrote a beautiful letter about how he had adopted a code of duty, honor, and steadfastness, and a folkdancing class had opened his eyes to joy, peace, and freedom. There is something beautiful of those things that can be learned in dancing, something that it's easy not to know you're missing. (For all that, I don't dance very well. Before a knee injury, I had something to do with my feet that looked impressive, but I haven't learned to dance (to commune with others, to connect in a merry, moving hug) as I have learned to touch.)

(Coming back after a time) I can recall one occasion when I really danced. At the last Mennonite Conference I attended, both youth and adult worship were [religion within the bounds of amusement](#), but the youth worship was at least honest about it, and I preferred it to the adult sessions. Before a Ken Medema concert, there was a group of high schoolers playing a dance game, and I joined in. It lifted me out of sorrow, and there was a vibrant synergy, a joy and connection and communion. It's something that everyone should experience at least once. He who dances, sings twice.

16: An I-Thou relationship. An I-Thou relationship differs from an I-It relationship as kything differs from mental telepathy. I only got halfway through Martin Buber's [I and Thou](#) before setting the book down, because it was too hard to concentrate on, but it says a lot about how to kythe. As pertains

to prayer and kything with God, I would pose an insight in the form of a riddle: how is it that the saint and mystic refers to God as `I' without blaspheming?

17: Dreaming. One story in a marvelous book, [Tales of a Magic Monastery](#) by Theophane the Monk, ended with a character saying, "While you tend to judge a monk by his decorum during the day, we judge him by the number of persons he touches at night, and the number of stars." Dreaming has always been special to me; it allows access to a different, fantastic world. It can be a way to kythe. What if there were a culture that regarded dreaming rather than waking as the aroused state?

18: Praying with another person. Where two or three are gathered, he is with them. When they are praying, there is not only an individual bond between each one and God; there are connections within the group. There have been some people who hold that a man and a woman who are not married to each other should not pray together; I do not agree with that, but the fact that such a position has been taken by levelheaded believers seems to underscore that there is a communion between people who pray together.

19: Artistic creation. When I create something, it fills my mind, my musings; I kythe with it as I give it form.

20: Children's play. Children's play can be timeless and absorbing, and Peter Kreeft, in [Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing](#), says that the activity of Heaven will be neither work, which is wearying, nor rest, which is passive, but pure and unending play, an activity which is energetic and energizing. Playing with children is entering into another world, a magical world, and entering into it means kything.

21: Listening prayers; listening to the Spirit. Ordinarily we think of prayer as speaking to God, but it is also possible to

listen to him. And dancing with the Spirit — there are so many adventures to be had.

22: The Romance. There is a sacred Romance described in, for example, C.S. Lewis's *Pilgrim's Regress*, and Brent Curtis's *Less-Wild Lovers: Standing at the Crossroads of Desire*. You do not come to the Romance; the Romance comes to you, although you may respond. Being in that is kything.

(I thought I might be able to think of 20 ways of kything...  
I've already gotten past that, by God's grace.)

23: Silliness. When some friends are doing something silly — tickling or teasing (without going too far — this is something I'm not very good at), for example, it is not thought of in terms of something serious (as 'serious' is misunderstood to mean 'somber'). None the less, there is in the lightheartedness a bond being forged or strengthened, a connection being made. Kything at its best is communication that needs no symbolic content, that has something that can't be reduced to words. So is grabbing your friend's nose.

24: Friendship and family relations. This differs from the above items, in that it is not an instantaneous experience resembling an instant of kything. It is rather a bond over time that is more than communication, where hearts touch each other. It is a bond where two people know each other, and in the time spent together a connection accumulates.

25: Agape love. There is a vain phrase, "To know me is to love me," that might fruitfully be turned around as, "To love me is to know me."

One of the stories in [Tales of a Magic Monastery](#) goes roughly as follows:

### **The Crystal Globe**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There have been times that I have been able to see beauty in other people, sometimes beauty that they were not likely aware of. Robin and Joel might not think in these terms, but they have the sight that comes of love. The words, "I never met a man I didn't like," bespeak this kind of love. Love is the essence of kything.

26: Passion. When we are filled with passion, we are singleminded and undistracted. Someone said that hate is closer to love than is apathy; if anything is the opposite of kything, it is apathy. Kything need not be associated with intense emotion, but passion has something of the spark of kything.

27: Tears. Crying is cathartic, and comes unbidden at the moments when something comes really close to our heart — be it painful or joyful. My ex-fiancée Rebecca commented that she was impressed at one time she saw me crying in public. My friend Amy, after reading my [treatise on touch](#), said that she wished I had written a treatise on crying — something that is well worth writing, but I don't have it in me to write. To cry is to kythe.

28: Don a mask. Putting on a mask can be a way of revealing; in role-play, I have through characters found ways of expressing myself that I couldn't have done otherwise, and many people learn more about themselves through acting. Temporarily putting on a mask allows you to kythe through that mask in a way that wouldn't occur otherwise.

29: Stand on your head. With familiarity, we don't really see the things before us; we become Inspector Clouseaus. This is why some painters stood on their heads to look at landscapes — to see afresh what was familiar. Standing on your head is not exactly a way of kything, but it does open up ways to kythe that would normally be overlooked.

I just had a change of perspective... I thought about soliciting others' insights as to ways of kything, but with some guilt, as if thinking about not doing my work. Then I remembered what I was writing about — a connected communion — and that it would be very appropriate to have this be not my isolated work but the work of several minds. So I will solicit and seek the help of others.

30: Stop hurrying. Our culture is obsessed with doing things quickly, and rushes through almost everything. Carl Jung, heretic as he may have been, had rare moments of lucidity; in one of them, he said, "Hurry is not of the Devil. Hurry is the Devil." Removing hurry, and letting a moment last however long it should

last by its own internal timing, is not exactly kything, but it is a removal of one of the chief barriers we face to kything. Kything is a foretaste of the eternal, timeless joy that is to come, and in kything five seconds and five hours are the same. One good idea before trying to kythe is to take off your watch.

31: Walks. I have just come back from a kything walk. It was warm, the ground was moist after rain, the sky was mostly covered by pink clouds, and it was silence — there was even silence in the sound of cars going by. Summer nights, with fireflies and crickets and a crystalline blue sky, are excellent for kything walks. In thinking about this, I realized that what we have is an incarnate kything — spirit moving through matter — while l'Engle portrays what is essentially a discarnate kything — spirit moving without regard to matter. It is also interesting to note that (to me at least) touch is more kything than sight — with sight potentially working at almost any range (we can see stars billions of light-years away), and touch having no range at all. I'm glad that I can absorb the grass around me in a way that I cannot absorb the grass a thousand miles away.

32: Grace. Up until now, I have written about what you can do to kythe, but there is a lot of kything that God initiates and provides. Having a vision is a kind of kything, and that is not anything you can do. My time with God by the railroad tracks was a kything with him that I had no power to create.

33: Looking. I am allergic to cats, and my family has a wonderful grey tabby named Zappy. I usually don't touch her, but I do sometimes sit and gaze at her for a while. (I just realized that looking at Zappy for a while has the same effect on me as stroking a cat has on most people.) I can recall being warmed by the same gaze as an expectant mother in my small group, Kelly, smiled at me as I stroked Lena's head (Lena being

the 5 year old daughter of the group leader). In medieval culture, beholding the body and blood of Christ at mass was in a sense almost more held to be a receiving, a partaking, than eating and drinking them. The kything power of sight is attested to in Augustine's words: "See what you believe; become what you behold."

34: Absorbing poetry. Here is an example of a poem I wrote which I think is effective for the purpose:

Beyond  
Beyond doing, there is being.  
Beyond time, there is eternity.  
Beyond mortality, there is immortality.  
Beyond knowledge, there is faith.  
Beyond justice, there is mercy.  
Beyond happy thoughts, there is joy.  
Beyond communication, there is communion.  
Beyond petition, there is prayer.  
Beyond work, there is rest.  
Beyond right action, there is virtue.  
Beyond virtue, there is the Holy Spirit.  
Beyond appreciation, there is awe.  
Beyond sound, there is stillness.  
Beyond stillness, there is the eternal song.  
Beyond law, there is grace.  
Beyond even wisdom, there is love.  
Beyond all else, HE IS.

35: Mirth. The one line from all of C.S. Lewis's writing that most sticks in my mind comes from [Out of the Silent Planet](#), where he wrote, "...but unfortunately, [name of villain] didn't

know the Malacandrian word for 'laugh'. Indeed, 'laugh' was a word which he didn't understand very well in any language." I debated about whether to put laughter in, as it has many forms — some of which, as the cynic's scoff, are corrupt, and some of which are lesser goods — but there is at least one form of laughter that really is kything. It is mirth. It can be found, for example, where old friends are sitting around a table after a hearty meal; the laughter is not just a reaction to isolated events, but a mood that has little eruptions over things that aren't that funny in themselves. It is mingled with companionship and fellow-feeling, and is a mirth that is the crowning jewel of forms of laughter.

36: Becoming good. Websters Revised Unabridged Dictionary 1913, p. 877, has:

### **Kythe**

(Kythe, Kithe) (ki&thlig;), v. t. [imp. Kydde, Kidde (kid"de); p. p. Kythed Kid; p. pr. & vb. n. Kything.] [OE. kythen, kithen, cuden, to make known, AS. cydan, fr. cud known. &radic;45. See Uncouth, Can to be able, and cf. Kith.] To make known; to manifest; to show; to declare. [Obs. or Scot.]

For gentle hearte kytheth gentillesse.

Chaucer.

### **Kythe**

(Kythe), v. t. To come into view; to appear. [Scot.]

It kythes bright . . . because all is dark around it.

Sir W. Scott.

The latter meaning of 'kythe' is the reason Madeleine l'Engle,

after a search, chose that word to carry her meaning.

C.S. Lewis said that the process of becoming good was like the process of becoming visible, in that objects becoming visible are more sharply distinguished not only from objects in obscurity but from each other; becoming good is becoming more truly the person you were created to be (being Named).

Becoming good is kything in the dictionary sense, and it is why I put it here. It is also a kind of kything, and an aid to kything, in l'Engle's sense — a stepping into the great kythe, into the great dance. It is like learning vocabulary to speech, or a conversation in which one learns vocabulary.

37: Comforting those in pain. Pain can isolate, but it can also bring down the walls around a person. I can remember now one time at a retreat when I was in the long, dark night of the soul, when I drank in a friend's silent presence and touch like a lifeline. The worst comforters offer words to fix everything with clichés and pat answers. The best often feel somewhat helpless, enduring an awkward silence as if they don't have anything to offer to so great a pain, but none the less offer something deep, more than they could have put into words, more often than they realize.

38: Presence. This facet of kything is perhaps best portrayed not directly, but in its stark silhouette, painted by Charles Baudelaire in his poem "Enivrez-vous": «Il faut être toujours ivre... Pour ne pas sentir l'horrible fardeau du Temps qui brise vos épaules et vous penche vers la terre, il faut vous enivrer sans trêve. Mais de quoi? De vin, de poésie, ou de vertu, à votre guise...» — "You must always be drunk.... to not feel the horrible burden of Time which crushes your shoulders and pushes you towards the earth, you must ceaselessly get drunk. But with

what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you please...."

Against this silhouette, of seeking something, anything, to flee into, stands out another facet of kything: that of being present, and giving undivided, focused attention. The kind of person you'd like to be around, the kind of person you'd want to have as a friend — isn't he present?

39: Digesting experience.

As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:19, NJB

A book is best understood, not just after being read once, but after being gone over several times. The same thing goes for experiences — they can be contemplated and pondered. This does not have instantaneous effect, but in a certain way it makes the experience contemplated a more complete experience, one that is more fully grasped.

40: Riflery. Riflery, I discovered, is not a macho thing, and someone who comes in with a macho attitude won't shoot very well. It has much more do do with concentration, stillness, and patience. In riflery, I learned how to hold at least parts of my body so still that the biggest cause of motion was the beating of my heart. Riflery is not so much a kything with, as just a kything.

41: Brainstorming. I think I do not need to say much here.

42: Step into other people's worlds... Tonight my father, Joseph, and I went to play ping-pong. I didn't realize one thing I had been doing — playing Joe's way, Joe's rules — until I saw Dad make Joseph rather upset by insisting that he play a standard, official rules game of ping-pong. (To his credit, Dad later started playing Joe's way.) Then I realized that I had been stepping into Joe's own little world, and meeting him more completely than had I insisted we stay in the public space that

all ping-pong players share. Joe didn't exactly mean to play ping-pong; he wanted to spend some time together, play around, goof off in a way that happened to make use of the framework of ping-pong. Part of the time, he was doing silly things that weren't ping-pong (such as hitting the ball around the room), which our father frowned on, and I commented were a little bit of Janra-ball (see below), a compliment which Joe said he really appreciated. People invite you into their worlds all the time, but the invitations don't have much fanfare and can be hard to notice. I'm glad I accepted Joe's invitation.

43: ...and invite others into your own. In one letter, when cherished abilities were beginning to return, I wrote:

The other thing which I have to share now is something which happened during the Gospel reading at the mass. I had my first theological musing in a long while. That touched a greater frustration — that of reading some of the richest passages of the Scriptures, and learning almost nothing from them. There had one text that I read and was able to appreciate, if not being able to think much at all (Isaiah 60: "Arise, shine, for your light has come..."). This bleak dryness was broken both mentally and emotionally (there is a distinct and deep pleasure I have in theological reasoning), as I mused over the words: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places [or rooms, or mansions, in other translations]."

The most obvious interpretation of this metaphor is to think of a physical building, and that is surely appropriate. But I began to think of another interpretation of the dwelling-places, and that is this: our souls and spirits.

We have a temptation and a culture which defines

happiness and sadness almost purely in terms of what is materially external to us: our possessions, the way others treat us, etc. That is certainly relevant — in that such blessings are to be gratefully received as a part of God's grace and provision, and pains are a real suffering to work through — but even more important and more central is what is internal to us and our interactions and relationship with God. Being an alcoholic is a worse suffering than being in prison. It is something related to this insight that is behind many Eastern religions defining Heaven and Hell to be defined almost purely by your internal state. One Zen koan tells us:

A Samurai came to a Zen master and said, "Show me the gates of Heaven and Hell."

The Zen master said, "Are you a Samurai? You look much more like a beggar. And that sword — I bet it is so dull that it could not cut off my head."

The enraged Samurai drew his sword, and raised it to strike the master down.

The Zen master said, "Now show me the gates of Heaven."

The Samurai sheathed his sword, bowed to the master, and left.

A person's bedroom is a place that has flavor and detail; it is an interesting place to explore, especially as compared to the sterility of a classroom or some other public place. A person's soul, too, has something of this color and distinctiveness; there are interests, memories, stories, and other things even more vital but which I have more difficulty describing — the particular virtues and vices, the

particular tendencies, which cause a person to act unlike any other. A soul, like a house, is a place of hospitality — a guest is invited into a host's house, to enjoy his comforts, his foods, and a friend is invited into another friend's soul, to enjoy it in a deeper form of the way in which we enjoy a friend's house. (In Heaven, there will be very much opportunity for hospitality; it will be the final place of community and celebration, and therefore our dwelling places can hardly be places of isolation.) For many years, I thought of this passage in terms of something of a more ornate, perhaps almost magical, physical edifice that would be nothing more; now, I see what is in retrospect obvious: when the old order of things has passed away and behold, all things are made new, our dwelling places will not simply be better purely physical buildings, but better than purely physical buildings. This is just as our bodies, which are dwelling-places of the Holy Spirit, will not simply be better purely physical bodies, but pneumatikon, spirit-bodies, better than purely physical bodies. I thought before of these rooms as physical rooms which we would decorate with artistic creations — and those artists among you will know what it means, and what a room means, when you are able to fill it with your artwork. I still do believe that — and I realized another form that will take. By our faith, and by our works, we are doing with our spirits what an artist does with a room when he toils over artwork to adorn it with. We are shaping the dwelling places we will have for our eternal play (and one of the images painted of Heaven is one of neither work nor rest, but pure and unbounded play). God is shaping us to become gods and goddesses, but he is not doing it in a way that bypasses us and our free will; we are working with

God in the work that will shape us forever.

Our souls, like our domiciles, are special places, far more than public places that anybody can enter without asking permission, in which to receive other people.

44: Nursing. The natural focal distance for an adult's eyes is twenty feet and on; the natural focal distance for an infant's eyes is eighteen inches, the distance between a woman's nipple and her nose. (Infants look at, and remember, noses rather than eyes.) Feeding, important as it may be, is only the beginning of what is going on when a mother is nursing a child. To put it another way, the necessity of physical feeding provides the occasion for a kything of love that provides even more necessary spiritual feeding.

45: Pregnancy. A fortiori.

46: Timeless moments. One person, speaking of singing a worship song, suggested thinking not so much in terms of "We start and stop this song," as "This song always has been going on and always will be going on; we just step into it for a time." In this spirit, there are moments of kything, often unsought and unattempted, which do not so much start and stop as are a stepping into the Eternal Kythe.

47: Parenting a child with a severe disease. At a bioethics conference, Dr. C. Everett Koop said, "There is a special bond that forms with a defective child, often far moreso than a normal child." He told a story from the practice of a Jewish pediatrician and colleague. A father lost a second child to Tay-Sachs, a degenerative disease whose people do not live to the age of four. Grieving, he said through tears, "He never gave me a moment's trouble." I am not sure why this is, but it may have something to do with why I enjoy a small glass of wine more than

a bottomless cup of Coke.

48: Corporate worship. Worship is a foretaste of Heaven, and it plays a focal role in the Eastern Orthodox emphasis on bringing Heaven down to earth; they describe their worship as stepping into Heaven. Worship is also the highest form of love. In these two aspects, at least, worship is kything. Corporate worship is a kything not only with God, but with the others you are worshipping with.

49: Janra-ball. This is a [game](#) I devised, and has been described as a Zen NOMIC. To excerpt the ingredients list:

Springfield, Monty Python, Calvin-Ball, body language, Harlem Globetrotters, sideways logic, Thieves' Cant, Intuition, counter-intuitive segues, spoon photography, creativity, Zen koans, Psychiatrist, adrenaline, perception, tickling, urban legend Spam recipe, swallowing a pill, illusionism, NOMIC, modern physics, raw chaos, F.D. & C. yellow number 5.

I originally hesitated to put this in, on the grounds that it is difficult to play, at least in a pure state. There've been a couple of times I've gotten together a group of people willing to play, and it didn't work. I thought it would require players with more of something — perception, intuition, creativity, spontaneity, etc.

— but in thinking recently, I have come to believe that it's something, like empathic listening, that can't just be turned on at will, especially by someone inexperienced (which would be everyone now). Joseph's behavior at the game last night persuaded me that it is indeed possible, perhaps best started at in small increments from a more structured game. (Maybe Pooh's Corner will be able to play. Who knows?) I will say this: It's a

difficult game to play, but if you can play it, it's an awesome kythe.

For further information, click [here](#).

50: Synchronicity/attunement. As treated in [The Dance of Life](#), people have rhythms about them — outside of conscious awareness — and when people are together, these rhythms can become attuned (and, if so, the people themselves are more attuned). This is something that is not as well appreciated in our culture as in others. The easiest example or analogue I can point to (I'm not sure which) is in walking together and holding hands.

When I was dating Rebecca, it took me a long time to learn to get in step, and stay in step — but things were smoother when I did.

51: A kind of openness. There is a kind of openness where you perceive something but can't put your finger on exactly what. If you can listen, be opening, look, then there is a sort of listening kything. I checked out a copy of [A Wind in the Door](#) yesterday, and when I was reading through to find insights for more ways of kything, I came on something that I felt was significant to what I'm writing, but I couldn't say what. I sat then, open, thinking, waiting to see what it was — and then realized that it was not the heart of a way of kything, but something to put at the beginning:

What he had actually seen she could not begin to guess. That he had seen something, something unusual, she was positive.

This is the same sort of feeling I felt about kything.

This is part of how kything is to Charles Wallace:

Meg said sharply, "Why? What did mother say?"  
Charles Wallace walked slowly through the high grass in  
the orchard. "She hasn't said. But it's sort of like radar  
blipping at me."

This kind of listening kythe is how I get a lot of the ideas for  
these items.

52: Introspection.

Then [Blajeny] sat up and folded his arms across his  
chest, and his strange luminous eyes turned inwards, so that  
he was looking not at the stars nor at the children but into  
some deep, dark place far within himself, and then further.  
He sat there, moving in, deeper and deeper, for time out of  
time. Then the focus of his eyes returned to the children,  
and he gave his radiant smile and answered Calvin's question  
as though not a moment had passed.

Introspection is a kything with oneself.

53: Forgiveness. Forgiveness is a spiritual act, a restoration of  
broken communion.

54: Artistic appreciation. In high school, I made a silver ring,  
designed to hold a drop of water as a stone. When I started to  
paint, I learned a new way of seeing. After a painting in which a  
pair of hands played prominently, I was captivated by the beauty  
of people's hands all around me; for the first time in my life, I  
saw in them a beauty as great as that of faces.

What an artist does is allow you to see through his eyes.  
When you look at a friend's watercolor, you are seeing the beach  
through her eyes, as you would not have perceived it yourself.  
When you read this list, you are thinking about the word 'kythe'  
through my mind.

55: Talking. This one is so obvious I overlooked it completely. The magic of symbols that allows mind-to-mind communication is one that is appreciated, for instance, when trying to work with someone who doesn't speak a common language with you.

56: Looking into another person, and telling him what you see. I have always enjoyed other people telling me what they see in me. For a time, I thought that was vanity, and vanity certainly played a part. But recently, I have come to see a deeper reason for asking this of other persons.

I have for a while enjoyed asking foreigners what they think of American culture, and probed a bit not only for the appreciation they will voice, but criticisms. Most foreigners can articulate the character of American culture better than can most Americans, and they have insights that wouldn't occur to an American. They see things that have become invisible to Americans. They have a distance, like aesthetic distance, that allows them to see what is too close to be visible to us.

For the same or analogous reasons, having another person tell you what he sees in you is another variant on introspection, like using a mirror in looking at yourself to see parts you can't look at directly. Different people who have known you for different amounts of time can see different parts of you.

When you tell another person what you see in him, you provide this sort of introspection; your words fuse with his knowledge of himself to form a deeper self-knowledge, and say more to him than they would mean to anyone else. They connect. They kythe. It is like the story of the crystal globe — only you can tell people how beautiful they are.

57: Driving. In the car this morning, after having to take my brother to school and my mother to work, I was thinking about the podracing in Star Wars: Episode I — one of the most

Jedi/Force parts of the movie — and I realized I was really enjoying driving for the first time in years. (I started late in driving, and have a fear of it. I had enjoyed singing while driving, but not driving itself.) I was very aware of my surroundings, and connected, and entered flow. Though I stayed within the speed limit and there were no hazardous conditions, it was in a very real sense podracing. It was a kythe with my surroundings and especially with my car, which was as an extension of my body. It is entirely possible to kythe with technology (and I was seeking an example), to have your hands on a steering wheel or a keyboard so that you are thinking through them, and your thoughts are not on your hands or fingertips, but where the car is moving, or what letters are appearing on the screen.

Technology (techne, art + logos, logic, reason, domain of knowledge) is part of the creation of the imago Dei, and therefore has a role in God's order. There is a tendency for the sort of people interested in kything things to be Luddites, but this need not be. If you can kythe with God, with another person, with a shaggy dog, with the grass, with ideas, with experiences, then you can also kythe with a car, with a computer.

58: Pain. This one will probably be difficult for most Americans to understand, and I'm not sure I can explain it well — here I will probably be talking around my point mostly. We live in a painkilling culture, one that attempts to delete that entire region of human experience, and therefore neither understands nor profits from it.

A place to begin is to say that leprosy ravages the body through one very simple means: it shuts off a person's ability to feel pain. Exactly how shutting off pain causes such severe damage is left as a valuable exercise to the reader's imagination. Pain is an awareness of your body's state, and of what you can

and cannot do without aggravating an injury. I very rarely take painkillers, because I want to know exactly how my body is doing. (Sunday night was the first time in memory of taking a painkiller not prescribed by a doctor.)

In addition, pain is a present sensation; it is not in our nature to not notice. Intense pain can fill consciousness. (Some mentally ill people self-mutilate because the sensation of physical pain, if only momentarily, can take them out of their mental anguish.) If all our kything is as real as pain, we are doing well.

59: Death. What was said about pain and our culture applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to death and our culture. (I don't know any good books on pain; a good, deep book on death is Peter Kreeft's [Love is Stronger Than Death](#).) In other kythes, you kythe love, or ideas, or listening; in this kythe, you kythe yourself. The art of dying well is an art of letting go of a world you've known for years and giving yourself fully to God. That's about as full of a message as you can send.

60: Gift-giving. A good gift is at least three messages: a statement about the nature of the person giving the gift, a statement about the nature of the person receiving the gift, and something else peculiar to the character of the gift. None of these messages are symbolically encoded, and the result is that they can say things inexpressible in normal words. A gift is not worth a thousand words; there is no exchange rate between gifts and words.

61: Reminiscing. Reminiscing is a kything with memories.

62: Local traditions. There are traditions, like Pooh's Corner or Club Pseudo (a tradition at my high school, similar to an open mike at a coffeehouse). These traditions have a unique local flavor and personality, and create a special bond among participants. Janra-ball, if it works, would be another example.

63: Community. Community is like friendship, but it does not reduce to friendship. A community is more than a set of friendships, as a friendship is more than two isolated individuals.

64: Ellis lifeguarding. This entry should not be written by me; it should be written by my high school acquaintance, Chuck Saletta. American Red Cross lifeguards are taught to respond to problems; Ellis lifeguards are taught to see them coming. Chuck has written that he knows ahead of time when a swimmer is going to be in distress, and also that on the highway he watches the cars ahead of him and is usually able to tell whether or not they'll turn on an exit — before they put their turn signals on. That has to involve an attention and attunement to the situation that is noteworthy.

65: Gathering.

"Has Mother actually told you all this?"

"Some of it. The rest I've just—gathered."

Charles Wallace did gather things out of his mother's mind, out of meg's mind, as another child might gather daisies in a field.

This is another passage that sticks in my mind as an insight into kything. I gather when I muse, when I have certain intuitions. I gather passages from the book. Where do you gather?

66: Firing a ballista at your television. Television is a crawling abomination from the darkest pits of Hell. It is a pack of cigarettes for the mind. It blinds the inner eye. It is the anti-kythe.

A home without television is like a slice of chocolate cake without tartar sauce.

When I was in fourth grade, we read *The Last of the Really Great Wang-Doodles*, and then drew pictures. My teacher commented that she could tell from the pictures who watched TV. Get rid of your television, and you will find yourself living life more fully, and kything more deeply.

Two good books dealing with this topic are Neil Postman's concise and lively [Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business](#), and Jerry Mander's in-depth [Four Arguments For the Elimination of Television](#).

67: Boundaries. Boundaries are an important part of friendship; the boundaries of a message give it shape; drinking a certain amount of wine and then stopping enables you to enjoy it without becoming drunk. Boundaries are a kind of kythe, and also a part of other kythes; a hug is best if it is neither too short nor too long.

68: Thunderstorms. Imagine that you are a child, outside in a thunderstorm at night, with the rain warm and heavy, the wind blowing about, the trees dancing, everything suddenly illumined by flashes of lightning. This is a night to connect with, to drink in.

(Idea taken from Robin Munn.)

69: Using a knack. I am adept at finding pressure points on the body — not just the ones I know, but the ones I don't know. I can tell from looking if a person will say 'yes' or 'no' to a hug. More fallibly, I can sometimes guess if a person is ticklish (hi, Ashley!).

I don't know how I do any of these things, but these knacks are a form of kything.

70: Trying to kythe. I think it was Richard Foster who said that the very act of struggling to pray is itself a form of prayer.

Last night during Pooh's Corner, my fear of driving began to act up, and I walked out of the building thinking, "I won't be able to kythe now. I'm not in the proper frame of mind." Then I realized — no, I could kythe. I couldn't produce the same end result, but I could put myself into it. A small child's crayon drawing of a five-legged dog whose head is larger than its body is a beautiful thing, and it is made beautiful not by the performance criteria that a commercial product would be judged by, but by the love and effort that went into it.

I have attention deficit disorder. I can hyperfocus at times (exactly which times being largely out of my control), but quite often I haven't connected with Pooh's Corner. I haven't been in the silliness, drinking it in even as an observer. What I have realized in writing this entry is that that doesn't matter nearly as much as I thought it did, just as the crudity of the above described drawing doesn't matter very much. It doesn't matter if I often don't succeed. I try. I kythe.

71: Weight lifting. The amount of force coming from a muscle is the result, not only of the muscle's size and condition, but the amount of nervous impulse coming from the brain. People can normally summon only a small fraction of the total possible muscle impulse. One case where there can be full or near-full exertion is when people are terrified; they can possess something called hysterical strength, where it is entirely possible for a small, middle-aged woman to lift the back end of a car. Another is an epileptic seizure; in my EMT class, we were told not to try to restrain someone having a seizure, because bones will snap sooner than muscle strength will give out.

I trained with weights for a few years, and doing so was largely on will. I had pencil-thin arms and legs as a child, and worked to the point of having a Greek figure. (I now have a

Greek figure plus a paunch, but we won't get into that.) I got to the point of being able to lift the full stack (as much resistance as a machine designed for football players can give) on the better part of the machines, and (in moments of being macho and trying to do something I could brag about) walked a couple of short steps while carrying over 400 pounds of weight, and injured my hand by punching through stone tiles. I didn't get much bigger after a certain point. Only a small portion of my doing those things was muscle. The rest was mind.

Many of the items above have been kythes of drinking in. This a kythe of putting out.

72: Doing something new and difficult. When you are skilled at something, you don't have to put much of yourself into it to succeed. In high school, I put a lot of effort into trying to learn how to balance on a slack rope. I never really succeeded at what I aimed for, but I learned a couple of things. My balance improved a lot. One person watching me said it was like watching the sensei catching flies with chopsticks, in *The Karate Kid*. Even if I didn't succeed at my intention, I learned to put my whole self into it.

73: Going through a difficult experience together. Meg and Mr. Jenkins came to know each other in a way that never would have happened had things been light and sunny. It may not be seen for the pain at the moment, but afterwards a growing-closer has happened.

74: Intuitions. Being attuned to, and using, your intuition is another way of kything.

75: Knowing others.

[Meg:] "...Did you know it was one of Calvin's brothers who beat Charles Wallace up today? I bet he's upset—I

don't mean Whippy, he couldn't care less—Calvin.

Somebody's bound to have told him."

[Mrs. Murray:] "Do you want to call him?"

"Not me. Not Calvin. I just have to wait. Maybe he'll come over or something."

One form of communion comes from knowing another person so well that communication is unnecessary. There is something more in this passage than if Meg had called Calvin — far more.

76: The useless. Many of those areas of human intercourse which are cut out by American pragmatism are the areas of speech which most embody kything. Within speech, talking about how to get something done is not a kythe — certainly not compared to a discussion which conveys love or insight or theory. Kything is something that's not in Pierce's and Dewey's practical world.

77: Culture. Culture, often invisible to us, is a shared kythe across a group of people. It is the framework for communication, a kythe that gives other kythes their shape.

78: Wordless knowledge. When I was at Innes's house, she asked me if I thought my twin brothers Ben and Joe were introverted, extroverted, etc. My first response, after a bit of a pause, was, "I don't know." I thought some more, and realized that the truth was slightly different: it had never occurred to me to think about them in those terms.

After I read [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), I began to realize that many of my deepest thoughts were not in English, not for that matter in anything like verbal language. When I write them down, it is usually a translation, and sometimes matter a far more difficult translation than between English and French. It is more like trying to translate a song into a poem. These thoughts are of

a wordless thinking, like the kything of the fara.

[Personal Knowledge](#), a profound book and an excellent cure for insomnia, deals with those facets of human thought and interaction that do not reduce to words.

79: Being underwater. I felt that this was a kythe, but couldn't put my finger on how. I still can't fully articulate it, but it has a similar feel to a visual kythe. The beginning of [A Dream of Light](#) provides a good description of an underwater kythe:

You pull your arms to your side and glide through the water. On your left is a fountain of bubbles, upside down, beneath a waterfall; the bubbles shoot down and then cascade out and to the surface. To your right swims a school of colorful fish, red and blue with thin black stripes. The water is cool, and you can feel the currents gently pushing and pulling your body. Ahead of you, seaweed above and long, bright green leaves below wave back and forth, flowing and bending. You pull your arms, again, with a powerful stroke which shoots you forward under the seaweed; your back feels cool in the shade. You kick, and you feel the warmth of the sun again, soaking in and through your skin and muscles. Bands of light dance on the sand beneath you, as the light is bent and turned by the waves.

There is a time of rest and stillness; all is at a deep and serene peace. The slow motion of the waves, the dancing lights below and above, the supple bending of the plants, all form part of a stillness. It is soothing, like the soft, smooth notes of a lullaby.

Your eyes slowly close, and you feel even more the warm sunlight, and the gentle caresses of the sea. And, in your rest, you become more aware of a silent presence. You were

not unaware of it before, but you are more aware of it now.

It is there:

Being.

Love.

Life.

Healing.

Calm.

Rest.

Reality.

Like a tree with water slowly flowing in, through roots hidden deep within the earth, and filling it from the inside out, you abide in the presence. It is a moment spent, not in time, but in eternity.

You look out of the eternity; your eyes are now open because you have eternity in your heart and your heart in eternity. In the distance, you see dolphins; one of them turns to you, and begins to swim. The others are not far off.

It lets you pet its nose, and nestles against you. You grab on to its dorsal fin, and go speeding off together. The water rushes by at an exhilarating speed; the dolphin jumps out of the water, so that you see waves and sky for a brief moment before splashing through the surface.

The dolphins chase each other, and swim hither and thither, in and out from the shore. After they all seem exhausted, they swim more slowly, until at last you come to a lagoon.

In the center, you see a large mass; swimming closer, you see that it is a sunken ship. You find an opening...

80: Becoming ancient. Most entries so far have focused on what you do when you kythe. This is an entry about who you are.

When you are ancient, you have had ages to let God work with you. You have had time to grow mature. You have gained experience. You have lived through many events and circumstances. You have smiled on generations. You have experienced change, both without you and within you. You have learned what is constant, both without you and within you. You have grown wise. You kythe with depth, with reality. You are like Senex (whose name means 'aged'), like the fara — deep, rooted, moving without motion, sharing in the age (however faintly) of the Ancient of Days. Become all this, and you will kythe.

81: Becoming a child. When you are a child, you look with wonder at every bit of the world God has made; you do not know jadedness. You do not know guile; it would never occur to you to wear a mask. You play. You are never afraid to come running for a hug. You stay out in the rain. You always want to grow. You always want to know, "Why?" You bear a peace no storm has troubled.

You can believe anything. You are like the little farandolae, dancing, swimming. Become all this, and you will kythe.

82: Doing something for its own sake. Someone said that a classic is a book that everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read. There is a big difference between reading a book because you want to have read it, and reading it because you want to read it. The former is something to endure, the latter something to enjoy. For a while, when I drove, I would often drive five or ten miles under the limit, and when I started driving at the limit, it was mainly as a courtesy to not stress other drivers, and because I started driving on streets with heavier traffic where it would be hazardous to drive that much more slowly than the flow of traffic. I do not generally get tense (for reasons other than my fear of driving, and blunders I make as I still learn to drive), have nervous fidgets, get angry, or

experience stress at red lights, slow traffic, and other delays that shoot some drivers' blood pressure through the roof. The reason is that I am operating within a mindset of "I am driving; I am in the process of getting there; I will be there," as opposed to "I need to be there now, and I am tolerating this drive because it is the least slow means of getting there, and— Hey! That's another second's delay. Ooh, that makes me mad!" Pirsig treats this point at some length in the section of [Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance](#) that deals with climbing and his son's ego climbing.

Of course many activities are means to other activities, and we would be in a bad state if we couldn't do one thing to get at something else. But even then, intermediate activities that are trampled on are not good to do. Really wanting to do something, and doing it for its own sake, is a kythe with the activity that is better for both you and the activity.

83: Silence.

Through [Mr. Jenkins's] discouragement she became aware of Calvin. "Hey, Meg! Communication implies sound. Communion doesn't." He sent her a brief image of walking silently through the woods, the two of them alone together, their feet almost noiseless on the rusty carpet of pine needles. They walked without speaking, without touching, and yet they were as close as it is possible for two human beings to be. They climbed up through the woods, coming out of the brilliant sunlight at the top of the hill. A few sumac trees showed their rusty candles. Mountain laurel, shiny, so dark a green the leaves seemed black in the fierceness of sunlight, pressed towards the woods. Meg and Calvin had stretched out in the thick, late-summer grass, lying on their backs and

gazing up into the shimmering blue of sky, a vault  
interrupted only by a few small clouds.

And she had been as happy, she remembere, as it is  
possible to be, and as close to Calvin as she had ever been to  
anybody in her life, even Charles Wallace, so close that their  
separate bodies, daisies and buttercups joining rather than  
dividig them, seemed a single enjoyment of summer and sun  
and each other.

That was surely the purest form of kything.

When I was in France, Rebecca wrote a letter about some of  
the moments she valued most with me. There was one moment  
when we went into the fine arts center, and I improvised on the

organ for her,  
and then we sat  
in the silence  
in the dark  
not saying anything  
not doing anything  
just being.

Other people had talked with her and done things with her. I  
was the first person to be in the silence with her, and it  
profoundly affected her.

84: Dodge-ball. When I thought of this during a slow, back-  
burner brainstorm, I initially wanted to put it in because of pride  
and boastfulness: I wanted to impress you with how talented I  
am. Then I realized what I was thinking, and realized that was  
entirely out of place, and decided to definitely leave it out. But I  
still had some idle thoughts about it mulling about... and I  
mused... and realized something amazing. This definitely belongs  
in.

Tn dodge-ball I couldn't throw worth beans. Still can't. But

In Dodge ball, I couldn't throw well in beans. One day, in a lock-in for sophomores at IMSA, I joined a game of dodge-ball, and hid around in the back... and noticed that there were fewer and fewer people left on my team... and then I was one of two... and then the only one. Then, for five minutes, I dodged the whole other team throwing at me, sometimes four or five balls at once, and then a ball brushed me. When I stopped and began to slow down, I realized that the soles of my bare feet were burning hot from the friction of my jumping. After another game like that, people decided that if it got down to the other team versus me, the game was a draw.

One of the upperclassmen supervising, Paul Vondrak, was a great thrower; he was able not only to throw accurately, but to throw much faster than anyone else. He would stand, wind up slowly, and throw like lightning. I think it only took him about five throws to nick me.

I was thinking about this latter item, and (examining the memory) realized that I was paying very close attention to him... then realized that I was attuned to him... then thought that it was almost like a martial artist... and then realized, in a flash of insight, that in the one game I was doing the same thing a Samurai does when he defeats ten men. I do not understand exactly why I was able to do this without any special training or experience, although it does lend some corroboration to the puzzling fact that as a karate white belt I was able to defeat two out of three of my blackbelt instructors in sparring. Now I know that I have had an experience I would not ordinarily expect to have access to. I guess I would chalk it up to an unusual talent for certain kinds of kything.

I was trying to analyze my state of mind in (especially) the five minute dodge at the end, and the first thing I realized was that I don't remember that state of mind too well — not as well

...that I don't remember that state of mind too well. Not as well as I remember feeling that my feet were hot afterwards. From what I remember, my state of mind differed from normal consciousness. A hint of an explanation would be to say that the perceptual processing alone would have severely overloaded my conscious mind. It could also be described as flow or pod racing. I know there's more, but I can't get at it. If I can better process this memory, I think I will better understand kything. As I mull over this, I think that those five minutes may qualify as the most intense kytke of my life.

85: Reading another person's body languages and emotions. As telekinesis is really moving things with your arms and telepathy is really talking, Charles Wallace's awareness, without being told, of what's going on in Meg is really a perception of others' emotions. This is the origin for the spark of beauty in that facet of Charles Wallace's kything, and it is an area where I'd like to grow.

86: Withdrawing.

[The Shal's] moments of community are profound; their moments of solitude are even more profound. 'Withdrawing' is what they call it; it is a time of stillness, and an expression of a love so profound that all other loves appear to be hate. It is a time of finding a secret place, and then withdrawing — from family, friends, and loved ones, from music and the beauty of nature, from cherished activities, from sensation — into the heart of the Father. It is a time of — it is hard to say what. Of being loved, and of loving. Of growing still, and becoming. Of being set in a right state, and realigned in accordance with the ultimate reality. Of purity from the Origin. Of being made who one is to be. Of communion and worship. Of imago dei filled with the light of

Deus. Of being pulled out of time and knowing something of the eternal.

[Espiriticthus: Cultures of a Fantasy World not Touched by Sin.](#)

87: Zoning out. This is one of the last places one would look for kything; Robin observed that one of the central themes tying these entries together is presence, and this would seem to be the essence of absence. For all that... I found myself spacing out, and left the spacing out for introspection, and realized that my mental and emotional state was that of kything. A start of an explanation is that if it is an absence, it is entirely devoid of the Baudelarian flight urged in Enivrez-vous. It is a present absence; it goes into It is an egoless sliding into enjoyment. It is still and peaceful; it is quite restful; it is a good. Being in a similar attitude will help other kythes.

88: Playing Springfield. Springfield is a game with very simple rules: two people alternate naming state capitals, and the first person to name Springfield wins.

What makes it interesting is that it's not a game of mathematical strategy. It's a game of perception. The real objective is to win as late as possible, and that means reading the other person and seeing how far you can go: from nonverbal cues, you need to read his mind.

Springfield is probably comparable to poker.

89: Thinking deeply, prolongedly, and intensely about a question. I realized today that I had been thinking pretty hard about kything for several days, and thought I should take a sabbath from it: I would record ideas that I had, but not intentionally give conscious thought to the question. It was after I did that that I began to realize how deeply I had been kything

with the idea of kything.

The first thing I noticed was that it was hard to stop thinking. The second thing I realized was that I was still thinking of ways of kything. I probably don't have to devote any more conscious effort to thinking to complete the number of entries.

When you think in that manner, for a sufficient length of time, your thought acquires the momentum of a freight train. Mathematicians solve some of the most difficult problems after long and intense thought, and then cessation of conscious thought, usually to the point of forgetting it — and the solution comes. If it can be solved by continuous thought, it is not among the most difficult problems; the mathematician is not exercising his full abilities. When the storm ceases and the surface of the ocean stills, then the Leviathan stirs in the deeps. Deep calls to deep. This is perhaps the most profound kythe with an idea.

90: Experience. Experience in a domain constitutes and enables a kythe with that domain. My Mom asked me if I had a universal adaptor for her tape recorder, and I pulled one and said, "Is this the right jack? If it isn't, I have another." She said, "I don't know, let me see." A short while afterwards, she called me over to look at it, because "it seems to have two prongs." I looked at, and instantly realized that it didn't need an adaptor. It needed a power cord.

I was mildly irritated, and was finally able to put my finger on something I'd felt. Answering her help requests with technology has the same feel to me as explaining things to a small, naive child who doesn't understand how the world works. She sees technology as this mysterious, unpredictable black box which works by magic.

I thought a little more, as my mother is neither naive nor childish. She is an intelligent and well-educated woman. What I

realized was that I was not appreciating my own experience. Experience enables a person to look at the surface and see the depths — and a port for a power cord does not look fundamentally different from what a port for an adaptor might be. I see a computer as having definite inner workings which work according to understandable principle; when the computer is malfunctioning, I think I have a chance of understanding why. If my Mom thinks that the computer is a black box (you can see what it does, but not what's inside it), I think of it as a white box (you can see what's going on inside, and try to fix it if need be). The way I look at computers might be compared to the topographical anatomy I was taught in my EMT class, where you look at skin and see the underlying organs.

You kythe more when you're interacting with a white box than with a black box, and that comes with experience.

91: Closing your eyes.

[Charles Wallace] closed his eyes, not to shut out Louise, not to shut out Meg, but to see with his inner eyes.

I closed my eyes when visiting my friend Innes's house, and I realized what I was doing, and why: to focus, to connect, to concentrate. This is why couples close their eyes when they kiss; this is why we have the custom of closing our eyes when we pray. The image of a blind seer is a part of myth and literature; when we close our eyes, we momentarily blind ourselves so we can see.

92: Mental illness. Mental illness is not exactly a purely negative thing. It is a difference that is ecological in character, with positive as well as negative aspects. This very dark cloud has a silver lining, sometimes a mithril lining. This is why people with mental illness speak of a gift — something that puzzled me

when I first heard it.

93: Mental health. If mental illness is a way of kything, then mental health is definitely a way of kything. Robin is a good friend and an excellent listener, and he radiates health. And Joel

—

Robin once mentioned a theatre professor saying of his predecessor that with most people, they walk into a room and it's "What about me?" His predecessor walks into the room and it's, "What about you?"

I remember thinking, "I'd like to have a friend like that," and then, "I would like to be like that." A day later, I realized that I do have a friend like that: Joel. With Joel, it's "What about you?"

Joel is a very good kyther.

94: Watching or studying a kythe.

[Meg] found herself looking directly into one of his eyes, a great, amber cat's eye, the dark mandala of the pupil, opening, compelling, beckoning.

She was drawn towards the oval, was pulled into it, was through it.

My brothers were playing, and I was watching Ben and Joe play. I became aware of an energetic character to the play, and then I recognized a kythe a split second before remembering the entry about play as kything. So I decided to watch — and then I realized I was in the kythe.

95: Nature. To be out in the woods, or looking at night at the sapphire sky and crystalline stars, or listen to the sounds of a forest, or to play with an animal, or wade barefoot through a cold, babbling brook — these are ways of kything with nature.

(Taken from Innes Sheridan.)

96: Swallowing a pill. Learning to swallow a pill was a long and traumatic experience for me; for the longest time, I tried my hardest and just couldn't do it. The reason was precisely that I was trying my hardest: I was trying much too hard. When I finally did learn, I learned far better than most; I can now swallow several decent-sized pills on a sip of water — when I was last hospitalized, the nurses remarked at how little water I needed, and told me to drink more.

In what is for the most people a minor learning experience, I came to really appreciate how easy swallowing a pill is — to easy to force or accomplish by willpower. In this regard, it is not only an example of kything, but a symbol. Do, or do not. There is no try.

97: Mystical experiences. These are bestowed by God, and are not human doing; visions may come once or twice in a person's life, not at all for most people. When they do happen, they are a special moment of grace, and communion with God, and they can leave a person changed for life.

98: Massage. Being able to do backrubs is a good skill to take to college campuses. When you give another person a massage, you communicate with his body through touch, and relax the flesh, the body, and the person you are touching, more fully than he can himself. It is different from many other touches, in that it is not spontaneous or habitual; it is a special time set aside to connect.

99: Saying farewell.

Parting is such sweet sorrow.

-William Shakespeare

*When someone's leaving, people say many of the things that*

When someone is leaving, people say many of the things that they should have said long before but never got around to. Barriers come down. People realize how much others mean. They cry.

That is an obvious insight into saying farewell. What is less obvious is that these things can happen at any time. It is not so much that people can't normally commune in this manner and are specially enabled to when someone leaves, as that people normally avoid this communion, and when some leaves they realize how bad it would be to them at any point. You can tell someone how much they mean to you any day. I did something like this for Robin recently, as I stopped from writing this to think about practicing what I was preaching. He and I are both glad I did. One part of the barriers coming down is that sharing yourself is inherently risky, and there is less risk if a person is leaving — if you share something that makes the other person think you are stupid, at least he'll be away. So people share more. If you realize this, you can share on ordinary days what you would normally share when saying farewell — and grow closer. It might be a good idea to hold a farewell party for someone when he's not going away. The same may be said for a funeral — there is something magnificent that goes on at a funeral, that doesn't really have to wait for a person's death.

100: Anything. Thursday night, I was at a band concert at Ben and Joe's school. Afterwards, when walking through the mass of people, there was a moment when I was looking down into a little girl's face, and as it passed I realized I was kything. There is a sense in which anything can be kything, if it is done in the right way.

Now we kythe darkly and through a glass. Then we shall kythe fully, spirit to spirit, even as we are fully kythed.

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I look for books that are filled with the Romance; they come to me in the strangest of ways, but they are impossible to find. I started this journal thinking it was not very good... I have realized that I may be writing a book filled with the Romance, a scrapbook of the beautiful. It is not something that I could have even approached if I had tried.

Sunday, 12/5/99

I haven't been writing in the main part of the journal for a couple of days, because I have been concentrating my creative energies on the kything entry. I haven't really had a singular event to prompt a journal entry, but I wanted to put something in as an update on how I'm doing.

When I thought about what to write, I realized something. All is well with my soul. Of course I should not get cocky ("He who thinks he stands should take heed lest he fall."), and this isn't the end of the growth God wants for me. But I am close to God. I am spiritually awake. It is in a way that would surprise me; I am doing ordinary things, and enjoying working on my creations. Ecclesiastes, even if it is the most pessimistic book of the [Bible](#), says (2:24, 9:7, NRSV):

There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This, also, is from the hand of God.

Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do.

I am doing these things, and enjoying their blessings. It is nothing spectacular, at least not in the Hollywood sense, but Hollywood can be quite blind. I am worshipping God in the

Hollywood can be quite blind. I am worshipping God in the ordinary things that are not very ordinary at all, and I see in them what Baudelaire cannot.

Here ends the Journal of an Awakening. It ends, not for the reasons I anticipated at the beginning, but because the awakening has reached its proper end (both finis and telos): I am awake. I mean to continue to journal, but this journal has reached its logical conclusion.

Please pray for me, that I remain steadfast in the abundant life God has given me.

JSH

soli deo gloria

# Knights and Ladies

I would like to talk about men and women and the debate about whether we are genuinely different or whether this aspect of our bodies is just packaging that has no bearing on who we are. I would like to begin by talking about three things:

- "Egalitarianism," which says not only that men and women are due equal respect but the differences are differences of body only and not differences of mind, heart, and spirit.
- "Complementarianism," which says that there are real and personal differences, and men and women are meant to complement each other.
- Why the debate between egalitarianism and complementarianism is like a car crash.

## **Egalitarianism, Complementarianism, and Car Crashes**

I was in a theology class when the professor argued emphatically that for two claims to contradict each other, one must be the exact opposite of the other. With the example he gave, it sounded fairly impressive, and it took me a while to be able to explain my disagreement.

Saying, for one claim to contradict another, that one must be the exact opposite of the other, its mirror image, is like saying that you can only have an auto collision if the two cars are the same kind of car, with the same shape, and they must be perfectly aligned when they hit each other—because if there's part of one car that doesn't touch the other car, then there hasn't been a real collision.

That is simply wrong. In the world of cars, only the tiniest fraction of collisions are two identical cars, hitting each other dead center to dead center. When there's a collision, it is usually two different things which hit off center. And the same is true of ideas. Most collisions in the realm of ideas are two very different things, not mirror images. What happens is that one piece of one of them, perhaps the leftmost edge of the bumper, hits one piece of the other, and in both that one piece is connected to the whole structure. There is much more involved

in the collision, on both sides, than that one little bit.

A debate many Christians care about, the debate between the feminist-like egalitarians and the more traditional complementarians, is interesting. (I'll say 'complementarian' for now, even though I don't like the term.) It is interesting as an example of a debate where the collision is not between mirror images. Egalitarianism is not the mirror image of complementarianism, and complementarianism is not the mirror image of egalitarianism. They are very different beasts from each other.

Although this is only the outer shell, egalitarians are usually better communicators than complementarians. Most egalitarians make an explicit claim and communicate it very powerfully. Complementarians usually have trouble explaining their position, let alone presenting it as compellingly as egalitarians do. This has the effect that people on both sides have a much clearer picture of what egalitarian stands for than what complementarianism stands for. The egalitarian claim is often backed by a coherent argument, while the complementarian claim may have Biblical proof texts but often has little else.

I would like to try and suggest what complementarians have so much trouble explaining.

## Colors

When I took a cognitive science class, the professor explained a problem for cognitive science: 'qualia'. A computer can represent red and green as two different things. As far as theory problems go, that's easy to take care of. The problem is that the computer knows red and green are different only as we can know that two numbers are different. It can't deal with the **redness** of the **red** or the **greenness** of the **green**: in other words it lacks qualia. It can know things are different, but not experience them as really, qualitatively different.

Some people can only hear complementarianism as rationalising, "White is brighter than black." Yet it is foundationally a claim of, "**Red is red and green is green.**" I don't like the term 'complementarian.' It tells part of the truth, but not enough—a property you can see, but not the essence. I would suggest the term 'qualitarian,' for a belief in qualia and qualitative differences. The term's not perfect either, but it's describing some of the substance rather than detail. From here on I'll say 'qualitarian' rather than 'complementarian' to emphasise that there are qualia involved.

With that mentioned, I'd like to make the most unpalatable of my claims next, and hope that if the reader will be generous enough not to write me off yet, I may be able to make some coherent sense.

# **The Great Chain of Being**

This is something that was important to many Christians and which encapsulates a way of looking on the world that can be understood, but takes effort.

**God**

**Angels**

**Humans**

**Animals**

**Plants**

**Rocks**

**Nothing**

The Great Chain of Being was believed for centuries. When

the people who believed it were beginning to think like moderns, the Great Chain of Being began to look like the corporate ladder.

If there were things above you, you wanted to climb higher because it's not OK to be you if someone else is higher than you.

If there were things above you, you wanted to look down and sneer because there was something wrong with anything below you. That's how hierarchy looks if the only way you can understand it is as a copy of the corporate ladder.

Before then, people saw it differently. To be somewhere in the middle of the great order was neither a reason to scorn lower things nor covet higher places. Instead, there was a sense of connection. If we are the highest part of the physical creation, then we are to be its custodian and in a real sense its representative. If we are spirits as well, we are not squashed by the fact that God is above us; the one we should worship looks on us in love.

Unlike them, our culture has had centuries of democracy and waving the banner of equality so high we can forget there are other banners to wave. We strive for equality so hard that it's easy to forget that there can be other kinds of good.

The Great Chain of Being is never explained in the Bible, but it comes out of a certain kind of mindset, a mindset better equipped to deal with certain things.

There's an old joke about two people running from a bear. One stops to put on shoes. The other says, "What are you doing?" The first says, "I'm stopping to put on tennis shoes." The second says, "You can't outrun the bear!" "I don't need to outrun the bear. I only need to outrun you."

One might imagine a medieval speaking with a postmodern. The medieval stands in his niche in the Great Chain of Being and stops. The postmodern says, "Why are you stopping?" The

medieval says, "I want to enjoy the glorious place God has granted me in the *Great Chain of Being*." The postmodern says, "How can you be happy with that? There are others above you."

The medieval says, "Not all of life is running from a bear."

What am I trying to say? Am I saying, for instance, that a man is as high above a woman as God is above an angel? No. All people—men, women, young, old, infant, red, yellow, black, white—are placed at the same spot on the *Great Chain of Being*.

The Bible deals with a paradox that may be called "equality with distinction". Paul writes that "In Christ there is no Jew nor Greek", yet claims that the advantage of the Jew is "much in every way." Biblical thinking has room to declare both an equality at deepest level—such as exists between men and women—and recognize a distinction. There is no need to culturally argue one away to defend the other. Both are part of the truth. It is good to be part of a Creation that is multilayered, with inequality and not equality between the layers. If this is so, how much more should we be able to consider distinction with fundamental equality without reading the distinction as the corporate ladder's abrasive inequality?

One writer talked about equality in relation to containers being full. To modify her image, Christianity wants all of us to be as full as possible. However, it does not want a red paint can to be filled with green paint, nor a green paint can to be filled with red paint. It wants the red and green paint cans to be equally full, but does not conclude that the green can is only full if it has the same volume of red paint as the red paint can. It desires equality in the sense of everyone being full, but does not desire e-quality (being without a qualitative difference), in the sense of qualia being violated.

## Zen and the Art of Un-Framing Questions

May we legitimately project man-like attributes up on to God? Before answering that question, I'd like to suggest that there are assumptions made by the time that question is asked. The biggest one is that God is gender-neutral, and so any talking about God as masculine is projecting something foreign up on to him.

The qualitarian claim is not that we may legitimately project man-like attributes up on to God. It is that God has projected God-like attributes down on to men. Those are different claims.

A feminist theologian said to a master, "I think it is important that we keep an open mind and avoid confining God to traditional categories of gender."

The master said, "Of course. Why let God reveal himself as masculine when you can confine him to your canons of political correctness?"

I can't shake a vision of an articulate qualitarian giving disturbing answers to someone's questions and sounding like an annoying imitation of a Zen master:

**Interlocutor:**

What would you say to, "A woman's place is in the House—

and in the Senate!"?

**Articulate Qualitarian:**

Well, if we're talking about disrespectful, misogynistic...  
Wait a minute... Let me respond to the intention behind your  
question.

Do you know the Bible story about the Woman at the  
Well?

**Interlocutor:**

Yes! It's one of my favorite stories.

**Articulate Qualitarian:**

Do you know its cultural context?

**Interlocutor:**

Not really.

**Articulate Qualitarian:**

Most Bible stories—including this one—speak for  
themselves. A few of them are much richer if you know  
cultural details that make certain things significant.

Every recorded interaction between Jesus and women,  
Jesus broke rules. To start off, a rabbi wasn't supposed to  
talk with women. But Jesus really broke the rules here.

When a lone woman came out and he asked for water, she  
was shocked enough to ask why he did so. And there's  
something to her being alone.

Drawing water was a communal women's task. The women  
of the village would come and draw water together; there  
was a reason why this woman was alone: no one would be  
caught dead with her. Everyone knew that she was the  
village slut.

Her life was dominated by shame. When Jesus said,  
"...never thirst again," she heard an escape from shamefully  
drawing water alone, and she asked Jesus to help her hide

from it. When he said to call her husband, she gave an evasive and ambiguous reply. He gave a very blunt response: "You are right in saying you have no husband, for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband."

Yowch.

Instead of helping her run from her shame, Jesus pulled her through it, and she came out the other side, running without any shame, calling, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did!"

There's much more, but I want to delve into one specific detail: there was something abnormal about her drawing water alone. Drawing water was women's work. Women's work was backbreaking toil—as was men's work—but it was not done in isolation. It was something done in the company of other people.

It's not just that one culture. There are old European paintings that show a group of women, bent over their washboards, talking and talking. Maybe I'm just romanticizing because I haven't felt how rough washboards are to fingers. But I have a growing doubt that labor-saving devices are all they're cracked up to be. Vacuum cleaners were introduced as a way to lessen the work in the twice-annual task of beating rugs. Somehow each phenomenal new labor-saving technology seems to leave housewives with even more drudgery.

I have sympathy for feminists who say that women are better off doing professional work in community than doing housework in solitary confinement. I think feminists are probably right that the Leave It to Beaver arrangement causes women to be lonely and depressed. (I'm not sure that

"Turn the clock back, all the way back, to 1954!" represents the best achievement conservatives can claim.)

The traditional arrangement is not Mom, Dad, two kids, and nothing more. Across quite a lot of cultures and quite a lot of history, the usual pattern has kept extended families together (seeing Grandma didn't involve interstate travel), and made those extended families part of an integrated community. From what I've read, women are happier in intentional communities like Reba Place.

**Interlocutor:**

Do you support the enfranchisement of women?

**Articulate Qualitarian:**

Let me visit the [dict.org](http://dict.org) website. Webster's 1913 says:

Enfranchisement \En\*fran"chise\*ment\, n.

1. Releasing from slavery or custody. —Shak.

2. Admission to the freedom of a corporation or body politic investiture with the privileges of free citizens.

Enfranchisement of copyhold (Eng. Law), the conversion of copyhold estate into a freehold. —Mozley & W.

WordNet seems less helpful; it doesn't really mention the sense you want.

enfranchisement

1: freedom from political subjugation or servitude

2: the act of certifying [syn: certification] [ant: c

If I were preaching on your question, I might do a Greek-style exegesis and say that your choice of languages fuses the egalitarian request to grant XYZ with the insinuation that their opponents' practice is equivalent to slavery. Wow.

I think you're using loaded language. Would you be willing to restate your question in less loaded terms?

**Interlocutor:**

Ok, I'll ask a different way, but will you promise not to answer with a word-study?

**Articulate Qualitarian:**

Ok, I won't answer with a word-study unless you ask.

**Interlocutor:**

Do you believe that women have the same long list of rights as men?

**Articulate Qualitarian:**

Hmm... I'm trying to think about how to answer this without being misleading...

**Interlocutor:**

Please answer me literally.

**Articulate Qualitarian:**

I'm afraid I'm going to have to say, "No."

**Interlocutor:**

But you at least believe that women have some rights, correct?

**Articulate Qualitarian:**

No.

**Interlocutor:**

What?!?

**Articulate Qualitarian:**

I said I wouldn't give a word-study...

Is it OK if I give a comparable study of a concept?

**Interlocutor:**

[Quietly counts to ten and takes a deep breath:] Ok.

**Articulate Qualitarian:**

I don't believe that women have any rights. I don't believe that men have any rights, either. The Bible doesn't use rights like we do. It answers plenty of questions we try to

solve with rights: it says we shouldn't murder, steal, and so on. But the older Biblical way of doing this said, "Don't do this," or "Be like Christ," or something like that.

Then this really odd moral framework based on rights came along, and all of a sudden there wasn't a universal law against unjustified killing, but an entitlement not to be killed. At first it seemed not to make much difference. But now more and more of our moral reasoning is in terms of 'rights', which increasingly say, not "Don't do this," or "You must do that," but "Here's the long list of entitlements that the universe owes me." And that has meant some truly strange things.

In the context of the concrete issues that qualitaricians discuss with egalitarianism, the Biblical concept of seeking the good of all is quietly remade into seeking the enfranchisement of all, and so it seems that the big question is whether women get the same rights as men—quite apart from the kind of situation where language comparing your opponents' behavior to slavery is considered polite.

**Interlocutor:**

Couldn't we listen to, say, Eastern Philosophy?

**Articulate Qualitarian:**

There's a lot of interesting stuff in Eastern philosophy. The contrast between Confucian and Taoist concepts of virtue, for instance, is interesting and worth exploring, especially in this nexus. I'm really drawing a blank as to how one could get a rights-based framework from Asian philosophy. And I'm not sure African mindsets would be much more of a help, for instance. Even if you read one Kwaanza pamphlet, it's hard to see how individual rights could come from the seven African values. The value of Ujima, or collective work and

responsibility, speaks even less of individual rights than,  
"Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can  
do for your country."

**Interlocutor:**

Ok, let me change the subject slightly. Would you  
acknowledge that Paul was a progressive?

**Articulate Qualitarian:**

Hmm... reminds me of a C.S. Lewis book in which Lewis quotes  
a medieval author. The author is talking about some  
important Greek philosopher and says, "Now when we come  
to a difficulty or ambiguity, we should always ascribe the  
views most worthy of a man of his stature."

Lewis's big complaint was that this kind of respect always  
reads into an author the biases and assumptions of the  
reader's age. It honors the author enough to think he  
believed what we call important, but not enough that the  
author can disagree with our assumptions and be able to  
correct us.

When we ask if Paul is a progressive, there are two basic  
options. Either we say that Paul was not a progressive, and  
relegate him to our understanding of a misogynist, or we  
generously overlook a passage here and there and generously  
include him as one of our progressives.

It seems that neither response allows Paul to be an  
authority who knows something we don't.

On second thought, maybe it's a good thing there aren't too  
many articulate qualitarians.

## **Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus... and Gender Psychologists are from the Moon**

When pop psychology talks about gender, it is trying to make academic knowledge available to the rest of us. An academic textbook by Em Griffin illustrates Deborah Tannen's theories, saying, "Jan hopes she's marrying a 'big ear'." This thread is picked up very well in popular works.

William Harley's *His Needs, Her Needs* is a sort of Christianized *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. Harley devotes a full chapter to explaining that one of the most foundational needs for a husband to understand is a woman's need for listening. He devotes a full chapter to convincing husbands that it is essential that they listen to everything their wives want to say. It was perhaps because reading this work (and *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*, part of *You Just Don't Understand*, etc.) that I was shocked when I reread C.S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*. It was much more than Mother Dimble's words, "Husbands were made to be talked to. It helps them concentrate their minds on what they're reading..."

The shock was deep. It wasn't like having a rug pulled out from under your feet. It was more like standing with your feet

on bare floor and having the floor pulled out from under your feet.

The gender books I'd read, both Christian and non-Christian, made a seamless fusion of the basic raw material, and one particular interpretation. The interpretation was as hard to doubt as the raw material itself—and one couldn't really see the fusion as something that can be questioned. It was like looking at a number of startlingly accurate pictures of scenes on earth—and then realising that all the pictures were taken from the moon.

That Hideous Strength suggests an answer to the question, "How else could it be?" I'm hesitant to suggest everyone else will have the same experience, but...

If we look at a Hollywood movie targeting young men, there will be violent action, a fast pace, and a sense of adventure. A movie made for young women will have people talking and delving into emotions as they grow closer, as they grow into more mature relationships. If we sum these up in a single word, the men's movie is full of action, and the women's movie is filled with relationship.

Aristotle characterized masculinity as active and femininity as passive. It seems clear to me that he was grappling with a real thing, the same thing that shapes our movie offerings. It also seems clear that he didn't quite get it right. Masculinity is active. That much is correct. But femininity is not described by the absence of such action. It's described by the presence of relationship. It seems that the following can be said:

- Aristotle was grappling with, and trying to understand, something real.
- Even though he's observing something real, his

interpretation was skewed.

These two things didn't stop with Aristotle. If a thinker as brilliant as Aristotle fell into this trap, maybe gender psychology is also liable to stumble this way, too. (Or at least today's gender psychology stumbles this way. If you're willing to listen to people who look and talk a bit different and are a bit older than us, Charles Shedd's *Letters to Karen* and *Letters to Philip* are examples of slightly older books worth the time to look at.)

## Christian Teaching

About this point, I expect a question like, "Ok, men reflect the masculine side of God. But don't you have a place for femininity, and can't women reflect the feminine side of God?"

This is a serious question, and it reflects a serious concern. Many Hindus believe that everything is either part of God or evil: your inmost spirit is a real part of God, and your body is intrinsically evil and illusory like everything else physical. I'm told that *Genesis 1* was quite a shocker when it appeared—not, so much, because it says we're made in the image of God, but because after the stars, rocks, plants, and animals were created, the text keeps on saying, "And God saw that it was good." That's really a staggering suggestion, if you knew the other nations' creation stories. The Babylonians believed that the god Marduk killed the demoness Tiamat, tore her dragon carcass apart, and made half of it the land and half of it the sky. So your body and mine, every forest, every star, is part of a demon's carcass that happens to be left over after a battle.

Please think about this claim for a minute, and then look at part of *Genesis 1*:

- Creation didn't happen as a secondary result of divine combat. God created the world because he specifically wanted to do so.

- Physical matter, and life, and everything else, is good.
- God made us in his image. Only then was his creation very good, and complete.

One thing that comes out of these things is that God can create good. God created the physical world without being physical. Our bodies, indeed the whole natural world, are good, because God created something outside of himself. Femininity is like this, only much more so. Femininity is a created good, and it is much more beautiful, more mysterious, more wondrous, more powerful thing than physical matter. People are the unique creation where matter meets spirit—no other creation can claim that. Women are the unique point where spirit meets the very apex of femininity.

Every woman is a mystery, and every man is a king. To be a Christian man is to be made like the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There is something kingly and lordly about manhood. Part of this is understood when you realize that this does not mean domineering other people and standing above them, but standing under them, like the servant king who washed feet. The sign and sigil of male authority is not a crown of gold, but a crown of thorns.

But all this is a hint. I give sketch here and there, and I hope less to provide an inescapable logical framework than suggest entry points that can look into the Bible and see these things.

I'd like to give a glimpse of the qualities:

# Qualia

## Lord Adam, Dragonslayer

If you could see Adam, you would see a knight, in burnished armor brightly gleaming, astride a white horse. What you wouldn't see is why the armor shines brightly. It is not burnished by him, nor any other human hands, but the claws of the dragons he wars against. Under his helmet is a lion's mane of thick hair and beard. Under his breastplate are

## Lady Eve, Poet's Heart

If you could see Eve at her best, she would be beside a fire, inside a great hall. She would be stoking a fire with one hand, another hand would call forth forth music from a silver harp, another hand would be writing a letter, and she would use both hands to embrace the sorrowing child on her lap in comforting love.

scars, some quite close to his heart.

This knight errant yearns for quests. Something difficult, something dangerous, something active. Some place to prove himself by serving in a costly way. He longs for that battle when his blood will mingle with that of his fellow warriors and he may at last embark on the last great adventure.

He has a lord above him, to whom he owes allegiance and honor. He is also a mentor, turning his face to a squire whom he focuses on and draws up. He draws them, as he was drawn, out of the comfort of home, into the mysteries of life,

And she would do this lightly, joyfully, with a smile from the other side of pain. Though Eve sits still, one can almost see her dancing. It would take time to see all her many layers of beauty... if that were even possible. What is the secret behind her enigmatic smile? What deep mysteries lie hidden in her heart of hearts?

Her beauty is as a rose: a ladder of thorns leads up to a flower so exquisite as to be called God's autograph. She toils hard, and it is difficult to see lines of pain in her face only because

and into the company of men and society to reconnect more deeply. He has tried to explain that siring a child is something an impudent youth can do, but being a spiritual father is the mark of a man.

Once his mind is on a task, it moves forward from beginning to end. It moves with the force of an avalanche. He does one task at a time, and wants to do it well.

There is another side to his seriousness. He can be deadly serious, but there is a merry twinkle in his eye.

His force and his energy are too much to contain, and he is capable of catching

she has worked through them so that they have become part of her joy. She knows a mother's worry, and she looks on others with a mother's caring eyes. She looks with the joy on the other side of sorrow.

Her home is her castle, and it is a castle she tries to run well. Adam... well, dear man as he is, he isn't very good with managing resources. She runs the castle in an orderly and efficient manner, and as the lady in charge, she handles well a great many things that her lord wouldn't know how

people off guard.  
(Especially in his practical jokes.) Like the lion, he is not safe and not tame; he is both serious and silly, and can astound in both. When he plays with children, playing with him is both like playing with a kitten and playing with a thunderstorm. To his lady Adam turns with reverence. She is a wonder to him. The extravagance of the quests she bids him and he embarks on, is a spectacular offshoot of his more quiet service in private. Though Adam would never see it this way, he is taller when he bows and kisses her hand, and richer when he gives her a costly

to begin doing. The castle is their castle, of course, but there are things that need attending to so that Adam can continue slaying dragons. Yet to say that is to put last things first. The reason she handles so many taxing details is that Adam is the light of her life, her king and her lord, her bright morning star. She turns to her loom as a place to make wall hangings. At least, that's what someone would say if he missed the point completely. She makes beautiful wall hangings, but there's more.

gift.

His honor is his life, and wants to live and act as a son of God. He believes that faith works, and strives to show virtue and behave in a manner worthy of Christ.

**Favorite**

**Scripture Passage:**

"And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to

The loom is a centering place for her, a quieting place. After other things happen that take processing, she settles into that peace. Her heart is quieted as she lets it all sort out.

That quieting is not far from her mystic's heart. She is mystery and lives in connection with the mystery of faith. There is One she is closer to than her lord, and presence, mystical communion, dwelling in the presence of the divine, is precious to her.

**Favorite**

**Scripture Passage:**

the glory of God the  
Father."

**A Quote:**

"God, give me  
mountains to climb  
and the strength for  
climbing."

"Why do you  
trouble the  
woman? For she  
has done a  
beautiful thing to  
me. For you always  
have the poor with  
you, but you will  
not always have  
me. In pouring this  
ointment on my  
body she has done  
it to prepare me  
for burial. Truly, I  
say to you,  
wherever this  
gospel is preached  
in the whole world,  
what she has done  
will be told in  
memory of her."

**A Quote:**

"Little surprises  
and big hugs and  
kisses.

Musical dances  
and bright  
reminisces,  
Quiet with stories  
and roast leg of  
lamb,

People who value  
me for who I am,  
Something to say  
and someone who  
will hear it,  
A home in good  
order and a  
mystical spirit,  
Warm fireside  
chats and a  
minstrel who  
sings,  
These are a few  
of my favorite  
things."

Jonathan Hayward, with thanks to Martin, Phil, Mary, Xenia,  
Patrick, Yoby, Mom, and Kathryn.

# On Kything

Nota bene: Before the reflection, I have included a couple of journal entries which are alluded to and whose content contributes to the discourse. People not interested can [skip down](#).

I was walking outside and met Robin, and we talked. When he asked me how I was doing, I didn't have much to say, but mentioned a few thoughts I'd had. Then I asked him how he was doing, and he said that he had been feeling really close to God, and more aware of other people.

I hadn't mentioned, because it had been around so long, the emptiness I was feeling, and I became more acutely aware of how dry my own spiritual life had been, how mechanical of an exercise my Bible reading was.

That night, I was walking over to Wheaton's campus for Pooh's Corner (a group of people that meets to read children's books aloud). A long and slow-moving freight train was crossing the tracks. While I was standing and waiting, I thought about the conversation and my own dryness, and decided to work on my spiritual state when I got home.

—No, not when you get home. Now.

—Not now! I'm waiting for a train.

—Now.

I decided to do something then and there. But what? Initiative and power are all on God's side; there was nothing I could do that would accomplish closeness between God and me. So I prayed a simple prayer.

That moment, I was filled with joy and peace, deeper than I had known in a long time. I paced back and forth in that joy and peace waiting for the train — enjoying through them the simple little things: the walking, the sound of the train. Whatever I did, there was God.

I thought about Thérèse de Lisieux's little way (as depicted in the movie *Household Saints*), about resting in God's presence, and of being in God's will in even the most simple places — even waiting for a train. At a low spot — when I medically can't work above half-time, and have an intermittent job not related to computers — and when used to thinking about serving God in spectacular and heroic ways, it was good to realize that. I went on to Pooh's corner, and enjoyed things there a great deal more. There were milk and cookies, and I enjoyed them in a different way than I usually enjoy food. I usually eat good food slowly and in little bites, to consciously savor its flavor — but I do not completely engage, or rather I am not able to let go of my disengagement. This time I was able to engage, and not just with the milk and cookies; I was also able to engage with the camaraderie and silliness.

When I create something (even something little), there is a first conception of the idea, then an incubation period where I let the idea ferment, then a time of implementation. The fermenting period is one which I cherish, and one which I had rarely experienced since a loss of creativity associated with my medication (the creativity has returned after an adjustment of the levels of those medications). I experienced it then. I also

spent time worrying about the loss of the joy and peace,  
although I tried not to.

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At Pooh's Corner, I was distracted for a good part of it, wanting to get up and write about the posting on the forum wall, but still trying to enjoy it, as that would be all the Pooh's Corner I would have for the week. Pooh's Corner meets in the lobby of Fischer dorm, where I stayed my freshman year. It is a place full of distractions and people passing through. There is a piano there, and partway through I realized in a flash that I had been drinking the music in the same way that I drink wine.

What I mean is this: Wine, as contrasted to e.g. milk or juice, is something you can only take a small amount of. You can drink water until your thirst is quenched, or have several glasses of milk, but with wine it is different. If you are having one drink, then that translates to a 5 ounce glass — not even a full cup. If you drink it the same way you drink Pepsi, you are going to find yourself holding an empty glass before you know it.

Consequently, when I drink wine, I sip it very slowly, and I consciously savor it in a way that would never occur to me if I could drink an indefinite quantity and remain sober. What I realized last night as I was thinking about my realization was that I taste wine in a way that I do not taste milk. I drink milk, and like it, and vaguely and absently taste it, but do not taste it wholly. With wine, the realization that I only have a little amount and it will soon be gone keeps me from absently quaffing glass after glass; when I have a glass of wine, I sometimes close my eyes and am able to taste it so intensely that I am not aware of anything else.

That is what happened with the music, and which I realized afterwards. I have no control over the music that is played, and the most beautiful passages seem to be over so quickly. At one point in the music, I was doing the same thing as I do when I

hold a sip of wine in my mouth, close my eyes, and savor it — I was concentrating on it so intensely that I was not aware of anything else (in a busy room with many voices talking and people passing through), and when it was over I had a feeling of having drunk it to the dregs.

It was somewhat strange to realize that I had learned such a thing from wine. My attitude towards alcohol is European rather than American, and (without trying to trace the argument here) I regard alcohol as a symbol of moderation, and learning to enjoy things in a temperate manner (the Puritan attitude towards alcohol). I had not, though, expected that in drinking I would learn something of this nature. I think that what I did is close to what goes on in empathic listening — a drinking in with your whole being. At the beginning of this journal, I talked about not being able to engage. This is a point where I have learned to truly engage in one area, and it may well help me to engage in others — it has helped me to enjoy music, at least.

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I was also thinking, Tuesday, about a point related to [chapter 4](#) of G.K. Chesterton's [Orthodoxy](#). Specifically, many things imagined as magic and psychic phenomena are exaggerated and cosmetically altered versions of things God has given us. For example, teleportation (to be able to move instantaneously from point to point) is less astounding than being able to move from point to point in the first place, and there are many creatures which live without any such faculty (such as trees). Telekenesis is not that much more astounding than having hands with which to move things. Mental telepathy is quite similar to speech, and the surprise we would have at seeing mental telepathy is nothing like the surprise an animal (with a sufficiently anthropomorphic mind) would have at discovering that once one of these creatures learns something, the rest know it. It would be like what reaction we might have upon first learning certain things about Star Trek's Borg, multiplied tenfold. If it is thought of in this manner, the concept of speech is far more impressive than the concept of altering speech by changing the channel through which the mind-to-mind transmission occurs. It might be also pointed out that, in the past few millenia, we have found another channel for mind-to-mind transmission to occur: reading and writing. When one pair of Wycliffe missionaries was working with some tribesmen, they were trying to persuade the chief of the advantage of writing. One of them left the other room, and the other one asked the chief's mother's name, and wrote it down. When his partner returned and read her name, the chief almost fainted.

There are a couple of things that come from this.

The first is that God's creation really is magical, in the sense of being something awesome, and something we should be amazed

that we have. It is in our nature to become blasé; our eyes become glazed over at magnificent things. If we can somehow let scales fall from our eyes, we would be dumbstruck at what we have — for example, music.

The second is that, if we can become blasé at what God has given us, we would probably also become blasé at the things we fantasize about. When I was a child, I absolutely loved to swim, and I wished that I could breathe underwater... but that (after a little while) would have held nothing for me than being able to breathe air, hold my breath, and swim underwater. I have fantasized about all of the special powers that I would like to have, and when I do that I do not much enjoy the gifts I have, not only as a human being, but personally — my sharp mind and so on and so forth.

Also related to this insight was kything... In *A Wind in the Door*, Madeleine l'Engle uses the word 'kythe' to describe a beautiful communion beyond communication. It is the whole cherubic language, of which mental telepathy is just the beginning. It holds a similar place to 'grok' in Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, and the meanings of the two words are similar. I am not going to try per se to describe its meaning further, but simply refer the reader to that excellent book.

What he had actually seen she could not begin to guess. That he had seen something, something unusual, she was positive.

This is the same sort of feeling I felt about kything. There is something in that word that strikes a deep chord in my spirit; it is the primary reason why that is my favorite book

out of the series, and at times been one of my favorite books at all. In conjunction with the above musing, l'Engle's portrait of kything has a beauty that is not an ex nihilo creation, that shows forth a beauty that is really in this world but which we do not see. I would very much like to kythe — but I can't do what's in the book without sinning. What is in this world that embodies the beauty of kything?

As I was thinking and praying, I realized several things that may, in a sense, be called kything, that are beautiful in the same way. I felt a Spirit-tugging to list a hundred such things. I don't know if I'll be able to do that, or if so where I'll come up with a hundred, but I will none the less try.

#### 100 Ways to Kythe

1: Prayer. Prayer allows a kind of communion with God that (at least this side of Heaven) we can't have with anyone else. With God, prayer is not limited to words; we can pray with words, or with images, or with music... Prayer has the same opportunities for exploration as kything.

2: Holy Communion. God speaks to us through that.

3: Martial arts sparring. It takes time (I've studied martial arts for a little over a year, and I've only begun to taste this), but there is something martial artists call 'harmony with opponents' that is a deep attunement. I've had one sparring match where I knew everything my opponent was going to do about a quarter second before he did it. A good book to read to get a little better feeling for this is *The Way of Karate: Beyond Technique*.

4: Flow, as described in Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence*.

5: Empathic listening. This is listening in which the listener is completely attuned to the speaker. I don't know any books to

reccommend for that topic.

6: Drinking as I drink wine, or as I drank music.

7: Improvising musically. Music is an alien language, not symbolic, not logical, and yet speaking powerfully. When you can really let the music flow through you, you are kything.

8: Making love. The subject of the Song of Songs is not just a physical act, but a total communion between a man and a woman, united for life.

9: Stillness. There is a way of being still that is kything.

10: What I did at Pooh's Corner the first night described. (Well, there's ten at one sitting... I expect to come back to this later.)

11: Mathematical problem solving. I won't even begin to explain this, beyond saying that to those who have experienced it no explanation is necessary. Just remembered — there's a good book on this topic for non-mathematicians, entitled, *The Art of Mathematics*.

12: Musical improvisation with another person. I have never done this, but I remember, at Calvin, being fascinated by my friends Bruce and Janna talking about when they improvised together at the keyboard. It worked. I believe, from conversations, that the Spirit was guiding them, and it was a communion with the Spirit and each other.

13: Singing prayers in tongues. I don't pray this way very often, but when I do, it's very uplifting. It is a praying, not with the rational mind, but with the spirit, and it receives what to say moment by moment from the Spirit.

14: Non-sexual touch. It's going to be hard to say something brief here, as I've written a whole [treatise](#) on this point, but to try: Non-sexual touch can be deep, and express something words cannot. It is the nature of love to draw close; touch is an

incarnate race's physical means of communicating love, and for babies the first and foremost way of knowing love. Beyond that... if what I am saying doesn't resonate within you (or if you'd just like a hug), ask me for a hug — a real one. It took me a long time, but I have learned how to touch, and at times to drink touch as I drink wine.

15: Dancing. Wheaton alumnus Alan Light wrote a beautiful letter about how he had adopted a code of duty, honor, and steadfastness, and a folkdancing class had opened his eyes to joy, peace, and freedom. There is something beautiful of those things that can be learned in dancing, something that it's easy not to know you're missing. (For all that, I don't dance very well. Before a knee injury, I had something to do with my feet that looked impressive, but I haven't learned to dance (to commune with others, to connect in a merry, moving hug) as I have learned to touch.)

(Coming back after a time) I can recall one occasion when I really danced. At the last Mennonite Conference I attended, both youth and adult worship were [religion within the bounds of amusement](#), but the youth worship was at least honest about it, and I preferred it to the adult sessions. Before a Ken Medema concert, there was a group of high schoolers playing a dance game, and I joined in. It lifted me out of sorrow, and there was a vibrant synergy, a joy and connection and communion. It's something that everyone should experience at least once. He who dances, sings twice.

16: An I-Thou relationship. An I-Thou relationship differs from an I-It relationship as kything differs from mental telepathy. I only got halfway through Martin Buber's I and Thou before setting the book down, because it was too hard to concentrate on, but it says a lot about how to kythe. As pertains

to prayer and kything with God, I would pose an insight in the form of a riddle: how is it that the saint and mystic refers to God as 'I' without blaspheming?

17: Dreaming. One story in a marvelous book, *Tales of a Magic Monastery* by Theophane the Monk, ended with a character saying, "While you tend to judge a monk by his decorum during the day, we judge him by the number of persons he touches at night, and the number of stars." Dreaming has always been special to me; it allows access to a different, fantastic world. It can be a way to kythe. What if there were a culture that regarded dreaming rather than waking as the aroused state?

18: Praying with another person. Where two or three are gathered, he is with them. When they are praying, there is not only an individual bond between each one and God; there are connections within the group. There have been some people who hold that a man and a woman who are not married to each other should not pray together; I do not agree with that, but the fact that such a position has been taken by levelheaded believers seems to underscore that there is a communion between people who pray together.

19: Artistic creation. When I create something, it fills my mind, my musings; I kythe with it as I give it form.

20: Children's play. Children's play can be timeless and absorbing, and Peter Kreeft, in *Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing*, says that the activity of Heaven will be neither work, which is wearying, nor rest, which is passive, but pure and unending play, an activity which is energetic and energizing. Playing with children is entering into another world, a magical world, and entering into it means kything.

21: Listening prayers; listening to the Spirit. Ordinarily we think of prayer as speaking to God, but it is also possible to

listen to him. And dancing with the Spirit — there are so many adventures to be had.

22: The Romance. There is a sacred Romance described in, for example, C.S. Lewis's *Pilgrim's Regress*, and Brent Curtis's *Less-Wild Lovers: Standing at the Crossroads of Desire*. You do not come to the Romance; the Romance comes to you, although you may respond. Being in that is kything.

(I thought I might be able to think of 20 ways of kything...  
I've already gotten past that, by God's grace.)

23: Silliness. When some friends are doing something silly — tickling or teasing (without going too far — this is something I'm not very good at), for example, it is not thought of in terms of something serious (as 'serious' is misunderstood to mean 'somber'). None the less, there is in the lightheartedness a bond being forged or strengthened, a connection being made. Kything at its best is communication that needs no symbolic content, that has something that can't be reduced to words. So is grabbing your friend's nose.

24: Friendship and family relations. This differs from the above items, in that it is not an instantaneous experience resembling an instant of kything. It is rather a bond over time that is more than communication, where hearts touch each other. It is a bond where two people know each other, and in the time spent together a connection accumulates.

25: Agape love. There is a vain phrase, "To know me is to love me," that might fruitfully be turned around as, "To love me is to know me."

One of the stories in *Tales of a Magic Monastery* goes roughly as follows:

### **The Crystal Globe**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There have been times that I have been able to see beauty in other people, sometimes beauty that they were not likely aware of. Robin and Joel might not think in these terms, but they have the sight that comes of love. The words, "I never met a man I didn't like," bespeak this kind of love. Love is the essence of kything.

26: Passion. When we are filled with passion, we are singleminded and undistracted. Someone said that hate is closer to love than is apathy; if anything is the opposite of kything, it is apathy. Kything need not be associated with intense emotion, but passion has something of the spark of kything.

27: Tears. Crying is cathartic, and comes unbidden at the moments when something comes really close to our heart — be it painful or joyful. My ex-fiancée Rebecca commented that she was impressed at one time she saw me crying in public. My friend Amy, after reading my [treatise on touch](#), said that she wished I had written a treatise on crying — something that is well worth writing, but I don't have it in me to write. To cry is to kythe.

28: Don a mask. Putting on a mask can be a way of revealing; in role-play, I have through characters found ways of expressing myself that I couldn't have done otherwise, and many people learn more about themselves through acting. Temporarily putting on a mask allows you to kythe through that mask in a way that wouldn't occur otherwise.

29: Stand on your head. With familiarity, we don't really see the things before us; we become Inspector Clouseaus. This is why some painters stood on their heads to look at landscapes — to see afresh what was familiar. Standing on your head is not exactly a way of kything, but it does open up ways to kythe that would normally be overlooked.

I just had a change of perspective... I thought about soliciting others' insights as to ways of kything, but with some guilt, as if thinking about not doing my work. Then I remembered what I was writing about — a connected communion — and that it would be very appropriate to have this be not my isolated work but the work of several minds. So I will solicit and seek the help of others.

30: Stop hurrying. Our culture is obsessed with doing things quickly, and rushes through almost everything. Carl Jung, heretic as he may have been, had rare moments of lucidity; in one of them, he said, "Hurry is not of the Devil. Hurry is the Devil." Removing hurry, and letting a moment last however long it should

last by its own internal timing, is not exactly kything, but it is a removal of one of the chief barriers we face to kything. Kything is a foretaste of the eternal, timeless joy that is to come, and in kything five seconds and five hours are the same. One good idea before trying to kythe is to take off your watch.

31: Walks. I have just come back from a kything walk. It was warm, the ground was moist after rain, the sky was mostly covered by pink clouds, and it was silence — there was even silence in the sound of cars going by. Summer nights, with fireflies and crickets and a crystalline blue sky, are excellent for kything walks. In thinking about this, I realized that what we have is an incarnate kything — spirit moving through matter — while l'Engle portrays what is essentially a discarnate kything — spirit moving without regard to matter. It is also interesting to note that (to me at least) touch is more kything than sight — with sight potentially working at almost any range (we can see stars billions of light-years away), and touch having no range at all. I'm glad that I can absorb the grass around me in a way that I cannot absorb the grass a thousand miles away.

32: Grace. Up until now, I have written about what you can do to kythe, but there is a lot of kything that God initiates and provides. Having a vision is a kind of kything, and that is not anything you can do. My time with God by the railroad tracks was a kything with him that I had no power to create.

33: Looking. I am allergic to cats, and my family has a wonderful grey tabby named Zappy. I usually don't touch her, but I do sometimes sit and gaze at her for a while. (I just realized that looking at Zappy for a while has the same effect on me as stroking a cat has on most people.) I can recall being warmed by the same gaze as an expectant mother in my small group, Kelly, smiled at me as I stroked Lena's head (Lena being

the 5 year old daughter of the group leader). In medieval culture, beholding the body and blood of Christ at mass was in a sense almost more held to be a receiving, a partaking, than eating and drinking them. The kything power of sight is attested to in Augustine's words: "See what you believe; become what you behold."

34: Absorbing poetry. Here is an example of a poem I wrote which I think is effective for the purpose:

Beyond  
Beyond doing, there is being.  
Beyond time, there is eternity.  
Beyond mortality, there is immortality.  
Beyond knowledge, there is faith.  
Beyond justice, there is mercy.  
Beyond happy thoughts, there is joy.  
Beyond communication, there is communion.  
Beyond petition, there is prayer.  
Beyond work, there is rest.  
Beyond right action, there is virtue.  
Beyond virtue, there is the Holy Spirit.  
Beyond appreciation, there is awe.  
Beyond sound, there is stillness.  
Beyond stillness, there is the eternal song.  
Beyond law, there is grace.  
Beyond even wisdom, there is love.  
Beyond all else, HE IS.

35: Mirth. The one line from all of C.S. Lewis's writing that most sticks in my mind comes from *Out of the Silent Planet*, where he wrote, "...but unfortunately, [name of villain] didn't

know the Malacandrian word for 'laugh'. Indeed, 'laugh' was a word which he didn't understand very well in any language." I debated about whether to put laughter in, as it has many forms — some of which, as the cynic's scoff, are corrupt, and some of which are lesser goods — but there is at least one form of laughter that really is kything. It is mirth. It can be found, for example, where old friends are sitting around a table after a hearty meal; the laughter is not just a reaction to isolated events, but a mood that has little eruptions over things that aren't that funny in themselves. It is mingled with companionship and fellow-feeling, and is a mirth that is the crowning jewel of forms of laughter.

36: Becoming good. Websters Revised Unabridged Dictionary 1913, p. 877, has:

### **Kythe**

(Kythe, Kithe) (ki&thlig;), v. t. [imp. Kydde, Kidde (kid"de); p. p. Kythed Kid; p. pr. & vb. n. Kything.] [OE. kythen, kithen, cuden, to make known, AS. cydan, fr. cud known. &radic;45. See Uncouth, Can to be able, and cf. Kith.] To make known; to manifest; to show; to declare. [Obs. or Scot.]

For gentle hearte kytheth gentillesse.

Chaucer.

### **Kythe**

(Kythe), v. t. To come into view; to appear. [Scot.]

It kythes bright . . . because all is dark around it.

Sir W. Scott.

The latter meaning of 'kythe' is the reason Madeleine l'Engle,

after a search, chose that word to carry her meaning.

C.S. Lewis said that the process of becoming good was like the process of becoming visible, in that objects becoming visible are more sharply distinguished not only from objects in obscurity but from each other; becoming good is becoming more truly the person you were created to be (being Named).

Becoming good is kything in the dictionary sense, and it is why I put it here. It is also a kind of kything, and an aid to kything, in l'Engle's sense — a stepping into the great kythe, into the great dance. It is like learning vocabulary to speech, or a conversation in which one learns vocabulary.

37: Comforting those in pain. Pain can isolate, but it can also bring down the walls around a person. I can remember now one time at a retreat when I was in the long, dark night of the soul, when I drank in a friend's silent presence and touch like a lifeline. The worst comforters offer words to fix everything with clichés and pat answers. The best often feel somewhat helpless, enduring an awkward silence as if they don't have anything to offer to so great a pain, but none the less offer something deep, more than they could have put into words, more often than they realize.

38: Presence. This facet of kything is perhaps best portrayed not directly, but in its stark silhouette, painted by Charles Baudelaire in his poem "Enivrez-vous": «Il faut être toujours ivre... Pour ne pas sentir l'horrible fardeau du Temps qui brise vos épaules et vous penche vers la terre, il faut vous enivrer sans trêve. Mais de quoi? De vin, de poésie, ou de vertu, à votre guise...» — "You must always be drunk.... to not feel the horrible burden of Time which crushes your shoulders and pushes you towards the earth, you must ceaselessly get drunk. But with

what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you please...."

Against this silhouette, of seeking something, anything, to flee into, stands out another facet of kything: that of being present, and giving undivided, focused attention. The kind of person you'd like to be around, the kind of person you'd want to have as a friend — isn't he present?

39: Digesting experience.

As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:19, NJB

A book is best understood, not just after being read once, but after being gone over several times. The same thing goes for experiences — they can be contemplated and pondered. This does not have instantaneous effect, but in a certain way it makes the experience contemplated a more complete experience, one that is more fully grasped.

40: Riflery. Riflery, I discovered, is not a macho thing, and someone who comes in with a macho attitude won't shoot very well. It has much more do do with concentration, stillness, and patience. In riflery, I learned how to hold at least parts of my body so still that the biggest cause of motion was the beating of my heart. Riflery is not so much a kything with, as just a kything.

41: Brainstorming. I think I do not need to say much here.

42: Step into other people's worlds... Tonight my father, Joseph, and I went to play ping-pong. I didn't realize one thing I had been doing — playing Joe's way, Joe's rules — until I saw Dad make Joseph rather upset by insisting that he play a standard, official rules game of ping-pong. (To his credit, Dad later started playing Joe's way.) Then I realized that I had been stepping into Joe's own little world, and meeting him more completely than had I insisted we stay in the public space that

all ping-pong players share. Joe didn't exactly mean to play ping-pong; he wanted to spend some time together, play around, goof off in a way that happened to make use of the framework of ping-pong. Part of the time, he was doing silly things that weren't ping-pong (such as hitting the ball around the room), which our father frowned on, and I commented were a little bit of Janra-ball (see below), a compliment which Joe said he really appreciated. People invite you into their worlds all the time, but the invitations don't have much fanfare and can be hard to notice. I'm glad I accepted Joe's invitation.

43: ...and invite others into your own. In one letter, when cherished abilities were beginning to return in the healing, I wrote:

The other thing which I have to share now is something which happened during the Gospel reading at the mass. I had my first theological musing in a while. That touched a greater frustration — that of reading some of the richest passages of the Scriptures, and learning almost nothing from them. There had one text that I read and was able to appreciate, if not being able to think much at all (Isaiah 60: "Arise, shine, for your light has come..."). This bleak dryness was broken both mentally and emotionally (there is a distinct and deep pleasure I have in theological reasoning), as I mused over the words: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places [or rooms, or mansions, in other translations]."

The most obvious interpretation of this metaphor is to think of a physical building, and that is surely appropriate. But I began to think of another interpretation of the dwelling-places, and that is this: our souls and spirits.

We have a temptation and a culture which defines happiness and sadness almost purely in terms of what is materially external to us: our possessions, the way others treat us, etc. That is certainly relevant — in that such blessings are to be gratefully received as a part of God's grace and provision, and pains are a real suffering to work through — but even more important and more central is what is internal to us and our interactions and relationship with God. Being an alcoholic is a worse suffering than being in prison. It is something related to this insight that is behind many Eastern religions defining Heaven and Hell to be defined almost purely by your internal state. One Zen koan tells us:

A Samurai came to a Zen master and said, "Show me the gates of Heaven and Hell."

The Zen master said, "Are you a Samurai? You look much more like a beggar. And that sword — I bet it is so dull that it could not cut off my head."

The enraged Samurai drew his sword, and raised it to strike the master down.

The Zen master said, "Now show me the gates of Heaven."

The Samurai sheathed his sword, bowed to the master, and left.

A person's bedroom is a place that has flavor and detail; it is an interesting place to explore, especially as compared to the sterility of a classroom or some other public place. A person's soul, too, has something of this color and distinctiveness; there are interests, memories, stories, and other things even more vital but which I have more

difficulty describing — the particular virtues and vices, the particular tendencies, which cause a person to act unlike any other. A soul, like a house, is a place of hospitality — a guest is invited into a host's house, to enjoy his comforts, his foods, and a friend is invited into another friend's soul, to enjoy it in a deeper form of the way in which we enjoy a friend's house. (In Heaven, there will be very much opportunity for hospitality; it will be the final place of community and celebration, and therefore our dwelling places can hardly be places of isolation.) For many years, I thought of this passage in terms of something of a more ornate, perhaps almost magical, physical edifice that would be nothing more; now, I see what is in retrospect obvious: when the old order of things has passed away and behold, all things are made new, our dwelling places will not simply be better purely physical buildings, but better than purely physical buildings. This is just as our bodies, which are dwelling-places of the Holy Spirit, will not simply be better purely physical bodies, but pneumatikon, spirit-bodies, better than purely physical bodies. I thought before of these rooms as physical rooms which we would decorate with artistic creations — and those artists among you will know what it means, and what a room means, when you are able to fill it with your artwork. I still do believe that — and I realized another form that will take. By our faith, and by our works, we are doing with our spirits what an artist does with a room when he toils over artwork to adorn it with. We are shaping the dwelling places we will have for our eternal play (and one of the images painted of Heaven is one of neither work nor rest, but pure and unbounded play). God is shaping us to become gods and goddesses, but he is not doing it in a

way that bypasses us and our free will; we are working with God in the work that will shape us forever.

Our souls, like our domiciles, are special places, far more than public places that anybody can enter without asking permission, in which to receive other people.

44: Nursing. The natural focal distance for an adult's eyes is twenty feet and on; the natural focal distance for an infant's eyes is eighteen inches, the distance between a woman's nipple and her nose. (Infants look at, and remember, noses rather than eyes.) Feeding, important as it may be, is only the beginning of what is going on when a mother is nursing a child. To put it another way, the necessity of physical feeding provides the occasion for a kything of love that provides even more necessary spiritual feeding.

45: Pregnancy. A fortiori.

46: Timeless moments. One person, speaking of singing a worship song, suggested thinking not so much in terms of "We start and stop this song," as "This song always has been going on and always will be going on; we just step into it for a time." In this spirit, there are moments of kything, often unsought and unattempted, which do not so much start and stop as are a stepping into the Eternal Kythe.

47: Parenting a child with a severe disease. At a bioethics conference, Dr. C. Everett Koop said, "There is a special bond that forms with a defective child, often far moreso than a normal child." He told a story from the practice of a Jewish pediatrician and colleague. A father lost a second child to Tay-Sachs, a degenerative disease whose people do not live to the age of four. Grieving, he said through tears, "He never gave me a moment's trouble." I am not sure why this is, but it may have

something to do with why I enjoy a small glass of wine more than a bottomless cup of Coke.

48: Corporate worship. Worship is a foretaste of Heaven, and it plays a focal role in the Eastern Orthodox emphasis on bringing Heaven down to earth; they describe their worship as stepping into Heaven. Worship is also the highest form of love. In these two aspects, at least, worship is kything. Corporate worship is a kything not only with God, but with the others you are worshipping with.

49: Janra-ball. This is a [game](#) I devised, and has been described as a Zen NOMIC. To excerpt the ingredients list:

Springfield, Monty Python, Calvin-Ball, body language, Harlem Globetrotters, sideways logic, Thieves' Cant, Intuition, counter-intuitive segues, spoon photography, creativity, Zen koans, Psychiatrist, adrenaline, perception, tickling, urban legend Spam recipe, swallowing a pill, illusionism, NOMIC, modern physics, raw chaos, F.D. & C. yellow number 5.

I originally hesitated to put this in, on the grounds that it is difficult to play, at least in a pure state. There've been a couple of times I've gotten together a group of people willing to play, and it didn't work. I thought it would require players with more of something — perception, intuition, creativity, spontaneity, etc.

— but in thinking recently, I have come to believe that it's something, like empathic listening, that can't just be turned on at will, especially by someone inexperienced (which would be everyone now). Joseph's behavior at the game last night persuaded me that it is indeed possible, perhaps best started at in small increments from a more structured game. (Maybe Pooh's

Corner will be able to play. Who knows?) I will say this: It's a difficult game to play, but if you can play it, it's an awesome kythe.

50: Synchronicity/attunement. As treated in *The Dance of Life*, people have rhythms about them — outside of conscious awareness — and when people are together, these rhythms can become attuned (and, if so, the people themselves are more attuned). This is something that is not as well appreciated in our culture as in others. The easiest example or analogue I can point to (I'm not sure which) is in walking together and holding hands.

When I was dating Rebecca, it took me a long time to learn to get in step, and stay in step — but things were smoother when I did.

51: A kind of openness. There is a kind of openness where you perceive something but can't put your finger on exactly what. If you can listen, be opening, look, then there is a sort of listening kything. I checked out a copy of *A Wind in the Door* yesterday, and when I was reading through to find insights for more ways of kything, I came on something that I felt was significant to what I'm writing, but I couldn't say what. I sat then, open, thinking, waiting to see what it was — and then realized that it was not the heart of a way of kything, but something to put at the beginning:

What he had actually seen she could not begin to guess. That he had seen something, something unusual, she was positive.

This is the same sort of feeling I felt about kything.

This is part of how kything is to Charles Wallace:

Meg said sharply, "Why? What did mother say?"  
Charles Wallace walked slowly through the high grass in  
the orchard. "She hasn't said. But it's sort of like radar  
blipping at me."

This kind of listening kythe is how I get a lot of the ideas for  
these items.

52: Introspection.

Then [Blajeny] sat up and folded his arms across his  
chest, and his strange luminous eyes turned inwards, so that  
he was looking not at the stars nor at the children but into  
some deep, dark place far within himself, and then further.  
He sat there, moving in, deeper and deeper, for time out of  
time. Then the focus of his eyes returned to the children,  
and he gave his radiant smile and answered Calvin's question  
as though not a moment had passed.

Introspection is a kything with oneself.

53: Forgiveness. Forgiveness is a spiritual act, a restoration  
of broken communion.

54: Artistic appreciation. In high school, I made a silver ring,  
designed to hold a drop of water as a stone. When I started to  
paint, I learned a new way of seeing. After a painting in which a  
pair of hands played prominently, I was captivated by the beauty  
of people's hands all around me; for the first time in my life, I  
saw in them a beauty as great as that of faces.

What an artist does is allow you to see through his eyes.  
When you look at a friend's watercolor, you are seeing the beach  
through her eyes, as you would not have perceived it yourself.  
When you read this list, you are thinking about the word 'kythe'  
through my mind.

55: Talking. This one is so obvious I overlooked it completely. The magic of symbols that allows mind-to-mind communication is one that is appreciated, for instance, when trying to work with someone who doesn't speak a common language with you.

56: Looking into another person, and telling him what you see. I have always enjoyed other people telling me what they see in me. For a time, I thought that was vanity, and vanity certainly played a part. But recently, I have come to see a deeper reason for asking this of other persons.

I have for a while enjoyed asking foreigners what they think of American culture, and probed a bit not only for the appreciation they will voice, but criticisms. Most foreigners can articulate the character of American culture better than can most Americans, and they have insights that wouldn't occur to an American. They see things that have become invisible to Americans. They have a distance, like aesthetic distance, that allows them to see what is too close to be visible to us.

For the same or analogous reasons, having another person tell you what he sees in you is another variant on introspection, like using a mirror in looking at yourself to see parts you can't look at directly. Different people who have known you for different amounts of time can see different parts of you.

When you tell another person what you see in him, you provide this sort of introspection; your words fuse with his knowledge of himself to form a deeper self-knowledge, and say more to him than they would mean to anyone else. They connect. They kythe. It is like the story of the crystal globe — only you can tell people how beautiful they are.

57: Driving. In the car this morning, after having to take my brother to school and my mother to work, I was thinking about the pod racing in Star Wars: Episode I — one of the most

Jedi/Force parts of the movie — and I realized I was really enjoying driving for the first time in years. (I started late in driving, and have a fear of it. I had enjoyed singing while driving, but not driving itself.) I was very aware of my surroundings, and connected, and entered flow. Though I stayed within the speed limit and there were no hazardous conditions, it was in a very real sense podracing. It was a kythe with my surroundings and especially with my car, which was as an extension of my body. It is entirely possible to kythe with technology (and I was seeking an example), to have your hands on a steering wheel or a keyboard so that you are thinking through them, and your thoughts are not on your hands or fingertips, but where the car is moving, or what letters are appearing on the screen.

Technology (techne, art + logos, logic, reason, domain of knowledge) is part of the creation of the imago Dei, and therefore has a role in God's order. There is a tendency for the sort of people interested in kything things to be Luddites, but this need not be. If you can kythe with God, with another person, with a shaggy dog, with the grass, with ideas, with experiences, then you can also kythe with a car, with a computer.

58: Pain. This one will probably be difficult for most Americans to understand, and I'm not sure I can explain it well — here I will probably be talking around my point mostly. We live in a painkilling culture, one that attempts to delete that entire region of human experience, and therefore neither understands nor profits from it.

A place to begin is to say that leprosy ravages the body through one very simple means: it shuts off a person's ability to feel pain. Exactly how shutting off pain causes such severe damage is left as a valuable exercise to the reader's imagination. Pain is an awareness of your body's state, and of what you can

and cannot do without aggravating an injury. I very rarely take painkillers, because I want to know exactly how my body is doing. (Sunday night was the first time in memory of taking a painkiller not prescribed by a doctor.)

In addition, pain is a present sensation; it is not in our nature to not notice. Intense pain can fill consciousness. (Some mentally ill people self-mutilate because the sensation of physical pain, if only momentarily, can take them out of their mental anguish.) If all our kything is as real as pain, we are doing well.

59: Death What was said about pain and our culture applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to death and our culture. (I don't know any good books on pain; a good, deep book on death is Peter Kreeft's *Love is Stronger Than Death*.) In other kythes, you kythe love, or ideas, or listening; in this kythe, you kythe yourself. The art of dying well is an art of letting go of a world you've known for years and giving yourself fully to God. That's about as full of a message as you can send.

60: Gift-giving. A good gift is at least three messages: a statement about the nature of the person giving the gift, a statement about the nature of the person receiving the gift, and something else peculiar to the character of the gift. None of these messages are symbolically encoded, and the result is that they can say things inexpressible in normal words. A gift is not worth a thousand words; there is no exchange rate between gifts and words.

61: Reminiscing. Reminiscing is a kything with memories.

62: Local traditions. There are traditions, like Pooh's Corner or Club Pseudo (a tradition at my high school, similar to an open mike at a coffeehouse). These traditions have a unique local flavor and personality, and create a special bond among participants. Janra-ball, if it works, would be another example.

63: Community. Community is like friendship, but it does not reduce to friendship. A community is more than a set of friendships, as a friendship is more than two isolated individuals.

64: Ellis lifeguarding. This entry should not be written by me; it should be written by my high school acquaintance Chuck Saletta. American Red Cross lifeguards are taught to respond to problems; Ellis lifeguards are taught to see them coming. Chuck has written that he knows ahead of time when a swimmer is going to be in distress, and also that on the highway he watches the cars ahead of him and is usually able to tell whether or not they'll turn on an exit — before they put their turn signals on. That has to involve an attention and attunement to the situation that is noteworthy.

65: Gathering.

"Has Mother actually told you all this?"

"Some of it. The rest I've just—gathered."

Charles Wallace did gather things out of his mother's mind, out of meg's mind, as another child might gather daisies in a field.

This is another passage that sticks in my mind as an insight into kything. I gather when I muse, when I have certain intuitions. I gather passages from the book. Where do you gather?

66: Firing a ballista at your television. Television is a crawling abomination from the darkest pits of Hell. It is a pack of cigarettes for the mind. It blinds the inner eye. It is the anti-kythe.

When I was in fourth grade, we read *The Last of the Really Great Wang-Doodles*, and then drew pictures. My teacher

commented that she could tell from the pictures who watched TV. A home without television is like a slice of chocolate cake without tartar sauce. Get rid of your television, and you will find yourself living life more fully, and kything more deeply.

Two good books dealing with this topic are Neil Postman's concise and lively *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*, and Jerry Mander's in-depth *Four Arguments For the Elimination of Television*.

67: Boundaries. Boundaries are an important part of friendship; the boundaries of a message give it shape; drinking a certain amount of wine and then stopping enables you to enjoy it without becoming drunk. Boundaries are a kind of kythe, and also a part of other kythes; a hug is best if it is neither too short nor too long.

68: Thunderstorms. Imagine that you are a child, outside in a thunderstorm at night, with the rain warm and heavy, the wind blowing about, the trees dancing, everything suddenly illumined by flashes of lightning. Wild nights are my glory. This is a night to connect with, to drink in.

(Idea taken from Robin Munn.)

69: Using a knack. I am adept at finding pressure points on the body — not just the ones I know, but the ones I don't know. I can tell from looking if a person will say 'yes' or 'no' to a hug. More fallibly, I can sometimes guess if a person is ticklish (hi, Ashley!).

I don't know how I do any of these things, but these knacks are a form of kything.

70: Trying to kythe. I think it was Richard Foster who said that the very act of struggling to pray is itself a form of prayer. Last night during Pooh's Corner, my fear of driving began to act up, and I walked out of the building thinking, "I won't be able to

kythe now. I'm not in the proper frame of mind." Then I realized — no, I could kythe. I couldn't produce the same end result, but I could put myself into it. A small child's crayon drawing of a five-legged dog whose head is larger than its body is a beautiful thing, and it is made beautiful not by the performance criteria that a commercial product would be judged by, but by the love and effort that went into it.

I have attention deficit disorder. I can hyperfocus at times (exactly which times being largely out of my control), but quite often I haven't connected with Pooh's Corner. I haven't been in the silliness, drinking it in even as an observer. What I have realized in writing this entry is that that doesn't matter nearly as much as I thought it did, just as the crudity of the above described drawing doesn't matter very much. It doesn't matter if I often don't succeed. I try. I kythe.

71: Weight lifting. The amount of force coming from a muscle is the result, not only of the muscle's size and condition, but the amount of nervous impulse coming from the brain. People can normally summon only a small fraction of the total possible muscle impulse. One case where there can be full or near-full exertion is when people are terrified; they can possess something called hysterical strength, where it is entirely possible for a small, middle-aged woman to lift the back end of a car. Another is an epileptic seizure; in my EMT class, we were told not to try to restrain someone having a seizure, because bones will snap sooner than muscle strength will give out.

I trained with weights for a few years, and doing so was largely on will. I had pencil-thin arms and legs as a child, and worked to the point of having a Greek figure. (I now have a Greek figure plus a paunch, but we won't get into that.) I got to the point of being able to lift the full stack (as much resistance

as a machine designed for football players can give) on the better part of the machines, and (in moments of being macho and trying to do something I could brag about) walked a couple of short steps while carrying over 400 pounds of weight, and injured my hand by punching through stone tiles. I didn't get much bigger after a certain point. Only a small portion of my doing those things was muscle. The rest was mind.

Many of the items above have been kythes of drinking in. This a kythe of putting out.

72: Doing something new and difficult. When you are skilled at something, you don't have to put much of yourself into it to succeed. In high school, I put a lot of effort into trying to learn how to balance on a slack rope. I never really succeeded at what I aimed for, but I learned a couple of things. My balance improved a lot. One person watching me said it was like watching the sensei catching flies with chopsticks, in *The Karate Kid*. Even if I didn't succeed at my intention, I learned to put my whole self into it.

73: Going through a difficult experience together. Meg and Mr. Jenkins came to know each other in a way that never would have happened had things been light and sunny. It may not be seen for the pain at the moment, but afterwards a growing-closer has happened.

74: Intuitions. Being attuned to, and using, your intuition is another way of kything.

75: Knowing others.

[Meg:] "...Did you know it was one of Calvin's brothers who beat Charles Wallace up today? I bet he's upset—I don't mean Whippy, he couldn't care less—Calvin. Somebody's bound to have told him."

[Mrs. Murray:] "Do you want to call him?"

"Not me. Not Calvin. I just have to wait. Maybe he'll come over or something."

One form of communion comes from knowing another person so well that communication is unnecessary. There is something more in this passage than if Meg had called Calvin — far more.

76: The useless. Many of those areas of human intercourse which are cut out by American pragmatism are the areas of speech which most embody kything. Within speech, talking about how to get something done is not a kythe — certainly not compared to a discussion which conveys love or insight or theory. Kything is something that's not in Pierce's and Dewey's practical world.

77: Culture. Culture, often invisible to us, is a shared kythe across a group of people. It is the framework for communication, a kythe that gives other kythes their shape.

78: Wordless knowledge. When I was at Innes's house, she asked me if I thought my twin brothers Ben and Joe were introverted, extroverted, etc. My first response, after a bit of a pause, was, "I don't know." I thought some more, and realized that the truth was slightly different: it had never occurred to me to think about them in those terms.

After I read *Stranger in a Strange Land*, I began to realize that many of my deepest thoughts were not in English, not for that matter in anything like verbal language. When I write them down, it is usually a translation, and sometimes matter a far more difficult translation than between English and French. It is more like trying to translate a song into a poem. These thoughts are of a wordless thinking, like the kything of the fara.

Personal Knowledge, a profound book and an excellent cure

for insomnia, deals with those facets of human thought and interaction that do not reduce to words.

79: Being underwater. I felt that this was a kythe, but couldn't put my finger on how. I still can't fully articulate it, but it has a similar feel to a visual kythe. The beginning of [A Dream of Light](#) provides a good description of an underwater kythe:

You pull your arms to your side and glide through the water. On your left is a fountain of bubbles, upside down, beneath a waterfall; the bubbles shoot down and then cascade out and to the surface. To your right swims a school of colorful fish, red and blue with thin black stripes. The water is cool, and you can feel the currents gently pushing and pulling your body. Ahead of you, seaweed above and long, bright green leaves below wave back and forth, flowing and bending. You pull your arms, again, with a powerful stroke which shoots you forward under the seaweed; your back feels cool in the shade. You kick, and you feel the warmth of the sun again, soaking in and through your skin and muscles. Bands of light dance on the sand beneath you, as the light is bent and turned by the waves.

There is a time of rest and stillness; all is at a deep and serene peace. The slow motion of the waves, the dancing lights below and above, the supple bending of the plants, all form part of a stillness. It is soothing, like the soft, smooth notes of a lullaby.

Your eyes slowly close, and you feel even more the warm sunlight, and the gentle caresses of the sea. And, in your rest, you become more aware of a silent presence. You were not unaware of it before, but you are more aware of it now.

It is there:

Being.  
Love.  
Life.  
Healing.  
Calm.  
Rest.  
Reality.

Like a tree with water slowly flowing in, through roots hidden deep within the earth, and filling it from the inside out, you abide in the presence. It is a moment spent, not in time, but in eternity.

You look out of the eternity; your eyes are now open because you have eternity in your heart and your heart in eternity. In the distance, you see dolphins; one of them turns to you, and begins to swim. The others are not far off.

It lets you pet its nose, and nestles against you. You grab on to its dorsal fin, and go speeding off together. The water rushes by at an exhilarating speed; the dolphin jumps out of the water, so that you see waves and sky for a brief moment before splashing through the surface.

The dolphins chase each other, and swim hither and thither, in and out from the shore. After they all seem exhausted, they swim more slowly, until at last you come to a lagoon.

In the center, you see a large mass; swimming closer, you see that it is a sunken ship. You find an opening...

80: Becoming ancient. Most entries so far have focused on what you do when you kythe. This is an entry about who you are. When you are ancient, you have had ages to let God work with you. You have had time to grow mature. You have gained

experience. You have lived through many events and circumstances. You have smiled on generations. You have experienced change, both without you and within you. You have learned what is constant, both without you and within you. You have grown wise. You kythe with depth, with reality. You are like Senex (whose name means 'aged'), like the fara — deep, rooted, moving without motion, sharing in the age (however faintly) of the Ancient of Days. Become all this, and you will kythe.

81: Becoming a child. When you are a child, you look with wonder at every bit of the world God has made; you do not know jadedness. You do not know guile; it would never occur to you to wear a mask. You play. You are never afraid to come running for a hug. You stay out in the rain. You always want to grow. You always want to know, "Why?" You bear a peace no storm has troubled.

You can believe anything. You are like the little farandolae, dancing, swimming. Become all this, and you will kythe.

82: Doing something for its own sake. Someone said that a classic is a book that everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read. There is a big difference between reading a book because you want to have read it, and reading it because you want to read it. The former is something to endure, the latter something to enjoy. For a while, when I drove, I would often drive five or ten miles under the limit, and when I started driving at the limit, it was mainly as a courtesy to not stress other drivers, and because I started driving on streets with heavier traffic where it would be hazardous to drive that much more slowly than the flow of traffic. I do not generally get tense (for reasons other than my fear of driving, and blunders I make as I still learn to drive), have nervous fidgets, get angry, or experience stress at red lights, slow traffic, and other delays that shoot some drivers' blood pressure through the roof. The

reason is that I am operating within a mindset of "I am driving; I am in the process of getting there; I will be there," as opposed to "I need to be there now, and I am tolerating this drive because it is the least slow means of getting there, and— Hey! That's another second's delay. Ooh, that makes me mad!" Pirsig treats this point at some length in the section of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* that deals with climbing and his son's ego climbing.

Of course many activities are means to other activities, and we would be in a bad state if we couldn't do one thing to get at something else. But even then, intermediate activities that are trampled on are not good to do. Really wanting to do something, and doing it for its own sake, is a kythe with the activity that is better for both you and the activity.

83: Silence.

Through [Mr. Jenkins's] discouragement she became aware of Calvin. "Hey, Meg! Communication implies sound. Communion doesn't." He sent her a brief image of walking silently through the woods, the two of them alone together, their feet almost noiseless on the rusty carpet of pine needles. They walked without speaking, without touching, and yet they were as close as it is possible for two human beings to be. They climbed up through the woods, coming out of the brilliant sunlight at the top of the hill. A few sumac trees showed their rusty candles. Mountain laurel, shiny, so dark a green the leaves seemed black in the fierceness of sunlight, pressed towards the woods. Meg and Calvin had stretched out in the thick, late-summer grass, lying on their backs and gazing up into the shimmering blue of sky, a vault interrupted only by a few small clouds.

And she had been as happy, she remember, as it is possible to be, and as close to Calvin as she had ever been to anybody in her life, even Charles Wallace, so close that their separate bodies, daisies and buttercups joining rather than dividig them, seemed a single enjoyment of summer and sun and each other.

That was surely the purest form of kything.

When I was in France, Rebecca wrote a letter about some of the moments she valued most with me. There was one moment when we went into the fine arts center, and I improvised on the

organ for her,  
and then we sat  
in the silence  
in the dark  
not saying anything  
not doing anything  
just being.

Other people had talked with her and done things with her. I was the first person to be in the silence with her, and it profoundly affected her.

84: Dodge-ball. When I thought of this during a slow, back-burner brainstorm, I initially wanted to put it in because of pride and boastfulness: I wanted to impress you with how talented I am. Then I realized what I was thinking, and realized that was entirely out of place, and decided to definitely leave it out. But I still had some idle thoughts about it mulling about... and I mused... and realized something amazing. This definitely belongs in.

In dodge-ball, I couldn't throw worth beans. Still can't. But, in a lock-in for sophomores at IMSA, I joined a game of dodge-ball and hid around in the back and noticed that there were

... and the ground in the back... and noticed that there were fewer and fewer people left on my team... and then I was one of two... and then the only one. Then, for five minutes, I dodged the whole other team throwing at me, sometimes four or five balls at once, and then a ball brushed me. When I stopped and began to slow down, I realized that the soles of my bare feet were burning hot from the friction of my jumping. After another game like that, people decided that if it got down to the other team versus me, the game was a draw.

One of the upperclassmen supervising, Paul Vondrak, was a great thrower; he was able not only to throw accurately, but to throw much faster than anyone else. He would stand, wind up slowly, and throw like lightning. I think it only took him about five throws to nick me.

I was thinking about this latter item, and (examining the memory) realized that I was paying very close attention to him... then realized that I was attuned to him... then thought that it was almost like a martial artist... and then realized, in a flash of insight, that in the one game I was doing the same thing a Samurai does when he defeats ten men. I do not understand exactly why I was able to do this without any special training or experience, although it does lend some corroboration to the puzzling fact that as a karate white belt I was able to defeat two out of three of my blackbelt instructors in sparring. Now I know that I have had an experience I would not ordinarily expect to have access to. I guess I would chalk it up to an unusual talent for certain kinds of kything.

I was trying to analyze my state of mind in (especially) the five minute dodge at the end, and the first thing I realized was that I don't remember that state of mind too well — not as well as I remember feeling that my feet were hot afterwards. From what I remember my state of mind differed from normal

what I remember, my state of mind differed from normal consciousness. A hint of an explanation would be to say that the perceptual processing alone would have severely overloaded my conscious mind. It could also be described as flow or podracing. I know there's more, but I can't get at it. If I can better process this memory, I think I will better understand kything. As I mull over this, I think that those five minutes may qualify as the most intense kythe of my life.

85: Reading another person's body languages and emotions. As telekinesis is really moving things with your arms and telepathy is really talking, Charles Wallace's awareness, without being told, of what's going on in meg is really a perception of others' emotions. This is the origin for the spark of beauty in that facet of Charles Wallace's kything, and it is an area where I'd like to grow.

86: Withdrawing.

[The Shal's] moments of community are profound; their moments of solitude are even more profound. `Withdrawing' is what they call it; it is a time of stillness, and an expression of a love so profound that all other loves appear to be hate. It is a time of finding a secret place, and then withdrawing — from family, friends, and loved ones, from music and the beauty of nature, from cherished activities, from sensation — into the heart of the Father. It is a time of — it is hard to say what. Of being loved, and of loving. Of growing still, and becoming. Of being set in a right state, and realigned in accordance with the ultimate reality. Of purity from the Origin. Of being made who one is to be. Of communion and worship. Of imago dei filled with the light of Deus. Of being pulled out of time and knowing something of the eternal.

[Espiriticthus: Cultures of a Fantasy World not Touched  
by Sin.](#)

87: Zoning out. This is one of the last places one would look for kything; Robin observed that one of the central themes tying these entries together is presence, and this would seem to be the essence of absence. For all that... I found myself spacing out, and left the spacing out for introspection, and realized that my mental and emotional state was that of kything. A start of an explanation is that if it is an absence, it is entirely devoid of the Baudelarian flight urged in *Enivrez-vous*. It is a present absence; it goes into It is an egoless sliding into enjoyment. It is still and peaceful; it is quite restful; it is a good. Being in a similar attitude will help other kythes.

88: Playing Springfield. Springfield is a game with very simple rules: two people alternate naming state capitals, and the first person to name Springfield wins.

What makes it interesting is that it's not a game of mathematical strategy. It's a game of perception. The real objective is to win as late as possible, and that means reading the other person and seeing how far you can go: from nonverbal cues, you need to read his mind.

Springfield is probably comparable to poker.

89: Thinking deeply, prolongedly, and intensely about a question. I realized today that I had been thinking pretty hard about kything for several days, and thought I should take a sabbath from it: I would record ideas that I had, but not intentionally give conscious thought to the question. It was after I did that that I began to realize how deeply I had been kything with the idea of kything.

The first thing I noticed was that it was hard to stop

thinking. The second thing I realized was that I was still thinking of ways of kything. I probably don't have to devote any more conscious effort to thinking to complete the number of entries.

When you think in that manner, for a sufficient length of time, your thought acquires the momentum of a freight train. Mathematicians solve some of the most difficult problems after long and intense thought, and then cessation of conscious thought, usually to the point of forgetting it — and the solution comes. If it can be solved by continuous thought, it is not among the most difficult problems; the mathematician is not exercising his full abilities. When the storm ceases and the surface of the ocean stills, then the Leviathan stirs in the deeps. Deep calls to deep. This is perhaps the most profound kythe with an idea.

90: Experience. Experience in a domain constitutes and enables a kythe with that domain. My Mom asked me if I had a universal adaptor for her tape recorder, and I pulled one and said, "Is this the right jack? If it isn't, I have another." She said, "I don't know, let me see." A short while afterwards, she called me over to look at it, because "it seems to have two prongs." I looked at, and instantly realized that it didn't need an adaptor. It needed a power cord.

I was mildly irritated, and was finally able to put my finger on something I'd felt. Answering her help requests with technology has the same feel to me as explaining things to a small, naive child who doesn't understand how the world works. She sees technology as this mysterious, unpredictable black box which works by magic.

I thought a little more, as my mother is neither naive nor childish. She is an intelligent and well-educated woman. What I realized was that I was not appreciating my own experience. Experience enables a person to look at the surface and see the

depths — and a port for a power cord does not look fundamentally different from what a port for an adaptor might be. I see a computer as having definite inner workings which work according to understandable principle; when the computer is malfunctioning, I think I have a chance of understanding why. If my Mom thinks that the computer is a black box (you can see what it does, but not what's inside it), I think of it as a white box (you can see what's going on inside, and try to fix it if need be). The way I look at computers might be compared to the topographical anatomy I was taught in my EMT class, where you look at skin and see the underlying organs.

You kythe more when you're interacting with a white box than with a black box, and that comes with experience.

91: Closing your eyes.

[Charles Wallace] closed his eyes, not to shut out Louise, not to shut out Meg, but to see with his inner eyes.

I closed my eyes when visiting my friend Innes's house, and I realized what I was doing, and why: to focus, to connect, to concentrate. This is why couples close their eyes when they kiss; this is why we have the custom of closing our eyes when we pray. The image of a blind seer is a part of myth and literature; when we close our eyes, we momentarily blind ourselves so we can see.

92: Mental illness. Mental illness is not exactly a purely negative thing. It is a difference that is ecological in character, with positive as well as negative aspects. This very dark cloud has a silver lining, sometimes a mithril lining. This is why people with mental illness speak of a gift — something that puzzled me when I first heard it.

93: Mental health. If mental illness is a way of kything, then mental health is definitely a way of kything. Robin is a good

friend and an excellent listener, and he radiates health. And Joel

—

Robin once mentioned a theatre professor saying of his predecessor that with most people, they walk into a room and it's "What about me?" His predecessor walks into the room and it's, "What about you?"

I remember thinking, "I'd like to have a friend like that," and then, "I would like to be like that." A day later, I realized that I do have a friend like that: Joel. With Joel, it's "What about you?"

Joel is probably the best kyther I know.

94: Watching or studying a kythe.

[Meg] found herself looking directly into one of his eyes, a great, amber cat's eye, the dark mandala of the pupil, opening, compelling, beckoning.

She was drawn towards the oval, was pulled into it, was through it.

My brothers were playing, and I was watching Ben and Joe play. I became aware of an energetic character to the play, and then I recognized a kythe a split second before remembering the entry about play as kything. So I decided to watch — and then I realized I was in the kythe.

95: Nature. To be out in the woods, or looking at night at the sapphire sky and crystalline stars, or listen to the sounds of a forest, or to play with an animal, or wade barefoot through a cold, babbling brook — these are ways of kything with nature.

(Taken from Innes Sheridan.)

96: Swallowing a pill. Learning to swallow a pill was a long and traumatic experience for me; for the longest time, I tried my

hardest and just couldn't do it. The reason was precisely that I was trying my hardest: I was trying much too hard. When I finally did learn, I learned far better than most; I can now swallow several decent-sized pills on a sip of water — when I was last hospitalized, the nurses remarked at how little water I needed, and told me to drink more.

In what is for the most people a minor learning experience, I came to really appreciate how easy swallowing a pill is — to easy to force or accomplish by willpower. In this regard, it is not only an example of kything, but a symbol. Do, or do not. There is no try.

97: *Mystical experiences.* These are bestowed by God, and are not human doing; visions may come once or twice in a person's life, not at all for most people. When they do happen, they are a special moment of grace, and communion with God, and they can leave a person changed for life.

98: *Massage.* Being able to do backrubs is a good skill to take to college campuses. When you give another person a massage, you communicate with his body through touch, and relax the flesh, the body, and the person you are touching, more fully than he can himself. It is different from many other touches, in that it is not spontaneous or habitual; it is a special time set aside to connect.

99: *Saying farewell.*

Parting is such sweet sorrow.

-William Shakespeare

When someone's leaving, people say many of the things that they should have said long before but never got around to. Barriers come down. People realize how much others mean. They

That is an obvious insight into saying farewell. What is less obvious is that these things can happen at any time. It is not so much that people can't normally commune in this manner and are specially enabled to when someone leaves, as that people normally avoid this communion, and when some leaves they realize how bad it would be to them at any point. You can tell someone how much they mean to you any day. I did something like this for Robin recently, as I stopped from writing this to think about practicing what I was preaching. He and I are both glad I did. One part of the barriers coming down is that sharing yourself is inherently risky, and there is less risk if a person is leaving — if you share something that makes the other person think you are stupid, at least he'll be away. So people share more. If you realize this, you can share on ordinary days what you would normally share when saying farewell — and grow closer. It might be a good idea to hold a farewell party for someone when he's not going away. The same may be said for a funeral — there is something magnificent that goes on at a funeral, that doesn't really have to wait for a person's death.

100: Anything. Thursday night, I was at a band concert at Ben and Joe's school. Afterwards, when walking through the mass of people, there was a moment when I was looking down into a little girl's face, and as it passed I realized I was kything. There is a sense in which anything can be kything, if it is done in the right way.

Now we kythe darkly and through a glass. Then we shall kythe fully, spirit to spirit, even as we are fully kythed.

*soli deo gloria*

# The Labyrinth

What labyrinth is this,  
Around and within me?  
My God, my God, why have I forsaken Thee?  
My God, my God, why have I forsaken Thee?  
Why have I fled from Thy help,  
And the Word whom Thou hast shouted?  
My God, Thou criest out in the fullness of day,  
And in season of night, yet there is no silence in me.  
But Thou dwellest in a sanctuary:  
Even the praises of Israel.  
In Thee our fathers hoped,  
They hoped, and Thou deliveredst them.  
They cried to Thee, and were saved;  
They hoped in Thee, and were delivered.  
But I am a worm, no more a man,  
A reproach to mankind, and of a people despised.  
All who see laugh me to scorn,  
They speak with their lips,  
They shake their heads, saying,  
He once trusted in the Lord,  
Let Him deliver him,  
Let Him save him,  
If He still takes pleasure in him.

But Thou art He that drew me from the womb:  
My hope from my mother's breasts.  
I was cast on Thee from the womb;  
Thou wert my God even in my mother's belly.  
I stand afar off from Thee;  
For I have drawn nigh unto affliction,  
Where there are none who shall help.  
For bears have encompassed me;  
Ravening bears have circled round about me.  
They have opened their mouths against me,  
As a devouring and roaring dragon,  
As a dragon spewing fire and brimstone.  
I am poured out like water,  
Yea, my very bones are pulled out of place,  
My heart is like wax,  
Melting away in my bowels.  
My strong wealth is dried up like a potsherd,  
My tongue never sated in my throat,  
I have brought myself down,  
To the very dust of death.  
For many dogs have compassed me,  
The assembly of wicked doers hath beset me round,  
They ensnared my deeds and my movement.  
They have a count on all my bones,  
They observe and look on all I do and say.  
They have split among themselves what covered me,  
And my raiment perdureth but as perchance.  
What is this labyrinth?  
What is this I have enmeshed myself in?  
For in the [Sermon on the Mount](#),

Hear the Lord the word spake:  
No man can serve two masters:  
Thou canst not serve God and Mammon.  
What reached Mammon in the days of yore?  
Ox and ass, a field, a vine,  
A house of single room, by single lamp enlightened:  
What reaches Mammon in our tangled web?  
Lexus and iPhone, or Nokia and Government Motors,  
Alike impossible to medieval lord,  
And not so different in reality:  
Oh what a tangled web we weave,  
When we allow branding us to deceive!  
Space-conquering tools of train and car,  
Dwarfed not by supersonic airplane nor spacecraft,  
But by internet communication, and mobile,  
Stripped communication bearing not communion,  
In the panopticon of NSA forever recorded:  
For in the [Sermon on the Mount](#),  
Hear the Lord the word spake:  
No man can serve two masters:  
Thou canst not serve God and Mammon:  
When the apex of technology remained,  
But the humble workshop of humble artisan,  
Mammon's nature was spoken: not servant, but master,  
A cruel yoke to shoulder, bear, and live.  
But of our labyrinth,  
Technology is neither beginning nor end,  
Nor properly the center, for it sufficeth not,  
To say as of computer games already obsolete,  
You are in a maze of twisted Infocom parodies, all alike:  
Do not confuse the skin with the heart.

Nor think only of the ancient attack on manhood,  
Named porn, for it is not new:  
Not new in sepia etching, nor old crumbling book;  
Archaeologists dig it up in ancient ruins.  
But in decades of yore, yt poison,  
Called for a man to sneak into a store,  
Hoping no one would see his parked car,  
Beside a store of windows all papered;  
Behold a new thing:  
For now thou needest do no such thing,  
It is included in a utility well nigh indispensable,  
And thou needest not even seek temptation:  
With a good filter, thou wilt receive less,  
Of offers that make Hugh Hefner look like Botticelli,  
And shouldst thy natural lust not suffice thee,  
Thou wilt be told thou needest Viagra.  
But call this not the sum of it either:  
For SecondLife is called SecondWife,  
Not only because thou needest not hear the moralist's protest,  
Fornicate using your OWN genitals!  
Push this temptation aside, which is not the sole raison d'être:  
The true raison d'être be never new:  
The true raison d'être was known to desert monks,  
Ancient and today,  
And by these fathers is called,  
Temptation, passion, demon,  
Of escaping the world.  
SecondLife is the apotheosis,  
Nay, the next installment,  
Of what came in an earlier installment,  
In cinematic movie theatres,

Such as rural American volunteers preserve,  
As a piece of history to keep alive for the young,  
And moralists said more than that movies can be made lewd,  
For they spake of an escape into fantasy,  
Whether literal or metaphorical is a smaller question than it  
might seem:

For fantasy is fiction squared, and in Western history,  
Fiction emerged, with abstraction:  
Abs-trahere, from Latin,  
Meaning pulled back from real things,  
And fantasy and science fiction provide a next installment:  
If the characters and story be created whole cloth,  
Why not unfold a bit further:

Why not the story's world itself?  
And this ancient passion of escaping the world,  
Of which monks were ever presently warned,  
We devise more potent ways to escape,  
Where God has placed us,  
Whence thou wouldst do well to hear exhortation,  
Of disenchanting exiles of SecondLife:  
Get a first life!

We have many ways to create our own private world:  
With technology or with ancient imagination,  
Modern or postmodern in our bent,  
Our own private escape from what is around us,  
Our own private Hell,  
But this need not rule us!  
Tis a tangled labyrinth before us,  
And whilst we gain,  
In learning to use technology,  
Not to further our journeys of passion,

But as tools in living life rightly,  
The door to life rightly lived,  
Is not closed to those who are neither ancient nor rural:  
There is a little gain in learning to bear with silence,  
Endure hunger, live on less,  
As a remedy to covetousness count thy blessings,  
Pray through boredom,  
Yet here also,  
Do not mistake the skin for the heart.  
In the labyrinth, there is no hope:  
Only infinite possibilities to lose thy way.  
But above the labyrinth there is hope.  
And Christ is the Door,  
Now as much as ever;  
Ascesis in the Church is lifegiving,  
Now as much as ever,  
Unseen warfare can lead us to serene contemplation,  
Now as much as ever,  
And God is here.  
Paradise is wherever the saints are,  
And we can find Paradise even with a labyrinth,  
That surrounds us,  
With no room to escape:  
We do not need to escape.  
But Thou, O Lord, be not far from me,  
O mine every strength, hasten to help me.  
Save my soul from the glaive:  
My very nature from the power of the dog.  
Save me from the dragon's mouth:  
For let me learn humility as a unicorn's horn.  
I will declare Thy praise to my brethren:

In the midst of the Church I will praise Thee.  
You who fear the Lord, praise Him;  
All ye seed of Jacob, glorify him;  
For He hath not despised nor abhorred,  
The affliction of the afflicted:  
Neither hath He hidden his face from him,  
But when he cried to Him for help, He heard him.  
My praise is before thee in the great congregation;  
I will pay my vows before them that hold him in holy fear.  
The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
And they that seek the Lord shall praise him;  
Let their hearts live forever!  
All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord:  
And all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him.  
For the Kingdom is the Lord's,  
And he is the Ruler of the nations.  
All the prosperous upon the earth shall eat and worship;  
All those that go down to the dust shall bow before him:  
And my soul eternally lives through him,  
My posterity shall serve him;  
The Lord will be declared to a generation yet to be born.  
They shall declare to a people yet to be formed,  
That by the Lord:  
It is finished.

# **The Law of Attraction: A Dialogue with an Eastern Orthodox Christian Mystic**

**Paidion:** I found some really interesting stuff about the Law of Attraction.

**Aneer:** What is it that you have found?

**Paidion:** This wonderful secret, the Law of Attraction, is a secret where if you understand how you attract what you think about... then you have the key to happiness!

**Aneer:** Have you seen what else the Law of Attraction could be?

**Paidion:** You mean the Law of Attraction could be more?

**Aneer:** Let me think about how to explain this...

**Paidion:** Did the Church Fathers say anything about the Law of Attraction? Or did the Bible?

**Aneer:** Where to start, where to start—the Law of Attraction says our thoughts are important, and that is true. Not just a little bit true, but deeper than a whale can dive. The Apostle writes:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

**Paidion:** And there is something about "ask, seek, knock?"

**Aneer:** Yes, indeed:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

It is part of the [Sermon on the Mount](#). But there is something that you may be missing about what is in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), and something you may be missing about the Law of Attraction.

**Paidion:** Why? Is there anything relevant besides the [Sermon on the Mount](#)?

**Aneer:** Yes indeed, from the first pages of [Genesis](#):

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, "Yea, hath God said, "Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"

And the woman said unto the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it,

neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."

And the serpent said unto the woman, "Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat,

The Law of Attraction is here. The very heart of the Law of Attraction is here. Have you read [The Magician's Nephew?](#)

**Paidion:** It is one of my favorite books.

**Aneer:** Do you remember what Jadis stole?

**Paidion:** How could Jadis steal anything? She was a queen!

**Aneer:** Then you have forgotten the verse when Jadis met a garden enclosed:

"Come in by the gold gates or not at all,  
Take of my fruit for others or forbear,  
For those who steal or those who climb my wall  
Shall find their heart's desire and find despair."

The story gives a glimpse of the Queen Jadis finding her heart's desire: undying years, and undying strength. She found everything the Law of Attraction promises. If the Law of Attraction does anything, you can see it unfold in Eve choosing to be attracted to the fruit, or Jadis.

But undying strength was not the only thing in the picture. When Jadis ate that apple, she might never age

or die, but neither could she ever live again. She cheated death, perhaps, but at the expense of Life. Which is to say that she didn't really cheat Death at all. And she damned herself to a "living" death that was hollow compared to her previous life she so eagerly threw away.

**Paidion:** So you think Eve was like Jadis? Halfway to being a vampire?

**Aneer:** Paidion, you're big on imagining. I want you to imagine the Garden of Eden for just a moment. Adam and Eve have been created immortal, glorious, lord and lady of all nature, and Eve tastes an exhilarating rush that has something very vampiric about it: a moment passed, and the woman who had never known pain found the seed of death deep inside her. And in a flash of insight, she realized something.

**Paidion:** What is it she realized?

**Aneer:** She had the seed of death eating away at her. Nothing could stop her from dying. And her deathless husband would watch her die.

**Paidion:** A sad end to the story.

**Aneer:** What do you mean?

**Paidion:** But it's a tragedy!

**Aneer:** It may be tragic, but how is it an end to Adam's story?

Adam was still deathless. He would live on; did you assume he would be celibate, or that Eve envisioned God to never provide him a wife to share in blessed happiness?

**Paidion:** Look, this is all very impressive, but is any of this really part of the ancient story?

**Aneer:** I cut off the story before its usual end. The end goes surprisingly fast:

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

**Paidion:** Why? Is this just Eve's... solution... to... the... problem... of... Adam's... [shudder]

**Aneer:** Do you think your generation is the first to invent jealousy?

**Paidion:** But can't the Law of Attraction be used for good?

**Aneer:** When people speak of the Law of Attraction, it always sounds like the unearthing of the key to happiness.

**Paidion:** But what else could it be once we are attracting the right thoughts?

**Aneer:** What, exactly, are the right thoughts might be something interesting to discuss someday. But for now let me suggest that the Law of Attraction might be something very different, at its core, from the key to happiness: it could be the bait to a trap.

The [Sermon on the Mount](#) truly does say,

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

but only after saying something that is cut from the same cloth:

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

The [Sermon on the Mount](#) finds it unworthy of the children of a loving and providing God to chase after food and clothing—or cars and iPods or whatever—as if they have to do so because their Heavenly Father has forgotten their needs. God knows our needs before we begin to ask, and it's a distraction for us to be so terribly concerned about the things that will be added to us if we put first things first and last things last.

**Paidion:** But what is wrong with wanting abundance?

**Aneer:** Have you read Plato's [Republic](#)?

**Paidion:** No.

**Aneer:** Did you know that royalty do not touch money?

**Paidion:** Why not? It would seem that a king should have the most right to touch money.

**Aneer:** Well, let us leave discussion of rights for another day. But there's something in the [Republic](#) where Plato knows something about gold, and it is the reason why royalty do not touch money.

**Paidion:** And that is?

**Aneer:** Plato is describing the guardians, the highest rulers of an ideal city. And what he says about them is that they have true gold in their character: they have a truer gold than gold itself, and they are set apart for something high enough that they would only be

distracted by handling the kind of gold that is dug up from the earth like something dead.

**Paidion:** But kings have palaces and jewels and such!

**Aneer:** Not in Plato's [Republic](#) they don't. The life of a ruler, of a king, in Plato is something like the life of a monk. It's not about having palaces of gold any more than being President is all about being able to watch cartoons all day!

**Paidion:** Ok, but for the rest of us who may not be royalty, can't we at least want abundance as a consolation prize?

**Aneer:** "The rest of us who may not be royalty?"  
What can you possibly mean?

**Paidion:** Um...

**Aneer:** All of us bear the royal bloodline of Lord Adam and Lady Eve. All of us are created in the divine image, made to grow into the likeness of Christ and—

**Paidion:** So we are all made to rule as kings?

**Aneer:** Read the Fathers and you will find that the real rule of royalty is when we rule over God's creation as royal emblems, as the image of God. For people to rule other people is not just not the only kind of royal rule: it's almost like a necessary evil. Do you know of the ritual anointing of kings? In the Bible, a man is made king when he is anointed with oil. Such anointing still takes place in England, for instance. And when a person receives the responsibility for sacred work in the Orthodox Church, he is anointed—chrismated—and in this anointing, the Orthodox Church has always seen the sacred anointing of prophet, priest, and king.

**Paidion:** But this is just for priests, right?

**Aneer:** Paidion, every one of us is created for spiritual

priesthood. Perhaps I wasn't clear: the anointing of prophet, priest, and king is for every faithful member of the Church, not just a few spiritual Marines. Chrismation, or royal anointing, is administered alongside baptism to all the faithful.

**Paidion:** And it's part of this royal dignity not to touch money?

**Aneer:** There is a very real sense in which Christians may not touch money. Not literally, perhaps; many Christians touch coins or other items, and so on and so forth. But there is a real sense in which Christians never have what you search for in abundance, because they have something better.

**Paidion:** Are you saying half a loaf is better than an abundance of loaves?

**Aneer:** I know a number of people who have found that an abundance of loaves is not the solution to all of life's problems. Easy access to an abundance of loaves can lead to weight issues, or worse.

May I suggest what it is that you fear losing? It isn't exactly abundance, even if you think it is.

**Paidion:** So am I mistaken when I think I want shrimp and lobster as often as I wish?

**Aneer:** Maybe you are right that you want shrimp and lobster, but you don't only want shrimp and lobster. You want to be able to choose.

Remember in Star Wars, how Luke and Ben Kenobi are travelling in the Millennium Falcon, and Kenobi puts a helmet on Luke's head that has a large shield completely blocking his eyesight? And Luke protests and says, "With the blast shield down, I can't even see.

How am I supposed to fight?" And then something happens, and Luke starts to learn that he can fight even without seeing what was in front of him, and Kenobi says, "You have taken your first step into a larger world."?

What you want is to have your ducks in a row and be able to see that you can have shrimp and lobster as often as you want.

What the [Sermon on the Mount](#) says is better than a way to do a better job of having your next meal right where you can see it. It says to put the blast shield down...

And take your first step into a larger world.

**Paidion:** I'm sure for a man of faith like you—

**Aneer:** Why call me a man of faith? I may not have all my ducks lined up in a row, but I have always known where my next meal is coming from.

**Paidion:** Well sure, but that's—

**Aneer:** Maybe everybody you know has that privilege, but a great many people in the world do not.

**Paidion:** That may be, but I still want abundance.

**Aneer:** May I suggest that you are reaching for abundance on a higher plane?

**Paidion:** Like what? What is this larger world?

**Aneer:** When you have the blast shield down over your eyes, what you receive is part of a life of communion with God. When you don't see where your next meal is coming from, and God still feeds you, you get a gift covered with God's fingerprints. You're living part of a dance and you are beckoned to reach for much deeper treasures. If you are asked to let go of treasures on

earth, it is so your hands can open all the wider to grasp treasures in Heaven.

**Paidion:** Maybe for super-spiritual people like you, but when I've tried anything like that, I've only met disappointments.

**Aneer:** I've had a lot of disappointments. Like marriage, for instance.

**Paidion:** You? You've always seemed—

**Aneer:** My wife and I are very happily married. We've been married for years, and as the years turn into decades we are more happily married—more in love. But our marriage has been a disappointment on any number of counts.

G.K. Chesterton said, "The marriage succeeds because the honeymoon fails." Part of our marriage is that it's not just a honeymoon; my wife is not some bit of putty I can inflate to the contours of my fantasies about the perfect wife; she is a real person with real desires and real needs and real virtues and real flaws and a real story. She is infinitely more than some figment of my imagination. She has disappointed me time and time again—thank God!—and God has given me something much better in her than if she was some piece of putty that somehow fit my imagination perfectly. By giving me a real woman—what a woman!—God is challenging me to dig deeper into being a real man.

**Paidion:** So all disappointments make for a happy marriage? Because...

**Aneer:** I'm not completely sure how to answer that. We miss something about life if we think we can only have a

happy marriage when we don't get any disappointments. Read the Gospel and it seems that Christ himself dealt with disappointments; his life on earth built to the disappointment of the Cross which he could not escape no matter how hard he prayed. But the Apostle Paul wrote about this disappointment:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It is part of his glory.

If you have a disappointment, you have one problem. If you have a disappointment and you think that with such a disappointment you can't really be where you should be, you have two problems. Disappointments sting like ninety, but they can be drawn into something deeper and a richer life.

**Paidion:** So you'd rather be disappointed in life than get your way.

**Aneer:** Yes.

When I haven't gotten my way, that has been a stepping stone for a refinement on more than one level, a refinement in what I sought and what I wanted. I've gotten better things than if I always had a magic key that gave me what I thought I wanted. St. Paul said, "When I became a man, I put childish things behind me."

**Paidion:** Am I being childish if I wish the Law of Attraction could get me what I want? If I dream?

**Aneer:** What the Law of Attraction is a way to satisfy the kind of things childish people set their hearts on. Always getting your way is not an unattainable dream. Always getting your way is not a dream at all. Always getting your way is a nightmare. It is the nightmare of succeeding at being a spoiled brat where others have grown up in all the disappointments you hope to dodge.

**Paidion:** Is virtue its own reward?

Or is it just the consolation prize when you do the right thing even if you don't get a real reward?

**Aneer:** Let us return to Plato again.

Elsewhere in the [Republic](#), some people say some questionable things about goodness. Someone says, for instance, that what is good is whatever the stronger group wants, or something like that. And so someone asks if there's anything a good man has that the evil man does not.

Actually, the question is put much more strongly than that. We are asked to suppose that an evil man has every worldly benefit—a good name, wealth, good children, everything in life going his way. And let us

suppose that the good man gets quite the opposite: he is slandered and betrayed, loses everything, is tortured, and is finally crucified. Can we still say that the good man has anything the evil one does not?

**Paidion:** If that is the case, it's hard to see that the good man has anything valuable that the evil man does not.

**Aneer:** He has goodness.

**Paidion:** Well, yes, but besides—

**Aneer:** Paidion, how would you like to have all of the wealth in the world and the health with which to spend it?

**Paidion:** No thanks!

**Aneer:** Meaning that on those terms, no man in his right mind would choose any amount of wealth!

**Paidion:** Sure, if you have to spend all the money on doctor bills...

**Aneer:** All right.

Let's suppose you don't have to spend any of it on doctor bills. Suppose you're a billionaire with all kinds of free medical care, and with your billions of dollars comes the worst of health and the most atrocious suffering for the rest of your mercifully short life.

Billions of dollars must be worth that, right?

**Paidion:** Does this relate to Plato?

**Aneer:** Yes—

**Paidion:** Are you saying that the evil man had bad health? You didn't mention that at first.

**Aneer:** Well, that depends on what you mean by health.

Externally, he had the best of health, I suppose, and the good man had terrible diseases. But the condition of being evil is the spiritual condition of being diseased, twisted, and shrunken. Even our English words like

"twisted" and "sick" are signs of ancient recognition of evil as a spiritual disease. The evil man with worldly glory is the man who has all of the wealth in the world and the health with which to spend it—and the good man is the man who has nothing but his health. He has the one thing the evil man does not: his health!

**Paidion:** Is this about Heaven and Hell? Because however impressive they may be, we aren't there yet.

**Aneer:** Wrong. Heaven and Hell begin in this life. The eternal tree that forever stands in Heaven or Hell is planted and nourished in this life. The connection between this life and the next is a closer connection than you can imagine.

**Paidion:** All this sounds very wonderful, and I could wish it were true. For people like you who have faith, at least. I don't...

**Aneer:** Paidion, there was something that happened in [The Magician's Nephew](#), before Queen Jadis attracted to her the deathless strength that she desired. Something happened before then. Do you remember what?

**Paidion:** I'm not sure what.

**Aneer:** It's quite memorable, and it has quite a lot to do with the Law of Attraction.

**Paidion:** I am afraid to ask.

**Aneer:** Let me quote the Queen, then.

...That was the secret of secrets. It had long been known to the great kings of our race that there was a word which, if spoken with the proper ceremonies, would destroy all living things except the one who spoke it. But the ancient kings were

weak and soft-hearted and bound themselves and all who should come after them with great oaths never even to seek after the knowledge of that word. But I learned it in a secret place and paid a terrible price to learn it. I did not use it until she forced me to it. I fought to overcome her by every other means. I poured out the blood of my armies like water...

The last great battle raged for three days here in Charn itself. For three days I looked down upon it from this very spot. I did not use my power till the last of my soldiers had fallen, and the accursed woman, my sister, at the head of her rebels was halfway up those great stairs that led up from the city to the terrace. Then I waited till we were so close that we could not see one another's faces. She flashed her horrible, wicked eyes upon me and said, "Victory." "Yes," said I, "Victory, but not yours." Then I spoke the Deplorable Word. A moment later I was the only living thing beneath the sun.

**Paidion:** Are you saying that the Law of Attraction is like the Deplorable Word?

**Aneer:** The Law of Attraction is described in glowing terms but what is described so glowingly is that there's you, your thoughts, and a giant mirror called the universe... and that's it. Everything else is killed. Not literally, perhaps, but in a still very real sense. The reason you have not succeeded at getting what you want couldn't be because a powerful man, with his own thoughts and

motives, is refusing something you want, much less that God loves you and knows that what you want isn't really in your best interests. The powerful man is just part of the great mirror, as is God, if there is anything to God besides you. The only possible reason for you to not have something, the only thing that is not killed, is your thoughts.

And how I wish you could enter a vast, vast world which is not a mirror focused on you, where even the people who meet and know you have many other concerns besides thinking about you, who have their own thoughts and wishes and which is ruled by an infinitely transcendent God who is infinitely more than you even if you were made for the entire purpose of becoming divine, and perhaps even more divine than if you are the only thing you do not lump into the great mirror reflecting your thoughts.

**Paidion:** But how shall I then live? It seemed, for a moment, like things got better when I paid attention to my thoughts, and things in my life—

**Aneer:** If you think it seems like your thoughts matter, perhaps that's because your thoughts really are important, possibly more important than you can even dream of. Perhaps there are other things going on in the world, but it is your thoughts that stand at the root of everything you contribute to the tree that will stand eternally in Heaven or as Hell. I don't know how to tell you how important it is to attend to your thoughts, nor how to tell you that what you think of as morality is something which all the wise go upstream and deal with at the source, in the unseen warfare of vigilant

attention to one's thoughts. Little thoughts build to big thoughts and big thoughts build to actions, and spiritual discipline or "asceticism" moves from the hard battle of actions to the harder battle of thoughts. And thoughts aren't just about concepts; when I've had trouble getting a thought of doing something I shouldn't out of my head, sometimes I've reminded myself that what is not truly desired doesn't really last long. [The Philokalia](#) there, my point is that it is a lifetime's endeavor to learn how to pay proper attention to one's thoughts.

**Paidion:** Um... uh... did you say I was made to be divine? Did you mean it?

**Aneer:** Paidion, if being divine just means that there isn't anything that much bigger than us, then that's a rather pathetic idea of the divine, and I wouldn't give twopence for it. But if we really and truly understand how utterly God dwarfs us, if we understand what it means that God is the Creator and we are his creatures, and the infinite chasm between Creator and creature is then transcended so that we his creatures can become by grace what God is by nature—then that is really something and I would give my life for that way of being divine!

There is a hymn, of ancient age, that says, "Adam, wanting to be divine, failed to be divine. Christ became man that he might make Adam divine." Christ's life is an example of what it means to be divine: as a child he was a refugee, then grew up as a blue-collar worker, then lived as a homeless man, and died a slave's death so vile its name was a curse word. This is a tremendous clue-by-four about what true glory is. This is a divine clue-

by-four about what Adam missed when he decided that reigning as immortal king and lord of paradise and following only one simple rule wasn't good enough for him.

And it is in this messy life we live, with so many situations beyond our control and so many things we would not choose, that God can transform us so that we become by grace what he is by nature.

**Paidion:** Aneer, can I ever enter the vast world you live in? It seems I have, well...

**Aneer:** Well?

**Paidion:** Chosen to live in an awfully small world, thinking I was doing something big.

**Aneer:** All of us have. It's called sin. Not a popular word today, but realizing you are in sin is Heaven's best-kept secret. Before you repent, you are afraid to let go of something that seems, like the Ring to Gollum, "my precious." Afterwards you find that what you dropped was torment and Hell, and you are awakening to a larger world.

**Paidion:** But when can I do something this deep? My schedule this week is pretty full, and little of it meshes well with—

**Aneer:** The only time you can ever repent is now.

# Learning a Language Like Russian

[C.J.S. Hayward](#) [Library](#) [Articles](#) [Learning a  
Language Like Russian](#)

This post is most immediately about learning Russian for native English speakers, but most of the principles apply to learning other languages as well.

## A bizarre conversation with a psychologist

Here's an excerpt from a bizarre conversation with a psychologist who kept frequently insisting I had "**very few interests**"= well past the point that he gave the oddest body language in acknowledging I had master's degrees bridging math and computers (UIUC) and theology and philosophy (Cambridge, England), and (it also came up) I had briefly studied French at the Sorbonne—and in all of this, he still alleged in undiminished force to have "**very few interests**=":

**Me (trying another approach):** I'm a philologist.

**Him (looking to neutralize or dismiss it):** What on earth do you mean by that?

**Me:** Languages are like Scotch: one is a good start; two is just about perfect; three is not nearly half enough.

**Him:Me:** I've dipped a finger in a lot of languages, but I've read the Bible in five or six languages.

**Him (counting on fingers while guessing):** English, French, German, Latin, Greek, Hebrew.

**Me:** A dozen translations in English, two translations each in French and Spanish, Latin, Greek, modern Russian three times in the Synodal version, and I'm

working my way through the Slavonic...

**Him:** Russian is a tonal language, and it's the second hardest language for native English speakers to learn after Chinese.

I don't remember what I said next. Those were some of the most bizarre remarks about Russian I'd heard in my life.

At least one webpage I've seen about easy, medium, and hard languages for native English speakers placed Russian squarely in the middle of things to learn; the major qualification for difficulty is simply a vocabulary that doesn't overlap modern English that much; I would guesstimate that the number of Russian words a native English speaker would easily recognize amounts to less than 10% of the words one would encounter.

Beyond that, the grammar is not particularly slippery, or otherwise odd; the alphabet has strong and recognizable similarities to our own (compare CJK ideograms or even trying to see where one letter ends and another begins in Arabic for the un-initiated). It's actually a lot nicer an alphabet to outsiders than the English use of our alphabet is. Learning Russian is moderately difficult, but it's doable, and this page is here because I want to share what gleanings I've learned in my studies, and make things easier.

## A preliminary note: the Russian alphabet

The first point I'm mentioning is the alphabet. In a word, it's not a hard alphabet to learn; it's just unfamiliar and takes practice. I learned it on an iPhone app named "Learn to read Russian in three hours.= Good old fashioned flashcards should work just as well, or for that matter having the alphabet below handy for cross-reference in reading. (Or a memory technique discussed below.) Also, don't feel the need to make every sound.

The Russian R sound is trilled; I've tried at length to learn a trilled R and don't know how to make it. The H sound is a grated H, the kind that makes you sound like you are clearing your throat because you have a bad chest cold. I can sometimes make it, but I've heard native Russian speakers pronounce it as an English K, or an English H, so apparently both work. There is also a sound that sounds like an "sh=" followed immediately by a "ch="; I'm working on this and sometimes succeeding at making it one sound without a break between the "sh=" and "ch=" sounds. Don't sweat it overall; in most languages people will have some tolerance for imprecise sounds: if your worst liability is an inauthentic R or H sound, you're doing well!

[Open just this image to print it](#)

The letters you should pay attention to are those on the far left.

## **A first language-learning workhorse: A parallel Bible**

I will try to cover a few primary techniques, but the main workhorse I've found, after a lot of other things, is reading a parallel Russian-English Bible. I found, to my irritation, that all the Russian-English Bibles I could track down on Amazon were made by the Russian Bible Society, which is a Protestant organization that omits certain books of the Old Testament that are present both in the Russian and English translations. (The Reformers at least included those books in an appendix!) The modern Russian translation you will be wanting is the Synodal Version (RUSV), which was translated into Russian by Orthodox Christians rather than Protestants. I wanted [a nice leatherbound edition](#); there is also [a nice but cheaper option](#) (the only one really cheaper one I could find was [a paperback edition](#)).

Additionally, there is [at least one available parallel Slavonic-English prayer book I'm aware of](#). It could perhaps be better, but it's not too many words to learn, and the words are often the same as at Liturgy. There is also [a transliterated version of the Liturgy](#) that displays the English version as you hover over the transliterated Russian.

No matter how much you may want to learn Russian, please start forays into the Synodal Version **slowly**, and ramp up **slowly**.

As Orthodox mystagogy would have it, you don't begin exercise by running a marathon. What I would recommend instead is reading the Gospel of John the Theologian, and start with the prologue.

The basic initial technique is to look at the Russian side for a single verse like John 1:1, and then see if you can make connections to the English side. And if you don't on the first try, that's fine. But try again an hour later. If you're comfortable with a verse, move on to the next one. Before long you may be able to read a different verse each hour, and continue with hourly study. If you are comfortable trying to read one verse at a time, try reading two verses, and maybe not all the time. When you are genuinely comfortable reading two verses, move on to three. It is possible this way to get up to maybe a chapter:

"Little and often fills the purse.="

But by all means, no marathons, nor stretching yourself as hard as you can for a short while. One detail about lawn care is that the kind of sprinklers that are great for children to play in should only be used for that purpose as they are terrible at watering lawns. What happens to a lawn used by the sprinklers is that the stream of water is shot high up into the air, and with the same force slams down into the ground. If you slam water onto parched ground, it isn't absorbed; it can't be. What each droplet of a fist does, instead of being absorbed, is hammer the ground into a beaten shield that repels further droplets. And you end up with a deceptive situation where there is water streaming in rivulets over the surface of the wet-looking soil, but an inch down the soil remains as parched as before it was watered. This is something you don't want to do in educational situations, including learning a language. Little and often fills the purse.

One specific note to people who are in fact looking to learn

classical Hebrew and/or Koine Greek: you can fairly easily find [a good intralinear Bible](#), and to some people this looks like practically all language learning solved at once. However, I would pass on a caution: unless you have already learned multiple languages and already have that discipline, it's not perfect and you can easily create a habit of your eyes jumping to the intralinear English words and not really spending that much time, or making much progress, with Hebrew or Greek itself. However, one bit of discipline that I am using now is as follows. Use a specially cut rubber jar opener to only let you see the partial or complete line in the ancient language, and don't unveil to yourself the English term until you have stopped to ponder the ancient language's term and tried to figure it out without (intralinear) help.

## Making a jar opener into a study tool ([skip](#))

In earlier versions of this page, I recommended using index cards to hide and show things in a way that would be optimal.

After working with them, I found that unless you have the luxury of a page that is completely level, they slide around the page whether you want it or not. That problem was solved by making a cover out of a carefully cut rubber jar opener, which I obtained at a local grocery store.

[Good Cook rubber jar openers](#) include a circular jar opener, and a larger squarish jar opener. Either of them could be cut to be useful; I used the more square model but if I made too bad a mistake cutting it I could have used the other one. The unopened package looks like so:

[image omitted]

I made a first cut; mine was too deep and I cut a slight distance off the top. The point of the cut at the top is to be placed on top of a page, at the line of text you are working on, and to reveal a line of text, up to a point, and conceal what hasn't been revealed further.

[image omitted]

The full vertical height is too much; go to the bottom of the page on at least some intralinear Bibles and the rubber will fall over the bottom of the page. It was cut to height that was much

less but still appropriate:

[image omitted]

Note that at the top the top borders are closer.

Here are three examples of reading a line of the text. In all cases, the point is to place the whole Hebrew line in view, while hiding the intralinear English translation until the Hebrew has been given primary attention:

[image omitteds]

These specific images are adapted to Hebrew, as a language that reads right to left. If you want to work with an interlinear Greek New Testament you can use the same covering in almost the same way; you'll just pull the cover left to right, after first flipping the cover horizontally so it conceals what is to the right instead of what is to the left.

## Mega Memory

I am here mentioning something that has served me powerfully in the past, and works with multiple languages, but may not be as much needed in our setting.

[The Elements of New Testament Greek](#), the Greek textbook I was taught from, told you what you needed to learn in vocabulary, etc. [Greek to Me](#) does one better by providing a practical means to learn the vocabulary above rote memorization; it applies the classical memory technique in the first half of [Kevin Trudeau's Mega Memory](#) (I have a much shorter page and training tool online in [Memory and Prayer](#)), and it has been a tremendous accelerator in offering a five-times-faster alternative to looking things up in an old-fashioned print XYZ-English dictionary.

The reason I consider this to be optional now is that there is a faster alternative to avoid repeatedly looking up a term in a thick paper dictionary. You can go to [translate.google.com](http://translate.google.com), set it to translate from Russian to English, and spell things phonetically, or set your computer to let you type in Russian, and maybe buy keyboard stickers (or just post-it notes) putting Russian letters on top of your keys. There are two major Russian keyboard layouts both of which should be supported; there is one that is the standard layout ([stickers are available](#)), and one that is roughly phonetic for English speakers (I couldn't find any

stickers). If you are going to Russia, you will want the Russian standard keyboard layout; if you are not intending to go to Russia, you will probably find the phonetic layout to feel easier and more natural.

That stated, the memory technique has its uses, especially in getting a new alphabet down. It acts as scaffolding; you first remember XYZ through a vivid mental image from what is called "pegging", and then with repeated use the provisional mental image fades out of significance and you more quickly remember the word itself.

I will briefly comment that some people develop a strong initial impression that the memory technique is too much work for what it tries to do. I personally have found it not to live up to its hype, but I don't know anyone who has become proficient and still retains the initial bad impression. I would place it as one tool among others, and less decisive given today's technology offerings than it has been for me in the past.

## **A quieter memory technique**

The business world has come to recognize that multitasking is not a good thing, and divided attention is needlessly diluted attention. (The Orthodox Church has known this for much longer.)

There is a less striking memory technique of, when you discover or rediscover something or come across something worth keeping, stopping and pausing for a moment to simply give it your full attention. No mental images needed: just the studious slow, focused, and present attention Orthodoxy gives to anything worth keeping. This memory tool is something that combines well with many other techniques and resources.

## **Language classes**

Language classes aren't available to all of us; but they can provide another tool. I wanted to take a course in conversational Russian, but it didn't work out.

## DuoLingo

There are multiple computer training systems; Rosetta Stone is far from the only option. I don't have informed opinion about all of them, but [DuoLinguo](#) comes highly recommended, and I respect it myself.

## Subtitles

I have had difficulty locating edifying Russian-language film or video with English subtitles. However, if you do find something, it can be worth its weight in gold to try to make connections between the Russian you hear and the English you read. However, please note that there is not a complete correspondence between speech in the video and subtitles in another language. (You can have a few people talking but only the essential part is relayed in subtitle.)

Two gems I am aware of are [Ostrov](#) and [The Tale of Peter and Fevronia](#).

## **Conversations with native speakers (if available)**

Having a conversation, on a very basic level, can be helpful.

One note from Wheaton's Institute for Cross-Cultural Training: in dealing with a native speaker, you may be working and working and working on improving your language, and it remains just as hard to talk to that person.

There is a reason for this, and it is really OK. Some people who are sensitive to others' imperfect language abilities simplify what they say to match the proficiency of the person they are speaking with. This may mean that when you start they speak very simply, but they simplify less and less when they see you become more proficient. You are making progress talking with that person; it just doesn't feel like it.

## **Reading books in Russian**

This is not a first step in working on a foreign language, but when you are able it is tremendously valuable to read books in that language. What may come to mind first are the proverbial nineteenth-century Russian novels, but beside them there is a vast collection of spiritual literature available in Russian. When you are ready to read books in Russian, reading books really pays off.

## **Listening to liturgical music**

This also can be invaluable.

## **Experimenting**

Different techniques work best for different people; what works best for one person may not be best for another.

This point is worth experimenting on, and it is worth being in some sense watchful by paying attention for what works and what doesn't.

Enjoy!

# Lesser Icons: Reflections on Faith, Icons, and Art

C.S. Lewis's [The Voyage of the Dawn Treader](#) opens with a chapter called "The Picture in the Bedroom," which begins, "There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it." Not long into the chapter, we read:

They were in Lucy's room, sitting on the edge of her bed and looking at a picture on the opposite wall. It was the only picture in the house that they liked. Aunt Alberta didn't like it at all (that was why it was put away in a little back room upstairs), but she couldn't get rid of it because it had been a wedding present from someone she did not want to offend.

It was a picture of a ship—a ship sailing straight towards you. Her prow was gilded and shaped like the head of a dragon with a wide-open mouth. She had only one mast and one large, square sail which was a rich purple. The sides of the ship—what you could see of them where the gilded wings of the dragon ended—were green. She had just run up to the top of one glorious blue wave, and the nearer slope of that

wave came down towards you, with streaks and bubbles on it.

She was obviously running fast before a gay wind, listing over a little on her port side. (By the way, if you are going to read this story at all, and if you don't know already, you had better get it into your head that the left of a ship when you are looking ahead is port, and the right is starboard.) All of the sunlight fell on her from that side, and the water on that side was full of greens and purples. On the other, it was darker blue from the shadow of the ship.

"The question is," said Edmund, "whether it doesn't make things worse, looking at a Narnian ship when you can't get there."

"Even looking is better than nothing," said Lucy. "And she is such a very Narnian ship."

"Still playing your old game?" said Eustace Clarence, who had been listening outside the door and now came grinning into the room. Last year, when he had been staying with the Pevensies, he had managed to hear them all talking of Narnia and he loved teasing them about it. He thought of course that they were making it all up; and as he was far too stupid to make anything up himself, he did not approve of that.

"You're not wanted here," said Edmund curtly.

"I'm trying to think of a limerick," said Eustace.

"Something like this:

Some kids who played games about Narnia  
Got gradually balmier and balmier—"

"Well, Narnia and balmier don't rhyme, to begin with," said Lucy.

"It's an assonance," said Eustace.

"Don't ask him what an assy-thingummy is," said Edmund. "He's only longing to be asked. Say nothing and perhaps he'll

go away."

Most boys, on meeting a reception like this, would have either cleared out or flared up. Eustace did neither. He just hung about grinning, and presently began talking again.

"Do you like that picture?" he asked.

"For Heaven's sake don't let him get started about Art and all that," said Edmund hurriedly, but Lucy, who was very truthful, had already said, "Yes, I do. I like it very much."

"It's a rotten picture," said Eustace.

"You won't see it if you step outside," said Edmund.

"Why do you like it?" said Eustace to Lucy.

"Well, for one thing," said Lucy, "I like it because the ship looks as if it were really moving. And the water looks as if it were really wet. And the waves look as if they were really going up and down."

Of course Eustace knew lots of answers to this, but he didn't say anything. The reason was that at that very moment he looked at the waves and saw that they did look very much indeed as if they were going up and down. He had only once been in a ship (and then only so far as the Isle of Wight) and had been horribly seasick. The look of the waves in the picture made him feel sick again. He turned rather green and tried another look. And then all three children were staring with open mouths.

What they were seeing may be hard to believe when you read it in print, but it was almost as hard to believe when you saw it happening. The things in the picture were moving. It didn't look at all like a cinema either; the colours were too real and clean and out-of-doors for that. Down went the prow of the ship into the wave and up went a great shock of spray. And then up went the wave behind her, and her stern

and her deck became visible for the first time, and then disappeared as the next wave came to meet her and her bows went up again. At the same moment an exercise book which had been lying beside Edmund on the bed flapped, rose and sailed through the air to the wall behind him, and Lucy felt all her hair whipping round her face as it does on a windy day. And this was a windy day; but the wind was blowing out of the picture towards them. And suddenly with the wind came the noises—the swishing of waves and the slap of water against the ship's sides and the creaking and the overall high steady roar of air and water. But it was the smell, the wild, briny smell, which really convinced Lucy that she was not dreaming.

"Stop it," came Eustace's voice, squeaky with fright and bad temper. "It's some silly trick you two are playing. Stop it. I'll tell Alberta—Ow!"

The other two were much more accustomed to adventures but, just exactly as Eustace Clarence said, "Ow," they both said, "Ow" too. The reason was that a great cold, salt splash had broken right out of the frame and they were breathless from the smack of it, besides being wet through.

"I'll smash the rotten thing," cried Eustace; and then several things happened at the same time. Eustace rushed towards the picture. Edmund, who knew something about magic, sprang after him, warning him to look out and not be a fool. Lucy grabbed at him from the other side and was dragged forward. And by this time either they had grown much smaller or the picture had grown bigger. Eustace jumped to try to pull it off the wall and found himself standing on the frame; in front of him was not glass but real sea, and wind and waves rushing up to the frame as they

might to a rock. There was a second of struggling and shouting, and just as they thought they had got their balance a great blue roller surged up round them, swept them off their feet, and drew them down into the sea. Eustace's despairing cry suddenly ended as the water got into his mouth.

I don't know that C.S. Lewis was thinking about icons or Orthodoxy when he wrote this, and I am reluctant to assume that C.S. Lewis was doing what would be convenient for the claims I want to make at icons. Perhaps there are other caveats that should also be made: but the caveats are not the whole truth.

I am not aware of a better image of what an icon is and what an icon does than this passage in Lewis. Michel Quenot's [The Icon: A Window on the Kingdom](#) is excellent and there are probably more out there, but I haven't come across as much of an evocative image as the opening to [The Voyage of the Dawn Treader](#).

I don't mean that the first time you see an icon, you will be swept off your feet. There was a long time where I found them to be clumsy art that was awkward to look at. I needed to warm to them, and appreciate something that works very differently from Western art. I know that other people have had these immediate piercing experiences with icons, but appreciating icons has been a process of coming alive for me. But much the same could be said of my learning French or Greek, where I had to struggle at first and then slowly began to appreciate what is there. This isn't something Orthodoxy has a complete monopoly on; some of the time Roman Catholic piety can have something much in the same vein. But even if it's hard to say that there's something in icons that is much more alive than there is something in

something in icons that is nowhere else, there is something in icons that I had to learn to appreciate.

A cradle Orthodox believer at my parish explained that when she looks at an icon of the Transfiguration, she is there. The Orthodox understanding of presence and memory is not Western and not just concerned with neurons firing in the brain; it means that icons are portals that bring the spiritual presence of the saint or archetypal event that they portray. An icon can be alive, some more than others, and some people can sense this spiritually.

Icons are called windows of Heaven. Fundamental to icon and to symbol is that when the Orthodox Church proclaims that we are the image of God, it doesn't mean that we are a sort of detached miniature copy of God. It doesn't mean that we are a detached anything. It is a claim that to be human is to be in relation to God. It is a claim that we manifest God's presence and that the breath we breathe is the breath of God. What this means for icons is that when the cradle Orthodox woman I just mentioned says that she is there at the Transfiguration, then that icon is like the picture of the Narnian ship. If we ask her, "Where are you?" then saying "Staring at painted wood" is like saying that someone is "talking to an electronic device" when that person is using a cell phone to talk with a friend. In fact the error is deeper.

An icon of a saint is not intended to inform the viewer what a saint looked like. Its purpose is to connect the viewer with Christ, or Mary the Theotokos, or one of the saints or a moment we commemorate, like the Annunciation when Gabriel told humble Mary that she would bear God, or the Transfiguration, when for a moment Heaven shone through and Christ shone as Christians will shine and as saints sometimes shine even in this life. I don't

know all of the details of how the art is put together—although it is art—but the perspective lines vanish not in the depths of the picture but behind the viewer because the viewer is part of the picture. The viewer is invited to cross himself, bow before, and kiss the icon in veneration: the rule is not "Look, but don't touch." any more than the rule in our father's house is "Look, but don't touch." The gold background is there because it is the metal of light; these windows of Heaven are not simply for people to look into them and see the saint radiant with Heaven's light, but Heaven looks in and sees us. When I approach icons I have less the sense that I am looking at these saints, and Heaven, than that they are looking at me. The icon's purpose is not, as C.S. Lewis's picture, to connect people with Narnia, but to draw people into Heaven, which in the Orthodox understanding must begin in this life. It is less theatrical, but in the end the icon offers something that the Narnian picture does not.

It is with this theological mindset that Bishop KALLISTOS Ware is fond, in his lectures, of holding up a photograph of something obviously secular—such as a traffic intersection—and saying, "In Greece, this is an icon. It's not a holy icon, but it's an icon."

That, I believe, provides as good a departure as any for an Orthodox view of art. I would never say that icons are inferior art, and I would be extremely hesitant to say that art is equal to icons. But they're connected. Perhaps artwork is lesser icons.

Perhaps it is indistinct icons. But art is connected to iconography, and even if that link is severed so that art becomes non-iconic, it dies.

Another illustration may shed light on the relation between iconography and other art. The Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ to Orthodox. It is not simply a sacrament, but the

sacrament of sacraments, and the sacrament which all other sacraments are related. And there are ways the Orthodox Church requires that this Holy Communion be respected: it is to be prepared for with prayer and fasting, and under normal circumstances it is only received by people who are of one mind as the early Church. It encompasses, inseparably, mystic communion with God and communion with the full brothers and sisters of the Orthodox Church.

How does an ordinary meal around a table with family compare? In one sense, it doesn't. But to say that and stop is to miss something fundamental. Eating a meal around a table with friends and family is communion. It is not Holy Communion, but it is communion.

A shared meal is a rite that is part of the human heritage. It persists across times, cultures, and religions. This is recognized more clearly in some cultures than others, but i.e. Orthodox Jewish culture says that to break bread is only something you do when you are willing to become real friends. The term "breaking of bread" in the New Testament carries a double meaning; it can mean either the Eucharist or a common meal. A common meal may not have Orthodox making the same astounding claims we make about the Eucharist, but it is a real communion. This may be why a theologian made repeatedly singled out the common meal in the Saint Vladimir's Seminary Education Day publication to answer questions of what we should do today when technology is changing our lives, sometimes for the better but quite often not.

I myself have not made that effort much, and I can say that there is a difference between merely eating and filling my animal needs, and engaging in the precious ritual, the real communion, of a common meal around a table.

If we compare a common meal with the Eucharist, it seems

very small. But if we look at a common meal and the community and communion around that meal (common, community, and communion all being words that are related to each other and stem from the same root), next to merely eating to serve our animal needs, then all of the sudden we see things that can be missed if we only look at what separates the Eucharist from lesser communions. A common meal is communion. It is not Holy Communion, but it is communion.

In the same sense, art is not the equal of sacred iconography. My best art, even my best religious art, does not merit the treatment of holy icons. But neither is art, or at least good art, a separate sort of thing from iconography, and if that divorce is ever effected (it has been, but I'll wait on that for how), then it generates from being art as a meal that merely fills animal, bodily needs without being communion degenerates from what a common meal should be. And in that sense I would assert that art is lesser iconography. And the word "lesser" should be given less weight than "iconography." I may not create holy icons, but I work to create icons in all of my art, from writing to painting to other creations.

In my American culture—this may be different in other areas of the world, even if American culture has a strong influence—there are two great obstacles to connecting with art. These obstacles to understanding need to be denounced. These two obstacles can be concisely described as:

- The typical secular approach to art.
- The typical Christian approach to art.

If I'm going to denounce those two, it's not clear how much wiggle room I am left over to affirm—and my goal is not merely to affirm but embrace an understanding of art. Let me begin to

to affirm but embrace an understanding of art. Let me begin to explain myself.

Let's start with a red flag that provides just a glimpse of the mainstream Christian view of art. In college, when I thought it was cool to be a cynic and use my mind to uncover a host of hidden evils, I defined "Christian Contemporary Music" in [Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary](#) to be "A genre of song designed primarily to impart sound teaching, such as the doctrine that we are sanctified by faith and not by good taste in music."

May God be praised, that was not the whole truth in Christian art then, and it is even further from being the whole truth today—I heartily applaud the "Wow!" music videos, and there is a rich stream of exceptions. But this doesn't change the fact that the #1 selling Christian series today is the Left Behind series, which with apologies to Dorothy Parker, does not have a single book that is to be set aside lightly. (They are all to be hurled with great force!)

If I want to explain what I would object to instead of simply making incendiary remarks about Christian arts, let me give a concrete example. I would like to discuss something that I discussed with a filmmaker at a Mennonite convention a couple of years I converted to Orthodoxy. I did not set out to criticize, and I kept my mouth shut about certain things.

What I did do was to outline a film idea for a film that would start out indistinguishably from an action-adventure movie. It would have one of the hero's friends held captive by some cardboard-cutout villains. There is a big operation to sneak in and deftly rescue him, and when that fails, all Hell breaks loose and there is a terrific action-adventure style firefight. There is a dramatic buildup to the hero getting in the helicopter, and as they are leaving, one of the villain's henchmen comes running with a shotgun. Before he can aim, the hero blasts away his knee

with a shotgun. Before he can aim, the hero blasts away his knee with a hollow-nosed .45.

The camera surprisingly does not follow the helicopter in its rush to glory, but instead focuses on the henchman for five or ten excruciating minutes as he curses and writhes in agony. Then the film slows down to explore what that one single gunshot means to the henchman for the remaining forty years of his life, as he nursed a spiritual wound of lust for vengeance that was infinitely more tragic than his devastating physical wound.

The filmmaker liked the idea, or at least that's what he thought. He saw a different and better ending than what I envisioned. It would be the tale of the henchman's journey of forgiveness, building to a dramatic scene where he is capable of killing the hero and beautifully lets go of revenge. And as much as I believe in forgiveness and letting go of revenge, this "happy ending" (roughly speaking) bespoke an incommensurable gulf between us.

The difference amounts to a difference of love. Not that art has to cram in as much love, or message about love or forgiveness, as it can. If that happens, it is fundamentally a failure on the part of the artist, and more specifically it is a failure of a creator to have proper love for his creation. My story would not show much love in action, and it is specifically meant to leave audiences not only disturbed but shell shocked and (perhaps) sickened at how violence is typically shown by Hollywood. The heartblood of cinematic craft in this film would be an effort to take a character who in a normal action-adventure movie is faceless, and which the movie takes pains to prevent us from seeing or loving as human when he is torn up by the hero's cool weapon, and give him a human face so that the audience feels the pain not only of his wounded body but the grievous spiritual wound that creates its deepest tragedy. That

grievous spiritual wound that creates the deepest tragedy. That is to say that the heartblood of cinematic craft would be to look lovingly at a man, unloving as he may be, and give him a face instead of letting him be a faceless henchman whose only purpose is to provide conflict so we can enjoy him being slaughtered. And more to the point, it would not violate his freedom or his character by giving him a healing he would despise, and announce that after his knee has been blasted away he comes to the point of forgiving the man who killed his friends and crippled him for life.

Which is to say that I saw the film as art, and he saw it as a container he could cram more message into. That is why I was disturbed when he wanted to tack a happy ending on. There is a much bigger problem here than ending a story the wrong way.

I don't mean to say that art shouldn't say anything, or that it is a sin to have a moral. This film idea is not only a story that has a moral somewhere; its entire force is driven by the desire to give a face, a human face, to faceless villains whose suffering and destruction is something we rejoice in other words. In other words, it has a big moral, it doesn't mince words, and it makes absolutely no apologies for being driven by its moral.

Then what's the difference? It amounts to love. In the version of the story I created, the people, including the henchmen, are people. What the filmmaker saw was a question of whether there's a better way to use tools to drive home message. And he made the henchman be loving enough to forgive by failing to love him enough.

When I was talking with one professor at Wheaton about how I was extremely disappointed with a Franklin Peretti novel despite seeing how well the plot fit together, I said that I couldn't put my finger on what it was. He rather bluntly

interrupted me and simply said that Peretti didn't love his characters. And he is right. In *This Present Darkness*, Franklin Peretti makes a carefully calculated use of tools at his disposal (such as characters) to provide maximum effect in driving home his point. He does that better than art does. But he does not love his characters into being; he does not breathe into them and let them move. It's not a failure of technique; it's a failure of something much deeper. In this sense, the difference between good and bad art, between [A Wind in the Door](#) and *Left Behind*, is that in [A Wind in the Door](#) there are characters who not only have been loved into being but have a spark of life that has been not only created into them but loved into them, and in *Left Behind* there are tools which are used to drive home "message" but are not in the same sense loved.

There is an obvious objection which I would like to pause to consider: "Well, I understand that elevated, smart people like you can appreciate high art, and that's probably better. But can't we be practical and look at popular art that will reach ordinary people?" My response to that is, "Are you sure? Are you really sure of what you're assuming?"

Perhaps I am putting my point too strongly, but let me ask the last time you saw someone who wasn't Christian and not religious listening to Amy Grant-style music, or watching the *Left Behind* movie? If it is relevant, is it reaching non-Christians? (And isn't that what "relevant" stuff is supposed to do?) The impression I've gotten, the strong impression, is that the only people who find that art relevant to their lives are Evangelicals who are trying to be relevant. But isn't the world being anti-Christian? My answer to that is that people who watch *The Chronicles of Narnia* and people who watch *Star Wars* movies are largely watching them for the same reason: they are good art. The

heavy Christian force behind *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which Disney to its credit did not edit out, has not driven away enough people to stop the film from being a major success. *The Chronicles of Narnia* is relevant, and it is relevant not because people calculated how to cram in the most message, but because not only C.S. Lewis but the people making the film loved their creation. Now, there are other factors; both *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Star Wars* have commercial tie-in's. And there is more commercial muscle behind those two than the *Left Behind* movie. But to only observe these things is to miss the point. The stories I hear about the girl who played Lucy walking onto the set and being so excited she couldn't stop her hands from shaking, are not stories of an opportunistic actress who found a way to get the paycheck she wanted. They are stories of people who loved what they were working on. That is what makes art powerful, not budget.

There's something I'd like to say about love and work. There are some jobs—maybe all—that you really can't do unless you really love them. How? Speaking as a programmer, there's a lot of stress and aggravation in this job. Even if you have no difficulties with your boss, or co-workers, the computer has a sort of perverse parody of intelligence that means that you do your best to do something clearly, and the computer does the strangest things.

It might crash; it might eat your work; it might crash and eat your work; it might show something weird that plays a perverted game of hide and seek and always dodge your efforts to find out what exactly is going wrong so you can fix it. Novices' blood is boiling before they manage to figure out basic errors that won't even let you run your program at all. So programmers will be fond of definitions of "Programming, n. A hobby similar to banging

your head against a wall, but with fewer opportunities for reward."

Let me ask: What is programming like if you do not love it? There are many people who love programming. They don't get there unless they go through the stress and aggravation. There's enough stress and aggravation that you can't be a good programmer, and maybe you can't be a programmer at all, unless you love it.

I've made remarks about programming; there are similar remarks to be made about carpentry, or being a mother (even if being a mother is a bigger kind of thing than programming or carpentry). This is something that is true of art—with its stress and aggravation—precisely because art is work, and work can have stress and aggravation that become unbearable if there is no love. Or, in many cases, you can work, but your work suffers. Love may need to get dirty and do a lot of grimy work—you can't love something into being simply by feeling something, even if love can sometimes transfigure the grimy work—but there absolutely must be love behind the workgloves. It doesn't take psychic powers to tell if something was made with love.

I would agree with Franky Schaeffer's remark in [Addicted to Mediocrity: 20th Century Christians and the Arts](#), when he pauses to address the question "How can I as a Christian support the arts?" the first thing he says is to avoid Christian art. I would temper that remark now, as some Christian art has gotten a lot better. But he encouraged people to patronize good art, and to the question, "How can I afford to buy original paintings?" he suggests that a painting costs much less than a TV. But Schaeffer should be set aside another work which influenced his father, and which suggests that if Christian art is problematic, that doesn't mean that secular art is doing everything well.

When I was preparing for a job interview with an auction house that deals with coins and stamps, I looked through the 2003(?) Spink's Catalogue of British Coins. (Mainly I studied the pictures of coins to see what I could learn.) When I did that, a disturbing story unfolded.

The Spink's catalogue takes coins from Celtic and Roman times through medieval times right up through the present day.

While there are exceptions in other parts of the world, the ancient and early medieval coins all had simple figures that were not portraits, in much the way that a drawing in a comic strip like [Foxtrot](#) differs from Mark Trail or some other comic strip where the author is trying to emulate a photograph. Then, rather suddenly, something changes, and people start cramming in as much detail as they could. The detail reaches a peak in the so-called "gold penny", in which there is not a square millimeter of blank space, and then things settle down as people realize that it's not a sin to have blank space as well as a detailed portrait. (On both contemporary British and U.S. coinage, the face of the coin has a bas-relief portrait of a person, and then there is a blank space, and a partial ring of text around the edge, with a couple more details such as the year of coinage. The portrait may be detailed, but the coinmakers are perfectly willing to leave blank space in without cramming in more detail than fits their design. In the other world coinage I've seen, there can be some differences in the portrait (it may be of an animal), but there is a similar use of portrait, text, and blank space.

This is what happened when people's understanding of symbol disintegrated. The effort to cram in detail which became an effort to be photorealistic is precisely an effort to cram some reality into coins when they lost their reality as symbols. There are things about coins then that even numismatists (people who

study coins) do not often understand today. In the Bible, the backdrop to the question in Luke 20 that Jesus answered, "Show me a coin. Whose likeness is it, and whose inscription? ... Give what is Caesar's to Caesar, and what is God's to God," is on the surface a question about taxes but is not a modern gripe about "Must I pay my hard-earned money to the Infernal Revenue Service?", It is not the question some Anabaptists ask today about whether it is OK for Christians' taxes to support things they believe are unconscionable, and lead one pastor to suggest that people earn less money so they will pay less taxes that will end up supporting violence. It's not a question about anything most Christians would recognize in money today.

It so happens that in traditional fashion quarters in the U.S. today have a picture of George Washington, which is to say not only a picture but an authority figure. There is no real cultural reason today why this tradition has to be maintained. If the government mint started turning out coins with a geometric design, a blank surface, or some motto or trivia snippet, there would be no real backlash and people would buy and sell with the new quarters as well as the traditional ones. The fact that the quarter, like all commonly circulated coins before the dollar coin, has the image of not simply a-man-instead-of-a-woman but specifically the man who once held supreme political authority within the U.S., is a quaint tradition that has lost its meaning and is now little more than a habit. But it has been otherwise.

The Roman denarius was an idol in the eyes of many Jewish rabbis. It was stamped with the imprint of the Roman emperor, which is to say that it was stamped with the imprint of a pagan god and was therefore an idol. And good Jews shouldn't have had a denarius with them when they asked Jesus that trapped question. For them to have a denarius with them was worse on

some accounts than if Jesus asked them, "Show me a slab of bacon," and they had one with them. The Jewish question of conscience is "Must one pay tax with an idol?" and the question had nothing to do with any economic hardship involved in paying that tax (even though most Jews then were quite poor).

Jesus appealed to another principle. The coin had Caesar's image and inscription: this was the one thing he asked them to tell him besides producing the coin. In the ancient world people took as axiomatic that the authority who produced coinage had the authority to tax that coinage, and Jesus used that as a lever: "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God's the thing that are God's."

This last bit of leverage was used to make a much deeper point. The implication is that if a coin has Caesar's image and we owe it to Caesar, what has God's image—you and I—are God's and are owed to God. This image means something deep. If it turns out that we owe a tax to Caesar, how much more do we owe our very selves to God?

Augustine uses the image of "God's coins" to describe us. He develops it further. In the ancient world, when coins were often made of precious and soft metals instead of the much harder coins today, coins could be "defaced" by much use: they would be rubbed down so far that the image on the coin would be worn away. Then defaced coins, which had lost their image, could be restruck. Augustine not only claims that we are owed to God; he claims that the image in us can be defaced by sin, and then restruck with a new image by grace. This isn't his whole theology for sin and grace, but it says something significant about what coins meant not just to him but to his audience.

During the Iconoclastic Controversy, not only in the East but before the overcrowded "gold penny", one monk, who believed in

showing reverence to icons, was brought before the emperor, who was trying to suppress reverence to icons. The emperor asked the monk, "Don't you know that you can walk on an icon of Christ without showing disrespect to him?" and the monk asked if he could walk on "your face", meaning "your face as present in this coin," without showing the emperor disrespect. He threw down a coin, and started to walk on it. The emperor's guards caught him in the act, and he was brutally assaulted.

These varying snapshots of coins before a certain period in the West are snapshots of coins that are icons. They aren't holy icons, but they are understood as icons before people's understanding of icons disintegrated.

When I explained this to one friend, he said that he had said almost exactly the same thing when observing the development or anti-development of Western art. The story I was told of Western art, at least until a couple of centuries ago, was a story of progress from cruder and more chaotic art. Medieval art was sloppy, and when perspective came along, it was improved and made clearer. But this has a very different light if you understood the older art's reality as symbol. In [A Glimpse of Eastern Orthodoxy](#), I wrote:

Good Orthodox icons don't even pretend to be photorealistic, but this is not simply because Orthodox iconography has failed to learn from Western perspective. As it turns out, Orthodox icons use a reverse perspective that is designed to include the viewer in the picture.

Someone who has become a part of the tradition is drawn into the picture, and in that sense an icon is like a door, even if it's more common to call icons "windows of Heaven." But it's not helpful to simply say "Icons don't use Renaissance

perspective, but reverse perspective that includes the viewer," because even if the reverse perspective is there, reverse perspective is simply not the point. There are some iconographers who are excellent artists, and artistry does matter, but the point of an icon is to have something more than artistry, as much as the point of visiting a friend is more than seeing the scenery along the way, even if the scenery is quite beautiful and adds to the pleasure of a visit. Cramming in photorealism is a way of making more involved excursions and dredging up more exotic or historic or whatever destinations that go well beyond a scenic route, after you have lost the ability to visit a friend. The Western claim is "Look at how much more extravagant and novel my trip are than driving along the same roads to see a friend!"—and the Orthodox response shows a different set of priorities: "Look how lonely you are now that you no longer visit friends!"

Photorealistic perspective is not new life but an extravagance once symbol has decayed. That may be one problem, or one thing that I think is a problem. But in the centuries after perspective, something else began to shift.

There is rich detail and artistry in this icon of the Prophet Elias. To those making their first contacts with Orthodox iconography, it may seem hard to appreciate—the perspective and proportions are surprising—but the things that make it something you need to learn are precisely the gateway to what an icon like this can do that mere photographs can never do.

In Giotto's painting of the dream of Joachim, one can see something probably that looks like an old icon to someone used to photorealistic art and probably looks photorealistic to someone used to icons. Not all medieval art is like this but this specific

... ..  
piece of medieval art is at once a contact point, a bridge, and a hinge.

Leonardo da Vinci's art is beginning to look very different from medieval art. In some ways Leonardo da Vinci's art is almost more like a photograph than a camera would take—Leonardo da Vinci's perspective is all the more powerful for the fact that he doesn't wear his grids on the outside, and in this picture Leonardo da Vinci makes powerful use of what is called "atmospheric perspective", giving the faroff place and above the Madonna of the Rocks' shoulder the blue haze that one gets by looking through a lot of air. Hence Leonardo da Vinci's perspective is not just a precise method of making things that are further away look smaller.

When Renaissance artists experimented with more photorealistic perspective, maybe they can be criticized, but they were experimenting to communicate better. Perspective was a tool to communicate better. Light and shadow were used to communicate better. It's a closer call with impressionism, but there is a strong argument that their departure from tradition and even photorealism was to better communicate how the outsides of things looked in different lighting conditions and at different times of day. But then something dreadful happened: not only artists but the community of people studying art learned a lesson from history. They learned that the greatest art, from the Renaissance onwards, experimented with tradition and could decisively break from tradition. They did not learn that this was always to improve communicate with the rest of us. And so what art tried to do was break from tradition, whether or not this meant communicating better to "the rest of us".

In at least some of Pablo Picasso's art, the photorealistic has vanished. Not that all Pablo Picasso art looks this way: some looks

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like a regular or perhaps flattened image. But this, along with Picasso's other cubist art, tries to transcend perspective, and the effect is such that one is told as a curiosity the story of a museumgoer recognizing someone from the (cubist) picture Picasso painted of him. Of all the pictures I've both studied and seem live, this kind of Pablo Picasso art is the one where I have the most respect for the responses of people considered not to be sophisticated enough to appreciate Pablo Picasso's achievement.

Some brave souls go to modern art museums, and look at paintings that look nothing like anything they can connect with, and walk away humbled, thinking that they're stupid, or not good enough to appreciate the "elevated" art that better people are able to connect with. There's something to be said for learning to appreciate art, but with most of these people the problem is not that they're not "elevated" enough. The problem is that the art is not trying to communicate with the world as a whole.

Innovation is no longer to better communicate; innovation at times sneers at communication in a fashion people can recognize.

In an age before television, Jacques Louis David's depiction of the oaths of the Horatii was extraordinarily powerful political communication, even political propaganda. Jacques Louis David combines two things that are separate today: elevated things from classical antiquity, and a message that is meant to communicate to ordinary people. A painting like one of Jacques Louis David's was the political equivalent of a number of television news commentaries in terms of moving people to action.

The Franky Schaeffer title I gave earlier was [Addicted to Mediocrity: 20th Century Christians and the Arts](#); the title I did

not give is [Modern Art and the Death of a Culture](#), which has disturbing lettering and a picture of a man screaming on its cover art. If there is a deep problem with the typical Christian approach to arts (and it is not a universal rule), there is a deep problem with the typical secular Western approach to arts (even if that is not a universal rule either). A painting like "The Oaths of the Horatii" is no more intended to be a private remark among a few elite souls than [Calvin and Hobbes](#); [Calvin and Hobbes](#) may attract the kind of people who like other good art, but this is never because, as Calvin tells Hobbes about his snowman art which he wants lowbrows to have to subsidize, "I'm trying to criticize the lowbrows who can't appreciate this."

The concept of an artist is also deeply problematic. When I was taking an art history class at Wheaton, the professor asked people a question about their idea of an artist, and my reaction was, "I don't have any preconceptions." Then he started talking, and I realized that I did have preconceptions about the matter.

If we look at the word "genius" across the centuries, it has changed. Originally your "genius" was your guardian angel, more or less; it wasn't connected with great art. Then it became a muse that inspired art and literature from the outside. Then "genius" referred to artistic and literary giftedness, and as the last step in the process of internalization, "genius" came to refer to the author or artist himself.

The concepts of the artist and the genius are not the same, but they have crossed paths, and their interaction is significant. Partly from other sources, some artists take flak today because they lead morally straight lives. Why is this? Well, given the kind of superior creature an artist is supposed to be, it's unworthy of an artist to act as if they were bound by the moral codes that the common herd can't get rid of. The figure of the artist is put

up on a pedestal that reaches higher than human stature; like other figures, the artist is expected to have an enlightened vision about how to reform society, and be a vanguard who is above certain rules.

That understanding of artists has to come down in the Christian community. Artists have a valuable contribution; when St. Paul is discussing the Spirit's power in the Church, he writes (I Cor 12:7-30, RSV):

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of

smell? But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

I would suggest that the secular idea of an artisan is closer to an Orthodox understanding of an artist than the secular idea of artist itself. Even if an artisan is not thought of in terms of being a member of a body, the idea of an artisan is one that people can accept being one member of an organism in which all are needed.

An artisan can show loving craftsmanship, can show a personal touch, can have a creative spark, and should be seen as pursuing honorable work; however, the idea of an artisan carries less bad

memorable work, however, the idea of an artist carries less baggage than the idea of an artist. They're also not too far apart: in the Middle Ages, the sculptors who worked on cathedrals were closer to what we would consider artisans who produced sculptures than being seen as today's artists. Art is or should be connected to iconography; it should also be connected to the artisan's craft, and people are more likely to give an artisan a place as a contributing member who is part of a community than artists.

If we look at technical documentation, then there are a number of believable compliments you could give if you bumped into the author. It would be believable to say that the documentation was a helpful reference met your need; that it was clear, concise, and well-written; or that it let you find exactly what you needed and get back to work. But it would sound odd to say that the technical writer had very distinctive insights, and even odder to say that you liked the author's personal self-expression about what the technology could do.

Technical writing is not glorified self-expression, and if we venerate art that is glorified self-expression, then maybe we have something to learn from how we treat technical writing.

If this essay seems like a collection of distinctive (or less politely, idiosyncratic) personal insights I had, or my own personal self-expression in Orthodoxy, theology, and faith, then that is a red flag. It falls short of the mark of what art, or Orthodox writing, should be. (And it is intended as art: maybe it's minor art, but it's meant as art.) It's not just that most or all of the insights owe a debt to people who have gone before me, and I may have collated but contributed nothing to the best insights, serving much more to paraphrase than think things up from scratch. Michel Quenot's [The Icon: A Window on the](#)

[Kingdom](#), and, for much longer, Madeleine l'Engle's [Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art](#) have both given me a grounding. But even aside from that, art has existed for long before me and will exist for long after me, and I am not the sole creator of an Orthodox or Christian approach to the arts any more than a technical writer has trailblazed a particular technique of creating such-and-such type of business report.

Good art is freedom and does bear its human creator's fingerprints. Even iconography, with its traditional canons, gives substantial areas of freedom to the iconographer and never specify each detail. Part of being an iconographer is using that freedom well. However, if this essay is simply self-expression, that is a defect, not a merit. As an artist and writer, I am trying to offer more than glorified self-expression.

This Sunday after liturgy, people listened to a lecture taped from Bp. KALLISTOS Ware. He talked about the great encounter at the burning bush, when God revealed himself to Moses by giving his name. At the beginning of the encounter, Moses was told, "Take off your shoes, for the place you are standing is holy ground." Bp. KALLISTOS went on to talk about how in those days, as of the days of the Fathers, people's shoes were something dead, something made from leather. The Fathers talked about this passage as meaning by implication that we should take off our dead familiarity to be able to encounter God freshly.

I was surprised, because I had reinvented that removal of familiarity, and I had no idea it was a teaching of the Orthodox Church. Perhaps my approach to trying to see past the deadness of familiarity—which you can see in [Game Review: Meatspace](#)—was not exactly the same as what Bp. KALLISTOS was saying to begin a discussion about receiving Holy Communion properly. Yet

I found out that something I could think of as my own private invention was in fact a rediscovery. I had reinvented one of the treasures of Orthodoxy. Part of Orthodoxy is surrender, and that acknowledgment that anything and everything we hold, no matter how dear, must be offered to God's Lordship for him to do with as we please. Orthodoxy is inescapably a slow road of pain and loss. But there is another truth, that things we think are a private heresy (I am thinking of G.K. Chesterton's discussion) are in fact a reinvention, perhaps a crude reinvention, of an Orthodox treasure and perhaps an Orthodox treasure which meets its best footing, deepest meaning, and fullest expression when that jewel is set in its Orthodox bezel.

There are times when I've wanted to be an iconographer (in the usual sense). I don't know if that grace will ever be granted me, but there was one point when I had access to an icon painting class. When I came to it and realized what was going on, I shied away. Perhaps I wanted to learn to write icons (Orthodox speak of writing icons rather than painting them), but there was something I wasn't comfortable with.

Parishes have, or at least should have, a meal together after worship, even if people think of it as "coffee hour" instead of thinking of it as the communion of a common meal. The purpose is less to distribute coffee, which coffee drinkers have enough of in their homes, than to provide an opportunity (perhaps with a social lubricant) for people to meet and talk. That meeting and talking is beautiful. Furthermore, a parish may have various events when people paint, seasonally decorate, or maintain the premises, and in my experience there can be, and perhaps should be, an air of lighthearted social gathering about it all.

But this iconography class had lots of chatter, where people gathered and learned the skill of icon painting that began and

ended with a prayer but in between had the atmosphere of a casual secular gathering that didn't involve any particularly spiritual endeavor or skill. Now setting my personal opinions aside, the classical canons require that icons be written in prayer, concentration, and quiet. There are reasons for this, and I reacted as I did, not so much because I had heard people were breaking such-and-such ancient rule, but more because I was affronted by something that broke the rule's spirit even more than its letter, and I sensed that there was something askew. The reason is that icons are written in silence is that you cannot make a healthy, full, and spiritual icon simply by the motions of your body. An icon is first and foremost created through the iconographer's spirit to write what priests and canons have defined, and although the iconographer is the copyist or implementor and not original author, we believe that the icon is written by the soul of the iconographer—if you understand it as a particular (secular) painting technique, you don't understand it. That class, like that iconographer, have produced some of the dreariest and most opaque icons, or "windows of Heaven", that I have seen. I didn't join that class because however much I wanted to be an iconographer, I didn't want to become an iconographer like that, and in the Orthodox tradition you become an iconographer by becoming a specific iconographer's disciple and becoming steeped in that iconographer's spiritual characteristics.

Years ago, I stopped watching television, or at least started making a conscious effort to avoid it. I like and furthermore love music, but I don't put something on in the background. And, even though I love the world wide web, I observe careful limits, and not just because (as many warn) it is easy to get into porn. The web can be used to provide "noise" to keep us from coming face

to face with the silence. The web (substitute "television"<http://cjshayward.com/>"title="Jonathan's Corner → Orthodox Books Online, and More"music"<http://cjshayward.com/>"title="Jonathan's Corner → Orthodox Books Online, and More"newspapers"<http://cjshayward.com/>"title="Jonathan's Corner → Orthodox Books Online, and More"movies"<http://cjshayward.com/>for that matter, "Church Fathers" for how this temptation appears to you) can be used to anesthetize the boredom that comes when we face silence, and keep us from ever coming to the place on the other side of boredom. When I have made decisions about television, I wasn't thinking, on conscious terms, about being more moral and spiritual by so doing. I believe that television is a pack of cigarettes for the heart and mind, and I have found that I can be creative in more interesting ways, and live better, when I am cautious about the amount of noise in my life, even if you don't have to be the strictest "quiet person" in the world to reap benefits. Quiet is one spiritual discipline of the Orthodox Church (if perhaps a lesser spiritual discipline), and the spiritual atmosphere I pursued is a reinvention, perhaps lesser and incomplete, of something the Orthodox Church wants her iconographers to profitably live. There is a deep enough connection between icons and other art that it's relevant to her artists.

When I write what I would never call (or wish to call) my best work, I have the freedom to be arbitrary. If I'm writing something of no value, I can impose my will however I want. I can decide what I want to include and what I want to exclude, what I am going to go into detail about what I don't want to elaborate on, and what analogies I want to draw. It can be as much

dictated by "Me! Me! Me!" as I want. When I am creating something I value, however, that version of freedom hardly applies. I am not free, if I am going to create fiction that will resonate and ring true, to steamroll over my characters' wishes. If I do I diminish my creation. What I am doing is loving and serving my creations. I can't say that I never act on selfish reasons, but if I am doing anything of a good job my focus is on loving my creation into being and taking care of what it needs, which is simultaneously a process of wrestling with it, and listening to it with the goal of getting myself out of the way so I can shape it as it needs to be shaped.

There is a relationship that places the artist as head and lord of his creation, but if we reach for some of the most readily available ideas of headship and lordship, that claim makes an awful lot of confusion. Until I began preparing to write this essay, it didn't even occur to me to look at the human creator-creation connection in terms of headship or lordship. I saw a place where I let go of arbitrary authority and any insistence on my freedoms to love my creation, to listen to and then serve it, and care for all the little details involved in creating it (and, in my case, publishing it on the web). All of this describes the very heart of how Christians are to understand headship, and my attitude is hardly unique: Christian artists who do not think consciously about headship at all create out of the core of the headship relation. They give their works not just any kind of love, but the particular and specific love which a head has for a body. If art ends by bearing the artist's fingerprints, this should not be because the artist has decided, "My art must tell of my glory," but because loved art, art that has been served and developed and educed and drawn into manifest being, cannot but be the image, and bear the imprint, of its creator. That is how

art responds to its head and lord.

To return to spiritual discipline: Spiritual discipline is the safeguard and the shadow of love. This applies first and foremost to the Orthodox Way as a whole, but also specifically to art. Quiet is a lesser discipline, and may not make the front page. Fasting from certain foods can have value, but it is only good if saying no to yourself in food prepares you to love other people even when it means saying no to yourself. There are harsh warnings about people who fast and look down on others who are less careful about fasting or don't fast at all and judging them as "less spiritual". Perhaps fasting can have great value, but it is better not to fast than to fast and look down.

Prayer is the flagship, the core, and the crowning jewel of spiritual discipline. The deepest love for our neighbor made in God's image is to pray and act out of that prayer. Prayer may be enriched when it is connected with other spiritual disciplines, but the goal of spiritual discipline and the central discipline in creating art is prayer.

There is a passage in *George MacDonald* where a little girl stands before an old man and looks around an exquisite mansion in wonder. After a while the old man asks her, "Are you done saying your prayers?" The surprised child responds, "I wasn't saying my prayers." The old man said, "Yes you were. You just didn't realize it."

If I say that prayer drives art, I don't just mean that I say little prayers as I create art (although that should be true). I mean that when I am doing my best work, part of why it is my best work is that the process itself is an act of prayer. However many arbitrary freedoms I would not dare to exercise and deface my own creation, I am at my freest and most alive when I am listening to God and a creation about how to love it into being.

It is not the same contemplation as the Divine Liturgy, but it is connected, part of the same organism. The freedom I taste when I create, the freedom of service and the freedom of love, is freedom at so deep a level that a merely arbitrary freedom to manipulate or make dictatorial insistences on a creation pales in comparison to the freedom to listen and do a thousand services to art that is waiting for me to create it.

"He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." (I Jn 4:20, RSV). If an artist does not love God and the neighbors whom he can see and who manifest the glory of the invisible God, he is in a terrible position to healthily love a creation which—at the moment, exists in God's mind and partially in its human creator, but nowhere else. This is another way of saying that character matters. I have mentioned some off-the-beaten-track glimpses of spiritual discipline; this leaves out more obvious and important aspects of love like honesty and chastity. The character of an artist who can love his works into being should be an overflow of a Christian life of love. Not to say that you must be an artist to love! Goodness is many-sided. This is true of what Paul wrote (quoted above) about the eye, hand, and foot all belonging to the body. Paul also wrote the scintillating words (I Cor 15:35-49, RSV):

But some one will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are

celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

These are words of resurrection, but the promise of the glorious and incorruptible resurrection body hinge on words where "star differs from star in glory". An artist's love is the glory of one star. It is no more the only star than the eye is the only part of the body. It is part of a scintillating spectrum—but not the whole spectrum itself!

I would like to also pause to respond to an objection which careful scholars would raise, and which some devout Orthodox would sense even if they might not put it in words. I have fairly uncritically used a typically Western conception of art. I have lumped together visual arts, literature, music, film, etc. and seem to assume that showing something in one case applied to every

case. I would acknowledge that a more careful treatment would pay attention to their differences, and that some stick out more than others.

I am not sure that a better treatment would criticize this assumption. However, let's look at one distinctive of Orthodoxy.

One thinks of why Western Christians talk about how the superficial legend goes that the leaders of (what would become) Russia went religion-shopping, and they saw that the Orthodox worship looked impressive, and instead of deciding based on a good reason, they went with the worship they liked best. Eastern Christians tend to agree about the details of what people believe happened, but we do not believe the aesthetic judgments were something superficial that wasn't a good reason. We believe that something of Heaven shone through, and if that affected the decision, people weren't making a superficial decision but something connected with Truth and the Light of Heaven and of God. We believe that worship, and houses of worship, are to be beautiful and reflect not only the love but the Light and beauty of Heaven, and a beautiful house of worship is no more superfluous to light than good manners are superfluous to love. The "beauty connection" has not meant that we have to choose between good homilies, music, liturgy, and icons. A proper Orthodox listing of what constituted real, iconic art may differ from a Western listing, and there's more than being sticks in the mud behind the fact that Orthodox Churches, by and large, do not project lyrics with PowerPoint. Part of what I have said about icons is crystallized in a goal of "transparency", that the goal of a window of Heaven is to be transparent to Heaven's light and love. Not just icons can be, or fail to be, transparent. Liturgical music can be transparent or fail to be transparent. Homilies can be transparent or fail to be transparent.

I've heard just enough bad homilies, that is opaque homilies that left me thinking about the homilist instead of God—to appreciate how iconically translucent most of the homilies I've heard are, and to realize that this is a privilege and not a right that will automatically be satisfied. The opaque Orthodox homilies don't (usually) get details wrong; they get the details right but don't go any further. But this is not the whole truth about homilies. A homily that is written like an icon—not necessarily written out but drawn into being first and foremost by the spirit, out of love, prayer, and spiritual discipline, can be not only transparent but luminous and let Heaven's light shine through.

Some wag said, "A sermon is something I wouldn't go across the street to hear, but something I'd go across the country to deliver." I do not mean by saying this to compete with, or replace, the view of homilies as guidance which God has provided for our good, but a successful homily does more than inform. It edifies, and the best homilies are luminously transparent. They don't leave the faithful thinking about the preacher—even about how good he is—but about the glory of God. When icons, liturgy, and homilies rise to transparency, they draw us beyond themselves to worship God.

My denser and more inaccessible musings might be worth reading, but they should never be read as a homily; the photographs in [my slideshow of Cambridge](#) might capture real beauty but should never be mounted on an icon stand for people to venerate; my best cooking experiments may be much more than edible but simply do not belong in the Eucharist—but my cooking can belong at coffee hour. The Divine Liturgy at its best builds up to Holy Communion and then flows into a common meal

(in my culture, coffee hour) that may not be Holy Communion but is communion, and just as my more edible cooking may not be fit for the Eucharist but belongs in a common meal, I am delighted to tell people I have a literature and art website at [Jonathan's Corner](#) which has both short and long fiction, musings and essays, poetry, visual art, and (perhaps I mention) computer software that's more artistic than practical. I have put a lot of love into my website, and it gives me great pleasure to share it. If its contents should not usurp the place of holy icons or the Divine Liturgy, I believe they do belong in the fellowship hall and sacred life beyond the sanctuary. Worshipping life is head and lord to the everyday life of the worshipping faithful, but that does not mean a denigration of the faithful living as lesser priests. The sacramental priesthood exists precisely as the crystallization and ornament of our priestly life in the world. As I write, I am returning from the Eucharist and the ordination of more than one clergy. Orthodox clergy insist that unless people say "Amen!" to the consecration of the bread and wine which become the holy body and the holy blood of Christ, and unless they say, "Axios!" ("He is worthy!") to the ordination, then the consecration or the ordination doesn't happen. Unlike in Catholicism, a priest cannot celebrate the Divine Liturgy by himself in principle, because the Divine Liturgy is in principle the work of God accomplished through the cooperation of priest and faithful, and to say that a priest does this himself is as odd as saying that the priest has a hug or a conversation by himself. The priest is head and even lord of the parish, but under a richer, Christian understanding of headship and lordship, which means that as the artist in his care he must listen to the faithful God has entrusted to his inadequate care, listening to God about who God and not the priest wants them to become, and both serve them and love them

into richer being. (And, just as it is wrong for an artist to domineer his creation, it is even more toxic for a priest to domineer, ahem, work to improve the faithful in his parish. The sharpest warning I've heard a bishop give to newly ordained clergy is about a priest who decided he was the best thing to happen to the parish in his care, and immediately set about improving all the faithful according to his enlightened vision. It was a much more bluntly delivered warning than I've said about doing that to art.) The priest is ordained as the crystallization and crown of the faithful's priestly call. The liturgy which priest (and faithful) is not to be cut off when the ceremony ends; it is to flow out and imprint its glory on the faithful's life and work. Not only the liturgical but the iconic is to flow out and set the pace for life.

Art is to be the broader expression of the iconic.

**Looking at**  
**Stranger in a**  
**Strange Land as a**  
**Modern**  
**Christological**  
**Heresy**

**Maximum Christ**

On a personal note, I write this as someone who became absorbed in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), who has felt its pull, and who has overreached and undershot in the same act many times. The things I critique are never too far from home for me. But there is something interesting to be said, and it begins with Christological heresy.

The Eastern Orthodox Church has often been called the Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, and these councils, especially the early ones, were about who Christ was and is, namely Christology. The Orthodox Church rejected as heresy a

number of answers to the question, "Who is Christ?" as deficient. What the councils affirmed might be titled "[Maximum Christology](#)." And what they rejected was Christologies that were too small, and made Christ too little.

Arius, perhaps the most castigated of the heretics, taught that Christ was "a Creature, but not as one of the creatures," a pre-eminent created work through whom God created all else. (And his teaching is alive and well, especially among Protestants; what Arius invented, keeps getting re-invented.) The insight of Athanasius was that this "a-mermaid-at-best Christ" failed to bridge God and his Creation: he has been summarized as saying that Arius's Christ was an isolated post in the chasm between God and his Creation, and the proof that the chasm could never truly be bridged.

Nestorius came on another solution, that Christ included both complete God and complete man, but there was something like a gentleman's agreement; they were not fully united. The Council that rejected him affirmed that not only was Christ fully divine and fully human, but the divine nature and the human nature were fully united in Christ's person. Another council affirmed that while the divine and human natures were fully united, they yet remained unconfused. Other rejected teachings included that Christ had a human body but no human soul, the soul's job being done by the divine nature, or that Christ had most of a human soul but not a human will. (To which the Orthodox reply that this is a most curious omission: it is by the will that we fell from our original glory, and what is not taken up in Christ is not saved. The maxim goes, "What is not assumed [taken into Christ] is not deified." But more of that later.) The Church in rejecting these affirmed [the maximum Christology of a Maximum Christ](#), maximally God, maximally man, with the divine and human natures

maximally united, and yet maximally unconfused. The Christ worshipped by Orthodox is the [Maximum Christ](#).

One book commented that someone had made a perceptive study of Martin Luther's crisis of faith in light of modern identity crises, although Martin Luther probably would not have understood the comparison between his great crisis of faith and modern identity crises, and he almost certainly would have found the comparison reprehensible if he had understood it. In somewhat similar fashion, Robert A. Heinlein's [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), in either the cut or uncut edition, cannot be placed alongside Arius, Nestorius, or the other classic arch-heretics as trying to offer a compelling solution to the question, "Who is Jesus Christ?" Heinlein has been called a "sex-crazed, anti-Christian libertine," and [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) plays it to the hilt. But [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) admits a quite fruitful comparison to seductive Christological heresies, and I might suggest that this book, in which Heinlein was aiming for something monumental, is a Messiah story. Heinlein had nothing higher to shoot for. However anti-Christian Heinlein may be, he had nothing higher than a Messiah story to shoot for.

## Heinlein's Messiah

[The figure of Merlin, deepened, becomes Christ.](#) But I would like to clear away a distraction in Michael Valentine Smith, and avoid going down the road of, "Well, Christ has a dual nature, and Michael Valentine Smith also has a dual nature by the end of the book: he is both Martian and human."

[Stranger in a Strange Land](#) is **riveting**. You can love the book, or you can be offended at it, but yawning and asking if there's anything good on television is not an option, or at least not one I've met. Michael Valentine Smith "passed through the earth like a flame" and quite assuredly "never bored a soul," to use words Dorothy Sayer applied to Christ. He comes to offer a gospel, and to awaken people to abundant life. [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) is a cult classic, with devoted readers who have never liked another science fiction book, and there are people who tried to create and live the Church of All Worlds it outlines: quite an achievement for a work of fiction with no pretensions of being anything else.

In this book, which a number of people consider the greatest science science fiction novel ever written (sound similar to "the greatest drama ever told"?), Michael Valentine Smith is born and raised on Mars with the wealth of Martian culture; early on he is referred to as a man, and another character adamantly denies this, says that he is not a man, calling him a Martian with the

genes and ancestry of a man. He is brought to earth, but this is no homecoming, at least not at first; he faces the struggles and challenges of dealing with what is to him a completely alien culture and language.

Much of the early part of the book is concerned with his struggles; when the book moves on to the next stage, where he tries all sorts of professions, fails at most of them, and undergoes a sort of self-directed apprenticeship about living and doing things on our world. Here he is still struggling at being human, and his failures are often spectacular, but he has made a connection on something that eluded him earlier: he has something that those around him do not. He bears a wealth of Martian culture, language, and psychic powers, and he is gaining a foothold in how to do things on earth.

In the last part of the book, he begins a church, the Church of All Worlds, and uses the genre of a mystery religion to share the wealth of Martian culture. It is a microcosm of Mars on earth, as well as being presented as fully human, and the story culminates in the martyrdom of a man who gave and received culture shock practically everywhere he went.

## Tenets of faith

Towards the middle of [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), Michael asks Jubal, a father figure who gave Michael (much of) his humanity, why he didn't mention "faith" when Jubal told him the list of bad words he shouldn't say.

The "faith" that Michael rejects may well be a "faith" that Orthodoxy rejects too: if "faith" means believing in a God who does not interact with daily life, and a Heaven which only starts after death, then Orthodoxy rejects that "faith" too—as surely as Orthodoxy rejects "faith" without works. Faith in the Orthodox Church is something practical, an interaction that begins here and now, something that tastes and knows. To "grok" in Martian is to drink deeply and to know, and this is bedrock to Orthodox faith. So the "faith" that is rejected in *Stranger in a Strange Land* is something the Orthodox faith rejects too.

Nonetheless, it seems somewhat clumsy to speak of Michael's "tenets of faith" in the book, and I will strike through the "bad" word, writing, "tenets of ~~faith~~." (You are welcome to read this as "The word 'faith' is behind the line used to strike through it.")

I would like to look at several tenets of ~~faith~~ that run throughout the book, and underscore and unfold something: **It is possible to overreach and undershoot in the same act.** This happens in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#)'s tenets of ~~faith~~.

"Thou art God"

## THOU ART GOD

Mike, after struggling with human concepts, tells Jubal, "Thou art God!" and Jubal facepalms and says to back up. But Michael is confident and serene, and "Thou art God" becomes a foundational tenet of faith for the Church of All Worlds.

It has been said, "I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give everything I own for the simplicity on the other side of complexity." And that is a hint of why everything simply being God from the beginning is much less powerful a drama than God creating something else besides himself, and then by his grace deifying it. "Pantheism", the idea that everything is God, has been called "paneverythingism," the idea that "everything is everything else"—and something like this is underscored by a joke later on in the book where one worm asks another, "Will you marry me?" and the other worm says, "Marry you? I'm your other end!" It kind of drains romance, and if that is being God, then it isn't really that much of an honor, or that big a deal, to be God. (Or, one might say, it isn't really that much of an honor to be Everything, like everything else.)

It has been observed that love poetry flourishes in cultures where people believe God has a conversation with something that is not-God. If everyone and everything is God by nature, if as the dialogue in the book goes the cat that eats the bird or mouse is God and the bird or mouse is God and it doesn't matter who is eaten, then being God does not hold a candle to the Orthodox teaching of divinization, that the Son of God became a Man and the Son of Man that men might become gods and the sons of God.

That is the simplicity on the other side of complexity: that is the deification on the other side of being created and not God.

Michael's Martian "Thou art God!" overreaches and undershoots in the same movement.

### **The Kiss of Brotherhood**

Within the bond of Michael's group, there was a kiss of brotherhood, and this among the most central tenets of faith—but Heinlein was really borrowing here. Remember the Bible on "Greet one another with a holy kiss?"

The kiss of love, shared within the community of the Church, is the one act the Bible calls holy. It has been said, "Examples of the kiss as a means of making and breaking enchantments have been found in the folklore of virtually every culture in the Western world," and this resonates with the holy kiss.

The Orthodox holy kiss is a microcosm of spiritual life. It is tied to Holy Communion, and receiving the Holy Mysteries is itself understood as a kiss. It is by the mouth that one breathes with one's spirit, and with the mouth that one receives communion, and though it is a kiss on the cheek, by implication it is a kiss on the mouth, displaced somewhat.

Perhaps there is much more to be said in this vein, even if the holy kiss seems somewhat restrained compared to the "all-out kiss of brotherhood" which was, um, more than a kiss. But there is another shoe to drop.

"Good fences make good neighbors:" we have a culture with boundaries and limits that are there for our protection. The difference between the Martian "kiss of brotherhood" and the Orthodox holy kiss is a bit like the difference between liberating yourself to be drunk all the time, and drinking wine in moderation. And the holy kiss is not a fixation: it is one of many things that fit into a larger reality, only one tree in a large

forest. This factor is completely lost in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#). Heinlein may have made much more of a to-do about the kiss itself, but there are some things in life where less is more.

The Orthodox holy kiss is much more striking in its original ancient context than one might imagine; and yet the Church preserved a balancing act with a holy kiss that respected boundaries. Exactly how it did so has changed over time, but balance has been preserved. Heinlein, to make it different from Christianity, toppled the balance by leaving nothing of personal or community boundaries. Destroy the balancing act, and the holy kiss becomes a gateway to pain.

In the "kiss of brotherhood", Heinlein overreached and undershot in the same act.

## Nakedness

In [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), the idea of wearing clothes for modesty is ridiculed as an irrational local custom. "Clothes optional" is a defining feature of the little bubble of Mars on earth. Not just a tenet of faith in the book, it was a basic practice when people tried to make a real-life Church of All Worlds following Heinlein's blueprint. But the bumper sticker saying, "God's original plan was to live in a garden with two naked vegetarians" is really missing something.

As to what exactly is missing, a frequent Orthodox hymn says of the Devil, "He who of old stripped you both naked" to Adam and Eve. What Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden was not something we re-create by taking our clothes off; we are in fact closer to Adam and Eve's original condition when we are clothed in modesty. The term "naked" itself comes from "nake", a verb that one would use to talk about stripping the natural covering

from a nut. Never mind that some cultures don't use clothes, and express their modesty in other ways. The natural condition is to present the person, not simply expose flesh, and the human person is presented properly when properly clothed. The New Eve, the Mother of God, is hymned, "Rejoice, robe of boldness for the naked!" because a person is naturally and properly presented when naturally and properly clothed.

Robert Heinlein sure makes nudity look good on paper. But from all reports, particularly Wendy Shalit's [A Return to Modesty](#), living nude is not all it's cracked up to be.

This attempt to remove barriers by removing clothing, too, overreaches and undershoots in the same act.

### **Laced with escapism**

[Stranger in a Strange Land](#) has bubbles of Martian culture, and Martian life, introduced to earth; and Orthodoxy brings the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life into earth. But there is a difference. The literary work of [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), and the Martian culture it heralds, is laced with escapism. Escapism is not simply a tenet of faith; an escapist streak gives form and substance to every tenet of faith. By contrast, Orthodox eternal Life, lived here and now, is not escapist. It is intended for the here and now we are in, even the messy circumstances of our real lives, not the lives we might wish we were living.

It is difficult to describe the lust for escape, the lust to escape this world, that is laced through and through the novel and its movement. I tried to describe it in [Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony with Nature: Anatomy of a Passion](#). It is a lust I know well. And to those thirsting with that lust, there is good news and bad news. The bad news is that you can't make

the escape you thirst for. The good news is that you don't need to.

Orthodoxy seems exotic enough; when you start out, things are very exotic, and in a certain sense it becomes something better than exotic when you have worn the shoe for long enough. But it lifts up slogwork, and offers engagement where one is tempted to seek escape. [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), when its woven spell works its magic, leaves you wishing Martian culture was something you could enter. Orthodoxy leaves you able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and live the eternal life, where you are now, wherever you are now.

[Stranger in a Strange Land](#), in trying to reach for something beyond the ken of earth, overreaches and undershoots in the same act. We need to let go of escape and discover that escape is not needed.

### **Water brothers**

Water brothers are described as a very serious bond, "much more serious than a marriage," and the tenet of faith of water brothers is indeed more serious than Heinlein's version of marriage. But to some readers it seems mysterious how Heinlein tears up traditional, permanent, monogamous marriage and then rushes in with water brotherhood as if there was a gaping hole he needed to fill.

The seriousness of water brotherhood parallels the seriousness of marriage and monasticism the Orthodox Church celebrates, and arguably its "inner circle" version of friendship bears such gravity. I've never read a reviewer of [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) say, "You know, this 'water brother' bond is something I just can't relate to." Water brotherhood is good

and it appears different ways in different places. But in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) its job is to fill a gaping hole after Heinlein has ripped up traditional marriage.

I remember reading a book where, to build up alchemy and give it a sense of transcendence, a character said he had studied all the world's religions and spurned them for the seriousness of alchemy. There was a very recognizable move of literary craft being made, if one that struck me as oddly: alchemy is not a more serious alternative to lightweight world religions, but a lightweight alternative to more serious world religions, and any one of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and sundry other religions offer a much meatier alternative to the alchemy that was being offered. Here, in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), the same kind of move is offered: kindred, friendship, and even traditional marriage are dismissed to make way for the weight of water brotherhood. But we would do well to avoid lusting for the depth of "water brother" bonds and pursue deeper relationships with those around us, especially if we are married to them.

After parenthetically adding a note about "Good fences make good neighbors" being part of how you form healthy bonds, I would say that in Heinlein's thirst for transcendent friendship, he has overreached and undershot in the same move.

### **Martian discipline and powers**

Although the term "psychic" never appears for Martian disciplines and powers, Michael Valentine Smith and the people he trains in Martian discipline have psychic powers. If you follow their tenets of faith in this book, you should expect to develop psychic powers. Characters see things and communicate far away, they can psychically kill and make things disappear (though

a gun is very much a wrong thing, killing by psychic powers is a light and casual deal), and more. And on that point I would admit a comparison.

Orthodox saints levitate, see things past and future and know what is in others' minds, and shine with the Light of Heaven. But to mention this is misleading, because it is a side effect: [The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#) says that people who see these things are like people who look at a sunbeam and see specks floating in the sunbeam because they are looking at the sunbeam itself. Michael Valentine Smith psychically kills a great many people; the greatest of Orthodox saints have raised the dead. But the Orthodox voice is insistent, emphatic, adamant. Repenting of your sins is greater work than raising the dead! The saints insist: Feeding the hungry is greater work than raising the dead! The few saints who work miracles see less wish fulfillment than us, not more; their struggles are like the messy circumstances of our lives, only much moreso.

The freedom in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) is the freedom of wish-fulfillment, of immature desires sated. The freedom in Orthodoxy is the freedom that counts: the Mother of God who is addressed, "Rejoice, robe of boldness for the naked!" is also addressed, "Rejoice, love that doth vanquish all desire," and the freedom in Orthodoxy is triumph over immature desire, and freedom to move on to more excellent things than one desires. In English, [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) tells us, being happy is a matter of functioning the way a person is meant to function; in Martian the statement amounts to a complete working manual. But Orthodoxy knows what it is, and has not only the Philokalia ([volume 1](#), [volume 2](#), [volume 3](#), and [volume 4](#)) written out of deep knowledge and experience of what the science of spiritual struggle entails, but has Tradition, a living voice that offers

bite-sized morcels to help day-by-day in our struggles. Orthodox Tradition trains us in the only freedom that really counts: not anything like psychic powers to sate unrefined desire, but transforming and transfiguring desire itself, which is itself greater work than raising the dead!

Heinlein offers powers equal to the powers of the saints in the superficial sense of the miraculous, and equal biofeedback-type control over their bodies so that one could stand through an ice storm naked (which some Orthodox saints can probably do), but without the most excellent way of the ABC of moral refinement and spiritual struggle. Fighting lust is one part of it, but not the only one, and here Heinlein offers heroes who win the Nobel prize for literature but do not deign to learn handwriting or typing. In Orthodoxy, the realization is that Nobel prizes are really not the bread-and-butter of life, but literacy in spiritual discipline is.

In psychic giants who embrace lust, Heinlein has overshot and underreached in the same heroes.

## The Heretic

The initial working title for [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) was, The Heretic, and this seems a carefully chosen title. On that point it is worth quoting St. Irenaeos, *Against Heresies*:

Their manner of acting is just as if one, when a beautiful image of a king has been constructed by some skilful artist out of precious jewels, should then take this likeness of the man all to pieces, should rearrange the gems, and so fit them together as to make them into the form of a dog or of a fox, and even that but poorly executed; and should then maintain and declare that this was the beautiful image of the king which the skilful artist constructed, pointing to the jewels which had been admirably fitted together by the first artist to form the image of the king, but have been with bad effect transferred by the latter one to the shape of a dog, and by thus exhibiting the jewels, should deceive the ignorant who had no conception what a king's form was like, and persuade them that that miserable likeness of the fox was, in fact, the beautiful image of the king.

This image seems apropos to the "practical gospel", if you will, in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), and it doesn't speak much of

Michael Valentine Smith.

Or does it?

In antiquity, there were Alexandrian and Antiochian schools of thought, and the Alexandrian school understood Christ as a teacher and a bearer of important teachings. And from the Alexandrian perspective, St. Paul's epistles in the Bible are quite puzzling: they make almost nothing of the wealth of teaching preserved in the Gospels; there is little if any trace of the parables the Gospels keep finding in the Lord's mouth. And all of this is puzzling until you realize that St. Paul was not making an Alexandrian use of Christ as a pivotal Teacher, but laying the foundations for what would become the Antiochian school, which found the significance of Christ in his becoming incarnate as man, dying as a sacrifice, and rising from the dead and trampling down death by death. And that is everywhere in St. Paul's quite Christocentric letters.

And if we place [Stranger in a Strange Land](#)'s account of Michael Valentine Smith with respect to these poles, Heinlein's precept and example are alike Alexandrian: his Messiah is a Teacher who is significant for the tenets of faith he bears. At one point Michael is compared to the first man who discovered fire; in that sense he is more like the most important of many important saints than a Messiah proper. In the Orthodox Church, Christ alone is divine by nature; the faithful and even the saints are made to be divine by grace when God transcends the difference between Creator and creature. The uniqueness of Christ is too secure to be threatened by his divinizing work among the Church and Creation with it. And in that sense, Michael Valentine Smith stands the hero of a Messiah story, but in an Alexandrian sense.

Michael Valentine Smith is significant as a deliverer of tenets of **faith**.

And in that sense his story stands as a Christological heresy,  
like the heresies the Church rejected in confessing her  
[Maximum Christ](#).

# The Luddite's Guide to Technology

## *Fasting from Technologies*

Since the Bridegroom was taken from the disciples, it has been a part of the Orthodox Church's practice to fast. What is expected in the ideal has undergone changes, and one's own practice is done in submission to one's priest. The priest may work on how to best relax rules in many cases so that your fasting is a load you can shoulder. There is something of a saying, "As always, ask your priest," and that goes for fasting from technology too. Meaning, specifically, that if you read this article and want to start fasting from technologies, and your priest says that it won't be helpful, leave this article alone and follow your priest's guidance.

From ancient times there has been a sense that we need to transcend ourselves. When we fast, we choose to set limits and master our belly, at least partly. "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food—maybe, but God will destroy them both." So the Apostle answered the hedonists of his day. The teaching of fasting is that you are more than the sum of your appetites, and we can grow by giving something up in days and seasons. And

really fasting from foods is not saying, "I choose to be greater than this particular luxury," but "I choose to be greater than this necessity." Over ninety-nine percent of all humans who have ever lived never saw a piece of modern technology: Christ and his disciples reached far and wide without the benefit of even the most obsolete of electronic communication technologies. And monks have often turned back on what luxuries were available to them: hence in works like the *Philokalia* or the [Ladder](#) extol the virtue of sleeping on the floor. If we fast from technologies, we do not abstain from basic nourishment, but what Emperors and kings never heard of. At one monastery where monks lived in cells without running water or electricity, a monk commented that peasants and for that matter kings lived their whole lives without tasting these, or finding them a necessity. (Even Solomon in all his splendor did not have a Facebook page.)

In Orthodoxy, if a person is not able to handle the quasi-vegan diet in fasting periods, a priest may relax the fast, not giving *carte blanche* to eat anything the parishioner wants, but suggesting that the parishioner relax the fast to some degree, eating some fish or an egg. This basic principle of fasting is applicable to technology: rather than immediately go cold turkey on certain technologies, use "some fish or an egg" in terms of older technologies. Instead of texting for a conversation, drive over to a nearby friend.

(Have you ever noticed that during Lent many Orthodox Christians cut down or eliminate their use of Facebook?)

As mentioned in [Technonomicon](#), what we call space-conquering technologies might slightly more appropriately be called body-conquering technologies, because they neutralize

Donald Knuth, one of the leading lights in computer science, got rid of his email address well over a

some of the limitations of our embodied state. The old wave of space-conquering technologies moves people faster or faster than they could move themselves, and older science fiction and space opera often portrays bigger and better versions of this kind of space conquering technologies: personal jet packs, cars that levitate (think Luke Skywalker's land speeder), or airplanes that function as spacecraft (his X-Wing). What is interesting to me here is that they serve as bigger and better versions of the older paradigm of space-conquering technologies, even if Luke remains in radio contact with the Rebel base. That is the older paradigm. The newer paradigm is technologies that make one's physical location irrelevant, or almost irrelevant: cell phones, texting, Facebook, and remote work, are all not bigger and better ways to move your body, but bigger and better ways to do things in a mind-based context where the location of your body may be collected as in Google Plus, but your actual, physical location is really neither here nor there.

decade ago. He said that email was good for being on top of the world, and what he wanted was to be at the bottom of the world and do research. In other words, he had certain goals, and he found that email was not a helpful luxury in reaching those goals. Knuth is also a (non-Orthodox) Christian.

## My own technology choices

I purchased a MacBook Pro laptop, and its specs are really impressive. Eight cores, eight gigabytes of RAM, a 1920x1200 17" display, and gracefully runs Ubuntu Linux, Windows XP, Windows 7, and Windows 8 as guest OS'es. And it is really obsolete in one respect: it doesn't have the hot new Retina display that has been migrated to newer MacBook Pros. I want to keep it for a long time; but my point in mentioning it here is that I did not purchase it as the hot, coolest new thing, but as a last hurrah of an old guard. The top two applications I use are Google Chrome and the Mac's Unix terminal, and the old-fashioned laptop lets me take advantage of the full power of the Unix command line, and lets me exercise root privilege without voiding the warranty. For a Unix wizard, that's a lot of power. And the one major thing which I did not "upgrade" was replacing the old-fashioned spindle drives with newer, faster solid state drives. The reason? Old-fashioned spindle drives can potentially work indefinitely, while spindle drives wear out after a certain number of times saving data: saving data slowly uses the drive up. And I realized this might be my only opportunity in a while to purchase a tool I want to use for a long while.

Laptops might continue to be around for a while, and desktops for that matter, but their place is a bit like landline phones. If

you have a desk job, you will probably have a desktop computer and a landline, but the wave of the future is smartphones and tablets; the hot, coolest new thing is not a bulky, heavy MacBook, but whatever the current generation of iPad or Android-based tablet is. One youngster said, "Email is for old people," and perhaps the same is to be said of laptops.

I also have an iPhone, which I upgraded from one of the original iPhones to an iPhone 4, not because I needed to have the latest new thing, but because my iPhone was necessarily on an AT&T contract, and however much they may advertise that the EDGE network my iPhone was on was "twice the speed of dialup," I found when jobhunting that a simple, short "thank you" letter after an interview took amazingly many minutes for my phone to send, at well below the speed of obsolete dial-up speeds I had growing up: AT&T throttled the bandwidth to an incredibly slow rate and I got a newer iPhone with Verizon which I want to hold on to, even though there is a newer and hotter model available. But I am making conscious adult decisions about using the iPhone: I have sent perhaps a dozen texts, and have not used the iPod functionality. I use it, but I draw lines. My point is not exactly that you should adopt the exact same conscious adult decisions as I do about how to use a smartphone, but that you make a conscious adult decision in the first place.

And lastly, I have another piece of older technology: a [SwissChamp XLT](#), the smallest Swiss Army Knife that includes all the functionality of a [SwissChamp](#) while also having the functionality of a [Cybertool](#). It has, in order, a large blade, small blade, metal saw, nail file, metal file, custom metal-cutting blade, wood saw, fish scaler, ruler in centimeters and inches, hook remover, scissors, hooked blade, straight blade with concave curved mini-blade, pharmacist's spatula, cybertool (Phillips

screwdrivers in three sizes, Torx screwdrivers in three sizes, hexagonal bit, and a slotted screwdriver), pliers, magnifying glass, larger Phillips screwdriver, large slotted screwdriver, can opener, wire stripper, small slotted screwdriver, can opener, corkscrew, jeweller's screwdriver, pin, wood chisel, hook, smaller slotted screwdriver, and reamer. It's somewhat smaller than two iPhones stacked on top of each other, and while it's wider than I like, it is also something of a last hurrah. It is a useful piece of older technology.

I mention these technologies not to sanction what may or may not be owned—I tried to get as good a computer as I could partly because I am an IT professional, and I am quite grateful that my employer let me use it for the present contract. I also drive a white 2001 Saturn, whose front now looks a bit ugly after cosmetic damage. I could get it fixed fairly easily, but it hasn't yet been a priority. (But this car has also transported the Kursk Root icon.) But with this as with other technologies, I haven't laid the reins on the horse's neck. I only use a well-chosen fragment of my iPhone's capabilities, and I try not to use it too much: I like to be able to use the web without speed being much of an issue, but I'm not on the web all the time. And I have never thought "My wheels are my freedom;" I try to drive insofar as it advances some particular goal.

And there are some things when I'm not aware of the brands too much. I don't really know what brands my clothing are, with one exception, Hanes, which I am aware of predominantly because the brand name is sewed in large, hard-to-miss letters at the top.

And I observe that technologies are becoming increasingly "capture-proof". Put simply, all technologies can be taken away from us physically, but technologies are increasingly becoming

something that FEMA can shut off from far away in a heartbeat. All network functionality on smartphones and tablets are at the mercy of network providers and whoever has control over them; more broadly, "The network is the computer," as Sun announced slightly prematurely in its introduction of Java; my own Unix-centric use of my Mac on train rides, without having or wanting it to have internet access during the train ride, may not be much more than a historical curiosity.

But the principle of fasting from technology is fine, and if we can abstain from foods on certain days, we can also abstain from or limit technologies on certain days. Furthermore, there is real merit in knowing how to use older technologies. GPS devices can fail to pick up a signal. A trucker's atlas works fine even if there's no GPS signal available.

## The point of this soliloquoy

The reason I am writing this up is that I am not aware of too many works on how to use technology ascetically. St. Paul wrote, [There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content.](#) This statement of necessities does not include shelter, let alone "a rising standard of living" (meaning more things that one uses). Perhaps it is OK to have a car; it is what is called "socially mandated", meaning that there are many who one cannot buy groceries or get to their jobs without a car. Perhaps a best rule of thumb here is, to repeat another author, "Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need." It is a measure by which I have real failings. And don't ask, "Can we afford what we need?", but "Do we need what we can afford?" If we only purchase things that have real ascetical justification, there's something better than investing for the left-over money: we can give to the poor as an offering to Christ. [Christ will receive our offering as a loan.](#)

Some years ago I wanted to write *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, and stopped because I realized I wasn't writing anything good or worthy of the title. But the attitude of the Church Fathers given the technology of the day: monasticism

renounces all property, and the faithful are called to renounce property in their hearts even if they have possessions. Monastic literature warns the monk of seeking out old company, where "old company" does not mean enticement to sexual sin exactly, but one's very own kin. The solitary and coenobetic alike cut ties to an outside world, even ties one would think were sacrosanct (and the Bible has much to say about caring for one's elders). If a monk's desire to see his father or brother is considered a temptation to sin that will dissipate monastic energy, what do we have to make of social media? The friendships that are formed are of a different character from face-to-face relationships. If monks are forbidden to return to their own kin as shining example, in what light do we see texting, email, IM's, and discussion forums? If monks are forbidden to look at women's faces for fear of sexual temptation, what do we make of an internet where the greatest assault on manhood, porn, comes out to seek you even if you avoid it? It's a bit like a store that sells food, household supplies, and cocaine: and did I mention that the people driving you to sample a little bit of cocaine are much pushier than those offering a biscuit and dip sample?

The modern Athonite tradition at least has Luddite leanings; Athos warns against national identification numbers and possibly computers, and one saint wrote apocalyptically about people eating eight times as much as people used to eat (has anyone read [The Supersizing of America?](#)) and of "wisdom" being found that would allow people to swim like fish deep into the sea (we have two technologies that can do that: SCUBA gear and submarines), and let one person speak and be heard on the other side of the world (how many technologies do we have to do that? Quite a lot).

All of this is to say that Orthodoxy has room to handle

technologies carefully, and I would suggest that not all technologies are created equal.

## The Luddite's Guide to Technology

For the different technologies presented my goal is not exactly to point to a course of action as to suggest a conscious adult decision to make, perhaps after consulting with one's priest or spiritual father. And as is usual in Orthodoxy, the temptation at least for converts is to try to do way too much, too fast, at first, and then backslide when that doesn't work.

It is better to keep on stretching yourself a little.

Sometimes, perhaps most of the time, using technology in an ascetical way will be countercultural and constitute outlier usage.

[A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#)  
[S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)

### Advertising

Advertising is kin to manipulation, propaganda, and pornography.

Advertising answers the question, "Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth?" by decisively saying, "Man was made for economic wealth." It leads people to buy things that are not in their best interest. If you see someone using a technology as part of a [form of life](#) that is unhelpful, the kind of thing that makes you glad to be a

Luddite, you have advertising to thank for that.

Advertising stirs discontent, which is already a problem, and leads people to ever higher desires, much like the trap of pornography. The sin is covetousness and lust, but the core structure is the same. Advertising and pornography are closely related kin.

Advertising doesn't really sell product functionality; it sells a mystique. And we may have legitimate reason to buy the product, but not the mystique. And maybe back off on a useful purchase until we are really buying the product and not the mystique.

### Alcohol

Alcohol is not exactly a new technology, although people have found ways of making stronger and stronger drinks as time goes on. However, there is a lesson to learn with alcohol that applies to technology.

One article read outlined a few positions on Christian use of alcohol, ending with a position that said, in essence, "Using alcohol appropriately is a spiritual challenge and there is more productive spiritual work in drinking responsibly than just not drinking." I don't think the authors would have imposed this position on people who know they have particular dangers in using alcohol, but they took a sympathetic look at positions of Christians who don't drink, and then said "The best course of all is not from trying to cut off the danger by not drinking, but rising to the spiritual lesson."

Yet an assumption behind all of the positions presented is that alcohol is something where you cannot safely lay the reins on the horse's neck. You need to be in command, or to put it differently ceaselessly domineer alcohol if you use it.

This domineering is easy for some people and harder for others, and some people may be wisest to avoid the challenge.

Something of the same need exists in our use of technology. We may use certain technologies or may not, but it is still a disaster to let the technology go wherever it wills. Sometimes and with some technologies, we may abstain. Other technologies we may domineer, even if we may find if we are faithful that "my yoke is easy and my burden is light:" establishing dominion and holding the reins may be easier when it becomes a habit. But the question with a technology we use is not, "May we use it as much as we want, or not at all?", any more than the question about wine would be, "May we use it as much as we want, or not at all?" Proper use is disciplined. Proper use is domineering. And we do not always have it spelled out what is like having one or two drinks a day, and what is like having five or ten. Nor do we have other rules of thumb spelled out, like, "Think carefully about drinking when you have a bad mood, and don't drink in order to fix a bad mood."

The descriptions of various "technologies and other things" are meant to provide some sense of what the contours of technologies are, and what is like drinking one or two drinks, and what is like drinking five or ten drinks a day.

#### Anti-aging medicine

The Christian teaching is that life begins at conception and ends at natural death, and not that life begins at 18 and ends at 30.

The saddest moment in [The Chronicles of Narnia](#) comes when we hear that Her Majesty Queen Susan the Gentle is "no longer a friend of Narnia;" she is rushing as quickly as

possible to the silliest age of her life, and will spend the rest of her life trying to remain at that age, which besides being absolutely impossible, is absolutely undesirable.

Quite a lot of us are afflicted by the Queen Susan syndrome, but there is a shift in anti-aging medicine and hormone replacement therapy. Part of the shift in [assistive technologies](#) discussed below is that assistive technologies are not just intended to do what a non-disabled person can do, so for instance a reader can read a page of a book, giving visually impaired people equivalent access to a what a sighted person could have, to pushing as far what they think is an improvement, so that scanning a barcode may not just pull up identification of the product bearing the barcode, but have [augmented reality](#) features of pulling a webpage that says much more than what a sighted person could see on the tab.

One of the big tools of anti-aging medicine is hormone replacement therapy, with ads showing a grey-haired man doing pushups with a caption of, "My only regret about hormone replacement therapy is that I didn't start it sooner," where the goal is not to restore functionality but improve it as much as possible. And the definition of improvement may be infantile; here it appears to mean that a man who might be a member of the AARP has the same hormone levels as he did when he was 17.

There was one professor I had who was covering French philosophy, discussed Utopian dreams like turning the seas to lemonade, and called these ideas "a Utopia of spoiled children." Anti-aging medicine is not about having people better fulfill the God-ordained role of an elder, but be a virtual youth. Now I have used [nutriceuticals](#) to bring more energy and be able to create things where before I was not,

and perhaps that is like anti-aging medicine that has me holding on to youthful creativity when God summons me to go [Further up and further in!](#) But everything I know about anti-aging is that it is not about helping people function gracefully in the role of an elder, but about making any things about aging optional.

In my self-absorbed [Seven-Sided Gem](#), I talked about one cover to the AARP's magazine, then called My Generation, which I originally mistook for something GenX. In the AARP's official magazine as I have seen it, the [marketing proposition](#) is the good news, not that it is not that bad to be old, but it is not that old to be old. The women portrayed look maybe GenX in age, and on the cover I pulled out, the person portrayed, in haircut, clothing, and posture, looked like a teenager. "Fifty and better people" may see political and other advice telling them what they can do to fight high prescription prices, but nothing I have seen gives the impression that they can give to their community, as elders, out of a life's wealth of experience.

Not that there are not proper elders out there. I visited a family as they celebrated their son's graduation, and had long conversations with my friend's mother, and with an elderly gentleman (I've forgotten how he was related). She wanted to hear all about what I had to say about subjects that were of mutual interest, and he talked about the wealth of stories he had as a sailor and veterinarian. In both cases I had the subtle sense of a younger person being handled masterfully by an elder, and [the conversation was unequal](#)—unequal but entirely fitting, and part of the "entirely fitting" was that neither of them was trying to say, "We are equal—I might as well be as young as you."

Anti-aging medicine is not about aging well, but trying to be a virtual young person when one should be doing the serious, weight, and profoundly important function as elders.

### Assistive technologies

This, at least, will seem politically incorrect: unless they have an inordinate monetary or moral cost, assistive technologies allow disabled people to function at a much higher level than otherwise. And I am not going to exactly say that people with disabilities who have access to assistive technologies should turn them down, but I am going to say that there is something I am wary of in the case of assistive technologies.

There is the same question as with other technologies: "Is this really necessary? Does this help?" A blind friend said,

I was recently interviewed for a student's project about assistive technology and shopping, and I told her that I wouldn't use it in many circumstances. First of all, I think some of what is available has more 'new toy' appeal and is linked to advertising. Secondly, I think some things, though they may be convenient, are dehumanising. Why use a barcode scanner thingummy to tell what's in a tin when I can ask someone and relate to someone?

Now to be clear, this friend does use assistive technologies and is at a high level of functioning: "to whom much is given, much is required." I get the impression that the assistive technologies she has concerns about, bleed into [augmented reality](#). And though she is absolutely willing to

use assistive technologies, particularly when they help her serve others, she is more than willing to ask as I am asking of many technologies, "What's the use? Does this help? Really help?"

But there is another, more disturbing question about assistive technologies. The question is not whether individual assistive technologies are helpful when used in individual ways, but whether a society that is always inventing higher standards for accessibility and assistive technology has its deepest priorities straight. And since I cannot answer that out of what my friend has said, let me explain and talk about the Saint and the Activist and then talk about how similar things have played out in my own life.

I write this without regrets about my own efforts and money spent in creating assistive technologies, and with the knowledge that in societies without assistive technologies many disabled people have no secular success. There are notable examples of disabled people functioning at a high level of secular success, such as the noted French Cabalist Isaac the Blind, but the much more common case was for blind people to be beggars. The blind people met by Christ in the Gospel were without exception beggars. And there are blind beggars in first world countries today.

So what objection would I have to assistive technologies which, if they may not be able to create sight, none the less make the hurdles much smaller and less significant. So, perhaps, medicine cannot allow some patients to read a paper book. Assistive technologies make a way for them to access the book about as well as if they could see the book with their eyes. What is there to object in making disabled people more able to function in society as equal

contributors?

The answer boils down to the distinction between the Saint and the Activist as I have discussed them in [An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism](#) and [The Most Politically Incorrect Sermon in History: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount](#). The society that is patterned after the Saint is ordered towards such things as faith and contemplation. The society patterned after the Activist is the one that seeks to ensure the maximum secular success of its members. And if the Activist says, "Isn't it wonderful how much progress we have made? Many disabled people are functioning at a high level!", the Saint says, "There are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your Activism. We have bigger fish to fry." And they do.

Now to be clear, I am not saying that you should not use assistive technologies to help give back to society. Nor do I regret any of the time I've spent on assistive technologies.

The first idea I wanted to patent was an assistive technology. But we have bigger fish to fry.

There is a way in which I am a little like the blind beggar in many societies that took the Saint for their pattern. It's on a much lesser scale, but I tried my hardest to earn a Ph.D. in theology. At Cambridge University in England the faculty made me switch thesis topic completely, from a topic I had set at the beginning of the year, when two thirds of the year had passed and I had spent most of my time on my thesis. My grades were two points out of a hundred less than the cutoff for Ph.D. continuation, and Cambridge very clearly refused for me to continue beyond my master's. So then I applied to other programs, and Fordham offered an assistantship, and I honestly found cancer easier than some

of the things that went wrong there. I showed a writeup to one friend and he wrote, "I already knew all the things you had written up, and I was still shocked when I read it." All of which to say is that the goal I had of earning a doctorate, and using that degree to teach at a seminary, seemed shattered. With all that happened, the door to earning a Ph.D. was decisively closed.

Now I know that it is possible to teach at a seminary on a master's; it may be a handicap, but it certainly does not make such a goal impossible. But more broadly God's hand was at work. For starters, I survived. I believe that a doctor would look at what happened and say, "There were a couple of places where what happened could have killed you. Be glad you're alive." And beyond that, there is something of God's stern mercy: academic writing takes a lot more work than being easy to read, and only a few people can easily read it. I still have lessons to learn about work that is easy to read, and this piece may be the least readable thing I've written in a while. But all the same, there is a severe mercy in what God has given. I have a successful website largely due to chance, or rather God's providence; I was in the right place at the right time and for all my skill in web work happened to have successes I had no right to expect.

And God works through assistive technologies and medicine. When I was in middle school, I had an ankle that got sorer and sorer until my parents went to ask a doctor if hospitalization was justified. The doctor's response, after taking a sample of the infection, said, "Don't swing by home; go straight to the hospital and I'll take care of the paperwork on this end for his admission." And I was hospitalized for a week or so—the bed rest day and night

being the first time ever that I managed to get bored teaching myself from my father's calculus textbook—and after I was discharged I still needed antibiotic injections every four hours. That involved medical treatment is just as activist as assistive technology, and without it I would not have written any the pieces on this website besides the Apple ][ BASIC [four dimensional maze](#).

I am rather glad to be alive now.

So I am in a sense both a ~~Ph.D.~~ person who was lost on Activist terms, but met with something fitting on a Saint's terms, and a person who was found on Activist terms. God works both ways. But still, there are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in Activism.

### Augmented Reality

When I was working at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, one part of the introduction I received to the CAVE and Infinity Wall virtual reality was to say that virtual reality "is a superset of reality," where you could put a screen in front of a wall and see, X-ray-style, wires and other things inside the wall.

Virtual reality does exist, and is popularized by [Second Life](#) among many others, but that may not be the main niche carved out. The initial thought was virtual reality, and when the dust has started to settle, the niche carved out is more a matter of augmented reality. Augmented reality includes, on a more humble level, GPS devices and iPhone apps that let you scan a barcode or QR code and pull up web information on the product you have scanned. But these are not the full extent of augmented reality; it's just an early installment.

It is an opportunity to have more and more of our experience rewritten by computers and technology.

Augmented technology is probably best taken at a lower dose and domineered.

### Big Brother

Big Brother is a collection of technologies, but not a collection of technologies you choose because they will deliver a Big Brother who is watching you. Everything we do electronically is being monitored; for the moment the U.S. government is only using it for squeaky-clean apparent uses, and has been hiding its use. Even the Amish now are being monitored; they have decided not to hook up to a grid, such as electricity or landline phones, but cell phones can be used if they find them expedient to their series of conscious decisions about whether to adopt technologies. Amish use the horse and buggy but not the car, not because the horse is older, but because the horse and buggy provide some limited mobility without tearing apart the local community. The car is rejected not because it is newer, but because it frees people from the tightly bound community they have. And because they carry cell phones, the NSA tracks where they go. They might not do anything about it, but almost everything about us is in control of Big Brother. And though I know at least one person who has decided carrying a cell phone and having an iPass transponder is not worth being tracked, you have to be more Luddite than the Luddites, and know enough of what you are doing that you are already on file, if you are to escape observation.

Big Brother has been introduced step by step, bit by bit. First there were rumors that the NSA was recording all Internet traffic. Then it came out in the open that the NSA was indeed recording all Internet traffic and other electronic communications, and perhaps (as portrayed on one

TV program) we should feel sorry for the poor NSA which has to deal with all this data. That's not the end. Now Big Brother is officially mainly about national security, but this is not an outer limit either. Big Brother will probably appear a godsend in dealing with local crime before an open hand manipulating the common citizen appears. But Big Brother is here already, and Big Brother is growing.

#### Books and ebooks

I was speaking with one friend who said in reference to Harry Potter that the Harry Potter series got people to read, and anything that gets people to read is good. My response (a tacit response, not a spoken one) is that reading is not in and of itself good. If computers are to be used in an ascetically discriminating fashion, so is the library; if you will recall my earlier writing about slightly inappropriate things at Cambridge and worse at Fordham, every single person I had trouble with was someone who read a lot, and presumably read much more than someone caught up in Harry Potter mania.

Orthodoxy is at heart an oral, or oral-like culture, and while it uses books, it was extremely pejorative when one friend said of a Protestant priest in Orthodox clothes, "I know what book he got that [pastoral practice] from." The first degree of priesthood is called a 'Reader', and when one is tonsured a Reader, the bishop urges the Reader to read the Scriptures. The assumption is not that the laity should be reading but need not read the Scriptures, but that the laity can be doing the job of laity without being literate. Or something like that. Even where there is reading, the transmission of the most important things is oral in character, and the shaping of the laity (and presumably

clergy) is through the transmission of oral tradition through oral means. In that sense, I as an author stand of something exceptional among Orthodox, and "exceptional" does not mean "exceptionally good." Most of the Orthodox authors now came to Orthodoxy from the West, and their output may well be appropriate and a fitting offering from what they have. However, the natural, consistent result of formation in Orthodoxy does not usually make a non-author into an author.

As far as books versus ebooks, books (meaning codices) are a technology, albeit a technology that has been around for a long time and will not likely disappear. Ebooks in particular have [a long tail effect](#). The barriers to put an ebook out are much more than to put a traditional book out.

It has been said that ebooks are killing Mom and Pop bookstores, and perhaps it is worth taking opportunities to patronize local businesses. But there is another consideration in regards to books versus cheaper Kindle editions. The Kindle may be tiny in comparison to what it holds, and far more convenient than traditional books.

But it is much more [capture proof](#).

"Capture proof"

In military history, the term "capture proof" refers to a weapon that is delicate and exacting in its maintenance needs, so that if it is captured by the enemy, it will rather quickly become useless in enemy soldier's hands.

The principle can be transposed to technology, except that possessing this kind of "capture proof" technology does not mean that it is an advantage that "we" can use against "them." It comes much closer to say that FEMA can shut down its usefulness at the flick of a switch. As time has

passed, hot technologies become increasingly delicate and capture proof: a laptop is clunkier than a cool tablet, but the list of things one can do with a tablet without network access is much shorter than the list of things can do with a laptop without network access. Or, to take the example of financial instruments, the movement has been towards more and more abstract derivatives, and these are fragile compared to an investment in an indexed mutual fund, which is in turn fragile compared to old-fashioned money.

"Cool," "fragile," and "capture proof" are intricately woven into each other.

Einstein said, "I do not know what weapons World War III will be fought with, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones." We might not have to wait until World War IV. Much of World War III may be fought with sticks and stones.

### Cars

Perhaps the most striking Luddite horror of cars that I have seen is in C.S. Lewis. He talked about how they were called "space-conquering devices," while they should have been called "space-annihilating devices," because he experienced [future shock](#) that cars could make long distances very close. (And someone has said, "The problem with the English is that they think a hundred miles is a long distance, and the problem with the U.S. is that they think a hundred years is a long time.") The "compromise solution" he offered was that it was OK to use cars to go further as a special solution on weekend, but go with other modes of transport for the bread-and-butter of weekdays. (And this is more or less how Europeans lean.)

Cars are one of many technologies that, when introduced,

caused [future shock](#). It's taken as normal by subsequent generations, but there is a real sense of "This new technology is depriving us of something basically human," and that pattern repeats. And perhaps, in a sense, this shock is the pain we experience as we are being lessened by degrees and slowly turning from man to machine-dominated.

#### CFLs and incandescent bulbs

There is something striking about CFL's. American society has a long history of technology migrations, and a thorough enough "out with the old, in with the new" that working 16mm film projectors, for instance, now fetch a price because we have so thoroughly gotten rid of them in favor of video. And people who use them now aren't using them as the normal way to see video; they may want to see old film canisters and maybe even digitize them (so they can be seen without the use of a film projector).

Compare with other countries such as Lebanon which have no real concept of being obsolete; they have a mix of old and new technologies and they get rid of an old piece of technology, not because it is old, but because it is worn out.

The fact that we are transitioning to CFL's for most purposes is not striking; transitions happen all the time. One could trace "If you have a phone, it's a landline," to "You can have a two pound car phone, but it's expensive," to "You can have a cell phone that fits in your hand, but it's expensive," to "You can have a cell phone, which is much cheaper now," to "You can have a cell phone that does really painful Internet access," to "You can have a cell phone with graceful Internet access." And there have been many successions like this, all because the adopters thought the new technology was an improvement on the old.

CFL's are striking and disturbing because, while there may be a few people who think that slightly reduced electricity usage (much smaller than a major household appliance) justifies the public handling fragile mercury containers, by and large the adoption is not of a snazzier successor to incandescent bulbs. Not only must they be handled like live grenades, but the light is inferior. The human race grew up on full-spectrum light, such as the sun provides. Edison may not have been aiming for a full-spectrum light, but his light bulb does provide light across the spectrum; that is an effect of an incandescent light that produces light that looks at all near. This is a strange technology migration, and a rather ominous omen.

Given that most bulbs available now are CFL's, there are better and worse choices. Some bulbs have been made with a filter outside the glass so they give off light that looks yellow rather than blue. I wouldn't look for that in and of itself. But some give a full spectrum, even if it is a bluish full spectrum, and that is better. There are also lights sold that are slightly more shatter resistant, which is commendable, and there are some bulbs that are both full spectrum and shatter resistant. I'd buy the last kind if possible, or else a full spectrum CFL, at a hardware store if possible and online if not.

But I would momentarily like to turn attention from the extinction of regular use of incandescent bulbs to their introduction. Candles have been used since time immemorial, but they're not a dimmer version of a light bulb. Even if you have candlesticks and candles lit, the candle is something of a snooze button or a minor concession: societies that used candles still had people active more or less during daylight

hours. (Daylight Saving Time was an attempt to enable people to use productive daylight hours which they were effectively losing.) People who used candles were still effectively tied to the cycle of day and night. Light bulbs caused a shock because they let you operate as early or as late as you wanted. Candles allowed you to wrap up a few loose ends when night had really fallen. Light bulbs made nighttime optional. And it caused people [future shock](#).

I have mentioned a couple of different responses to CFL's: the first is to buy full spectrum and preferably shatter resistant (and even then handle the mercury containers like a live grenade), the second is turning to the rhythm of day and light and getting sunlight where you can. Note that inside most buildings, even with windows, sunlight is not nearly as strong as what the human person optimally needs. Let me mention one other possibility.

There is a medical diagnosis called 'SAD' for 'Seasonal Affective Disorder', whose patients have lower mood during the winter months when we see very little light. The diagnosis seems to me a bit like [the fad diagnosis of YTD, or Youthful Tendency Disorder, discussed in The Onion](#). If you read about it and are half-asleep it sounds like a description of a frightening syndrome. If you are awake you will recognize a description of perfectly normal human tendencies. And the SAD diagnosis of some degree of depression when one is consistently deprived of bright light sounds rather normal to me. And for that reason I think that some of the best lighting you can get is with something from the same manufacturer of the [Sunbox DL SAD Light Box Light Therapy Desk Lamp](#). That manufacturer is one I trust; I am a little wary of some of their cheaper

competitors. There is one cheaper alternative that provides LED light. Which brings me to a problem with LED's. Basically, LEDs emit light of a single color. While you can choose what that color may be, white represents a difficult balancing act. If you've purchased one of those LED flashlights, it has what is called "lunar white", which is basically a way of cheating at white light. (If you've ever gone to a dark closet and tried to pick out clothing by a lunar white flashlight, this may be why you had trouble telling what color your clothing was.) Expensive as they may be, [a Sunbox light box may fit in to your best shot at taking in a healthy level of light.](#)

#### Children's toys

Charles Baudelaire, in his "la Morale du Joujou" ("the moral of the toy") talks about toys and the fact that the best toys leave something to the imagination. Children at play will imagine that a bar of soap is a car; girls playing with dolls will play the same imagined drama with rag dolls as they will with dolls worth hundreds of dollars. There has been a shift, where Lego sets have shifted from providing raw material to being a specific model, made of specialized pieces, that the child is not supposed to imagine, only to assemble.

Lego sets are perhaps the preferred childhood toy of professional engineers everywhere; some of them may have patronized Lego's competitors, but the interesting thing about Legos that are not "you assemble it" models is that you have to supply something to what you're building. Lego the company might make pieces of different sizes and shapes and made them able to stick together without an adhesive; I wouldn't downplay that achievement on the part of the manufacturer, but the child playing with Legos

supplies half of the end result. But this is not just in assembly; with older models, the Legos didn't look exactly like what they were supposed to be. There was one time when I saw commercials for a miniature track where some kind of car or truck would transport a payload (a ball bearing, perhaps), until it came to a certain point and the payload fell through the car/track through a chute to a car below. And when I asked my parents to buy it for me and they refused, I built it out of Legos. Of course it did not look anything like what I was emulating, but I had several tracks on several levels and a boxy square of a vehicle would carry a marble along the track until it dropped its payload onto a car in the level below. With a bit of imagination it was a consolation for my parents not getting the (probably expensive) toy I had asked for, and with a bit of imagination a short broom is a horse you can ride, a taut cord with a sheet hung over it is an outdoor tent, and a shaky box assembled from sofa cushions is a fort. Not, perhaps, that children should be given no toys, or a square peg should be pounded into a round hole by giving everyone old-style Lego kits, but half of a children's toy normally resides in the imagination, and the present fashion in toys is to do all the imagining for the child.

And there is a second issue in what is imagined for children. I have not looked at toys recently, but from what I understand dragons and monsters are offered to them. I have looked rather deeply into what is offered to children for reading. The more innocuous part is bookstores clearing the classics section of the children's area for Disney Princess books. The more serious matter is with [Dealing with Dragons and other Unman's Tales.](#)

## The Cloud

Cloud computing is powerful, and it originated as a power tool in supercomputing, and has now come down to personal use in software like [Evernote](#), a note-taking software system that synchronizes across all computers and devices which have it installed.

Essentially, besides being powerful, cloud computing, besides being very powerful, is one more step in abstraction in the world of computing. It means that you use computers you have never even seen. Not that this is new; it is a rare use case for someone using the Web to own any of the servers for the sites he is visiting. But none the less the older pattern is for people to have their own computers, with programs they have downloaded and/or purchased, and their own documents. The present trend to offload more and more of our work to the cloud is a step in the direction of vulnerability to [the damned backswing](#). The more stuff you have in the cloud, the more of your computer investment can be taken away at the flick of a switch, or collapse because some intervening piece of the puzzle has failed. Not that computers are self-sufficient, but the move to the cloud is a way of being less self-sufficient.

[My website](#) is hosted on a cloud virtual private server, with one or two "hot spares" that I have direct physical access to. There are some reasons the physical machine, which has been flaky for far longer than a computer should be allowed to be flaky (and which keeps not getting fixed), is one I keep as a hot spare.

## Contraception and Splenda

There was one mostly Catholic where I was getting annoyed at the degree of attention given to one particular

topic: I wrote,

Number of posts in this past month about faith: 6  
Number of posts in this past month about the Bible:

8

Number of posts in this past month about the  
Eucharist: 9

Number of posts in this past month extolling the  
many wonders of Natural Family Planning: 13

The Catholic Church's teaching on Natural Family Planning is not, "Natural Family Planning, done correctly, is a 97% effective way to simulate contraception." The Catholic Church's teaching on children is that they are the crown and glory of sexual love, and way down on page 509 there is a footnote saying that Natural Family Planning can be permissible under certain circumstances.

And if I had known it, I would have used a quotation from Augustine I cited in [Contraception, Orthodoxy, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article](#):

Is it not you who used to counsel us to observe as much as possible the time when a woman, after her purification, is most likely to conceive, and to abstain from cohabitation at that time, lest the soul should be entangled in flesh? This proves that you approve of having a wife, not for the procreation of children, but for the gratification of passion. In marriage, as the marriage law declares, the man and woman come together for the procreation of children. Therefore whoever makes the procreation of children a greater sin than copulation, forbids marriage, and makes the woman

not a wife, but a mistress, who for some gifts presented to her is joined to the man to gratify his passion. Where there is a wife there must be marriage. But there is no marriage where motherhood is not in view; therefore neither is there a wife. In this way you forbid marriage. Nor can you defend yourselves successfully from this charge, long ago brought against you prophetically by the Holy Spirit ([source](#); the Blessed Augustine is referring to [I Tim 4:1-3](#)).

Thus spoke the Catholic Church's favorite ancient theologian on contraception; and to this it may be added that the term 'Natural Family Planning' is deceptive and perhaps treacherous in how it frames things. There is nothing particularly natural about artificially abstaining from sexual intercourse precisely when a woman is capable of the greatest desire, pleasure, and response.

The chief good of the marriage act is that it brings in to being new images of God; "a baby is God's vote that the world should go on." The chief good of eating is that it nourishes the body. Now there are also pleasures, but it is an act of confusion to see them as pleasure delivery systems and an act of greater confusions to frustrate the greater purpose of sex or eating so that one may, as much as possible, use them just as pleasure delivery systems.

There are other strange effects of this approach: for starters, Splenda use correlates to increased weight gain. Perhaps this is not strange: if you teach someone, "You can eat as much candy and drink as many soft drinks as you like," the lesson is "You can consume more without worrying about your waistline," and you will consume more: not only more

foods containing Splenda, but more foods not containing Splenda.

There is an interesting history, as far as "Natural" Family Planning goes, about how in ancient times Church Fathers were skeptical at best of the appropriateness of sex during the infertile period, then people came to allow sex during the infertile period despite the fact that it was shooting blanks, and then the West came to a point where priests hearing confessions were to insinuate "Natural" Family Planning to couples who were using more perverse methods to have sex without children, and finally the adulation that can say that Natural Family Planning is the gateway to the culture of life.

Contraception and Splenda are twins, and with Splenda I include not only other artificial sweeteners, but so-called "natural" sweeteners like Agave and Stevia which happen not to be manufactured in a chemical factory, but whose entire use is to do Splenda's job of adding sweetness without calories. What exists in the case of contraception and Splenda alike is neutralizing a greater good in order to have as much of the pleasure associated with that good as possible. It says that the primary purpose of food and sex, important enough to justify neutralizing other effects as a detriment to focusing on the pleasure, is to be a pleasure delivery system.

About pleasure delivery systems, I would refer you to:

### [The Pleasure-Pain Syndrome](#)

The dialectic between pleasure and pain is a recurrent theme among the Fathers and it is something of a philosophical error to pursue pleasure and hope that no pain

will come. If you want to see real discontent with one's sexual experiences, look for those who are using Viagra and its kin to try to find the ultimate sexual thrill. What they will find is that sex becomes a disappointment: first sex without drugged enhancement becomes underwhelming, and then Viagra or Cialis fail to deliver the evanescent ultimate sexual thrill.

### The damned backswing

There is a phenomenon where something appears to offer great improvements, but it has a damned backswing. For one example in economics, in the 1950's the U.S. had an unprecedentedly high standard of living (meaning more appliances in houses—not really the best measure of living), and for decades it just seemed like, [It's Getting Better All the Time](#). But now the U.S. economy is being destroyed, and even with another regime, we would still have all the debts we incurred making things better all the time.

Another instance of the damned backswing is how medieval belief in the rationality of God gave rise to the heroic labors of science under the belief that a rational God would create a rational and ordered world, which gave way to modernism and positivism which might as well have put science on steroids, which in turn is giving way to a postmodernism and subjectivism that, even as some of it arose from the philosophy of science, is fundamentally toxic to objectivist science.

[I invite you to read more about the damned backswing.](#)

### Email, texting, and IM's

"Email is for old people," one youngster said, and email is largely the wave of the past. Like landlines and desktop computers, it will probably not disappear completely; it will

probably remain the communication channel of corporate notifications and organizational official remarks. But social communication via email is the wave of the past: an article in [A List Apart](#) said that the website had originated as a mailing list, and added, "Kids, go ask your parents." When texting first caught on it was neither on the iPhone nor the Droid. If you wanted to say, "hello", you would probably have to key in, "443355555666". But even then texting was a sticky technology, and so far it is the only common technology I know of that is illegal to use when driving. It draws attention in a dangerous way and is treated like alcohol in terms of something that can impair driving. It is a strong technological drug.

The [marketing proposition](#) of texting is [an intravenous drip of noise](#). IM's are similar, if not always as mobile as cell phones, and email is a weaker form of the drug that youth are abandoning for a stronger version. Now, it should also be said that they are useful, and the proper ascetical use is to take advantage of them because they are useful (or not; I have a phone plan without texting and I text rarely enough that the default \$.20 per text makes sense and is probably cheaper than the basic plan.

Fasting and fasting from technologies

[And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.](#)

The healing of this comes in partly by eating, in the Holy

Mysteries where we eat from the Tree of Life. But this is no imitation of Eve's sin, or Adam's. They lived in the garden of paradise, and there is no record of them fasting before taking from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Before we take communion, we answer the question "Where are you?", the question in which God invited Adam and Eve to come clean and expose their wound to the Healer, and we prepare for confession and answer the question Adam and Eve dodged: "Where are you?" We do not live in a garden of delights, but our own surroundings, and we turn away from sensual pleasures. Adam and Eve hid from God; we pray to him and do not stop praying because of our own sordid unworthiness. And, having prepared, we eat from the Tree of Life.

[You shall not surely die.](#) and [Your eyes shall be opened,](#) [and you shall be as gods.](#) are some of the oldest [marketing propositions](#), but they are remarkably alive in the realm of technology. [Witness the triumph of hope over experience in the artificial intelligence project.](#) Witness a society like the meticulously groomed technology of a Buddha who saw an old man, a sick man, and a dead man, and wondered whatever on earth they can mean. Mortality may be as total in our generation as any other, but we've done a good job of hiding it. Perhaps doctors might feel inadequate in the face of real suffering, but modern medicine can do a lot. In many areas of the third world, it might be painful, but it is not surprising to play with a child who was doing well two weeks ago and be told that he is dead. Death is not something one expects in homes; it is out of sight and half out of mind in hospitals and hospices. All of this is to say that those of us in the first world have a death-denying society, and if we

have not ultimately falsified "You will surely die," we've done a pretty good job of being in denial about it. And "You shall be as gods" is the marketing proposition of luxury cars, computers, smartphones, and ten thousand other propositions. My aunt on discovering Facebook said, "It feels like I am walking on water," and Facebook offers at least a tacit [marketing proposition](#) of, "You shall be as gods." Information technology in general, and particularly the more "sexy" forms of information technology, offer the [marketing proposition](#) of, [Your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods.](#)

There was one time as an undergraduate when I tried to see what it would be like to live as blind for a day, and so I was blindfolded and had a fascinating day which I wrote up for my psychology class. Now I would be careful in saying based on one day's experience would let me understand the life experience of being blind, any more than a few days spent in Ontario entitle me to say that I understand Canadian culture. However, the experience was an interesting challenge, and it had something to do with fasting, even if it was more adventuresome than fasting normally is.

Fasting is first and foremost fasting from food, but there are other things one can fast from. Some Orthodox bid Facebook a temporary farewell for fasting seasons. On fasting days, we are bidden to cut back on sensory pleasures, which can mean cutting back on luxury technologies that give us pleasure.

I'm not sure how much fastiing from technologies should form a part of one's rule; it is commonplace to discuss with one's priest or spiritual father how one will keep one's fast,

and with what oikonomia if such is needed. But one of the rules of fasting is that one attempts a greater and greater challenge. Far from being a spiritual backwater, Lent is the central season of the Christian year. And so I will present twenty-three things you might do to fast from technology.

(Or might not.)

1. Sleep in a sleeping bag on the floor. (Monks mention sleeping on the floor as a discipline; the attenuated fast of sleeping on a sleeping bag on the floor may help.)
2. Leave your smartphone at home for a day.
3. Leave all consumer electronics at home for a day.
4. Only check for email, Facebook, etc. once every hour, instead of all the time.
5. Don't check your email; just write letters with a pen or [lead pencil](#).
6. Camp out in your back yard.
7. Read a book outside, using sunscreen if appropriate.
8. Organize some outdoor activity with your friends or family.
9. Don't use your computer or smartphone while you are preparing for the Eucharist.
10. Basic: If you have games and entertainment apps or application, don't play them when you are fasting.
11. Harder: If you have games and entertainment applications, delete them.
12. Basic: Spend an hour outside with a book or an ebook Kindle, doing nothing but read and observe the trees, the wind, and the grass growing. ([You are welcome to use my ebooks.](#))
13. Harder: Spend an hour outside, but not with a book, just observing the trees, the wind, and the grass growing.

14. Don't use your car for a week. It's OK to get rides, and it may be a pleasure speaking with your friends, but experience being, in part, dependent, and you may be surprised how some of your driving suddenly seems superfluous.
15. Shut off power for an hour. If you keep your fridge and freezer doors shut, you shouldn't lose food, and sometimes power loss has meant adventure.
16. Turn off your computer's network access but still see what you can do with it for a day. (The Luddite's Guide to Technology is written largely on a computer that doesn't have internet access for the majority of the time it is being used to write this.)
17. Especially if you have a beautiful screensaver, set your computer to just display a blank screen, and have a single color or otherwise dull wallpaper for a time, perhaps for a fasting season.
18. Switch your computer's resolution to 800x600 or the tiniest it can go. That will take away much of its status as a luxury.
19. Make a list of interesting things to do that do not involve a computer, tablet, or smartphone.
20. Do some of the vibrant things on the list that do not involve a computer, tablet, or smartphone.
21. Use computers or whatever other technologies, not for what you can get from them, but what you can give through them.
22. Bear a little more pain. If pain is bearable, don't take pain medication. If you can deal with a slightly warmer room in the summer, turn down the air conditioning. If you can deal with a slightly cooler room in the winter,

turn down the heat.

23.

**Visit a monastery.**

A monastery is not thought of in terms of being Luddite, but monasteries tend to be lower in level than technology, and a good monastery shows the vibrancy of life not centered about technology. And this suggestion is different.

All the other suggestions say, "I would suggest." The suggestion about the monastery says, "God has given."

**Food**

There is some ambiguity, or better yet a double meaning, when the New Testament uses the term "breaking bread." On one level, breaking bread means a shared meal around the table. On another, it means celebrating the Eucharist.

You can say that there is one sacrament, or that there are seven, or that there are a million sacraments. A great many things in life have a sacramental dimension, even if the man on the street would not consider these to be religious matters. There is something sacramental about friendship. And there is something sacramental about a meal around a table. Even if the sacramental character of a meal is vanishing.

Proverbs said, "[Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it.](#)" Today one may draw forth an implication: "Better is a dinner of really bad fast food than the most exquisite [Weston A. Price Foundation](#) meal where there is hatred."

However, there are ways that the sacramental character of meals is falling away. Many foods are not intended to be eaten around a table with family or friends: think of microwave dinners and the 100 calorie snack pack. Read

[Nourishing Traditions](#), which tells how far our industrial diet has diverged from meals that taste delicious precisely because they are nutritionally solid.

But besides the plastic-like foods of the industrial diet, there is another concern with munching or inhaling. The Holy Eucharist can legitimately be served, in an extreme case, with plastic-like foods. For that matter it is normal for it to be made with white flour, and white flour is high on the list of foods that should be limited. And it would be a mistake to insist on whole wheat flour because it is overall healthier. But with extreme exceptions such as grave illness, the Holy Mysteries are not to be consumed by oneself off in a corner.

They are part of the unhurried unfolding of the Divine Liturgy, which ideally unfolds rather naturally into the unhurried unfolding of a common meal.

Both eating snacks continually to always have the pleasure of the palate, and the solo meal that is inhaled so it can be crammed into an over-busy schedule, fall short of the (broadly) sacramental quality of a common meal around a table.

In Alaska there are many people but not so many priests, and therefore many parishes rarely celebrate the Divine Liturgy. And a bishop, giving advice, gave two pastoral directions to the faithful: first that they should pray together, and second that they should eat together.

Let us try harder to eat with others.

"Forms of life" (Wittgenstein)

I'm not Wittgenstein's biggest fan, and I wince when people speak of "after Wittgenstein." But his concept of "forms of life" is relevant here. A form of life is something that is structural to how people live, and normally tacit; a

professor was searching for an example of "forms of life" to give to the class, and after a couple of minutes of silence I said, "You are trying to do a difficult thing. You are trying to find something that is basically tacit and not consciously realized, but that people will recognize once it is pointed out.

I guess that you have thought of a few possibilities and rejected them because they fall around on one of those criteria." And he searched a bit more, and gave the example of, "It used to be that procreation was seen as necessary for human flourishing. Now people think that limiting procreation is seen as necessary for human flourishing."

Arguably a Luddite's Guide to Forms of Life would be more useful than The Luddite's Guide to Technology, but in the discussion of different technologies there is always a concern for what Wittgenstein would call forms of life. It is possible to turn on the television for 10 minutes a day for weather information, and that retains the same form of life as not using television at all. Watching television for hours a day is, and shapes, a distinct form of life. And in some sense the basic question addressed in this work is not, "What technologies are you using?" but "What forms of life do you have given your technology usage?"

### Future shock

Some people have said that Americans are in a constant state of "future shock," "future shock" being understood by analogy to "culture shock", which is a profoundly challenging state when you are in a culture that tramples assumptions you didn't know you had. Not all of future shock is in relation to technology, but much of it is.

We think of a "rising standard of living," meaning more unfamiliar possessions in many cases, and even if the

economy itself is not a rising standard of living now, we have accepted the train of new technology adoption as progress, but there has been something in us that says, "This is choking something human." And in a sense this has always been right, the older technologies as the new, for movies as much as [augmented reality](#).

One author said, "The future is here. It's just unevenly distributed."

### GPS

GPS is in general an example of something that has a double effect. Traditionally [advertising](#) in an overall effect helps people to covet what a company has to offer, and the behavior stimulated by the advertising is to advance the company's interest, even though the company never says "We are making this so that we will acquire more money or market share." As in [How to Win Friends and Influence People](#), the prime actor is attempting to pursue his or her own interests, while it is presented entirely as being to the advantage of the other party on the other party's terms.

Apple didn't just change the game by making the first smartphone done right, in which regard the iPhone is commonly considered more significant than the Macintosh. The company that invented and still sells the Macintosh has established something more important than owning a Macintosh: owning an iPhone or iPad, which unlike the Macintosh generate a steady subscription income stream. The price for my MacBook was 100% up front: now that I've made the one-time purchase, I do not have any further financial obligations that will filter to Apple. My iPhone, on the other hand, has a subscription and contract; part of my hefty baseline phone bill goes to Apple. And if I were to

purchase an iPad, I would have two subscriptions. (The main reason I have not seriously moved towards buying an iPad is not what I would pay up front; it is adding another subscription.)

The GPS also has a double effect. It is what science fiction writers called a "tracking device." Now it is a terrifically useful traffic advice; part of the marketing proposition offered for Sila on the iPhone 4 S is that it makes terrifically resourceful use of a GPS. ("I feel like a latte."—and it is the GPS that Sila uses to find nearby locations where one might find a latte.) On a more pedestrian level GPS for driving (or biking, or walking) has become so entrenched that people don't know what they'd do without it to reach unfamiliar locations. I have never heard someone question the utility of a GPS for this or other purposes, and I've heard of interesting-sounding hobbies like geocaching where you navigate to specified coordinates and then search out and find some hidden attraction in the area indicated by the GPS.

But for all of these things, GPSes, as well as cell phones in general, provide one more means for [Big Brother](#) (and possibly more than one [Big Brother](#)) to know exactly where you go, when you go there, what the patterns are, and other things where [Big Brother](#) will keep closer tabs on your whereabouts and activities than your spouse or parent. IBM published a book on "Why IBM for Big Data?" and made it very clear that [Big Brother](#) analysis of data isn't just for No Such Agency. It's also for the corporate world. One author told the seemingly attractive story of having made repeated negative posts on his FaceBook wall, slamming an airline after repeated problems, and the airline reached out to him

and gave him a service upgrade. This was presented in the most positive light, but it was very clear that business were being invited to use IBM's expertise to do Big Data [Big Brother](#) analysis on social networks.

Guns and modern weapons (for fantasy swords, see [Teleporters](#))

Let me give a perhaps controversial preamble before directly talking about weapons.

I have spoken both with NRA types and anti-gun advocates, and there is a telling difference. The anti-gun advocates point to hard-hitting, emotional news stories where a walking arsenal opens fire in a school and kills many people. The NRA types may briefly talk about selective truth-telling and mention an incident where someone walked into a church armed to kill a bear, and an off-duty security guard who was carrying a gun legally and with the explicit permission of church leadership, "stopped the crime." But that is something of a tit-for-tat sideline to the main NRA argument, which is to appeal to statistical studies that show that legal gun ownership does not increase crime.

I have a strong math background and I am usually wary of statistics. However, I find it very striking that anti-gun advocates have never in my experience appealed to statistics to show that legal gun ownership increases crime, but only give hard-hitting emotional images, while the bread-and-butter of NRA argument is an appeal to research and statistics. I've never personally investigated those statistics, but there is something suspicious and fishy when only one side of a debate seriously appeals to research and statistics.

With that preamble mentioned, learning to really use a

gun is a form of discipline and stillness, and I tried to capture it in the telescope scene in [Within the Steel Orb](#). Hunting can be a way to be close to your food, and I approve of hunting for meat but not hunting for taxidermy. However, [sacramental shopping](#) for weapons is as bad as any other [sacramental shopping](#). I would tentatively say that if you want skill with a weapon, and will train to the point that it becomes something of a spiritual discipline, then buying a weapon makes sense. If you want to buy a gun because all the cool guys in action-adventure movies have one, or you are not thinking of the work it takes to handle a gun safely and use it accurately, I would question the appropriateness of buying a gun.

(Owning a gun because that is part of your culture is one thing; buying a gun because they are glamorized in movies is another thing entirely.)

And that is without investigating the question of whether it is appropriate to use violence in the first place. St. George the soldier and the passion-bearers Ss. Boris and Gleb are both honored by the Church; yet the better path is the one set forth in the [Sermon on the Mount](#).

Heating and air conditioning

A college roommate commented that middle class Americans had basically as much creature comforts were available. Not that they can buy everything one would want; but there is a certain point beyond which money cannot purchase necessities, only luxuries, and then a certain point after that where money cannot purchase luxuries, only status symbols, and a point beyond that where money cannot purchase any more meaningful status symbols, only power. And middle class Americans may well not be able to purchase

every status symbol they want, but really there is not much more creature comfort that would come with ten times one's salary.

Heating and air conditioning are one such area, and monastics wear pretty much the same clothing in summer and winter. One Athonite monk talked about a story about how several Russian sailors made a fire and stood close, and still did not feel warm, while islanders who were barely clad stood some distance off and were wincing because of the heat. We lose some degree of spiritual strength if we insist on having cool buildings in the summer and warm buildings in the winter. Even just cutting back a bit, so that buildings are warm but not hot in the summer and cool but not cold in the winter would constitute a spiritual victory. Usually this sort of thing is argued for environmental reasons; I am not making the argument that the lowered utility usage is good for the environment but that the lowered utility usage is constructive and, in the old phrase, "builds character." Indoor tracks exist, but in the summer I see bicyclists and runners exercising hard in the summer. These people are not super-heroes, and exercising in the heat really does not seem to be much of a deterrent to getting one's artificially added exercise. The human body and spirit together are capable of a great deal more sturdiness, when instead of always seeking comfort we learn that we can function perfectly well after adjusting to discomfort. (And this is not just with heating and air conditioning; it is true with a lot of things.)

### Hospitality

There is an ancient code of hospitality that recently has been influenced by consumer culture. What commercial

marketing does, or at least did, to make a gesture of friendship and welcome was by offering a selection of choices carefully fitted to the demographics being targeted.

Starbucks not only established that you could market an experience that would command a much higher price than a bottomless cup of coffee at a regular diner; they sold not one coffee but many coffees. You had a broad selection of consumer choices. Starbucks was doubtlessly more successful than some frozen yoghurt places I visited in grad school, which offered something like fifty or more flavors and varieties of yoghurts and had staff who were mystified when customers said, "But I just want some frozen yoghurt!" As a nuance, Starbucks offers guidance and suggestions for the undecided—and a large number of choices for the decided.

And in light of the hospitality industry, hosts offer guests choices and sometimes mystify them by the offering: a guest, according to the older (unwritten) code, did not have the responsibility of choosing what would be offered.

Now perhaps I need to clarify, or maybe don't need to clarify, that if you have a severe peanut allergy and your host offers you a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, you are not duty bound to accept it. But even then, social graces come to play. I remembered one time, at a feast although not strictly a host/guest relationship, when I offered a friend a glass of port and he kindly reminded me that he was a recovering alcoholic. I apologized profusely, and he stopped me and said, "I appreciate the offer, I just can't drink it." So then I offered him something he could consume, and he took it and thanked me for it. Social graces apply.

But this is something of a footnote. There is a story of a

staretz or monastic spiritual father who was going with one of a monk's disciples, and they visited a monastery that was feasting with bread, and the elder and disciple both shared in that informal communion, and then the two of them resumed their journey. The disciple asked the master if he could drink water, and to his astonishment was told no. The master, in answering his question, said, "That was love's bread. But let us keep the fast." The Fathers are very clear: as one priest said, "Hospitality trumps fasting." And the assumption there is that fasting is important enough. This piece originated with the title, "Fasting from Technologies."

But hospitality is even more important.

The ancient rule of hospitality, although this is never thought of in these terms with today's understanding of authority, is that the host has a profound authority over the guest which the guest will obey, even to the point of trumping fasting. But this is not what we may think of as despotism: the entire purpose and focus of the host's role in hospitality is to extend the warmest welcome to the guest. I remember one time when a friend visited from Nigeria, and although I set some choices before them, when I said, "We can do A, B, and C; I would recommend B," in keeping with hospitality they seemed to always treat my pick as tacit authority and went along with me. It was a wonderful visit; my friend made a comment about being treated like royalty, but my thought was not about how well I was treating them. My thought was that this would probably be the last time I saw my friend and her immediate family face to face, and I'd better make it count.

I might comment that this is tied to our inability today to understand a husband's authority over his wife and the

wife's submission. The rôle is somewhat like that of host and guest. A liberal source speaking on [the Ephesians haustafel as it dealt with husbands and wives](#) said that it did not portray marriage in terms of the husband's authority, while a conservative source understood authority at a deeper level: it said that nowhere here (or anywhere else in the Bible) are husbands urged, "Exercise your authority!", but the text that says, [Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord](#), also says, [Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it](#). If the wife's role is to submit herself to her husband as to the Lord, the husband's role is to give up his life as Christ was crucified for the Church.

And all of this seems dead to us as we have grown dead to it. The role of hospitality, including authority, is infinitely less important than marriage, yet we see a husband's authority as external and domineering, when it is less external than the host's authority. And I am drawn to memories of visiting one very traditional couple where both of them exuded freedom and comfort and dealing with them felt like a foot sliding into a well-fitting shoe. But if we see a husband having authority over a wife as a foreign imposition and nothing like the implicit authority we do not even recognize between host and guest (where the host's authority consists in making every decision to show as much kindness as possible to the guest), this is not a defect in marriage but in our deafened ears.

An intravenous drip of noise

"Silence is the language of the age to come," as others have said. Hesychasm is a discipline of stillness, of silence, of [Be still and know that I am God](#). Whether spiritual silence

is greater than other virtues, I do not wish to treat here; suffice it to say that all virtues are great health, and all vices are serious spiritual diseases, and all are worth attention.

There are a number of technologies whose [marketing proposition](#) is as a noise delivery system. The humble radio offers itself as a source of noise. True, there are other uses, such as listening to a news radio station for weather and traffic, but just having a radio on in the background is noise. Other sources of noise include television, iPods, smartphones, the web, and top sites like FaceBook, Google Plus, and the like. Right use of these tends to be going in and out for a task, even if the task lasts five hours, versus having noise as a drone in the background.

In terms of social appropriateness, there is such a thing as politely handling something that is basically rude. For one example, I was visiting a friend's house and wanted to fix his printer, and apologetically said I was going to call my brother and called him to ask his opinion as a computer troubleshooter. I handled the call as something that was basically rude even though the express purpose was to help with something he had asked about and it was a short call.

And it was handled politely because I handled it as something that is basically rude. And other people I know with good manners do sometimes make or receive a cell phone call when you otherwise have their attention, but they do so apologetically, which suggests that just ignoring the other person and making a phone call is rude. In other words, they politely handle the interruption by treating it as something that is basically rude, even if (as in the case I mentioned) the entire intention of the call was to help me

help the friend I was visiting.

Something like this applies to our use of technology. There are things that are entirely appropriate if we handle them as something that is basically "rude." Or, perhaps, "noisy." The equivalent of making a long phone call when you are with someone, without offering any apology or otherwise treating it as basically rude, is laying the reins on the horse's neck and allowing technologies to function as a noise delivery system. And what we need is to unplug our intravenous drip of noise.

Silence can be uncomfortable if you are used to the ersatz companionship of noise. If you have been in a building and step outside into the sunlight at noon, you may be dazzled. Most spiritual disciplines stretch us into something that is uncomfortable at first: the point is to be stretched more each time. The Philokalia talks about how people hold on to sin because they think it adorns them: to this may be added that after you repent and fear a shining part of you may be lost forever, you realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell." Silence is like this; we want a noise delivery system as a drone, and once we begin to get used to its absence, there is a deeper joy. It may take time; it takes something like a year for a recovering alcoholic's brain chemistry to reset. But once we have got rid of the drug, once we have repented and sought to bear fruit worthy of repentance, we may find ourselves (to adapt the title of a book) **blindsided by joy.**

Killing time

"You cannot kill time," the saying goes, "without injuring eternity."

At least one breakdown of mobile users has said that

they fall into three groups: "Urgent now," people who have some degree of emergency and need directions, advice, contingency plans, and the like, "Repeat now," people who are monitoring information like whether or how their stocks are doing, and "Bored now," people who are caught and have some time to kill, and look for a diversion.

"Bored now" use of cell phones is simply not constructive spiritually; it offers a virtual escape for the here and now God has given us, and it is the exact opposite of the saying, "Your cell [as a monk] will teach you everything you need to know."

#### The lead pencil

The lead pencil is a symbol of an alternative to an overly technologized world; one organization of people who have made a conscious decision to avoid the encroachment of technology chose the lead pencil as their emblem and formed the Lead Pencil Club.

But the lead pencil is a work of technology, and one that 99% of humans who ever lived have never seen any more than a cuneiform stylus or any other writing implement. And even such a seemingly humble technology comes about in an impressive fashion; [one economist wrote a compelling case that only God knows how pencils are made.](#)

Sitting down and writing letters is a valuable discipline, but the norm that has been lived by 99% of the human race is oral culture; anthropologists have increasingly realized that the opposite of "written" culture is not "illiterate" culture but "oral" culture. And the weapon that slides through the chink in oral culture's armor is the writing implement, such as the lead pencil. It is not the computer, but the lead pencil and its kin, that serve as a disease vector

to destroy age-old orality of culture.

This is not to say that you can't try to use computer keyboards less and pens and pencils more. But understand that you're not turning the clock all the way back by writing handwritten letters, however commendable the love in handwritten letters may be. The lead pencil is a technology and to those societies that embrace it, it is the death knell to an old way.

The long tail

The long tail can be your best friend, or an insidious enemy.

Let me briefly outline the long tail. A retail bookstore needs to sell one copy of a book in a year's time, or else it is losing them money: shelf space is an expensive commodity.

And all of this leads to a form of implicit censorship, not because bookstores want to stamp out certain books, but because if it's not a quick seller or a safe bet it's a liability.

By contrast, Amazon has large volumes of shelf space; their warehouses might comfortably store a city. And it costs them some money to acquire books, but the price of keeping books available is insignificant compared to a brick-and-mortar bookstore. And what that means, and not just on Amazon, that the economic censorship is lifted. People used to wonder who would be able to fill hundreds or more cable channels; now Youtube would be hard pressed to reduce itself down to a thousand channels. And so a much larger portion of Amazon's profits comes from having an enormous inventory of items that occasionally make a sale.

There is specialization implicit in the long tail; if you want to know how to make something, chances are pretty good that some blog explains how. And the proper ascetical use of

technology, or Luddite if you prefer, uses things differently than the mainstream. Nobody in a phone store is going to tell you that an intravenous drip of noise in terms of text messages that go on even when you are trying to sleep does not make you happier than if you use texting when there is a special need. Some of the best resources you will find for ascetical use of technology are to be found in the long tail.

But there is something else that comes with it. The temptation is to be off in our own customized worlds, with everything around our interests. And that is a form of spiritual poverty. Part of an age-old asceticism has been learning how to deal with the people who are around you, localist style, instead of pursuing your own nooks and crannies. The monoculture of retail stores in America was first a problem, not because it had no long tail effects, but because it supplanted at least an implicit localism. Local cultures gave way to plastic commercial culture.

And we can use the long tail to our profit, if we don't lay the reins on the horse's neck. Shopping on the Internet for things that won't be local stores is one thing; shopping on the Internet so you don't have to get out of your pyjamas is another.

The long tail can be a gold mine, but it is subject to [the damned backswing](#).

#### Marketing proposition

There was one CIA official who said, being interviewed by a journalist, that he would never knowingly hire someone who was attracted by the romance of cloak and dagger work. Now this was quite obviously someone who did want to hire people who would be a good fit, but someone who wants to join a cloak and dagger agency as a gateway to have life feel

like a James Bond movie is off on the wrong foot.

I doubt if any major intelligence agency has promoted James Bond movies because they think it's a good way to draw the right recruits, but James Bond movies function as highly effective advertisements. They may not lead people to be able to stick out the daily grind and level of bureaucracy in a three-letter government agency, but they give a strong sense that spying is cool, and cool in a way that probably has only the most accidental resemblance to life in one of those bureaucratic organizations.

Cop shows likewise show police officers pulling their guns out much more than in real life; it is a frequent occurrence on the cop shows I've seen, while the last figure I heard was that real, live, flesh and blood police officers draw a gun on the job (apart from training) once every few years if even that.

Advertisement is produced as a service to the companies whose goods and services are being advertised, but the real message they sell is if anything further from the truth than the "accidental advertisement" of James Bond movies advertising a romantic version of bureaucratic intelligence agencies and cop shows making a dramaticization that effectively ignores the day-to-day work of police officers because it just doesn't make good drama. (What would happen to the ratings of a cop show if they accurately portrayed the proportion of time that police officers spend filling out paperwork?)

Advertising sells claims that are further out. Two examples discussed in a class showed a family that moved, and what was juxtaposed as cementing this bonding time was a vacuum cleaner. In another commercial, racial harmony was

achieved by eating a hamburger. The commercials that stuck with me from childhood were in one case kids jumping around with rotating camera angles because they were wearing a particular brand of shoes: When I asked my parents for those shoes, they explained to me that the commercial was made to make me want them, and I took a marker and colored the patterns on the bottom of the shoes on the add on to my shoes. Another one showed a game of Laser Tag that was end to end acrobatics. Now I have never played Laser Tag, and I get the impression people like it, but I doubt that its gear confers the ability to do theatrically delivered acrobatics.

Marketing is usually more subtle and seductive than I have portrayed it here. The vacuum cleaner did not offer any words connecting the appliance with family connectedness; it's just that this family was going through a major experience and the vacuum cleaner appeared with perfect timing just at the center of that memory. The marketing message that is portrayed is seductive and false, and it is never the right basis to judge the product on. The product may be the right thing to buy and it may well be worth buying, but only after one has rejected the mystique so masterfully built up in the marketing proposition. If it is right for me to study ninjutsu, it will only be right after I have rejected the ninja mystique, something which the nearest dojo does in fact do: they refer to the martial art they teach as "toshindo", nor "ninjutsu", even though they refer to essentially the same thing in Japanese.

I have said earlier, or rather repeated, the words, "Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need." They bear repeating, but is there anything else to add? I would add three things:

1. Reject [sacramental shopping](#).
2. Reject the mystique advertising has sold you this product on.
3. Wait until your heart becomes clear about what is the best choice, and then make the best choice.

The best choice, in the third world, may be to buy a Mercedes-Benz instead of a Ford because you cannot afford to replace a Ford in six years.

But take care of the spiritual housecleaning first.

### Martial arts

There have been two times in my life that I have studied martial arts, and both of them have been times of exceptional spiritual dryness. I have not felt any particular dryness when learning how to use a bow and arrow—or a .22—but there is something different about at least internal Asian martial arts. Practicing them, like Orthodoxy, is walking along a way. And it would seem somewhat confused to try to pursue one of these ways along with the Orthodox way.

I am careful of declaring this in the absolute; the literature is ambivalent but there are soldiers who bear the cross of St. George, and many of them have training in Asian martial arts. That looks to me grey, as outlined in [the timeless way of relating](#).

I am tempted to train in ninjutsu: partly for technique, partly because the whole of the training includes stealth, and partly for practical self-defense. But I am treating that desire as a temptation, on the understanding that God can impress things on my conscience if he wants me to enter training.

MMO's (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games, like

World of Warcraft)

["Do You Want to Date My Avatar?" was designed and created as a viral video.](#) and something about it really stuck.

There are common threads between many of the things there, and an MMO is a cross between the MUDs I played in high school, and SecondLife. The MUDs were handled from pure text, leaving imagery in the player's imagination; MMO's provide their own imagery. Another form of escape.

## Money and financial instruments

The Fathers commenting on St. Job also illustrate another principle of such wealth as existed then. St. Job is reported as having thousands of herd animals and thousands of beasts of burden, the wealthiest of the men of the East. But there are somewhat pointed remarks that wealthy Job is not reported to possess gold or silver. His wealth was productive wealth, living wealth, not a vault of dead metal coins. In modern terms he did not live off an endowment of stocks and bonds, but owned and ran a productive business.

Endowments are a means of being independently wealthy, and this ultimately means "independent from God." Now the wealthiest are really as dependent on God as the poorest; let us remember [the parable of the rich fool, in which a man congratulates himself for amassing everything he would need and that night the angels demanded his soul from him.](#) The ending is much sadder than St. Job's story.

Those of us in the world usually possess some amount of money, but there is something that makes me uncomfortable about the stock market overall, even moreso for the more abstract financial instruments. What one attempts to do is gain the most money from one's existing money as much as possible, given the amount of risk you want and possibly including such outliers as ethical index funds which only index stocks deemed to meet an ethical standard. The question I have is, "What are we producing for what we get out of the stock market?" Working in a job delivers tangible value, or at least can. Investing in the stock market may be connected with helping businesses to function, but more and more abstract forms of wealth have the foul smell that

heralds the coming of [the damned backswing](#).

I would suggest as a right use of wealth acquiring tools that help you work, and being generous even or especially if money is tight. And explicitly depending on God.

### Movies

When movies had arrived on the scene and were starting to have a societal effect, at least one Luddite portrayed a character moving from one movie to another in escapism.

The premise may seem quaint now, but a little bit of that keeps on happening with new technologies.

One fellow parishioner talked about how in Japan, anime shows aired with a certain animation technique, and all of the sudden emergency rooms were asking why they were being inundated with people having epileptic seizures. And when they saw the connection, Japan stopped cold in its use of that animation technique. He said that that underscored to him the power of television and movies.

I don't quite agree with him, any more than I would agree with using findings that extremely high levels of artificial light—fluorescent or incandescent—cause problems, and we should therefore be very wary of lighting. For most sedentary people, even with artificial light (fluorescent or incandescent), the level of exposure to light is materially lower than natural exposure to the sun, and people who spend their time indoors tend to see less light (significantly less light) than people living outdoors. I didn't accept his conclusion, but he followed with another insight that I can less easily contest.

He asked if I saw movies infrequently (we had not discussed the topic, but he knew me well enough to guess where I might stand), and I told him that I usually don't

watch movies. He asked me if I had ever observed that an hour after seeing a movie, I felt depressed. I had not made any connection of that sort, even if now it seems predictable from [the pleasure-pain syndrome](#). And now I very rarely see movies, precisely because the special effects and other such tweaks are stronger than I am accustomed to seeing; they go like a stiff drink to the head of the teetotaler. And on this score I would rather not be the person who has a stiff drink every so often, and whose body tolerates alcohol better, but the person whose system hasn't had to make such an adjustment, an adjustment that includes losses. The little pleasures of life are lost on someone used to a rising standard of special effects, and the little pleasures of life are more wholesome than special effects.

#### Multitasking

As I discussed in [Religion And Science Is Not Just Intelligent Design Vs. Evolution](#), one of the forms of name-dropping in academic theology is to misuse "a term from science": the claim to represent "a term from science" is endemic in academic theology, but I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times I've read "a term from science" that was used correctly.

One book said it was going to introduce "a term from computer science," toggling, which meant switching rapidly between several applications. The moral of this story was that we should switch rapidly between multiple activities in our daily lives.

What I would have said earlier is, "While that moral might be true, what it is not is a lesson from computer science." What I would say now is, "Never mind if that is a lesson from computer science. The moral is fundamentally

flawed."

In the [Sermon on the Mount](#), Matthew 6:22, Christ says, "If your eye be," and then a word that doesn't come across in translation very well. It is rendered "healthy" (NIV), "clear" (NASB), "sound" (RSV), and "good" (NKJV, NLT). Only the King James Version properly renders the primary sense of haplous as "single." This may be a less user-friendly translation but it captures something the other translations miss. The context of the discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body is about choosing whether to have a single focus in serving God, or try to multitask between serving God and money. Haplous does have "healthy", "clear", "sound", and "good" as secondary meanings, but the primary meaning is the less accessible one that I have only found in the Greek and in the King James. If the eye is the lamp of the body, and it is important that the eye be single, then by extension the whole person is to be single, and as one aspect of this single eye, give a whole and single attention to one thing at a time. Now this is not necessarily a central, foreground focus in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), but as its logic unfurls, even as spiritual silence unfurls, a single eye gives its whole and undivided attention to one thing at a time. (And study after study has shown that increased productivity through multitasking is an illusion; divided attention is divided attention and hurts all manner of actions.)

#### Nutriceuticals

The term "nutriceuticals is itself an ambiguous and ambivalent term.

On the one hand, 'nutriceuticals' can refer to the diet advanced by the [Nourishing Traditions](#) school, and while nutrition should not be considered on its own without

reference to the big picture of exercise, work, light, almsgiving, fasting, prayer, and the Holy Mysteries, there is something to the recipes and type of diet advocated in Nourishing Traditions.

There are also the different, and differently excellent, nutraceuticals of [a company that combines absolutely top-notch supplements with a pushy, multi-lev—I mean, a unique opportunity to become CEO of your own company.](#) (I am formally a distributor; [please contact me if you want to be a customer or possibly distributor without being pushed to drink Kool-Aid.](#))

However, it seems that everybody selling certain things wants to be selling "nutraceuticals", and there are people selling "synthetic testosterone" as a "nutraceutical." Friends, I really hope that the offer of "synthetic testosterone" is false advertising, because if it is false advertising they are probably delivering a better product than if it's truth in advertising. Testosterone is a steroid, the chief of the anabolic steroids used to get muscles so big they gross girls out. Now testosterone does have legitimate medical uses, but using steroids to build disgustingly huge muscles can use up to a hundred times what legitimate medical use prescribes, and it does really nasty things to body, mind, and soul.

I get the impression that most things sold as nutraceuticals are shady; to authorities, illegal nutraceuticals are probably like a water balloon, where you step on it one place and it just slides over a bit to the side. It used to be that there were perhaps a dozen major street drugs on the scene; now there is a vast bazaar where some "nutraceuticals" are squeaky-clean, and some

"nutriceuticals" are similar in effect to illegal narcotics but not technically illegal, and some of them are selling testosterone without medical supervision or worse.

So buyer beware. There's some good stuff out there (I haven't talked about goji berries), but if you want a healthy diet to go with healthy living, read and cook from [Nourishing Traditions](#), and if you want another kind of good nutraceutical supplement without being pushed to drink Kool-Aid, [contact me and you might be my first customer](#). (No, I don't have dreams of striking it rich through, um, "my business." I am satisfied enough with my job.)

### Old Technologies

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

Old technologies are usually things that caused changes and moved people away from what might be called more natural [forms of life](#). However, they represent a lower drug dose than newer technologies. [The humble lead pencil](#) may be historically be the kind of technology that converted cultures away from being oral; however, a handwritten letter to an old friend is profoundly different from a stream of texts. And in my technological soliloquy above, two out of the three technologies I mentioned represent an old tradition. Being familiar with some of the best of older technologies may be helpful, and in general they do not have

the layers on layers of fragile character that have been baked into new technologies. A Swiss Army Knife is still a portable toolchest if something messes up with the Internet. Bicycles are not a replacement for cars—you can't go as fast or as far, or stock up on groceries—but many people prefer bicycles when they are a live option, and a good bicycle has far fewer points of failure than a new car.

I noted when I was growing up that a power failure meant, "Office work stops." Now more recently an internet or network failure means, "Office work stops," and there is someone who said, "Systems integration is when your computer doesn't work because of a problem on a computer you never knew existed." Older technologies are in general not so fragile, and have more of a buffer zone before you get in to [the damned backswing](#).

#### Online forums

Online forums are something of a mixed blessing. They can allow discussion of obscure topics, and have many of the benefits of the [the long tail](#). I happily referred someone who was learning Linux to [unix.stackexchange.com](http://unix.stackexchange.com). But the blessing is mixed, and when I talked with my priest about rough stuff on an Orthodox forum, he said, "People love to talk about Orthodoxy. The real challenge is to do it."

Online forums may be more wisely used to consult for information and knowhow, but maybe not the best place to find friends, or perhaps a good place to find friends, but not a good place to use for friendship.

Planned obsolescence, fashion, and being built NOT to last

When I made one visit to the Dominican Republic, one thing that surprised me was that a substantial number of the vehicles I saw were Mercedes-Benz or other luxury

brands by U.S. standards, while there were no or almost no U.S. cars. The reason I was given to this by my youth pastor is that you can keep a German engineered car up and running for 30 years if you take care of it; with a U.S. car you are doing well to have a car still running after 10 years. German cars, among others, are engineered and built to last; U.S. cars are engineered and built NOT to last. And in the Dominican Republic economy, buying a car that may well run for 30 years is something people can afford; buying a car that may only last 5-7 years is a luxury people cannot afford. An old but well-cared-for Mercedes Benz, Saab, Volvo, or BMW will probably last longer than a new car which is "imported from Detroit."

One of the features of an industrial economy is that the economy needs to have machines in production and people buying things. If we ask the question, "Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth," the decisive answer of industrial economy is, "Man was made for economic wealth." There are artificial measures taken to manipulate culture so as to maximize production and consumption of economic wealth, three of which are planned obsolescence, fashion, and being built NOT to last.

Planned obsolescence socially enforces repeat purchases by making goods that will have a better version available soon; in computers relatively little exploration is done to make a computer that will last a long time, because computers usually only need to last until they're obsolete, and that level of quality is "good enough for government work." I have an iPhone 4 and am glad not to be using my needlessly snail-like AT&T-serviced iPhone 1, but I am bombarded by advertisements telling me that I need an

iPhone 4S, implying that my iPhone 4 just doesn't cut it any more. As a matter of fact, my iPhone 4 works quite nicely, and I ignored a link advertising a free port of the iPhone 4's distinctive feature Sila. I'm sure that if I forked out and bought an iPhone 4S, it would not be long before I saw advertisements breeding discontent about my spiffy iPhone 4S, and giving me a next hot feature to covet.

In the Middle Ages, fashion changed in clothing about once per generation. In our culture, we have shifting fashions that create a manufactured social need to purchase new clothing frequently, more like once per year. People do not buy clothing nearly so often because it is worn out and too threadbare to keep using, but because fashion shifted and such-and-such is in. Now people may be spending less on fashion-driven purchases than before, but it is still not a mainstream practice to throw a garment out because further attempts to mend it will not really help.

And lastly, there is the factor of things being made to break down. There are exceptions; it is possible for things to be built to last. I kept one Swiss Army Knife for twenty years, with few repairs beyond WD-40 and the like—and at the end of those twenty years, I gave it as a fully functional hand-me-down to someone who appreciated it. There is a wide stripe of products where engineers tried to engineer something to last and last, and not just German engineers. However, this is an exception and not the rule in the U.S. economy. I was incredulous when a teacher told me that the engineering positions some of us would occupy would have an assignment to make something that would last for a while and then break down. But it's true. Clothing, for instance, can be built to last. However, if you buy expensive new

clothing, it will probably wear out. Goodwill and other second-hand stores sometimes have things that are old enough to be built to last, but I haven't found things to be that much sturdier: your mileage may vary. And culturally speaking, at least before present economic difficulties, when an appliance breaks you do not really take it in for repairs.

You replace it with a newer model.

All of these things keep purchases coming so the gears of factories will continue. Dorothy Sayers' "The Other Six Deadly Sins" talks about how a craftsman will want to make as good an article as possible, while mechanized industry will want to make whatever will keep the machines' gears turning. And that means goods that are made to break down, even when it is technologically entirely feasible for factories to turn out things that are built to last.

All of these answer the question, "Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth?" with a resounding, "Man was made for economic wealth."

Porn and things connected to porn

There is a story about a philosopher who was standing in a river when someone came to him. The philosopher asked the visitor, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under the water for a little while, and asked him the second time, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under water for what seemed an interminable time, and let him up and asked, "What do you want?" The visitor gasped and said, "Air!" The philosopher said, "When you want Truth the way you want air, you will find it."

The same thing goes for freedom from the ever-darker

chain called pornography, along with masturbation and the use of "ED" drugs to heighten thrills (which can cause nasty street drug-like effects even in marriage). To quote the [Sermon on the Mount](#) (RSV):

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

The Church Fathers are clear enough that this must not be taken literally; canon law forbids self-castration. But if you want to be free from addiction to pornography, if you want such freedom the way you want air, then you will do whatever it takes to remove the addiction.

What are your options? I'm not going to imitate the Dilbert strip's mentioning, "How to lose weight by eating less food," but there are some real and concrete steps you can take. If you shut off your internet service, and only check email and conduct internet business in public places with libraries, that might be the price for purity. If you are married, you might use one of many internet filters, set up with a password that is only known to your wife. You could join a men's sexual addiction support group: that may be the price of freedom from porn, and it is entirely worth it. The

general rule of thumb in confession is not to go into too much detail in confessing sexual sins, but going to confession (perhaps frequently, if your priest or spiritual father allows it) can have a powerful "I don't want to confess this sin" effect. Another way to use the Internet is only go to use it when you have a defined purpose, and avoid free association browsing which often goes downhill. You could ask prayers of the saints, especially [St. Mary of Egypt](#) and [St. John the Long-Suffering of the Kiev Near Caves](#). You could read and pray "The Canon of Repentance to Our Lord Jesus Christ" in the [Jordanville prayer book](#) and [St. Nectarios Press's Prayers for Purity](#), if your priest so blesses.

Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe: first it drains wonder and beauty out of everything else, and then it drains wonder and beauty out of itself: the only goal of lust is more lust. It works like a street drug. St. Basil the Great compared lust to a dog licking a saw: the dog keeps licking it because it likes the taste it produces, but it does not know that it is tasting its own woundedness, and the longer it keeps up at this, the deeper the wounds become.

Furthermore, an account of fighting sexual sin is incomplete if we do not discuss gluttony. What is above the belt is very close to what is below the belt, and the Fathers saw a tight connection between gluttony and lust. **Gluttony is the gateway drug to lust.** "Sear your loins with fasting," the Fathers in the Philokalia tells us; the demon of lust goes out with prayer and fasting.

#### Sacramental shopping

I remember when I had one great struggle before surrendering, letting go of buying a computer for my studies, and then an instant later feeling compelled to buy it. The

only difference was that one was sacramental shopping to get something I really needed, and the other was just getting what I needed with the "sacramental shopping" taken out.

In American culture and perhaps others, the whole advertising industry and the shape of the economy gives a great place to "sacramental shopping", or shopping as an ersatz sacrament that one purchases not because it is useful or any other legitimate concern, but because it delivers a sense of well-being. Like Starbucks, for instance. Some have argued that today's brand economy is doing the job of spiritual disciplines: hence a teacher asks students, "Imagine your future successful self. With what brands do you imagine yourself associating?" and getting no puzzled looks or other body language indicating that students found the question strange. I've mentioned brands I consume both prestigious and otherwise; perhaps this piece would be better if I omitted mention of brands. But even if one rejects the ersatz spirituality of brands, not all brands are created equal; my previous laptop was an IBM Thinkpad I used for years before it stopped working, and the one before that was an Acer that demonstrated "You get what you pay for." Investing in something good—paid for in cash, without incurring further debt—can be appropriate. Buying for the mystique is spiritual junk food. (And in telling about my iPhone, I didn't mention that I tried migrating to a Droid, before realizing its user interface didn't stack up to the iPhone's.)

"Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need," is a rejection of brand economy as a spiritual discipline. Buy things on their merits and not because of the prestige of

the brand. And learn to ignore the mystique that fuels a culture of discontent. Buy new clothes because your older clothing is wearing out, not because it is out of fashion. (It makes sense to buy classic rather than trendy.)

### SecondLife

Most of the other technologies mentioned here are technologies I have dealt with myself, most often at some length. SecondLife by contrast is the one and only of the technologies on this list I haven't even installed due to overwhelming bad intuitions when I tried to convince myself it was something I should be doing.

It may be, some time later, that SecondLife is no longer called SecondWife, and it is a routine communication technology, used as an audio/visual successor to (purely audio) phone conversations. The web was once escape, one better than the Hitchhiker's *Guide to the Galaxy*, and now it can be explored but it is quite often used for common nuts and bolts. No technology is permanently exotic: perhaps sometime the world of SecondLife will seem ordinary. But for now at least, it is an escape into building an alternative reality, and almost might as well be occult, [as the foundations of modern science](#), for the degree of creating a new alternate reality it involves.

Smartphones, tablets, netbooks, laptops, and desktop computers

Jakob Nielsen made a distinction between computers that are movable, meaning laptops and netbooks which can be moved with far less difficulty and hassle than a desktop system, and mobile, meaning that they are the sort of thing a person can easily carry. Netbooks cross an important line compared to full-sized laptops; a regular laptop weighs

enough on the shoulder that you are most likely to take a laptop in its carrying case for a reason, not just carry it like one more thing in a pocket. Netbooks, which weigh in at something like two pounds, are much lighter on the shoulder and they lend themselves more readily to keeping in a backpack, large purse, or bag of holding, without stopping to consider, "Do I really want to carry this extra weight?" Not that this is unique to netbooks; tablets are also light enough to just carry with you. Smartphones cross another important line: they are small enough to keep tucked in your pocket (or on your belt).

I was first astonished when I read that one iPhone user had completely displaced her use of the desktop computer. It surprised me for at least three reasons. First, the iPhone's screen is tiny compared to even a small desktop screen; one thing programmers tend to learn is the more screen space they have, the better, and if they have any say in the matter, or if they have savvy management, programmers have two screens or one huge screen. Second, especially when I had an iPhone 1 that came with painfully slow and artificially limited bandwidth, the niche for it that I saw was as an emergency surrogate for a real computer that you use when, say, you're driving to meet someone and something goes wrong. A bandwidth-throttled iPhone 1 may be painfully slow, but it is much better than nothing. And lastly, for someone used to high-speed touch typing on a regular keyboard, the iPhone, as the original Droid commercials stomped on the sore spot, "iDon't have a real keyboard." You don't get better over time at touch typing an iPhone keyboard because the keyboard is one you have to look at; you cannot by touch move over two keys to the left

to type your next letter. What I did not appreciate then was that you give the iPhone keyboard more focus and attention than touch typing a regular keyboard calls for; the "virtual keyboard" is amazing and it works well when you are looking at it and typing with both thumbs. And once that conceptual jolt is past, it works well.

But what I didn't appreciate when that woman said she had stopped using her computer was that the desktop computer is wherever you have to go to use the desktop computer, while the iPhone is in one's pocket or purse. And there is an incumbency advantage to the iPhone that is in one's pocket or purse. It's not just that you can only use your home computer when you are at home; if you are in one room and the computer is in another, it is less effort to jot a brief email from the phone than go to the other room and use the computer.

Laziness is a factor here; I have used my iPhone over my computer due to laziness. But more broadly a desktop or even laptop computer is in something of a sanctuary, with fewer distractions; the smartphone is wherever you are, and that may be a place with very few distractions, and it may be a place with many distractions.

Smartphones, tablets, netbooks, laptops, and desktops are all computers. The difference between them is how anchored or how portable they work out to be in practice. And the more mobile a computer is, the more effectively it will be as a noise delivery system. The ascetical challenge they represent, and the need to see that we and not the technologies hold the reins, is sharper for the newer and more mobile models.

Social networks

I personally tend not to get sucked in to Facebook; I will go to a social networking site for a very particular reason, and tend not to linger even if I want something to do. There is a reason for this; I had an inoculation. While in high school

I served as a student system administrator, on a system whose primary function in actual use was a social network, with messages, chatting, forums, and so on and so forth. I drank my fill of that, so to speak, and while it was nowhere near so user-friendly as Facebook, it was a drug from the same family.

Having been through that, I would say that this is not what friendship is meant to be. It may be that friends who become physically separated will maintain correspondence, and in that case a thoughtful email is not much different from a handwritten letter. As I wrote in [Technomicon:](#)

[Technology, Nature, Asceticism:](#)

- "Social networking" is indeed about people, but there is something about social networking's promise that is like an ambitious program to provide a tofu "virtual chicken" in every pot: there is something unambiguously social about social media, but there is also something as different from what "social" has meant for well over 99% of people as a chunk of tofu is from real chicken's meat.
- There is a timeless way of relating to other people, and this timeless way is a large part of asceticism. This is a way of relating to people in which one learns to relate primarily to people one did not choose, in friendship had more permanency than many today now give marriage, in which one was dependent on others

(that is, interdependent with others), in which people did not by choice say goodbye to everyone they knew at once, as one does by moving in America, and a social interaction was largely through giving one's immediate presence.

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

### "Teleporters"

I use the term "teleporters" because I do not know of a standard name, besides perhaps the name of one of the eight capital vices, for a class of technologies and other things that are in ways very different from each other but all have the same marketing proposition: escape. Not that

one needs technologies to do this; metaphysics in the occult sense is another means to the same end. But all of them deliver escape.

A collection of swords is not usually amassed for defense: the owner may be delighted at the chance to learn how to handle a medieval sword, but even if the swords are "battle ready" the point is not self-defense. It's a little bit of something that transports us to another place. Same thing for movies and video games. Same thing for historical re-enactments. Same thing, for that matter, for romances that teach women to covet a relationship with a man that could never happen, and spurn men and possibilities where a genuinely happy marriage can happen. And, for that matter, ten thousand things.

There are many things whose marketing proposition is escape, and they all peter out and leave us coveting more. They are spiritual poison if they are used for escape. There may be other uses and legitimate reasons—iPhones are, besides being "avoid spiritual work" systems, incredibly useful—but the right use of these things is not found in the marketing proposition they offer you.

### Television

Television has partly been ousted with Facebook; TV is stickier than ever, but it still can't compete with the web's stickiest sites.

However, a couple of Far Side cartoons on television are worth pondering; if they were written today, they might mention more than TV.

In one cartoon, the caption reads, "In the days before television," and a whole family is staring blankly at a blank spot on a wall, curled around it as if it were a television. The

irony, of course, is that this is not what things were like before television began sucking the life out of everything. The days before television were that much more dynamic and vibrant; Gary Larson's cartoon, with a caption that simply subtracts television from the eighties, is dripping with ironic clarity about precisely what the days before television were **not**.

In the other cartoon, an aboriginal tribesman stands at the edge of a chasm, a vine bridge having just been cut and fallen into the chasm and making the chasm impassible. On the other side were a group of angry middle-class suburbanites, and the tribesman was holding a television.

The caption read, "And so Mbogo stood, the angry suburbanites standing on the other side of the chasm. Their idol was now his, as well as its curse."

Some years back, an advertising executive wrote, [Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#) (one friend reacted, "The author could only think of four?"), and though the book is decades old it speaks today. All of the other technologies that have been stealing television's audiences do what television did, only more effectively and with more power.

I said at one point that the television is the most expensive appliance you can own. The reasoning was simple. For a toaster or a vacuum cleaner, if it doesn't break, it costs you the up front purchase price, along with electricity, gas, or any other utilities it uses. And beyond those two, there is no further cost as long as it works. But with television, there was the most powerful propaganda engine yet running, advertising that will leave you keeping up with the Joneses (or, as some have argued after comparing

1950's kitchen appliances with 1990's kitchen appliances, keeping up with the Trumps). In this ongoing stream, the programming is the packaging and the advertising is the real content. And the packaging is designed not to steal the show from the content. Today television rules less vast of a realm, but megasites deliver the same principle: the reason you go to the website is a bit of wrapping, and the product being sold is you.

Our economy is in a rough state, but welcome to keeping up with the Trumps version 2.0. The subscription fees for smartphones and tablets are just the beginning.

The timeless way of relating

Christopher Alexander saw that computers were going to be the next building, and he was the champion who introduced computer-aided design to the field of architecture. Then he came to a second realization, that computer-aided design may make some things easier and faster, but it does not automatically make a building better: computer aided design makes it easier to architect good and bad buildings alike, and if you ask computers to make better buildings, you're barking up the wrong fire hydrant.

But this time his work, [A Timeless Way of Building](#), fell on deaf ears in the architectural community... only to be picked up by software developers and be considered an important part of object-oriented software design. The overused term MVC ("model-view-controller"), which appears in job descriptions when people need a candidate who solves problems well whether or not that meant using MVC, is part of the outflow of object-oriented programming seeing something deep in patterns, and some programmers have taken a profound lesson from [A Timeless Way of Building](#)

even if good programmers in an interview have to conceal an allergic reaction when MVC is presented as a core competency for almost any kind of project.

There really is [A Timeless Way of Building](#), and Alexander finds it in some of ancient and recent architecture alike. And in the same vein there is a timeless way of relating. In part we may see it as one more piece of it is dismantled by one more technology migration. But there is a real and live timeless relating, and not just through rejecting technologies.

C.S. Lewis, in a passage in [That Hideous Strength](#) which has great romantic appeal if nothing else, talks about how everything is coming to a clearer and sharper point. Abraham was not wrong for his polygamy as we would be for polygamy, but there is some sense that he didn't profit from it. Merlin was not something from the sixth century, but the last survival in the sixth century of something much older when the dividing line between matter and spirit was not so sharp as it is today. Things that have been gray, perhaps not beneficial even if they are not forbidden, are more starkly turning to black or white.

This is one of the least convincing passages for Lewis's effort to speak of "mere Christianity." I am inclined to think that something of the exact opposite is true, that things that have been black and white in ages past have more leniency, more grey. Not necessarily that leniency equals confusion; Orthodoxy has two seemingly antithetical but both necessary principles of *akgravia* (striving for strict excellence) and *oikonomia* (the principle of mercifully relaxing the letter of the law). We seem to live in a time of *oikonomia* from the custom which has the weight of canon

law, where (for instance) the ancient upper class did far less physical exertion than the ancient lower class and slaves, but middle class fitness nuts today exercise less than the ancient upper class. Three hours of aerobic exercise is a lot. While we pride ourselves on abolishing legal slavery, we wear not only clothing from sweatshops made at the expense of preventable human misery, but large wardrobes and appliances and other consumer goods that bear a price tag in human misery. Many Orthodox have rejected the position of the Fathers on contraception from time immemorial, [and the Church has been secularized enough for many to get their bearings from one article.](#)

But two things are worth mentioning here. The first is that this is a time that invites prophets. Read [the Old Testament prophets](#): prophets, named "the called ones" in [the Old Testament](#) never come when things are going well to say "Keep it up. Carry on your good work!" They come in darker days.

Second, while we live in a time where mere gloom is called light and we rely on much more oikonomia than others, oikonomia is real Orthodoxy in proper working order, and in ways Orthodoxy with oikonomia is much greater than rigidly rejecting oikonomia. The people who call themselves "True Orthodox", or now that "True Orthodox" sounds fishy, rename the term "Genuine Orthodox" to avoid the troubles they have created for the name of "True Orthodox." And despite observing the letter of canons more scrupulously than even the most straight-laced of normal Orthodox, these people are people who don't get Orthodoxy, and would do well to receive the penance of eating a thick steak on a strict fast day.

And despite having so many slices taken out, the timeless way of relating is alive and well. It is present at a meal around table with friends. It is present when a man and wife remain together "til death do us part." It is present when Catholics adore the Eucharist, or Evangelicals don't miss a Sunday's church for years and keep up with their quiet times and Bible studies. "Conversation is like texting for adults," said our deacon, and the timeless way of relating is there when people use texting to arrange a face-to-face visit. The timeless way of relating is always close at hand.

#### Video games

I was introduced to the computer game rogue and while in school wanted to play rogue / UltraRogue for as long as I could. When I decided in grad school that I wanted to learn to program, I wrote [a cruffy and difficult-to-understand roguelike game implemented in 60,000 lines of C.](#)

Those many hours I played in that fantasy land were my version of time lost in television. There are things I could have done that I didn't: create something, explore time outside, write letters. And as primitive and humble as rogue is, it stems from the same root as World of Warcraft. It is one of several technologies I have tasted in an egg: rogue, UltraRogue, [The Minstrel's Song](#), and different MUDs; or a command-line computer doing the work of a social network. And on that score, see [Children's toys](#) on Baudelaire's "la Morale du Joujou". The newer games and social network may connect more dots and do some of your imagining for you.

The core remains: you sit in front of a computer, transported to a fantasy land, and not exploring the here and now that you have been placed in in all its richness.

#### The Web

When I was a boy and when I was a youth, it was a sheer delight to go to Honey Rock Camp. I don't want to elaborate on all of my fond memories but I would like to point to one memory in particular: the web.

Resourceful people had taken a World War II surplus piece of netting, attached it to the edges of a simple building, and pulled the center up by a rope. The result was everything a child wants from a waterbed, and I remember, for instance, kids gathering on the far side of the web, my climbing up the rope, and then letting go and dropping five or ten feet into the web, sending little children flying. And as with my other macho ways of connecting with children, if I did this once I was almost certainly asked to do it again. (The same goes, for some extent, with throwing children into the web.)

I speak of that web in the past tense, because after decades of being a cherished attraction, the web was falling apart and it was no longer a safe attraction. And the people in charge made every effort to replace it, and found to everyone's dismay that they couldn't. Nobody makes those nets; and apparently nobody has one of those nets available, or at least not for sale. And in that regard the web is a characteristic example of how technologies are handled in the U.S. ("Out with the old, in with the new!") Old things are discarded, so the easily available technologies are just the newer one.

Software is fragile; most technological advances in both software and hardware are more fragile than what they replace. Someone said, "If builders built buildings the way programmers write programs, the first woodpecker that came along would destroy civilization." The web is a

tremendous resource, but it will not last forever, and there are many pieces of technology stack that could limit or shut off the web. Don't assume that because the web is available today it will equally well be available indefinitely.

## Conclusion

This work has involved, perhaps, too much opinion and too much of the word "I"; true Orthodox theology rarely speaks of me, "myself, and I," and in the rare case when it is really expedient to speak of oneself, the author usually refers to himself in the third person.

The reason I have referred to myself is that I am trying to make a map that many of us are trying to make sense of. In one sense there is a very simple answer given in monasticism, where renunciation of property includes technology even if obediences may include working with it, and the words [Do not store up treasures on earth](#) offer another simple answer, and those of us who live in the world are bound not to be attached to possessions even if they own them. [The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#) offers a paragraph addressed to married people and a book addressed to monastics, but it has been read with great profit by all manner of people, married as well as monastic.

Somewhere amidst these great landmarks I have tried to situate my writing. I do not say that it is one of these landmarks; it may be that the greatest gift is a work that will spur a much greater Orthodox to do a much better job.

My godfather offered me many valuable corrections when I entered the Orthodox Church, but there is one and only one I would take issue with. He spoke of the oddity of writing

something like "the theology of the hammer"; and my own interest in different sources stemmed from reading technological determinist authors like [Neil Postman](#), and even if a stopped clock is right twice a day, their Marxism is a toxic brew.

However, I write less from the seductive effects of those books, my writing is not because they have written XYZ but because I have experienced certain things in mystical experience. I have a combined experience of decades helping run a Unix box that served as a social network, and playing MUDs, and sampling their newer counterparts. My experience in Orthodoxy has found great mystical truth and depth in the words, [Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.](#) Part of that pruning has been [the involuntary removal of my skills as a mathematics student](#); much of it has been in relation to technology. [The Bible](#) has enough to say about wealth and property as it existed millenia ago; it would be strange to say that [Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth](#) speaks to livestock and owning precious metals but has nothing to do with iPads.

One saint said that the end will come when one person no longer makes a path to visit another. Even with social media, we now have the technology to do that.

Let our technology be used ascetically, or not at all.

# **The ~~Martian~~ Human Complete Set of Working Instructions to Happiness**

**Life, the Paleo Diet,  
(Paleo) Orthodoxy, and  
Other Things**

**Michael:** Robert Heinlein, in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), wrote, "Happiness is a matter of functioning the way a human being is organized to function... but the words in English are a mere tautology, empty. In Martian they are a complete set of working instructions." Would that we had such a set of working instructions!

**Photios:** But such exists, or rather such is not needed.

**Michael:** How? I've read [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) and can still only guess at it.

**Photios:** This reminds me of a forum where a young Asian told of some white guys driving by in a car and making "Chinese-like sounds" at him, and asked, "What about these white suburbanite middle-class..." and one of the more liberal members of the forum said, "Question asked, question answered."

**Michael:** Ok, I'll bite. What's your point?

**Photios:** Well it's hard to talk about [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) without discussing sex, and I'd like to start there.

In the real world, outside of the novel, there have been many studies to determine which maverick experiments make for the greatest sexual happiness. And to the dismay of the people running the study, the answer, unless they are willing to lie outright, is that a married couple in the traditional sense, straight, faithful, lifelong, no porn, open to parenting children, experiences far and away the greatest pleasure and overall happiness. And this is a finding of dismay because the assumption is that if you're really going to have a good time, you've got to be breaking rules, and the question "Which rebels against traditional marriage have it best?" meets the one entirely unwelcome answer: "Traditional marriages have it best."

Heinlein posits one maverick arrangement. Ok, this doesn't constitute maverick now, but it did when [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) first came out, and it was a point Heinlein needed to make with a sledgehammer. He posited free love within a tightly guarded nest. And on that point I would recall a counselor who said that after decades of seeing people in every conceivable living arrangement and some he couldn't conceive, only

underscored more strongly that the traditional rules about sexuality are intended for our benefit and not to keep us away from the good stuff.

You seem to assume that the "complete working manual" would be some super-secret or super-elite document only available to a few, or some super-secret way of reading the [Bible](#) or whatnot. But remember the maxim learned by many in the military: "When you assume, you make an ass out of U and me!" There is something as good as a complete working manual, and your assumption is one best dismantled.

**Michael:** Oof. What about [the Paleo diet or lifestyle](#): what do you think about that?

**Photios:** I practice a modified form of it, but I don't preach it much more than I preached about the diet I practiced before then. And to be an un-modified form of [the Paleo diet](#) is at least a concession in Orthodoxy.

**Michael:** So Orthodoxy and its cooking traditions have a scientifically better basis than [the Paleo diet](#)?

Traditional Orthodox diets are based on the kinds of food people ate after the agricultural revolution; unless you believe the earth is younger than the agricultural revolution's dates, no matter where you draw the line for the first humans, the departure from hunter-gatherer living is only an eyeblink compared to the total time people have been around.

**Photios:** And most Orthodox saints believed in a young earth; I don't share that belief, let alone the crypto-Protestant "Creation Science" that was popular with [Fr. Seraphim \(Rose\)](#) and unknown to most saints. But that is beside the point.

**Michael:** Then what is your point? Why is [the Paleo diet](#) not scientifically superior?

**Photios:** I do not hold any other diet to be superior, on scientific grounds, to [the Paleo diet](#). But scientific grounds are not the only grounds to judge by. Never mind that the authors of [Proverbs](#) were scientifically illiterate by our standards. The proverb still stands: [Better is a dinner of herbs \[including bread\] than a fatted ox and hatred with it.](#)

**Michael:** Can't we allow for greater ignorance in the past?

**Photios:** We can allow for different ignorance, but not greater ignorance—and what an odd thing for a [Paleo](#) devotee to say! And thinking about some things on materialistic terms is a material error.

**Michael:** Such as?

**Photios:** Once upon a time surgeons would do surgery with dirty hands, horse spit and all, and Pasteur's revolution came by and said to be sanitary, which is why to this day the preferred medical practice is for surgery to be done in as sanitary and sanitized conditions as possible.

And over-zealots of Pasteur's style of sanitization thought that the best way to give an infant a best shot at life is to keep things as sanitary as possible, and for all this "Emperor's New Clothes" improved sanitary conditions, the infant mortality in hospitals was atrociously high. And then someone had the very unscientific idea of bringing in old women to touch, cuddle, and hold infants for half an hour, or an hour, or two hours or whatever each day. And infant mortality plummeted overnight. With that one change, many more infants survived early hospitalization.

And something of the same error relates to kissing icons. Materialistic-minded people wince at kissing something that other people have kissed—but it is an overall strengthening, not weakening, that comes from paying reverence to icons and relics. And you can push it more forcefully and say that it's as unsanitary as kissing all those people on the mouth, and for that matter the two or three kisses on the cheek given occasionally in some jurisdictions and frequently in other jurisdictions are a tamer version of kissing on the mouth—in fact, by liturgical implication, the kiss on the cheek by implication is a kiss on the mouth. And in areas of helping infants survive the beginning of life, or kissing icons, or kissing Orthodox Christians, the Pasteurized version is the wrong route.

It's not just that we are justified in taking a health detriment if we do not practice Pasteur's idea of sanitation. We actually are better off even in matters of health. With what is known about touch and the beginning of life, it would now be a foolhardy proposition to eliminate touch as far as possible from a baby's life in order to obtain good sanitation. And with what is known about touch at the beginning of life, it is not considered ethical to explore the effects of reducing touch in infants' lives. It is, however, ethical to explore the effects of increasing touch in infants' lives, for instance by placing a newborn infant against its mother's body for thirty to forty-five minutes before going to business as usual, and the effect of increased touch is not only decreased mortality but greatly improved well-being.

And if I may quote a second snippet from the Bible:  
[Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.](#)

[The Paleo Solution](#) says that exercise is important and diet is indispensable. I would rather say that exercise and diet may be important, but godliness is indispensable. Perhaps the past few thousand years have been aberration from the naturally good diet our race has enjoyed, but however adamant we may be that [Paleo living](#) is better, keep in mind that the Bible and many of the Fathers lived in cultures where everyone up to the king ate bread as the main food, and it is bread and no other food that is honored in the Eucharist and in prosphora. You may hold if you want that it is seriously damaging to eat even the purest organic whole grain bread, but the Bible got its work done during millenia and cultures where the main staple food was bread, and the Gospel was much deeper than getting back paleo hunter-gather eating and living. And hospitality trumps fasting in Orthodoxy, hospitality should trump diet as well. And that is the biggest area where I make the most concession against [the paleo diet](#); I gratefully accept hospitality as it is given. If you're far enough in [the paleo diet](#) that breaking its rules actually makes you sick—I'm not—then maybe it is appropriate to explain your dietary needs, but insofar as much as it is possible, let hospitality alike trump fasting and diet.

**Michael:** None the less, there is something haunting, something I wish to be true, in "Jubal learned that... (f)

it was not possible to separate in the Martian tongue the human concepts: 'religion,' 'philosophy,' and 'science' ..."

**Photios:** Well said indeed, and you can have something better than a hope such things can be. Instead of hoping for things from another world, you can [enjoy, in the legal sense](#), the things in this real world from whose pierced side they were taken. Religion, philosophy, and science are inseparable in "[Physics](#)", and I encourage reading it.

But let me take a step back, far back. Let's look at the world of television commercials, or a glitzy animated commercial on the Internet. Whether selling cars or clothing, internet access or movies, they are selling escape from the here and now. It may be a car, almost invariably portrayed as sensual, mysterious, and intimate—which are really not what we would best do to seek in a car—but a car that delivers from the burden of the here and now. Clothing adorns the wearer and relieves the wearer of the necessity of appearing as she appears here and now. Internet access is more than just bandwidth; it is portrayed by people who have escaped the here and now. Or a movie or a video game; you have seen the commercials blanketing people recently and saying everyone has a bit of a soldier in them. What they are selling is escape into another world.

On this point I would like to talk about the predecessor to the present [Archdruid of Canterbury](#), who would have flatly have denied that any escape from reality satisfies, or perhaps that there is anywhere to escape to but reality. And even that way of talking

violates his writing; in the ancient world, one said, "\_\_\_\_\_ said \_\_\_\_\_," while in the modern world one says both "\_\_\_\_\_ said \_\_\_\_\_," and "\_\_\_\_\_ would have said \_\_\_\_\_." And this transformation is deep enough that students, trying to understand what a past author wrote, find it natural and not in the least provocative to ask, "What would \_\_\_\_\_ have said about \_\_\_\_\_?" when everybody in the room knows that the author never touched on the matter in question.

On this point, Anselm, admittedly after the schism, and for that matter Muslims are right. It is not the case that there are a large number of "possible worlds" and we happen to inhabit one of these fantasy-like worlds; there is a reality that Allah or God has created, and it is fundamental confusion to escape it, even in thought. So [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) makes a world where free love within a circle of people is allowed—and after ripping marriage apart re-constructs quite a large chunk of marriage in his free love. A man is not forbidden to seek love outside of his nest, but once inside the nest he is entirely free from desire for anyone outside of the nest. That is a reconstruction of what Heinlein has dismantled in marriage: one might speak of marriage as a nest of two, only a nest where fidelity represents not an inescapable preference but a legitimate and freely given choice. Heinlein divorced repeatedly, but a nest of water brothers is permanent. [Stranger in a Strange Land](#)'s nest of water brothers is drawn from the wounded side of reality, only this time it is not the Lord's doing. Eve may have been drawn

from the wounded side of Adam, and the Church may have been drawn from the wounded side of Christ, pouring out blood and water, but this is a matter of "Satan cannot create, he can only mock", and having rejected the real cistern: [\[M\]y people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.](#) And this is the choice of escape: to forsake the fountain of living water, and draw from the wounded side of reality broken cisterns that can hold no water. If you read [Within the Steel Orb](#), it peddles escape and seemingly alien wisdom, but it is a mutilation of reality that is offered: the session about controlling the telescope is in fact based in riflery, but if it were not taken from riflery it would have to be taken from somewhere else. And the session about dropping Einstein's name and claiming to ponder the deeper implications of relativity could just as well have been written in a story set in this world, or for that matter in actual live discussion.

And the emphatic choice of cannibalism among the book's features is if anything further proof that there is no other reality out there to draw on. In terms of *épater la bourgeoisie*, cannibalism delivers shock and presumably offense. But, while Heinlein compares the alien Martian world's cannibalism to the Eucharist at some point, and indeed it is an obvious comparison, one has to ask, "Where is the profound draw to cannibalism except for allowing something that is forbidden?" It is not clear to me, or to many others, what the advantage is of having one more form of meat available and even in

the book the prevalence of cannibalism does not offer clear and sincere benefits like the water brotherhood, or great psychic abilities (or both water brotherhood and great psychic powers) that Heinlein builds up in the book. If you want to eat forbidden food, forbidden at least in American culture (which does not offer the only set of rules around), you can eat animals that are kept as pets and companions: eat dog, cat, or horse. All three of these are edible, and for that matter there are cultures on earth where any or all of these are permitted food. But if the question arises, "What is the benefit of eating these animals beyond the foods permitted in American culture?" I don't see what the substantive answer would be, except for something related to our emotional reaction at the thought of eating a pet. [The Paleo Solution](#) and the call to return to more recent historical diets in [Nourishing Traditions](#) might never forbid eating cats, dogs, or horses, but neither one paints a nutritional picture where we are advised to eat the kinds of animals we keep as pets because they provide something we can't get, or can't as easily get, from eating animals Americans think of as meat. Come to think of it, neither text suggests that Jews or Muslims are missing out on any needed nutrients if they don't eat pig or other unclean animals. [The Paleo Solution](#) argues that there are essential amino acids and essential fats but no essential carbohydrates: "essential" meaning something we need and our bodies cannot make from other foods. However, there is no suggestion at all that we need to eat more types of meats, let alone cherished dogs, cats, and

horses, let alone human flesh, to be properly nourished.

Now the Martian culture which was big on cherishing things admitted cannibalism of loved ones was a way of cherishing them, but even then the Wikipedia provides a motive for cannibalism that offers a more serious incentive than having yet another form of meat: "Both types of cannibalism can also be fueled by the belief that eating a person's flesh or internal organs will endow the cannibal with some of the characteristics of the deceased." This belief, which would offer some real motivation to desire "Martian" cannibalism, is entirely absent in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), and friends and killed enemies are both eaten without distinction for "food".

**Michael:** Who are you to make such a judgment?

**Photios:** Let me tell you about one person who decided he was going to be an icefisher, so he purchased a bunch of equipment, walked over on the ice, and started to drill down. He got down two inches before a deep, booming voice said, "There are no fish there!"

He looked around and quietly moved his equipment over 50 feet, and started to drill there. No sooner had he started than a deep booming voice said, "There are no fish there either!"

He picked up his equipment, moved over a hundred feet, looked around before drilling, when the same voice said, "Nor are there any fish there!"

He looked around and said, "Who are you, God?"

The voice said, "No! I'm the arena manager!"

I'm not the arena manager, but I am an arena employee.

**Michael:** [Pause] So we should all become monks, or something like that? I've heard some people say that every Orthodox Christian is called to be a monastic.

**Photios:** Every Orthodox Christian is called to be an ascetic, and asceticism, or spiritual struggle, is the beating heart of monasticism. And monasticism is higher than life in the world.

**Michael:** So married life in the world is sort of a "monasticism lite"?

**Photios:** Erm, kind of.

**Michael:** Meaning, "No."

**Photios:** Meaning, "No." The monastic who is saved is saved through the struggle of monastic asceticism, and the married man who is saved is saved through the struggle of caring for a family. Monasticism is higher than married life in the world.

Married life in the world is not the highest path, but it is not improved by trying to make it "virtual monasticism." Maybe a monk requires obedience to a spiritual father, and an intentionally disruptive sleep cycle, and food deliberately cooked to be as bland as it can be. Married couples have another yoke to bear, and it is a sad thing for people to get married and then "try to make up for it" by imitating monasticism. Marriage is not a sin, but holy matrimony. And it brings with it childbearing, if God so wills, so that the couple is no longer living for themselves alone but for their children. You might have heard the saying, "Men love women. Women love children. Children love pets. Life isn't fair." But if we return to the Heinlein quote you gave a while back, "Happiness is a matter of functioning the way a

human being is organized to function... but the words in English are a mere tautology, empty. In Martian they are a complete set of working instructions." Happiness in monasticism is functioning the way the monastic asceticism is organized to function, and happiness in married life in the world is functioning the way the married asceticism is organized to function. It may happen that a couple marries, has children, much later live together as brother and sister, and then split off to separate monasteries. In that sense celibacy and marriage are not mutually exclusive, and the couple is still considered to be married even if they have passed the realm of carnal knowledge. But even this is not normative to marriage; it is one of many forms holiness takes.

And here a man is reminded of Confucius's *Analects*, and its "ritual", which the Western mind may have trouble understanding because in the West "ritual," if not used metaphorically to speak of someone always giving a speech at family reunions, has a religious center of gravity. But in Confucius's whole realm of thought, "ritual" was something like a graduation ceremony or a town parade, with a civic center of gravity. And on that point someone speaking to Confucius praised someone else for doing ritual very well. And Confucius, answering somewhat indirectly, essentially said, "Ritual dictates that only a monarch may place a gate in front of his door, but he has a gate in front of his door," and mentioned one or two other areas where the man in question usurped privilege that did not belong to him. The implication is a strong criticism: this man, who is

praised for his performance in ritual and who probably worked much harder to do ritual correctly than most, undercuts it in a way that is reminiscent of [tithing mint, dill, and cummin, and neglecting justice, mercy, and faith](#). Performing the details of ritual correctly really didn't help much for someone who lacked the humility that ritual was designed to foster. At heart, placing a monarch-like gate in front of his door made him less, not more, like a monarch, and in fact placed him further from the monarch than if he did ritual, in a way that was proper to his station, without copying the privileges of people in a higher place.

**Michael:** Well, at least it's an obscure phenomenon, limited to people who are trying to be devout in the wrong way.

**Photios:** Obscure? Obscure? Obscure? The entire question of feminism hinges on a confusion that is the fruit of the same tree.

**Michael:** How so?

**Photios:** Let me quote three passages that sometimes you'll see even conservatives trying to balance out, for instance by comparing what is asked of wives with what is asked of husbands:

[But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.](#)

[I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and](#)

love and holiness, with modesty.

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

**Michael:** And what do conservatives have to say for these, besides the fact that they are old and are culturally conditioned?

**Photios:** Well, they might start with the obvious and say that **you** are culturally conditioned.

**Michael:** And then what?

**Photios:** And then that someone who eats from the million year old paleo diet as the food that is optimal for Homo sapiens should not dismiss a two thousand year old text

as just too old to be worth listening to.

**Michael:** Ouch. And then what?

**Photios:** Well, in the last and longest quote, compare what is asked of husbands and of wives and who bears the brunt of the pleas. The wife is told to submit to her husband as if to the Lord. And yes, I've checked the Greek. "Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord" is a minor mutilation. The text says, "Wives, submit to your husbands as if to the Lord."

But the burden of the text—incidentally, in the densest passage in the [New Testament](#) for references to the Church—falls on husbands. If wives are called to show the Church's submission to Christ, husbands are to lay down their lives and die for their wives if needed. If wives bear the duty of submitting to their husbands as the Church submits to Christ, husbands are called to lay their lives down for their wives as Christ laid down his life for the Church. Wives are called to give to their husbands what the Church gives to Christ; husbands are called to give wives what Christ gives to the Church.

One might say that the sigil of male headship and authority is not a crown of gold, but a crown of thorns. People coming to this text afresh might be staggered at how much more is expected of husbands than of wives.

And the same people might be even more staggered that the text is politically incorrect because of the claim it makes on wives.

**Michael:** So the text evens out to be egalitarian after all.

**Photios:** What was the venom the Serpent poured into Eve's ear? Egalitarianism! "You shall be as gods," meaning "You shall be equal to some greater than you." And let's

pause for a moment.

There was a time—it happened to be brief, but that is beside the point—when the Serpent had stung Eve but Adam still reigned as mortal. Eve already felt the seed of death growing in her heart, even though it would be long years before the venom grew to the point of killing her completely. And let's think about what was in her heart. She was mortal; Adam was still immortal. At some point she would die, and then what? God said, "It is not good for man to be alone;" would Adam simply be celibate? Or would rather God not give her another immortal wife, to be his forever? Was there anything Eve could do to prevent Adam reigning immortal as another woman's husband?

**Michael:** Ouch.

**Photios:** It is said in some witchcraft that you knowingly allow a demon to possess you. And when that moment comes, you realize that you have allowed evil into you the same way you know that you are violently ill. You may not repent in the least, but demons are never merciful to those they inhabit. Perhaps they enable magic; but they never give the glow of spiritual health, nor can they.

Eve knew and felt the seed of death growing in her heart, that in her attempt to be like gods, she had lost her godlike ladyship over the whole Creation. And she made her second egalitarian move. The first move was to try to be equal to "gods", perhaps exalted ranks of seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, powers, authorities, principalities, archangels, and angels. And her second egalitarian move was to make Adam her

equal in mortality. And she succeeded; as the Serpent stung Eve, so Eve stung her then-immortal husband who would otherwise outlive her and belong to another woman.

This is the politics of envy. This is the root of the war on educational excellence. This is the radix of Janteloven. This is the vice that moved Saul to seek David's murder as soon as he heard, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." Envy says, in essence, "I don't care if we're three feet tall or ten feet tall. All I want is that you not be taller than me."

In conversations that cross denominations and confessions, one can say with Calvinists, "We are totally depraved and stunted in our spiritual growth; we have a spiritual height of about three feet." Or one can say with Orthodox, "The image of God is present even in the most hardened sinner; the most spiritually astute Orthodox, especially monastics, find much good in the people they see; so we are at a spiritual height of about six feet." But woe to the unwary soul who says, "Monastics are six feet tall and laity are five feet tall," or "Clergy are six feet tall and laity are five feet tall," or, to give a hypersensitive trigger, "Men are six feet tall and women are five feet tall." That will unleash an explosion that dwarfs any response to Calvinists saying, "We are totally depraved and steeped in sin; we are spiritually three feet tall, if even that." Better to say that everyone is exactly one foot tall than to say that heights vary somewhere around six feet and on average most men are taller than most women, let alone that men have one role and women another.

And this general point, perhaps more focally dealt with in matters of men and women, has to do with a broader sense of pseudomorphosis affecting all modern life. Are you familiar with the term 'pseudomorphosis' in its usual Church usage?

**Michael:** I've heard... things like icons being painted in a more Western fashion, or that figure... what was it... Cyril Lucaris, the bishop whose "profession of faith" really had much more to do with Calvinism than Orthodoxy; there was that book, called [Protestant Patriarch](#), which I suppose I should read. I think there's more, but I'm forgetting the examples. Wait, there was also something about people thinking theology was philosophy whose subject-matter was God...

**Photios:** Yes; the term 'pseudomorphosis' in Orthodox culture is something like the term 'Oreo' in African-American culture, for someone who is black on the outside but too white on the inside, and acts white. The examples you gave of pseudomorphosis are all valid.

**Michael:** Ok, so we've established the meaning of 'pseudomorphosis.' What next? Do we need to say anything more to establish that the politics of envy, as you call it, is no ingredient to human happiness?

**Photios:** We haven't quite established it, not yet, because I want to use it as a metaphorical springboard to discuss something else.

**Michael:** What is that something else?

**Photios:** 'Pseudomorphosis' in standard Orthodox usage is a bit of a hydra; it's not easy to pin down, but in traditional Orthodox unsystematic fashion, it is possible to get a sense of it. As I am using here, it has

to do with all sorts of things in modern living. [The paleo diet](#) is one attempt to remedy a pseudomorphosis. I will not say if it succeeds or fails, but what it attempts to do is replace "foods" that are an anomaly in the human diet and which our body is not really well served by eating, with foods that are the standard tradition diet of the human race. The book also covers some other things, like what kind of artificially added exercise will best simulate the active lives of our forbears, and here at least I am not so interested in whether it succeeds or fails as the implicit powerful recognition that we are in an iron mask under unnatural conditions. If one were to ask Robb Wolf who he would intend [The Paleo Solution](#) to, if economics etc. were no obstacle, I believe he would answer, "Everyone who is not a hunter-gatherer today."

That is one aspect of pseudomorphosis. Another aspect is how men and women are understood, or misunderstood, and how sex is seen. Another aspect is the politics of envy. Another aspect is how so many of us [spend large chunks of time looking at a flickering screen](#). These are five of maybe a hundred holes that are being drilled down into the ice, and the arena employees' lungs are sore from shouting, "There are no fish there!"

**Michael:** Then where are the fish?

**Photios:** Some centuries back, though this may seem hard to imagine now, philosophy was understood differently; in our day philosophy is understood as an academic discipline, as something with arguments you study and respond to, and philosophy has always been that to an

extent. But in ancient times philosophy was first a way one walked and secondarily about ideas. And a number of people, all men I think, arrived at the conclusion that the truest way of philosophy was that of monasticism, which kept things alive from Plato, for instance, that do not necessarily live in a philosophy department today.

The observation that monasticism is the height of a certain understanding of philosophy, where like Mike's Martians' philosophy, religion, and science are inseparable, is a profitable observation whether or not one is a monk. [The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#), to pick one

classic, addresses perhaps two sentences of exhortation to those outside the monastic world, but it has been read, it is said, with utmost spiritual profit to Orthodox in all walks of life. Perhaps the letter in its strict sense should not always be applied to laity. There is still much of benefit, as with the [Philokalia](#) the book [Orthodox Psychotherapy](#) is essentially a realization that before Freud began positing theories about what can go wrong with us, and how what is tangled in us can be untangled and freed, the Orthodox [Philokalia](#) which could be called 'the science of spiritual struggle,' takes on that territory and does a better job. And perhaps it would be better to talk with one's priest about reading selections; reading the [Philokalia](#) when one has not been prepared for it can be an exercise in frustration. But this is best done with the consultation of one's priest.

**Michael:** So, with all of this said, what can I get that will make me happiest?

**Photios:** Well, if you're thinking in terms of dollars, let's say you get however many million dollars you think would

make you happy. Then you will discover that you still have all of your problems and the money doesn't keep you happy—at least not for long. So you will have the rare opportunity to be wealthy beyond your wildest nightmares, and perhaps after you have one luxury after another lose its glamour, failing to give either lasting satisfaction or happiness, that you will come to a realization worth every penny of your millions of dollars: in seeking happiness from wealth, you might as well have been trying to coax a stone to lay an egg.

**Michael:** Then is there no hope?

**Photios:** [So faith, hope, love abide, these three](#). Hope remains; you just have to look for it in the right places. You are assuming that your happiness will come from what you get, but you make a living by what you get and a life by what you give. [\[T\]he Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many](#), and this is the key to the happiness of functioning as a person is organized to function. Forbes's survey of the happiest jobs in America found that there was little correlation between job happiness and the amount of money made: and in fact one of the twenty happiest jobs is one of the few Americans feel the need to cover up with euphemisms: no one is a plain old secretary any more; they are all executive assistants, administrators, and the like. But notwithstanding the fact that America thinks being a secretary needs a euphemism, being a secretary ranked as one of the twenty happiest jobs in America, alongside bank tellers who serve clients by helping them with financial nuts and bolts, and some customer service

representatives. And there is a very simple reason for that. Among many others, secretaries serve.

And that is, if we may return to Heinlein one of the three keys that unlocks "Happiness is a matter of functioning the way a human being is organized to function... but the words in English are a mere tautology, empty. In Martian they are a complete set of working instructions." Now Michael Valentine Smith mentions 'faith' as belonging among the list of obscene words Jubal told him not to use, and he is emphatic: not faith but climbing the peaks of spiritual discipline.

However, the [Philokalia](#) in its embrace of faith does climb the peaks of spiritual discipline. And all of these are a preliminary that many people don't need; human fulfillment is found, not in being served, but in serving.

Such was Christ's act; such was his example.

Not that reading the [Philokalia](#) is necessary to salvation. Monks have reached the peaks of mystic contemplation without having any books; among the many notable monastics who never read anything, and in fact did not know how to read, is [St. Mary of Egypt](#). And one minor clergy said, "There are two books you do not read: the [Philokalia](#) and the [Rudder](#)," not because they are bad—they are arguably the second and third most important collections to Orthodoxy outside the Bible—but because they have raw industrial strength power that has not been selected, boiled to essentials, and then packaged in a way that will just fit anyone who reads it. [The Philokalia](#) is a collection of texts at all various levels of spiritual maturity, and the [Rudder](#) is basically a book of rules for bishops to apply with

strictness or leniency as is pastorally appropriate to the situation. And the [Rudder](#) has some of the most valuable rules the Orthodox Church owns; but it still should not be confused with ordinary devotional materials designed to build up and edify the lay faithful.

And one may adapt St. Paul and say, "**If I have all manner of knowledge of antiquarian texts and I read the [Philokalia](#) and the [Rudder](#), but I do not serve in love, I am nothing.**"

**Michael:** So then it's all we learned in kindergarden?

**Photios:** There are all sorts of minor insights along the way. There is a Rabbinic tradition of having a *kelal*, a nutshell that for its brevity none the less concentrates the distilled essence of Scripture; such as, [He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?](#), and what I am going to quote is not a *kelal*; it's from the rest of the Scripture and has something of a character of a footnote. But Ecclesiasticus tells us, [Honor the physician with the honor due him, according to your need of him, for the Lord created him; for healing comes from the Most High, and he will receive a gift from the king.](#) And there is a place for exercise; there is a place for diet. There may be also a place for "Let the buyer beware", because fads come and go; the author of [The Paleo Solution](#) all but killed himself trying to eat healthily by being a vegetarian; [the paleo diet](#) is posed to be the next fad diet and that is reason to view it carefully. The medical community, like many others, has its fads and changes its conclusions much more

quickly than developments in research would warrant. Still I wouldn't make these things the center. "Honor the physician..." is not a kelal at all, let alone one that should be the rudder of your life.

**Michael:** If I may ask, what is the greatest kelal?

**Photios:** It's one endorsed by a rabbi you've heard of.

**Michael:** Sorry, but I'm really not up to par on all things Jewish. Could you quote it for me?

**Photios:** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

# **Changes in Mac OSX Over Time: The Good Parts**

## **C++: The Good Parts**

C++ is the best example of second-system effect since the  
OS/360 project - Henry Spenser

Even Bjarne Stroustrup has some sense that there is indeed a  
smaller and more elegant language struggling to get out of C++.

He is right that that language is not Java or C#, but I would  
suggest that this more elegant language has been right under our  
noses the whole time: **C!**

## **Now if we could turn back the clock on MacOS**

I used to think that OSX was my favorite flavor of Unix. Now I think that the Mac, iPad, iPhone, and Apple Watch may be preferred for nontechnical users on all counts, but Apple has been more and more going its own way, and the result has made an environment that is more and more hostile to Unix / Linux gurus. Some of this is discussed further in [Macs are now Super.Computer.s running "IRIX" a Super.Computer. OS!](#)

## Terminal confusion

I have narrated above the breakage that shipped to me with OSX 12.2.4; the breakage that shipped with the OSX 12.2.2 update was Terminal.app crashing on a regular basis. And while I don't wish to patronize developers who work with graphical IDEs, the two most heavily used applications I have are Google Chrome and Terminal. When I poked around, I was pointed to [an Apple developer bug first posted in 2016 that has 147 "I have this problem too" votes](#)... I wish they had done something more polite to Unix users than breaking and not fixing Terminal, like setting a Terminal.app background image of someone flipping the bird at command-line Unix / Linux types. Really, flipping the bird would be markedly more polite.

In conversations with technical support about malfunctioning in Apple's version of Apache, it took me an escalation all the way to level 3 support before I spoke with someone who knew that the Macintosh had a command line (let alone having any idea what that meant). And I was told that Apple supported GUI use of e.g. webservers, but not command line.

More broadly, it's been harder and harder by the year to get things working and I was astonished after initial difficulties installing SuiteCRM what my research turned up: Apple has

removed parts of the OS that that project needed to run.

## An even bigger shock

A much bigger shock came when I created a Linux VM to install some open source software projects I had meant to install natively.

I was **shocked** about how easy it was.

It was the command line version of "Point and click".

I realized that over the years I had become more and more accustomed to installing open source software under MacOS being like out-stubborning an obscure and crufty flavor of Unix (such as Irix on NCSA supercomputers, with a general comment of "Nothing works on Irix!"). And working on installing major open source projects recalls [a favorite xkcd comic about the joy of first meeting Python](#).

**Tolerating upgrades that  
break software:**

*Do you remember how  
people used to just accept  
the forever close at hand  
BSOD?*

Before Windows XP came out, I remember trying to make a point to a non-hacker friend that "Computers are logical but not rational." Meaning that from a programming standpoint they ideally do neither more nor less than what the logic in a computer program called for, but state-of-the-art AI could not make sense of the basics of a children's "I Can Read" book. (For that matter, computers cannot understand the gist of a program.

They may execute the program, but only programmers understand the gist.)

She said, "I disagree. What if you're using a computer and the mouse freezes?"

In the ensuing conversation, I failed completely in my efforts to communicate that **incessant** crashes on par with the Blue Screen of Death were simply not an automatic feature of how computers act, and that my Linux box did not malfunction at anywhere near the violence of Windows, on which point I quote

Tad Phetteplace:

In a surprise announcement today, Microsoft President Steve Ballmer revealed that the Redmond-based company will allow computer resellers and end-users to customize the appearance of the Blue Screen of Death (BSOD), the screen that displays when the Windows operating system crashes.

The move comes as the result of numerous focus groups and customer surveys done by Microsoft. Thousands of Microsoft customers were asked, "What do you spend the most time doing on your computer?"

A surprising number of respondents said, "Staring at a Blue Screen of Death." At 54 percent, it was the top answer, beating the second place answer "Downloading XXXScans" by an easy 12 points.

"We immediately recognized this as a great opportunity for ourselves, our channel partners, and especially our customers," explained the excited Ballmer to a room full of reporters.

Immense video displays were used to show images of the new customizable BSOD screen side-by-side with the older static version. Users can select from a collection of "BSOD Themes," allowing them to instead have a Mauve Screen of Death or even a Paisley Screen of Death. Graphics and multimedia content can now be incorporated into the screen, making the BSOD the perfect conduit for delivering product information and entertainment to Windows users.

The BSOD is by far the most recognized feature of the Windows operating system, and as a result, Microsoft has historically insisted on total control over its look and feel. This recent departure from that policy reflects Microsoft's recognition of the Windows desktop itself as the "ultimate information portal." By default, the new BSOD will be

configured to show a random selection of Microsoft product information whenever the system crashes. Microsoft channel partners can negotiate with Microsoft for the right to customize the BSOD on systems they ship.

Major computer resellers such as Compaq, Gateway, and Dell are already lining up for premier placement on the new and improved BSOD.

Ballmer concluded by getting a dig in against the Open Source community. "This just goes to show that Microsoft continues to innovate at a much faster pace than open source. I have yet to see any evidence that Linux even has a BSOD, let alone a customizable one."

Most of the software upgrades I have purchased in over a decade of Mac ownership have been because an OSX upgrade broke them completely.

On this point I would distinguish between Windows and Mac on the one hand, and Linux on the other. Microsoft and Apple both need to make changes that people have to buy different software over time; Linux may include mistakes but there is no built-in need to radically change everything on a regular basis. Now some Linux programming may change quickly: front-end web developers face a very volatile list of technologies they should know. However, something said about Unix applies to Linux to a degree that is simply unparalleled in Windows or Mac: "Unix has a steep learning curve, but you only have to climb it once."

OSX admittedly has better UX than Linux, and possibly it make sense for open source types to buy a Mac, run VMware Fusion in Unity mode, and do Linux development and open source software use from a Linux Mint VM. (My own choice is just to do Linux, with Windows VM's for compatibility.) However, for Unix

and Linux wizards, the container is one that occasionally gives a nasty surprise.

**Beautiful things work  
better:  
*An interesting solution***

I've given a once-over to Linux Mint Sonya, to address UX tweaks and to echo some of that old glory. As is appropriate to an appliance, passwords are not needed (though the usual root methods of assigning a Linux password work better). The desktop and background are laid out to be truly beautiful!

To pick one little example of improved UX: copy is Control-C, and paste is Control-V, with gnome-terminal or without; if you want to send a literal Control-C, then Shift-Control-C will do that, and likewise for Control-V. This cuts down on frustrating attempts to remember, "In this context, will I copy by typing Control-C, or Control-Shift-C?" There are other little touches.

For instance, Chrome is already installed, and the default Firefox search engine is configured out of the box to be, drum roll please... **Google!**"

Mint comes with a search engine that in my experience only have SERPs with ads above the fold that are formatted exactly or almost exactly like real organic search results. And not only is Google not the main search engine: it is FUDded, banished to a list options that are either not monetizable to Mint's makers, or are considered problematic and potentially unsafe. (Mint's FUDding does not distinguish which is which; it is set up to make

Google look seedy.)

Perhaps you don't like the Aqua interface; it is if nothing else the gold star that North Korea's ~~One Star Linux~~ Red Star Linux offers, and people seem interested in an Aqua-themed Linux enough to write HOWTO's to get a root shell and migrate to English. Even if they advise against serious use, not because a fresh install has software that's years obsolete software, but because the entire environment could be described not so much as having spyware, but **being** spyware.

Or perhaps it might served as a change of scenery, a virtual vacation of a virtual machine.

### [Download](#)

This is a virtual machine from [VMware Workstation Player](#). If you have not used virtualization software before, you may need to turn on hardware virtualization on your BIOS.

You can likely find instructions to do this by searching for "bios enable hardware virtualization" and adding the manufacturer and model for your machine. If you aren't feeling brave, just ask for help from the local teenage computer guru.

**Macs Are Now  
Super.Computer.s  
Running "IRIX",  
a  
Super.Computer.  
OS!**

But worst of all is what they've done  
To software that we used to run  
Like dbx and even /bin/cc.  
Compilers now have license locks  
Wrapped up in OpenWindows crocks —  
We even have to pay for GCC!  
The applications broke;  
/usr/local went up in smoke.  
The features we've depended on  
Before too long will all be gone  
But Sun, I'm sure, will carry on  
By peddling Solaris,  
Forever singing,  
"Bye, bye, SunOS 4.1.3!  
ATT System V has replaced BSD

ATT System V has replaced BSD.  
You can cling to the standards of the industry  
But only if you pay the right fee —  
Only if you pay the right fee . . ."

Lyrics by N.R. "Norm" Lunde, [The Day that SunOS Died](#), to  
the tune of "American Pie."

## The operating system of supercomputers

When I was studying math at the University of Illinois, my first year's support was as a teacher's assistant, and my second one, that I was quite happy about, was as a research assistant at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications. I walked in vaguely hoping to work on Cray supercomputers: in fact I worked on successor supercomputers made by Silicon Graphics. And really, the main workhorse computer I was working with had 32 CPU's, which wasn't their most powerful, but today you need to really dig today to find a computer with 32 CPU's even though twenty years have passed since then.

Part of my work was system administration, which covered software installation, updates, and related responsibilities. In addition to this I made one major program that addressed a critical interest. It would run some software in question with different numbers of CPU's, giving flexibility and control in producing a graph that shows at a glance how the program is running at the specified numbers of CPU's. I have no idea why any revision of that program would still be in use today, but one of the extremely pressing questions on the minds of the userbase was, "Is my program scaling the way I am attempting to do to increased CPU's?" and this program succeeded enough to answer that question at a glance.

I considered, and still consider my time there to be a great privilege, and I remember seeing an e-mail offering a privately owned(!) used SGI Octane for \$8000. The SGI computers were really something.

However, the OS those computers were tied to was another deal entirely. They ran a flavor of Unix called Irix, and in a social setting where Unix chauvinism was mainstream. I mentioned above that I installed software; that does not usually qualify as evidence of any particularly great skill; on Linux today you can run "sudo apt-get install apache2" and maybe enter a password and everything is neatly tucked away. There might be something substantial going on behind the scenes, but the requisite effort and knowledge to install Apache really just boils down to the command line equivalent to "point and click."

This is not true of the SGI version of Unix called Irix. Everyone I remember dealing with was a Unix wizard, but I do not recall a single person who liked Irix. I remember one person voicing hopes that some would port Linux to run on SGI supercomputers. For an example of what was wrong, and a particularly obnoxious example, read the following:

#### **Introduction**

Thank you for purchasing InCom's PowerComp Libraries. At InCom, customer satisfaction is our number one priority, and we hope that you will be pleased with the power of our libraries. Please follow all of the instructions in order to enjoy a quick and easy installation.

#### **Getting Started**

In this guide, information which you will need to supply will be enclosed in angle brackets, <like this>. Commands which you

will have to enter will be indented,

like this.

You will need to provide a loading directory, in which to load the material from tape (/tmp/pcl is recommended), and a permanent installation directory (/usr/local/pcl is recommended).

### **Loading From Tape**

First create and change directory to the loading directory:

```
mkdir <working directory>  
cd <working directory>
```

Now you are ready to load the software from tape.

The specific device name needed to load the tape varies with hardware vendors, and may be found in Appendix A, "Vendors and Device Names".

Load the software from tape:

```
tar xvf /dev/<device name>
```

You have now loaded all of the software from tape, and are ready to compile and install the PowerComp libraries.

### **Compiling and Installing the PowerComp Libraries**

Compiling and installing the libraries is handled by a user-friendly shell script. You will need to provide some information to the script, such as your organization name and registration number. To run the script, type

```
/bin/sh pcl/pcl.install -d <installation directory>
```

Follow the script's directions, and provide the information which it prompts for.

When the script prompts you for the directory in which the distribution files are located, you will find that you are unable to provide it with any directory which the script will deem satisfactory...

Then spit into the computer's ventilation slots. This will complete different circuits inside the computer, causing its motherboard and cards to function in ways that the engineers never intended, thereby making your system compatible with our libraries.

Reboot your computer. The installation is now complete.

(N.B. I posted this and the XEmacs maintainer asked permission to include it under the XEmacs installation instructions.)

This was written after attempting an installation under Irix and finding that I was being prompted for a directory location by a shell script that rejected every single reasonable (and unreasonable) answer I provided. I don't know exactly what the result of that installation attempt was; if I recall correctly, my boss was not the faintest bit surprised that I had extensively offered directories and that no single directory was ever accepted by the installer. The general comment I remember is, "Nothing works under Irix!"

If I may boast a bit, my achievements at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications hold two things that were noteworthy: providing a nifty tool that helped with a major need, and installing basic software under circumstances where the level of difficulty installing something on Irix could be on par with out-stubborning a cat.

I've been involved with several flavors of Unix before and since then; I was in charge of a Santa Cruz Operation Unix lab for a previous position and I cut my teeth as a system

for a previous position, and I cut my teeth as a system administrator on (4.1.3, BSD) SunOS in high school, as well as Linux distributions including Gentoo (mentality as taken from forum signature: 'Ubuntu: an African word meaning, 'Gentoo is too hard for me.''), which is penny wise and pound foolish in that it allows much tighter optimizations of binaries than anything I know, but regular updates would frequently break, and one used standard investigative skills to search for who found the breakage before you, and what it was that made it work. In other words, the cost of shaving off microseconds or milliseconds off of executing XYZ software was easily an hour a week of your time playing mechanic for random breakage as your computer was kept up to date. And that was after learning specialized search approaches to find pages saying "I had this go wrong and here is how I fixed it or found a workaround."

## OSX as a flavor of Unix

For a long time I thought in terms of MacOS being my favorite flavor of Unix. (N.B. My Unixy usage, for instance, included Homebrew for Unix software not available as a regular Mac app, and my two most heavily used applications were Chrome and Terminal, with VMware in third place.) I'd done plenty of easy software installations, and problematic installations as well, and I was content with either. When certain things like installing software became harder, I didn't particularly notice.

However, I did notice when, trying to build up my Mac to function as a server running several useful websites, that it was taking a while to install SugarCRM. And I was caught off guard when web discussion said that Apple had removed certain OS components that SugarCRM tried to run. (Huh?) I opted for a plan B of trying to install SugarCRM on a Linux Mint virtual machine under VMware.

I was astonished at how easy it was, and how much a matter of "Follow your nose." It was the Linux command-line equivalent of "point and click": follow a short, simple set of instructions (if even that), and you have a working software installation in no time. Then I installed one or two additional packages. Again, practically "point and click" difficulty level. These things that I had wrestled with on my Mac, sometimes winning, sometimes not, and Linux Mint cut like a hot knife through butter.

I shifted gears then; I no longer wanted to make the websites (SugarCRM / SuiteCRM, Request Tracker, MediaWiki, etc.) based on my Mac and resort to proxying for a Linux Mint VM for the remainder I couldn't get working on my Mac; I thought I'd make a fresh start on a new Linux VM without any history, and this time through aim to make an appliance that could profitably be offered to others.

Unfortunately, I began this appliance project after installing an update to OSX 10.12.4, and once that update was in place I began to experience multiple daily crashes from every VMware Virtual Machine I tried. Suddenly installing things under Linux was harder than directly on my Mac.

I have admittedly been using a slightly old (7.1.3) VMware Fusion, and I'd consider upgrading it. However, a fresh copy of VirtualBox seems do to predictably well at everything I have tried; an up-to-date VMware Fusion installation is off the critical path for me now.

(I believe that my last VMware Fusion update was after the time VMware stopped cold after an Apple OS upgrade.)

## Terminal confusion

I have narrated above the breakage that shipped to me with OSX 12.2.4; the breakage that shipped with the OSX 12.2.2 update was Terminal.app crashing on a regular basis. And while I don't wish to patronize developers who work with graphical IDE's, the two most heavily used applications I have are Google Chrome and Terminal. When I poked around, I was pointed to [an Apple developer bug first posted in 2016 that has 147 "I have this problem too" votes](#). It's not resolved, and people are advised to circumvent the (immediate) problem by using [iTerm2](#). But I would like to make a point, and again no slight is intended against developers who leverage graphical IDE's like PyCharm:

I have used the Unix / Linux command line for decades, and it is a powerful toolchest to be able to use. While there are of course differences between Linux and MacOS's BSD-based computing environments, I find it quite helpful that my main way of doing Unixy things on a Mac works essentially unchanged on a Linux Virtual Private Server, or shelled in to my father's NetBSD server, or in general being able to work with someone and have full superpowers merely by downloading PuTTY and not making further demands on a Windows box's hard drive and resources.

Maybe I would program better if I knew how to really take advantage of a top-notch IDE, but as things stand, I acquired a One Laptop Per Child to serve as a tool for a disabled child, and

in following a HOWTO to beef up the laptop to serve these kinds of needs, I was still surprised and delighted when I pulled up a Red Hat command line terminal window and felt, "This speaks my language!" Apple, if anything, is giving cues that it is actively forgetting, if not its Unixy internals, at least Unix guru customers. I wish they had done something more polite to Unix users than breaking and not fixing Terminal, like setting a Terminal.app background image of someone flipping the bird at command-line Unix / Linux types. Really, flipping the bird would be markedly more polite.

That's what broke for the Unix crowd with 10.12.2.

My VMware installation became heavily destabilized with 10.12.4.

**I have no idea what is next.**

As far as Terminal goes, destabilizing it to some degree would make an excellent move to tell Unix wizards "You're not wanted here," while people using a Mac as it is marketed now, getting powerful software from the hardware store instead of hacking in Python, wouldn't grasp the difference even with extended explanation.

## Failing to support mainstream Unix developer interests

(Originally posted as part of a [StackExchange question here](#); the question is left very technical as originally written, and skip down to [the next section](#).)

More recently I posted another issue: there's something called Apache installed, and I can't do an `apachectl start` twice without getting an error of `/System/Library/LaunchDaemons/org.apache.httpd.plist: service already loaded`, but I can't for the life of me connect to port 80 on localhost. I posted on apple.SE at <https://superuser.com/questions/1185171/how-do-i-get-apache-to-run-from-osx-sierra-10-12-13> :

I've made multiple searches for e.g. "apache Sierra", but haven't been able to find my issue.

I have a MacBook Pro running OSX Sierra 10.12.3, and it seems to have some version of Apache installed, but I can't connect on port 80 (or 443), either with a browser, or by running `telnet localhost 80`. If I run `apachectl restart`, it runs without reported error; if I run `apachectl stop` it runs without reported error; if I run `apachectl start` when I think Apache is running, it gives an error message, `/System/Library/LaunchDaemons/org.apache.httpd.plist:`

service already loaded. `A` which `apachectl` gives  
`/usr/sbin/apachectl`, so I believe I'm running OSX's native  
Apache and not a version pulled in from Homebrew.  
What can/should I be doing so that Apache is running  
normally?

Thanks,

After the question was old enough to be eligible for bounty,  
and I had gotten off the phone with Apple technical support, I  
flagged it for moderator attention and requested migration to  
ServerFault.

In the technical support call, which lasted a bit short of an  
hour, I was escalated twice; even the first escalation was with  
someone who didn't know the command line and didn't know what  
Apache was. I was told that Apple offers Server which may  
include Apache, installable from the store, and supported GUI-  
driven use of Server, but Apple technical support does not offer  
help for the command line or command-line-driven Apache setup  
and configuration file editing.

Those both look like significant red flags. It's mainstream for  
users who want Macs to offer Unix functionality to want a stable  
Terminal.app and it's mainstream for web developers to want a  
working Apache installation on their box even if it's not shared.

Now I know that MacOS and iOS, with their `NSStrings`, owe a  
nearly indelible debt to Unix. And there are workarounds, like  
[iTerm2](#) and Homebrew or source builds of Apache, and I'm using  
iTerm2 and plan on building another Apache. But I see ominous  
writing on the wall; it seems that Apple is losing its respect for  
hackerdom.

Are there other examples or signs that Apple is dropping care  
for Unix hackers?

**“On [date], Apple announced the death of the Mac. And Apple couldn’t be happier!”**

One article, I read an article about the introduction of the iPad, with a title like, “On [date], Apple announced the death of the Mac. And Apple couldn’t be happier!” The announcement of “the death of the Mac” was a reference to the release of the iPad, a device that is giving other devices including the Mac a run for its money. And indeed a basic observation holds: Go to a computer store and ask for a smartphone or tablet, and a salesperson will try to guide you to choosing between a dizzying array of options. Go to a computer store and ask for a desktop PC, and you may get some comment like, “They’re out in the back, next to the mainframes.”

At the risk of belaboring the obvious, on technical grounds iOS devices are a more purist Steve Jobs-like version of the Mac. Or at least they are as programming goes. As regards physical technology, they represent something that is smaller, lighter, use a touchscreen well (with high pixel density!), and in general more shrewdly adjusted than any laptop or desktop I am aware of, Macs and e.g. MacBook Air’s specifically included. But if we bracket the step from movable laptops to mobile iPhones

and iPads, and look from a programming perspective, iOS is basically MacOS (if you're in the App store for either, you're using e.g. NSStrings), but stricter and more focused around some UX concerns. There is a command line for iOS devices, developers apparently consider it essential, and my understanding is that a jailbroken iOS device usually unhides it. However, the technical aspects have been corralled, out of heavily Unix-powered, OSX-based tools, to be able to say, "There's an app for that!", and present users with a hand-picked set of offerings in a walled garden. It is technically possible to program your own device, but only if you pay a developer's subscription membership, and one gets the sense that Apple allows people programming own devices as a necessary evil to get a flow of app submissions that will allow regular customers to have every app etc. that Apple would like to be included among the iOS ecosystem. And my own attempts to migrate from a Mac to an iOS devices have been failures, because one window-filling app (even if that app allows remote access to a server's command line) does not support complex tasks with multiple terminal windows with each terminal window doing its own part.

But here is something that I did not hear from Apple being delighted at "the death of the Mac." It is also different related suggestions that XCode could be available to Linux, possibly in order to obviate the need to sell Macs to enable developers to target iOS. My original interpretation was that, over time, iOS device sales would bury MacBook sales, as mobile sales seem to everywhere be burying laptop sales. And that may have been all that a journalist writing a punchy headline really meant.

But what I've observed is different. Unix wizards seem to be less and less welcome to use Macs as offering a very nice consumer OS with all the comforts of \$HOME. We're being kicked

out, or at least there are clearer and clearer hints to go away. Allowing Terminal.app not to remain broken, and (AFAIK) not even steering people to [iTerm2](#) when developers ask for any workaround, is a step beyond how institutions like Barnes & Nobles would play classical music that on some counts was used to subtly tell teenagers that they were not welcome to hang out. Frequent Terminal.app crashes are not in any sense subtle; they create a hostile environment to customers who want the Unix command line without perturbing general public customers who will in all likelihood not know what a Unix command line is.

Top-notch iPads are being sold as "Super. Computer."s, and OSX's progressive Unix breakage is starting to seem like the supercomputer OS I used, Irix. I grew up with Ultrix, and I've had exposure to more flavors of Unix than I can remember, and more Linux distributions than I can remember, and Gentoo and Sierra 1.12.4 have together done the best I've seen yet to give nasty Irix a run for its money. During the time, I have done software installations that would succeed without further attention after a "brew install \_\_\_\_\_" or "aptitude install \_\_\_\_\_". I've also done installation-driven research investigations that rival outstuborning a cat as far as difficulty goes. I hadn't really noticed how many attempts to get something working under OSX included repeated web searches, or how many immediate approaches had been failing, until I went to a Linux VM to try and see if I could install SuiteCRM, and encountered a difficulty one notch above "point and click," not more. I don't remember if I was given installation instructions, but if there were, they were short, they worked the first time, and they were unobtrusive enough that I've forgotten them completely.

**The more installments complete coming in, the more it looks like the Unix side of OSX is turning into Irix.**

## Epilogue

This article was posted while I did not know where my iPhone was. For the second time since acquiring this iPhone 7, I have lost it and been unable to locate it by usual means, such as calling my iPhone from another line and should have heard vibration, although I believe it is in the house as my iPad is proxying phone calls to my iPhone and sound is crisp and clear. My Apple ID password is locked in my iPhone password manager (my fault; I should have been using redundant password managers from the beginning), and so I can only look up my password to use Find My iPhone if I track down and use my iPhone. There is only one recovery option driven by a manual anti-fraud investigative process on Apple's end, and it's been a couple of days since I attempted to exercise that option. I called Apple technical support and after a couple of dead-end calls spent a fifteen or twenty minute call with a tech support person who checked in with her supervisor and explained that, because I had requested some days before to recover Apple ID account access, that she was not allowed to do anything to change my password or otherwise let me in. I asked about an ETA for my multi-day password recovery, and simply was not provided with any estimate of any sort even though I had a good rapport with the technical support representative and she tried to give me practically everything she could.

There is no one for shiny gadgets like Apple, although I gave my Apple Watch to my brother because I thought he'd genuinely like the "Mickey Mouse watch" bit and I found that the watch I thought I could program was on a device that didn't even have a web browser. I'm not saying I couldn't enjoy a programmable Android watch, but I am right now happy to have a 20bar water resistant compass watch (not a smartwatch) to take to my adventures. Right now the brand is appealing to me less and less.

# The Magician's Triplet: Magician, Scientist, Reformer

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let me bring in another partner in the dialogue: [The Magician's Twin: C.S. Lewis, Science, Scientism, and Society](#). The title may need some explanation to someone who does not know

Lewis, but I cannot ever read a book with so big a thesis so brilliantly summarized in so few words. There are allusions to two of his works: [The Abolition of Man](#), which as discussed below calls the early scientist and the contemporary "high noon of magic" to be twins, motivated by science, but science blossomed and magic failed because science worked and magic didn't. (In other words, a metaphorical Darwinian "survival of the fittest" cause science to ultimately succeed and magic to ultimately fail). In [The Magician's Nephew](#), Lewis has managed to pull off the rather shocking feat of presenting and critiquing the ultimately banal figures of the Renaissance magus and the Nietzschean *Äœbermensch* (and its multitude of other incarnations) in a way that is genuinely appropriate in a children's book. The title of "The Magician's Twin," in three words including the word "The", quotes by implication two major critiques Lewis provided, and one could almost say that the rest, as some mathematicians would say, "is left as an exercise for the reader."

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

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

Nothing I can say will prevent some people from describing this lecture as an attack on science. I deny the charge, of course: and real Natural Philosophers (there are

some now alive) will perceive that in defending value I defend inter alia the value of knowledge, which must die like every other when its roots in the Tao [the basic wisdom of mankind, for which Lewis mentions other equally acceptable names such as "first principles" or "first platitudes"] are cut. But I can go further than that. I even suggest that from Science herself the cure might come.

I have described as a 'magician's bargain' that process whereby man surrenders object after object, and finally himself, to Nature in return for power. And I meant what I said. The fact that the scientist has succeeded where the magician failed has put such a wide contrast between them in popular thought that the real story of the birth of Science is misunderstood. You will even find people who write about the sixteenth century as if Magic were a medieval survival and Science the new thing that came in to sweep it away. Those who have studied the period know better. There was very little magic in the Middle Ages: the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are the high noon of magic. The serious magical endeavour and the serious scientific endeavour are twins: one was sickly and died, the other strong and thrived. But they were twins. They were born of the same impulse. I allow that some (certainly not all) of the early scientists were actuated by a pure love of knowledge. But if we consider the temper of that age as a whole we can discern the impulse of which I speak.

There is something which unites magic and applied science while separating both from the wisdom of earlier ages. For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied

science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men: the solution is a technique; and both, in the practice of this technique, are ready to do things hitherto regarded as disgusting and impious " such as digging up and mutilating the dead.

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

Is it, then, possible to imagine a new Natural Philosophy,

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

Perhaps I am asking impossibilities.

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

In my lifetime I have seen a shift in the most prestigious of sciences, physics (only a mathematician would be insulted to be compared with a physicist), shift from an empirical science to a fashionable superstring theory in which physics abdicates from the ancient scientific discipline of refining hypotheses, theories, and laws in light of experiments meant to test them in a

feedback loop. With it, the discipline of physics abdicates from all fully justified claim to be science. And this is specifically physics we are talking about: hence the boilerplate Physics Envy Declaration, where practitioners of one's own academic discipline are declared to be **scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-"hard-sciences"-like-physics.**

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

However, that is just a distraction.

## A third shoe to drop

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

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

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

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

**Second of all**, it would cut against the grain of the Tao as discussed (the reader who so prefers is welcomed to use alternate phrasing like "first platitudes"). His appendix of quotations illustrating the Tao is relatively long and quotes

Ancient Egyptian, Old Norse, Babylonian, Ancient Jewish, Hindu, Ancient Chinese, Roman, English, Ancient Christian, Native American, Greek, Australian Aborigines, and Anglo-Saxon, and this is integrated with the entire thrust of the book. If I were to attempt such a work as Lewis did, it would not be a particularly obvious time to try to make a sharp critique specifically about one tradition.

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

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

neighbourhood and at an inauspicious hour."

You have to really dig into some of the history to realize how intertwined the Reformation was with the occult. Lewis says, for one among many examples, "In Paracelsus the characters of magician and scientist are combined." Some have said that what is now called Lutheranism should be called Melancthonism, because as has happened many times in history, a charismatic teacher with striking influence opens a door, and then an important follower works certain things out and systematizes the collection. In Melancthon the characters of Reformer, Scientist, and Astrologer are combined. Now I would like to address one distraction: some people, including Lewis ([The Discarded Image](#)), draw a sharp distinction between astrology in the middle ages and the emptied-out version we have today. He says that our lumping astrology in with the occult would have surprised practitioners of either: Renaissance magic asserted human power while astrology asserted human impotence. [The Magician's Twin](#) interestingly suggests that astrology as discussed by C.S. Lewis is not a remnant of magic but as a precursor to present-day deterministic science. And there is an important distinction for those who know about astrology in relation to Melancthon. Medieval astrology was a comprehensive theory, including cosmology and psychology, where "judicial astrology", meaning to use astrology for fortune-telling, was relatively minor. But astrology for fortune-telling was far more important to Melancthon. And if there was quite a lot of fortune-telling on Melancthon's resume, there was much more clamor for what was then called natural philosophy and became what we now know as science.

Another troubling weed in the water has to do with Reformation history, not specifically because it is an issue with

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

Questions like "Where did Luther's Sola Scriptura come from?", or "Where did the Calvinist tradition's acronym TULIP for 'Total Depravity', 'Unconditional Election', 'Limited Atonement', 'Irresistible Grace', and the 'Perseverance of the Saints?' come from?" are legitimate historical questions. However, questions like these only ask about matters that have rightly or wrongly survived the winnowing of history, and they tend to favor a twin that survived and flourished over a twin that withered and died. This means that the chaos associated with the founders of Anabaptism do not linger with how truly chaotic the community was at first, and in general Protestant

accounts of the Reformation fail to report the degree to which the Reformation project was connected to a Renaissance that was profoundly occultic.

## **A big picture view from before I knew certain things**

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

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

becoming scientific technology, its vision for a better world becoming political ideology, and its spiritual practices becoming a private fantasy.

One way to look at historical data in a way that shows the kind of sensitivity I'm interested in, is explored by Mary Midgley in *Science as Salvation* (1992); she doesn't dwell on the occult as such, but she perceptively argues that science is far more continuous with religion than its self-understanding would suggest. Her approach pays a certain kind of attention to things which science leads us to ignore. She looks at ways science is doing far more than falsifying hypotheses, and in so doing observes some things which are important. I hope to develop a similar argument in a different direction, arguing that science is far more continuous with the occult than its self-understanding would suggest. This thesis is intended neither to be a correction nor a refinement of her position, but development of a parallel line of enquiry.

It is as if a great island, called Magic, began to drift away from the cultural mainland. It had plans for what the mainland should be converted into, but had no wish to be associated with the mainland. As time passed, the island fragmented into smaller islands, and on all of these new islands the features hardened and became more sharply defined. One of the islands is named Ideology. The one we are interested in is Science, which is not interchangeable with the original Magic, but is even less independent: in some ways Science differs from Magic by being more like Magic than Magic itself. Science is further from the mainland than Magic was, even if its influence on the mainland is if anything greater than what Magic once held. I am interested in a

scientific endeavour, and in particular a basic relationship behind scientific enquiry, which are to a substantial degree continuous with a magical endeavour and a basic relationship behind magic. These are foundationally important, and even if it is not yet clear what they may mean, I will try to substantiate these as the thesis develops. I propose the idea of Magic breaking off from a societal mainland, and sharpening and hardening into Science, as more helpful than the idea of science and magic as opposites.

There is in fact historical precedent for such a phenomenon. I suggest that a parallel with Eucharistic doctrine might illuminate the interrelationship between Orthodoxy, Renaissance and early modern magic, and science (including artificial intelligence). When Aquinas made the Christian-Aristotelian synthesis, he changed the doctrine of the Eucharist. The Eucharist had previously been understood on Orthodox terms that used a Platonic conception of bread and wine participating in the body and blood of Christ, so that bread remained bread whilst becoming the body of Christ. One substance had two natures. Aristotelian philosophy had little room for one substance which had two natures, so one thing cannot simultaneously be bread and the body of Christ. When Aquinas subsumed real presence doctrine under an Aristotelian framework, he managed a delicate balancing act, in which bread ceased to be bread when it became the body of Christ, and it was a miracle that the accidents of bread held together after the substance had changed. I suggest that when Zwingli expunged real presence doctrine completely, he was not abolishing the Aristotelian impulse, but carrying it to its proper end. In like fashion, the scientific movement is not a repudiation of the

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

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

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

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

Testament (the patristic Old Testament of choice) to the original Hebrew, dropping quite a few books of the Old Testament in the process. (He contemplated deeper cuts than that, and called the New Testament epistle of James a "letter of straw," fit to be burned.)

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

I wrote above of the Renaissance Magus, one heir of which is the creation of political ideology as such, who stands against the mainland but, in something approaching Messianic fantasy, has designs to tear apart and rebuild the despicable raw material of society into something truly worthwhile and excellent by the power of his great mind. On this point, I can barely distinguish the Reformer from the Renaissance Magus beyond the fact that the Reformer's raw material of abysmal society was more specifically the Church.

[Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony with Nature: Anatomy of a Passion](#) was something I wrote because of several reasons but triggered, at least, by a museum visit which was presented as an Enlightenment exhibit, and which showed a great many ancient, classical artifacts. After some point I realized that the exhibit as a whole was an exhibit on the Enlightenment specifically in the currents that spawned the still-living tradition of museums, and the neo-classicism which is also associated that century. I don't remember what exact examples I settled on, and the article was one where examples could be swapped in or out. Possible examples include the Renaissance, the Reformation, Enlightenment neo-classicism, various shades of postmodernism, neo-paganism, the unending Protestant cottage industry of

reconstructing the ancient Church, unending works on trying to make political ideologies that will transform one's society to be more perfect, and (mumble) others; I wrote sharply, "**Orthodoxy is pagan. Neo-paganism isn't,**" in [The Sign of the Grail](#), my point being that if you want the grandeur of much of any original paganism (and paganism can have grandeur), you will do well to simply skip past the distraction and the mad free-for-all covered in even pro-paganism books like [Drawing Down the Moon](#), and join the Orthodox Church, submitting to its discipline.

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

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

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

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

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

stating that prophets die on an anniversary of their conception or birth, and the determination that placed the Nativity on December 25th was a spillover calculation to a date deemed more central, the Annunciation as the date when Christ was conceived, set as March 25th.

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

However, Halloween is a bit of anomaly.

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

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

And commercial poisoning of the Christmas spirit was also

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

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

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

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

## **Alchemy no longer needs to come out of the closet**

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

far greater detail in modern science, but in that liminal figure, such as alchemists love, the heart was still doing major alchemical jobs even if his successors may have abandoned them.

Today there are some people who have made some sharp apologetic responses. Books endorsed on Oprah may treat alchemy as supreme personal elevation. However, conservative authors acknowledge some points while condemning others as barren. It is perhaps true that alchemy represents a tradition intended to transform the practitioner spiritually. But alchemy is false in that spiritual transformation is approached through master of technique and "sympathetic magic" as Bible scholars use the term. We do not need a technique to transform us spiritually. We may need repentance, faith, spiritual discipline that is neither more nor less than a cooperation with God, and communion, and in the Holy Mysteries we have a transformation that leaves gold in the dust. And alchemy is in the end positively **anemic** when it stands next to full-blooded religion. And really, what person in any right mind would crawl on broken glass to create gold when Someone will give you the [Providence of the true Dance](#) and make the divine Life pulse through your blood? A while ago, I wrote a poem, [How Shall I Tell an Alchemist?](#) which is I think where I'll choose to end this section:

# How Shall I Tell an Alchemist?

The cold matter of science“  
Exists not, O God, O Life,  
For Thou who art Life,  
How could Thy humblest creature,  
Be without life,  
Fail to be in some wise,  
The image of Life?  
Minerals themselves,  
Lead and silver and gold,  
The vast emptiness of space and vacuum,  
Teems more with Thy Life,  
Than science will see in man,  
Than hard and soft science,  
Will to see in man.  
How shall I praise Thee,  
For making man a microcosm,  
A human being the summary,  
Of creation, spiritual and material,  
Created to be,  
A waterfall of divine grace,  
Flowing to all things spiritual and material,

A waterfall of divine life,  
Deity flowing out to man,  
And out through man,  
To all that exists,  
And even nothingness itself?  
And if I speak,  
To an alchemist who seeks true gold,  
May his eyes be opened,  
To body made a spirit,  
And spirit made a body,  
The gold on the face of an icon,  
Pure beyond twenty-four carats,  
Even if the icon be cheap,  
A cheap icon of paper faded?  
How shall I speak to an alchemist,  
Whose eyes overlook a transformation,  
Next to which the transmutation,  
Of lead to gold,  
Is dust and ashes?  
How shall I speak to an alchemist,  
Of the holy consecration,  
Whereby humble bread and wine,  
Illumine as divine body and blood,  
Brighter than gold, the metal of light,  
The holy mystery the fulcrum,  
Not stopping in chalice gilt,  
But transforming men,  
To be the mystical body,  
The holy mystery the fulcrum of lives transmuted,  
Of a waterfall spilling out,  
The consecration of holy gifts,

That men may be radiant,  
That men may be illumined,  
That men be made the mystical body,  
Course with divine Life,  
Tasting the Fountain of Immortality,  
The transformed elements the fulcrum,  
Of God taking a lever and a place to stand,  
To move the earth,  
To move the cosmos whole,  
Everything created,  
Spiritual and material,  
Returned to God,  
Deified.

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

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

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

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

in the scientific age.

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

Feynman's attempt to summarize as much of the sciences as possible in a single sentence is impressively well-done. This is not.

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

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

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

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

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

It appears that Darwin did just that. He introduced a concept of natural selection, something that might seem odd at first but was intelligible. "Natural selection" meant that there was something like breeding going on even in the absence of a breeder. Instead of farmers breeding (I think the term ecosystem may be anachronism to place in Darwin's day and it apparently does not appear in his writing, but the term fits in Paleo-Darwinism as well as in newer forms like a glove), natural selection is a mechanism by which the natural environment will let organisms that survive continue to propagate, and organisms that can't survive won't propagate either. There is a marked difference between animals that are prey animals and those that aren't. Animals that contend with predators tend to have sharp senses to notice predators, the ability to flee predators, and the ability to put up a fight. None of these traits is absolutely essential, but mice that do not evade cats cease to exist. Dodos

in Darwin's day, or field chickens in the 19th century U.S., did not face predators and at least the dodos were quickly hunted to extinction when humans discovered the place.

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

What else is there? Before a Paleo diet stopped some really nasty symptoms, I read [Nourishing Traditions](#). That book documents, in scientific terms, ways and patterns of eating that are beneficial, even though those dishes appeared well before we had enough scientific understanding to dissect the benefits.

Buttered asparagus, for instance, provides a nutritionally beneficial that is greater than the nutritional value of its parts.

And there are many things; the author, celebrating fermentation, says that if you have a Ruben, you are eating five fermented foods.

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

Science has a very valuable way to select theories and laws that is really impressive. However, it is not the only winnowing fork available, and the other winnowing fork, analogous to natural selection, is live and powerful. And, though this is not really a fair comparison, a diet that has been passed down for generations in a society is almost certainly better than the industrial diet that is causing damage to people worldwide who can't afford their traditional cuisine.

There exist some foods which were scientifically engineered to benefit the eater. During World War II, experiments were

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

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

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

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

“Neutrals?”

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

“You mean eldilsâ€™angels?”

“Well, the word angel rather begs the question. Even the OyÃ©resu aren't exactly angels in the same sense as our guardian angels are. Technically they are Intelligences. The

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

"You think there are things like that?"

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

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

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

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

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

I might briefly comment that the virtues that are posited to have pretty much died with Merlin are alive and kicking in Orthodoxy; see "[Physics.](#)" The Orthodox Christian is in a very real sense not just in communion with fellow Orthodox Christians alive on earth: to be in communion with the Orthodox Church is

to be in communion with Christ, in communion with saints and angels, in communion with Creation from stars to starlings to stoplights, and even in a certain sense in communion with heterodox at a deeper level than the heterodox are in communion with themselves. This is present among devout laity, and it is given a sharper point in monasticism. It may be completely off-limits for a married or monastic Orthodox to set out to be like Merlin, but a monastic in particular who seeks first the Kingdom of God and his perfect righteousness may end up with quite a lot of what this passage sells Merlin on.

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

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

1. [The Best of Jonathan's Corner](#): This is my flagship title, and also the one I am most pleased with reception.

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

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

I ranked 7th in the nation in the 1989 MathCounts competition, and that is something to be very humble about. There's more than just jokes that have been floating around about, "How can you tell if a mathematician is an

extravert?" "He looks at your feet when he talks to you!"

In the troubled course of my troubled relationship with my ex-fiance, I am not interested in disclosing my ex-fiance's faults. I am, however, interested in disclosing my own faults in very general terms. The root cause in most cases came from acting out of an overly mathematical mind, very frequently approaching things as basically a math problem to solve and relating to her almost exclusively with my head rather than my heart, and really, in the end, not relating to her as properly human (and, by the same stroke, not relating to myself as properly human either).

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

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

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

crack under torture.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I seek the silence of hesychasm.

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

# **Maximum Christ, Maximum Ambition, Maximum Repentance**

*Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!*

That is how the way was paved,  
For the coming of the Son of God,  
Perfect God and Perfect Man:  
Maximum God and Maximum Man,  
Maximally united,  
Yet the Divine and human natures,  
Maximally unconfused:

This is what the Church proclaims,  
In her maximum Christology,  
Proclaiming the Maximum Christ.

*Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!*

*Repent, and believe the Gospel.*

The *Revelation to St. John* tells,  
Words that bear hard truth in hard times:  
*And I heard the altar cry,*

"Yea, Lord God the Almighty,  
True and just are thy judgments!"  
The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun,  
And it was allowed to scorch men with fire;  
Men were scorched by the fierce heat,  
And they cursed the name of God,  
Who had power over these plagues,  
And they did not repent and give him glory.  
The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast,  
And its kingdom was in darkness;  
Men gnawed their tongues in anguish,  
And cursed the God of heaven  
For their pain and sores,  
And did not repent of their deeds.  
If our time looks like a time of plagues,  
Do not be like these.  
Repentance is not intended,  
For a more ideal time:  
Do not pray as the Blessed Augustine:  
"O Lord, give me chastity and continence,  
But not yet,"  
Do not seek to repent later,  
But keep on struggling to repent now.  
Do you live in tough times,  
And do you fear for even worse disasters?  
Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.  
Do you not see?  
Are your eyes closed?  
God is not gone in a global financial crisis:  
Do you not see,  
The hand of God,

Working to give in hard times,  
What we overlooked in a comfortable age?  
Can you not see a God  
Who whispers in our pleasures,  
Shouts in our pains,  
Whispers also, in times of comfort and ease,  
And shouts in a time of crisis,  
Crisis,  
Κρισις,  
A Greek word meaning,  
"Judgment."  
If we experience judgment,  
Do we need to assume the Judge has abandoned his post?  
Do we really need to try and escape him?  
**Make friends quickly with your accuser!**  
Would you rather know God as your friend or accuser?  
**It hurts you to kick against the goads.**  
Are you terrified to face what you have to repent of?  
Take courage:  
Repentance terrifies like nothing else,  
An unconditional surrender,  
Terrifying to a saint as much as to either of us,  
Only afterwards does it show its true nature,  
As an awakening and more:  
As Heaven's best-kept secret.  
God has ambitions for you,  
Beyond your wildest dreams,  
And commands you to want the best for yourself.  
And if it seems that God only gives you,  
Things that are harder and worse,  
Then you do not understand this:

God's desires for you are beyond your wildest dreams:  
Your wildest dreams are yet not wild enough,  
To see the true good that God holds in store for you.

And if you say,

"Beautiful words, but I have a tough life,"

Know that words like these come from tough lives,  
Hard realities where something great shines so brightly:

The Light of God in Heaven.

Do you fear the loss of your treasures on earth,  
Are you afraid you do not have enough to survive?

Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,  
where neither moth nor rust consumes,  
and where thieves do not break in and steal,

Nor do global economic meltdown or hyperinflation

Do anything but strip away a mask,

That makes it look as if we can live by bread alone,

Or comfort ourselves with a "rising standard of living,"

Like as to moving from an ancient, rounded, nourishing diet,

To "upgrade" to cotton candy,

Seeking a Utopia of spoiled children,

Because what we need is not what a child wants to spoil him,

But to grow to be men:

And this crisis, κρίσις, may do much more,

Than separate the men from the boys:

It will help some boys learn to be men,

Learning under the iron yoke of law,

What we kept putting off under the freedom of grace,

As we curse the cruel judgment of a Judge,

Who "cruelly" shouts,

"Sorry, son, it is time for you now,

To move on to better things.

I have real ambitions for you,  
And I want what is truly good as you cannot,  
And I know what is truly good as you cannot.

Try again.

Try again about what you really want.  
I want you to taste the River of Life,  
And you keep on trying to drink filth,  
**Like your dog drinking from your toilet:**

Please try again.

I want you to have real treasure,  
And if what it takes is my taking away every treasure on earth,  
Everything that you want,  
And everything you turn to for security,  
So that you lose your job,  
And your possessions begin to wear out,  
And some of your technologies come to fail,  
In ways you had never even imagined,  
And your investments become worthless,  
And your luxuries vanish one by one,  
And the government does everything people want it to,  
But the results get worse and worse,  
And maybe you even pray,  
**Give us this day our daily bread,**  
Because you do not know,  
Where your next meal is coming from,  
Who knows?

Perhaps you will listen to me shout,  
When you found my whisper easy to ignore,  
Perhaps you will stop chasing after shadows.

Perhaps you will grasp reality:  
Perhaps you will know real treasure,

Real treasure,  
Next to which a bull market,  
Is but mist, vapor, and shadow."

Repent, and believe the Gospel.

Our entire understanding of what it means to be God,  
And our entire understanding of what it means to be man,  
Is the Maximum Christ.

For man is created for maximum glory,  
And God ever beckons us to reach higher,  
When we in confusion reach far below,  
Far less than the glory we were made for.

Every sin does this,  
Even pride.

What do we want in pride?  
Inevitably something that sparkles and shimmers,  
But is cotton candy and mirage,  
Next to the humble things we turn our nose up at.

In pride we turn up our nose,  
At abundant health,  
And do not want the freedom of movement,  
Of a body in health,  
But clingingly cherish,  
Our "extra-special" movement of broken bone,  
And yet we wonder why we hurt,  
And why we are not satisfied,  
Even though we have what we clingingly cherish,  
Not knowing it is the seed of Hell.

You do not understand the measure of man,  
Until you know in Christ,

Who, though he was in the form of God,  
Did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

But emptied himself,  
Taking the form of a servant,  
Being born in the likeness of men.  
And being found in human form,  
He humbled himself,  
And became obedient unto death,  
even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him,  
And bestowed on him the name which is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

We do not understand greatness except in Christ,  
And in Christ we understand that greatness is humble,  
For there is something missing in our lives,  
Until they are oriented by Christ,  
And we know that pride cannot be enough:  
God summons us to the heights of humility.

Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

Repent, and live real life in a virtual world.  
Industrial food is not like the food of ancient times:  
It is tasty on the outside,  
Manipulated like plastic on the inside,  
A cherry flavored drink engineered that the palate may  
reminisce of cherry taste,  
While holding nothing of the nourishment and sustenance,  
That comes with cherry sweetness in nature,  
Almost like eating an "apple" molded of styrofoam,  
Injected with Splenda,  
Sprayed with petroleum-based fragrance,

And sprinkled with vitamin extract,  
So it may be marketed as health food.  
Do not think that this be isolated as a phenomenon:  
It is a microcosm of our virtual world,  
Where so much of our reality is virtual,  
That "virtual reality" neither begins nor ends with SecondLife.  
Christ knew a life of technologies,  
The son of a carpenter with tools and wood,  
But never like techno-pagans,  
Was his technology  
The technology of molding nature to man's every whim,  
Seeking HumanLife version 2.0:  
Or if you believe that Christ's technology was exactly that,  
But less advanced,  
At least know that it is different,  
As a pint of beer,  
From a pint of rum:  
As today we mold nature to our whims,  
Graduating from pint of rum to pint of absinthe,  
Our TV's always on, and stronger brew,  
Placing before our souls, our mind's eyes,  
The strange brew of HumanLife 2.0... 3.0... 4.0...  
Trying to improve on timeless reality,  
And failing,  
And failing.  
Entranced by technology with its flickering screens,  
[Twice imprisoned in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave,"](#)  
The gate to the timeless way of human life,  
Lies open, and if the path be narrow and hard,  
It has always been narrow and hard:  
Our hindrances may be our aids,

If we use them rightly,  
In asceticism,  
If we go against the flow,  
Of technologies ever more brittle,  
From appliances, cookware, and clothing built to last,  
To possessions that keep wearing out,  
To more and more disposable possessions,  
When we abandon glass plates for the convenience of paper.  
From computers discarded because they are obsolete,  
To computers whose solid state drives become something you use  
up,  
From physical computers that are in your control,  
To virtual cloud computers,  
That you may easily use now,  
But can be taken away by any number of human actions,  
Or system failures:  
"Systems integration is when your computer will not work,  
Because of a problem on a computer you've never heard of;"  
"If builders built buildings the way programmers wrote  
programs,  
The first woodpecker that came along would destroy civilization."  
Use technology but don't trust it.  
We are digging a pit,  
In how we use technology,  
And the progress we embrace,  
Is digging ourselves in deeper.  
And what is true of technology,  
Is also true of much more:  
The story of our culture, our world, our economy,  
Is as a game of chess against a demonic adversary,  
Where we have greedily captured:

An unguarded pawn here, and a bishop there,  
Never heedful of the trap we were stepping into,  
Taking seeming advantage of our opponent's cunning bait,  
All the way to sealing his checkmate against us,  
Until our world and society have lost the game,  
And yet still redemption is open to us,  
Redemption open to every one who repents,  
Living real life even in a virtual world.  
But if we repent, the Kingdom of God ever remains nigh.  
You have already met Christ.

So have I,  
Both of us many times,  
And yet we forget this central fact.  
Wonder when you have met him?  
Hear Christ's own words,  
Hear Christ's own Christology unfold:  
When the Son of man comes in his glory,  
And all the angels with him,  
Then he will sit on his glorious throne.  
Before him will be gathered all the nations,  
And he will separate them one from another,  
As a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,  
And he will place the sheep at his right hand,  
But the goats at the left.  
Then the King will say to those at his right hand,  
"Come, O blessed of my Father,  
Inherit the kingdom prepared for you,  
From the foundation of the world;  
For I was hungry and you gave me food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,  
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

I was naked and you clothed me,  
I was sick and you visited me,  
I was in prison and you came to me."  
Then the righteous will answer him,  
"Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee,  
Or thirsty and give thee drink?  
And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee,  
Or naked and clothe thee?  
and when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?'  
And the King will answer them,  
"Truly, I say to you,  
As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren,  
You did it to me."

Then he will say to those at his left hand,  
"Depart from me, you who are damned,  
Into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;  
For I was hungry and you gave me no food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,  
I was a stranger and you did not welcome me,  
naked and you did not clothe me,  
sick and in prison and you did not visit me."

Then they also will answer,  
"Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty,  
Or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison,  
And did not minister to thee?"

Then he will answer them,  
"Truly, I say to you,  
as you did it not to one of the least of these,  
you did it not to me."

Could this be irrelevant to survival?  
People survived the Great Depression by sharing:

If you don't share because you have little,  
You simply don't get it.  
The less you have,  
The more you need to be generous, and believe,  
Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,  
But righteousness delivers from death.  
If you want to survive,  
Help others survive:  
Lend to the Lord and he will repay you,  
In his time:  
He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD,  
And he will repay him for his deed.  
Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,  
saith our God:  
Fear not: for, behold,  
I bring you good tidings of great joy,  
which shall be to all people:  
Christ wills to be incarnate in us,  
Not in some other circumstance, but now.  
The Son of God became a man,  
That men might become the sons of God:  
The Incarnation,  
Is for us today.  
If our earthly hope is stripped away,  
Our heavenly hope beams brighter:  
The mighty arm of God in divine providence,  
Rippling with muscle such as easy times rarely know.  
If our cherished neighborhood frisbee is shut down,  
Perhaps it is because we are summoned,  
To reach for gold at spiritual Olympics,  
To become men,

And as in the great hymn to love,  
Put childish ways behind us.

Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!  
Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,  
and Christ shall give you light.

Awaken to God's maximum ambitions for you.  
But the door to the heart can only be opened from the inside,  
And the door of the heart that opens to God,  
Is called repentance,

The door we are terrified to open:

The door we must open:

Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;  
Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!

# Meat

I was sitting at a table with my classmates, and there was one part of the conversation in particular that stuck in my mind. One of my classmates was a vegan, and my professor, who was Orthodox but usually was not as strict as some people are observing Orthodox fasts, said that he was challenged by that position. He talked about Orthodox monasticism, which usually avoids meat, and its implication that meat is not necessary. I wanted to contribute to that discussion, but my sense was that that wasn't quite the time to speak. When I explored it after that meal, it seemed more and more to be something that was part of a deep web, connected to other things.

## **What is Theophany? And what does it have to do with meat?**

When I became Orthodox, one of the biggest pieces of advice the priest who received me (my spiritual father) gave me was to take five or ten years to connect with the liturgical rhythm. Now in the Orthodox Church advice from spiritual fathers is like a doctor's prescription in that what is given to one person may not be good at all for another: like a prescription given by a doctor, it is given to one person for that specific person's needs, and should not normally be seen as universal advice that should be good for everyone. However, that doesn't mean that advice is perversely designed to be useless to everyone else. I believe this was good pastoral advice not because of something ultimately idiosyncratic about me—something true of me but no one else—but because of something I share with a lot of other people, especially other Westerners.

In the Orthodox Church, there are days, weeks, and years as in the West, but what they mean is different. In some respects the similarity is deceptive. The biggest difference is less a matter of linear vs. cyclical time, as that in the West time is like money: people will say, "Time is money," and if it is a metaphor, it is none the less a metaphor that captures people's outlook very well. Time is like a scarce commodity; it's something you use to

get things done, and you can not have enough, and run out of time. Language of "saving time" like one would save resources is because the way people treat time is very close to how one would treat a commercial resource that you use to get things done. This may be deeply rooted in some Orthodox, especially Western members of the Orthodox, but instead of time being like a limited supply of money, time is like a kaleidoscope turning. There are different colors—different basic qualities held in place by worship, prayer at home, fasting from certain foods, feasting, commemorating different saints and Biblical events, and being mindful of different liturgical seasons—and they combine in cycles of day, week, and year, given different shades as people grow. Again, this is much less like "Time is money." than "Time is the flow of colors in a kaleidoscope."

One of those seasons is called "Theophany," and it is defined by the third most important feast in the year. I am writing in that season, and it seems an appropriate enough season to write this piece. It fits Theophany.

"Theophany" means "the manifestation of God." That word does not refer to icons or animals. But the way that God was manifest in Theophany has every relevance to icons and animals.

Theophany is the celebration of the Lord Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan, and at one point this was not celebrated from what we now celebrate in Christmas. At that baptism, the Father spoke from Heaven and said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," the Son was baptized, and the Spirit appeared in the form of a dove. The Trinity was made manifest, but more to the point, the Trinity of God was made manifest to and through material Creation.

The Fathers have never drawn a very sharp line between Christ the Savior of men and Christ the Savior of the whole

creation. This isn't something the Fathers added to the Bible: the Son of God has entered into his creation so completely that the Bible itself says that Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

When Christ was baptized in water, he blessed the whole creation. Yes, he set a precedent for his followers. I wouldn't want to diminish that. But if you draw the line and say the story is relevant to our being baptized but nothing more, you have cut off its fundamental relevance to the whole Creation. The Orthodox liturgy never forgets the rest of the created order, and the liturgy for Theophany crystallizes this in the service for the blessing of the water:

Great art thou, O Lord, and wonderful are thy works, and no word doeth justice to the praise of thy wonders; for by thy will thou didst bring out all things from nonexistence into existence; and by thy might thou dost control creation, and by thy providence thou dost govern the world. Thou it is who didst organize creation from the four elements, and crowned the cycle of the year with four seasons. Before thee tremble supersensual powers; thee the sun praiseth, the moon worshippeth, the stars submit to thee, the light obeyeth, the tempests tremble, the springs worship thee.

Thou didst spread out the heaven like a tent; thou didst establish the earth on the waters. Thou didst surround the sea with sand. Thou didst pour out the air for breathing.

Thee do the angelic hosts serve; thee the ranks of the

archangels do worship, the many-eyed cherubim, the six-winged seraphim, as they stand in thy presence and fly about thee, hiding with fear from thine unapproachable glory...

And shortly the water is blessed, opening a season of blessing in which people's houses are blessed, icons are blessed, people are blessed, and so on. To be human is to be created for worship, but it is not only humans; every material creature and every spiritual creature (the "supersensual powers", the "many-eyed cherubim", and other figures in the liturgy quoted above) are not only created to worship but have a place in what could be called a united organism.

People today are seeking a harmony between man and nature, and some people may wonder if Orthodoxy has a basis for such a harmony. The answer is a yes and no. Let me explain.

If we ask a different question, "What would harmony between humans and technology be? What would a society look like?" then there might be an image of people caring for machines, adapting themselves to them, and so on and so forth.

And that image, or that projection, would lead to a deceptive image among societies today. If we are talking about the kind of technology in the first world today, then the first world today not only is better attuned with technology than the second or third world, but has done something with technology that is simply without parallel in the first 99.999% (literally) of the time humans have been around. Although some other nations like Japan may have a slight edge over my native USA, I'm going to focus on the USA for the simple reason that I know it better.

In the USA, which has something about technology that exceeds what has been done in the same vein in the first 99.999% of the time humans have been around, there are people who develop technology and are carefully attuned to it. And the

...the develop technology, and are carefully attuned to it. And the culture is optimized to support technology in a way that I didn't appreciate until I lived in the second world. You may be able to count on your fingers the number of societies that have ever managed, in the entire history and prehistory of the human race, to be more attuned to technology. And yet the society is not what one would imagine if one tried to imagine a society in harmony with technology.

This is a society with a minority current making Luddite arguments about why computers are bad (and to me the arguments have more weight than some might suspect). There are also people who have no academic axe to grind about the sociological effects of video games, but hate learning new programs. The predominant computer operating system is the most insecure operating system, the one that most exposes its users to viruses and worms—better operating systems are available, at very least from a security and privacy perspective, for free in some cases, but the industry standard is the one that leaves its users most vulnerable to malicious software.

Furthermore, people do not hold technology as objects of reverence, or at least most people don't. Not only is it not a big deal to dispose of no-longer-wanted technology, but "planned obsolescence" means that technology is made to be thrown away. When technology is broken, it will probably be replaced instead of being repaired. You can be very educated and know very little about technology. And the list goes on.

Now I ask: Is this attunement with technology? And the answer is "Yes," but it is the kind of attunement seen in real society (perhaps more perfectly in Japan and other places), not what one would imagine as "harmony with technology." The difference between the two is like the difference between romantic relationships—the kind you have with another flesh-

and-blood human who has things that your imagination didn't put there—and romantic fantasies. In fact people don't think in terms of "harmony with technology;" to ask if American culture lives in harmony with technology is a question few Americans would ask.

Does Orthodoxy have a key to harmony with nature? Let me give one clue. No single technology—not SUVs, not environmentally incorrect inks, not styrofoam—dictates a heavy environmental footprint. Even if there were no soy inks, the printer in itself need not dictate environmental damage. What dictates environmental damage is waste. And Orthodoxy never tells a society what technologies it may and may not use—when someone ran an anti-SUV advertisement asking, "What would Jesus drive?" Orthodoxy may well agree with the archaeologist who in essence said, "Speaking as someone who's done excavations in the Holy Land's rugged terrain, you basically need an SUV, and Jesus with his twelve disciples would have driven a Hummer." (This does not mean that we all need Hummers. I get rides from people but don't own a car myself.) Even if Orthodoxy does not give a list of what technologies its people can't use, Orthodoxy does join voices with many other Christians in saying that part of the walk of virtue is living simply, meaning using what you need but being willing to ask "Do we need what we can afford?" instead of just "Can we afford what we need?" This simplicity is not lived consistently in the first world, but the classical virtue of living simply, formulated at a time when people simply were not thinking in environmentalist terms, has implications for appropriate stewardship of the earth. Living simply has usually been conceived as something that deals with rich and poor—almost all people in the first world who have a home would be considered rich—but it is part of a right ordering

that will rightly orient people and society to the material world.

But there is another side to the issue. In the Western way of looking at it, there is a fundamental opposition between harmony (shaded by equality) and domination (shaded by inequality). Harmony, by definition, does not include domination. But the way the Eastern Church approaches it fits neither into the Western boundaries of harmony nor the Western boundaries of domination. The link between man and nature needs harmony, but it is incomplete if it cannot include domination and even destruction. The PETA position, admittedly extreme for people who have animal rights sympathies, is that a duck is a rat is a goat is a boy. To them, meat is murder, not just as a way of exaggerating something deep, but in a literal sense. And I cannot agree with that. If I could kill a goat and save a girl, I would do so. And beyond that, I eat meat, more than most people (at least before low-carb diets came in vogue, and perhaps after).

## The smock

When I was a boy, my art teacher told the class to get smocks, and my father gave me an unwanted shirt—but he would have given me his best shirt if I needed it. I used it and it kept me from getting clay and paint on my other clothing. (In other words, I destroyed it.) That wasn't the only thing of my parents' that I destroyed. I destroyed the meals my mother cooked for me (usually by eating them and throwing away as little as possible—you wouldn't want them when I was done). I destroyed things that weren't working by taking them apart to see what was inside. I destroyed clothing that my mother brought for me, usually by wearing it out. If my parents had back every penny they spent on something that I destroyed, they would have a good deal more money.

However, my parents did not raise me to be a destructive man. The smock is an example of justified destruction. The fact that my father gave me one of his shirts to destroy as a smock does not mean that it didn't matter if I destroyed his shirts. He would have been quite bothered if I had rubbed red clay onto all of his shirts. Quite a lot of the destruction I did was appropriate. It was justified destruction within a context, and I believe it illustrates what it means to say both that destruction can be permissible, and that destruction matters. To speak of justified destruction is both to say that destruction can be

justified and that justification needs to be justified: it is acceptable to destroy a dress shirt when a smock is needed, but destroying a dress shirt needs to be justified, and is not appropriate when it is not justified.

The concept of "raw materials" applied to the natural world isn't a very Orthodox concept, for much the same reason that it would seem strange to interpret our house as merely a bunch of raw materials for me to destroy at will. The examples above notwithstanding, my parents did not want me to be destructive, and the fact that I was permitted to destroy things was not the central truth of the matter. It would be much closer to the truth to say that I was in that home to grow into a Christian and a man, and be a member of that family. There was also a footnote that said I could destroy some things in some circumstances. But even the things which I was permitted to destroy were not "raw material". A shirt has value in itself, as a shirt, even if it is used as a smock.

The problem with considering the items in my parents' house is raw material is that they have both status and value independently of what I might get out of destroying them. It might matter that I would benefit from destroying the shirt by using it as a smock, but the heart of the matter is that "potential for making a smock" is neither the only status nor the only value of a dress shirt.

An icon, a picture painted to help make spiritual realities manifest, has value as the emblem of a view of the Creation where science and materialism do not tell the whole story, where matter has spiritual qualities above the legitimate observation of scientists, and where saying "Nature is simply what science describes" is as fundamentally erroneous as saying "Your value as a human being is simply what you get when you subtract your

financial liabilities from your assets." If an icon is spiritual, if it is part of God manifesting himself through matter and restoring matter to his circle of blessing, then there is something inadequate if the only meaning to "matter" is "what science describes." Matter is a part of the treasurehouse of God, and the icon is spiritual not as an exception to inert matter and raw material, but as the crystallization of something at the heart of Creation. Seeing the natural world as raw material is almost as strange from an Orthodox perspective as seeing people in terms of their financial net worth. It's the same kind of error.

Of the possessions in my parents' house, not all are equal, and it makes a difference whether I am destroying a plastic cup or a landscape painted by my mother. In God's own house with his treasures, not all are of equal value. There are some of these treasures that exist, in their way reflecting a God who is existence itself: rocks, for instance. There are some possessions which exist in a deeper sense, having an existence that is alive, a reflection of a God who is not only Being itself but Life itself.

Then, beyond these oaks and roses, there are treasures which exist and even live in a way that moves: gazelles and badgers. As the pinnacle of material creation and the microcosm that brings together the material and the spiritual, are creatures that exist, live, and move in out of rationality—on a richer and more interesting understanding of "rationality" than most people would associate with the word today. That would be the realm of men. Lastly, there are bodiless rational spirits, rank on rank of angels.

We can destroy treasures that exist, live, and even move, and some people think that in dire circumstances we may destroy the highest of material treasures, the ones that are rational. But that does not mean that it's all the same to destroy rocks, plants, and animals. Destroying a plant—to make a vegan's meal,

for instance—is more serious than smashing a pebble. (Unfortunately, you can't live off of a diet of rocks.) Destroying an animal is far more serious, and there are sources which suggest it is more a concession than what we would think of today as a right. You can find people arguing that meat is more of a condition to weakness and medical concerns than something healthy people should need to resort to.

## Kosher meat

In Judaism, "kosher" is not only a matter of whether the meat comes from a clean animal like a cow or a sheep or an unclean animal like a pig. It also is a matter of how the animal was slaughtered.

The butcher says a blessing over the animal and then makes a single motion with a knife that has to be sharp, and is specified so that the animal dies as swiftly and painlessly as possible. Its lifeblood is also to be poured out as thoroughly as possible—because the animal's life belongs to God, not to us, and even if we may kill it, Judaism at least frames acceptable slaughter in a way that shows respect for the animal killed.

If we look at a Jewish shepherd with his flock of sheep, under second temple Judaism, and a contemporary (to him) pagan Greek swineherd with his flock of pigs, they (or at least the Jew) would have seen themselves as complete opposites, at least after taking into account that they both raise a group of animals.

There may have been a difference in whether all the animals were being raised for meat, but let's ignore that for the sake of argument. The Greek swineherd might have found the comparison rather insulting: to Greeks, Jews were these antisocial people who wouldn't mingle in polite company and for some reason treated one of the most delicious meats (pork) as if it were something revolting and putrid. In other words, Greeks perceived

Jews as rather a bit weird, a beer or two short of a six-pack. The Jew, however, would have certainly found the comparison insulting to the extreme: not only was this figure a goy, a heathen dog, but he was raising pigs. Saying that he was like a swineherd is offensive in much the same way it would be offensive to tell a UPS delivery driver who is proud of helping the business world and contributing a little to help the economy run smoothly, that that she is like a gang's drug runner because they both deliver packages, whether the packages are productive business documents or street drugs. The Jew would have been more offended by the comparison, but for people who raise flocks of animals, the Jew and Greek would have seen themselves as very different.

But let's compare them to how pigs are raised today, in today's factory farming. Pigs spend almost their entire lives in tiny cells, with an hour of artificial light a day—the rest of the day being surrounded by darkness—constricted in cells too small for them to turn around, deprived of a herd animal's normal contact with other animals from its herd, traumatized not only by sounds but by the unending stench of rotting feces. The workers who treat them come down with atrocious respiratory diseases—and they are exposed to the vile air for a few hours a day instead of 24/7 as the pigs are. I don't believe that feeding animals antibiotics is innately wrong, but with pigs it serves as an inappropriate band-aid for the damage caused by a dungeon—if that is a strong enough word—which is such a toxic environment that feeding the animals constant antibiotics actually makes a marked difference in the number of pigs killed by the life in their dungeon.

If we compare the Jew and the Greek herd-keepers, suddenly they look the same, and some things take on a new significance.

Both allowed their herds to graze at least some of the time. Both allowed their animals to have natural contact with other like animals as part of a herd. Both raised their animals in daylight. Both raise their animals in places that gave them not just room to turn around, but room to move about normally. And now I'd like to ask what the Jewish shepherd (at least) would have thought of the factory farming way of raising (in the example above) pigs. Or, if you prefer, a rabbi.

Do you know how when you step on a tack or stub your toe, you feel tremendous pain, immediately, but if you get in a car accident and really need to go to the emergency room, it takes a while for the pain to register? My suspicion is that kosher slaughter techniques leave an animal unconscious and possibly dead before the pain has had time to register. Even if it is not painless slaughter, the specific rules are motivated by a principle that reduces suffering in a timespan of only a few minutes. And non-kosher slaughter, unless people go out of their way to cause suffering, cannot come anywhere near the suffering which factory farming inflicts on pigs. For that matter, it's not clear how one would go about creating a torment-filled slaughter technique that would come anywhere near the lifelong suffering animals experience in factory farming. My suspicion is that people who are criminally convicted of cruelty to animals (at least in the U.S.) cause nowhere near the suffering before the animal is dead that factory farms do. To the best of my knowledge, Orthodox Judaism has not made rules about how an animal must be treated for its entire life to provide kosher meat, but if the rules were being articulated today, I suspect that the rules would recognize that lifelong torment is more of a problem than failing to kill an animal quickly and with a minimum of pain (as well as pouring its blood out as a reverent recognition

that the life of an animal belongs to the Lord).

Before further discussion about factory farming's evil side, I would like to explain what it has allowed. Raising animals the traditional way is expensive, requiring a lot of land and a lot of manpower. Factory farming—stacking animal cells in warehouse-like fashion and in general treating animals like mere machines—is a way to automate and mechanize the production of both meat and animal products like eggs and cheese. It is a tremendous way to cut corners, and the result is that things that come from animals are drastically reduced in price, drastically cheaper.

It is difficult, at least in the first world, for people to understand that for most of history people have not been vegetarians but neither did they eat meat every day. There have been a few hunter tribes that had a meat-based diet. For most people whose food came from farms, bread or rice has been the staple food. Meat was for special occasions or a seasoning; eating meat every day would seem strange to most people, like ordering lobster every time you feel like a snack, or drinking Champagne with every meal. Meat, being an expensive thing to produce, was something people didn't have as the basis for normal meals. If you are an American adult—and you have not made a conscious choice early in your life to drastically reduce or eliminate meat from your diet—then you have almost certainly eaten much more meat than Jesus did. This does not automatically mean that we shouldn't eat meat ever, or that we should eat meat rarely, but it does suggest that eating meat every day is not really the traditional way of doing things, even if most people were not vegetarians. A lot of people today love lobster and Champagne, but that doesn't mean it's normal in my society to have them every day. It might be telling that the "Our Father" Jesus gave doesn't say, "Give us today our daily meat," but "Give us today

our daily bread." That doesn't mean that we shouldn't eat meat, but it seems not to assume, as people sometimes do, that meat is the main food.

## Three American rules

I'd like to point out something more about American culture. Where I was growing up, I heard that a restaurant, Dragon West, had been closed down for improper use of domestic animals. For those of you who don't have X-ray goggles, "improper use of domestic animals" is an opaque bureaucratic euphemism for the fact that they were serving dogs as food. The reason the restaurant was shut down has to do with the fact that eating dogs is culturally offensive to much of American culture, and there is a reason for that.

There's a rule in America that if you keep a particular type of animal as a pet, you don't eat that kind of animal's meat. The rule is not absolute, and part of it is that most kinds of pets (carnivorous cats, for instance) would make poor livestock, and most kinds of livestock (behemoth bovine, for instance) would be hard to keep in a suburban home. And the rule isn't absolute. Aside from rabbits, people swallow goldfish, although they seem to do that precisely because it crosses a line. But once you acknowledge a jagged border, it's not just true that we happen not to eat the most common pets; many Americans would find the idea of eating a dog or cat to be nauseating. And it's deeply seated enough to close down a restaurant.

You can, at some restaurants I've been to, order fish head curry. That doesn't get a place shut down, but it breaks another

rule. More specifically, it breaks the rule that meat shouldn't give obvious clues that it came from an animal. Fish, which look the least like people, can be sold with their heads on. But unless you go out of your way, chickens are sold without head and feathers, and red meat and pork (which are from non-human mammals) is sold with even fewer clues that it's some of the flesh of a slaughtered animal. Not that a detective couldn't figure it out, but meat is sold in a form that hides where it came from, and people buying or eating beef would probably be grossed out by having a cow's severed head nearby. Surely some of this is for economic reasons, but Americans who eat meat tend not to want to be reminded where it came from.

Lastly, people can be disturbed by the idea of eating certain kinds of "gross" things, things that creep and crawl—eating a tarantula or scorpion would be disturbing. (Interestingly, this rule seems to have a clause that says, "except if it came from the sea," so the tarantula's watery cousin the crab is fair game, as is the scorpion's cousin the lobster.) That observation aside, the animals used to evoke horror in movies are generally not used as food.

My point in this is not to say that we all have rules, or think that only Orthodox Jews and Muslims have dietary rules. Even if the last rule has a strange exception, these rules are not random.

A devout Muslim will not eat pork and a devout Hindu will not eat beef, but the reasons are opposite: to the Muslim, a pig is an abomination, while to the Hindu, the god Shiva's steed is a cow, and it would be an affront to Shiva to kill his steed for food. So we have abstinence out of disrespect and out of respect.

In the last rule I gave, "Thou shalt not eat anything creepy," is an abstinence out of disrespect: spiders and lizards are dirty

things that aren't clean enough to eat. But neither of the first two rules is like this. The rules against eating animals that could be used as pets, and meat that looks too much like it came from an animal, are not rules of disrespect but rules of "Don't remind me that an animal was killed for this." The average suburbanite would rather be fed by meat from a kind of animal he has never interacted with closely—i.e. a cow—than think, "This came from a dog like the one I had growing up."

This adds some complexity to the picture of "America is a place where people eat lots of meat and that's that." It suggests that, even if we eat lots of meat, there is something residual, a reticence that tries not to know that meat comes from slaughtered animals. (That is even without adding any knowledge of what it means for livestock to be raised under factory farming, which in my mind far outweighs the slaughter itself.)

## Two things animal rights activists won't tell you

Not all meat is created equal.

I had a bear of a time learning what specific conditions animals are raised under. Animal rights activists tend to want to treat animals as people, and only tell about what is inhumane, never what is humane, and so they will never tell you that beef cattle are raised under much nicer conditions than pigs. The people involved in factory farming seem not to advertise what they are doing. This makes not the easiest conditions to find out how much cruelty is associated with different things. (Or maybe

I was just looking in the wrong places.)

What I was able to find—or the impression I was able to get—makes for a sort of ascending scale of cruelty, moving from least cruel (no more cruel than traditional animal husbandry) to most cruel. This scale isn't perfect, but it's the one I use.

Before we get on the scale, there is soy milk (which I've found to be available at grocery stores, and the chocolate is easiest to get used to), soy cream cheese, and so on. I still haven't gotten the hang of liking tofu. I've found some other soy substitutes not to taste equivalent, but to taste good enough, and soy is claimed to have a complete protein signature.

At the base of the scale, the purest and most humane end, include ocean caught fish and seafood, and organic and free

range anything. Organic food (which goes a little further than free range food—free range means that livestock can move about, free range, instead of being confined to coffinlike cells) can be found if you look for it at some supermarkets, and can be found at yuppie, granola music listening places like Whole Foods, which stacks exclusively organic produce, is pure as the driven snow, and has prompted a nickname of Whole Paycheck.

Next up the list are beef and mutton. Beef cattle do end up in fattening lots where they have little space, but they spend most of their lives growing up on open grazing land, able to move about, see sunlight, and be part of a herd.

Next up are eggs and dairy products. Because of the moral tenor of factory farming, animals can be treated cruelly even if they're not exactly being raised for their meat, and if you order a cheeseburger, there's more cruelty in the cheese than in the burger. Dairy cattle live much like pigs, although less of their lives (and therefore less cruelty) goes into producing a gallon of milk than a comparable amount of pork.

Last on the list are chicken, pork, turkey, and (the worst) veal. Many people know veal is cruel; pork and chicken are not much better. Chickens have a space roughly equal to a letter-sized paper folded in half, and farmers melt much of their beaks off (this is called "debeaking" by the farmers and the literature) because the living conditions cause so much fighting that the chickens would kill each other if they had their beaks and could peck like normal chickens would.

That is one of two things the animal rights crowd won't tell you. There's one other major thing I found that they don't advertise.

In the Orthodox tradition, part of the story is fasting, which doesn't mean abstaining from all foods and drinking only water,

but usually means abstaining from some foods. The requirement on paper is to essentially go to a vegan diet (shellfish are allowed; oil and alcohol aren't) and avoid most meat and animal products. This is more of a measuring stick than a requirement on paper, and some Orthodox bishops are concerned that new converts do not fast strictly. But, among people that observe fasting, most people go at least a notch or two closer than usual to a vegan diet. A little less than half the year has some fast or other, and the fast can be relaxed to some degree while still being observed. There are seasons of fasting, as well as days of the week.

What I realized in relation to fasting is that I hadn't expected what fasting would really do. Giving up some of my favorite tastes was obvious, and I experienced that. But craving meat and not giving into that craving came up, and I don't know that I consciously expected that, but it didn't surprise me. What did surprise me was consciousness, or more properly the effect it had on my consciousness.

Fasting quiets sinful habits and makes it easier to fight them. But at the same time, it drains energy and puts your mind in a fog. I have reason to believe that's not the final effect, that your body responds differently over time, but fasting affects different people somewhat differently, and the effect on me is quite strong.

What I realized, that animal rights activists will not tell you, was that the main difference in giving up meat (temporarily or permanently) is not the taste; it's not even really the craving, even if you fight a strong craving. It's consciousness, and when one friend said he was going to cut meat mostly out of his diet as he married his mostly vegetarian fiancée, I strongly urged him to monitor his state of consciousness.

## Why I'm glad I can't eat Splenda

When I eat more than a little Splenda, it makes me sick—nothing life-threatening or anything like that; I don't need a medical alert bracelet. But Splenda doesn't agree with me. If I eat a little, nothing happens. If I eat a bit more than that, I feel mildly sick. If I eat a lot, not only will I feel sick but nature will call with a louder-than-usual voice.

It's a shame, really. Every other artificial sweetener I've tried doesn't taste right; it tastes like something that's meant to taste like sugar, but fails. Splenda tastes like sugar's cousin come in for substitute duty, instead of complete strangers dressed up to vaguely resemble sugar. And I'm not the only person who likes the taste.

Actually, I don't think it's a shame at all. Perhaps it has its downsides: I suddenly can't eat most desserts, because at least where I buy desserts it's hard to find a dessert sweetened with real, honest sugar. If you can't eat Splenda, you can't eat most desserts. And perhaps I will have to turn down more than a tiny serving of some hand-cooked desert made by the friend I am visiting. But there's something to real, honest sugar, and it betrays something about Splenda.

A couple of friends in Kenya sent a newsletter trying to explain to the Western mind that people value a ring of oil as

evidence of a stew's richness, that bread lists its calories as how much energy it provides for hard work, and they underscored that the calorie is a unit of energy. This is a totally different attitude from in the U.S., when calories count as strikes against food.

It is also a healthier attitude, which underscores that food is eaten to nourish the body. Now God, in his generosity, has made it a pleasure as well, but we don't need the pleasure, and we do need the nutrition (i.e. nourishment).

Splenda represents an effort to sever the link between eating and nourishment. It may be physically healthier to eat one ice cream bar sweetened with Splenda than with sugar, but it is not spiritually healthier, and there may be hidden consequences to the message, "I can eat and eat and not get fat." Not only is that bad for the spirit, in that it causes you to fall short of the full stature of being human. If you think about it, it may end up being bad for the waistline.

Splenda is, in short, a very attractive invitation to become a moral eunuch.

In contrast to this, I remember a plaque with a picture of a pig, which said, "Eat to live. Don't live to eat." It is the same mindset as Richard Foster saying (I think quoting someone), "Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need." Maybe he was talking about clothes, but it applies to foods too.

## A private response

I try to eat animal products and meat, as much as are necessary for me be able to function. Unfortunately, I've found that I need a lot to function, partly for medical reasons. When I am receiving hospitality, I eat freely from what is offered to me; when I buy food, I buy a lot of beef, tuna, and chocolate soy milk. I try to get the minimum I need to function, and to take as much as I can from the lowest end of the cruelty scale. (I try. Sometimes I eat more than I need.) I also try to avoid wasting food and really try to avoid wasting meat—if it bothers me to see a pig raised in cruelty so I can eat a pork chop, it would be even worse for that pork chop to be thrown into the trash.

But there's something wrong with that. I don't mean that I chose the wrong private response to this dilemma. I think that as far as private responses go, it's at least tolerable. Perhaps other people have chosen different responses, and maybe it could be better, but the problem is that it is a private response in the first place.

PETA, officially "People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals" and labelled by some as "People Eating Tasty Animals," tend to be the sort of people Rush Limbaugh would have lampooned when he wanted to give the impression that all liberals were crackpots. They made a gruesome TV commercial telling children to run from their fisherman fathers, apparently for

much the same reason you'd run from a serial killer. They've probably done quite a lot that will prevent moderates and conservatives from taking animal welfare concerns seriously. But there is one area in which they are perfectly rational.

If, as they believe, meat is literally murder, and if, as they believe, imprisoning animals under lifelong conditions of misery is morally equivalent to imprisoning humans under lifelong conditions of misery, then it is entirely inappropriate to say "I'll privately choose to be a vegan and you can privately eat your meat, and we can disagree without being disagreeable."

Whatever else they may have wrong, what they have right is that society's default placement for the matter, of private decisions where people exercise their own private judgment on what if any dietary restrictions it may be. If they are completely wrong, and there is nothing wrong with veal, then maybe they have a private right to eat as if their erroneous beliefs are true, but if substantial parts of their claims are true, even the claims I have made, then there are real problems with the way American culture frames it.

I think I'm going to have to leave this approach "depricated without replacement"; I don't see anything better that could believably replace it.

## **An animal lover**

I've been told I'm good with animals. I certainly love pets, other peoples' as well as my own: when I visit certain friends, I usually have a pet on my lap.

There was one point when a friend was moving into the area, and (for reasons I don't understand) asked me to stay with her dog, who was afraid of men. (Even though there were women in the group of friends who had come to help her.) At the beginning, it was very clear that the dog was nervous about being at the other end of a leash from me. But after half an hour, the dog's head was in my lap as I petted him, and when the group came, he was jumping up and down and wanted to meet the men as well as the women in the group. Part of what happened was because I knew how to approach slowly and let an animal get used to me, but part of it was probably something else.

That is probably the most exotic, or at least most impressive, story I can muster about my being good with animals. If I visit friends with pets, I usually ask to see the pets. And I believe my family's warm atmosphere is part of why our cat is nineteen years old and still catches mice. This is not to say that we love our cat more than one friend, whose dog was hit by a car, or another friend, whose dog died of cancer. But it is to say that she might not have lived nearly so long if we merely gave her food and water, and that when she was attacked and was found

curled up and not moving, she desperately needed a vet's attention, but I'm not sure she would have pulled through if she didn't have the love and prayers she received. (As it is, we are delighted that she pulled through and is back to being her old sweet self.)

When I left to study, I moved to an apartment where pets were not allowed—not dogs, not goldfish. (And even if they were allowed, I wouldn't want to buy a pet that I wasn't reasonably confident I could care for properly with vacations, moves, etc. I wouldn't want to put a pet to sleep because it was no longer convenient to me.) So, I thought, I knew the perfect creative solution. I would buy a Furby—a furry stuffed animal that talks and moves, due to the technology inside. (In other words, a pet that wouldn't make messes or upset the powers that be.)

So I tried to convince myself that I could enjoy it as a pet, and for a while I thought I was successful: the Furby spoke its own language, and I learned a few words, being fond of languages. It would respond to my commands at least some of the time. The perfect pet for my situation... and it took a while before I acknowledged that there was something creepy about it. It wasn't creepy when it just stood there, looking like a stuffed animal and adding color to my room. But when it opened and closed its eyes, the technology seemed different from what I was expected. It almost seemed like the unnatural un-life of a vampire. I knew, of course, that it would run according to technology, and having done a master's thesis about artificial intelligence running into a brick wall, I knew that it wouldn't be truly intelligent. Yet I didn't count on the creep effect. Now the Furby stands as a decoration in my room, one I like looking at.

But it isn't really to conserve battery power that I don't activate it very often. I recognize it as an impressive technical

achievement, but not as a pet.

There's a spark of something that is there in a real animal that isn't there in a robot dressed in a stuffed animal costume, and it was driven home to me when I tried to pretend that it didn't make a difference. There is something special about existing, and there is something more special about living as a plant does, and something about the moving force that is an animal. Something that I can enjoy when I am with pets.

What is the point of this? Am I saying that being an animal lover is an obligation? No. I do not believe that the minimum acceptable requirement is being an animal lover. I don't think there is any moral imperative to learn how to deal with animals or have the faintest desire for a pet. But I would say that it is part of the spectrum of things that are acceptable. Not everyone needs to be a big animal lover, but it is an appropriate exercise of freedom. Not everyone needs to be a wine aficionado, but it makes sense to savor subtle differences in flavor and aroma for good wines that doesn't make sense with Mountain Dew. Slowly savoring a tiny taste of different years of Mouton Cadet rouge is not incongruous; slowly savoring a tiny taste of different years of Mountain Dew is absurd. It might me good for making a delightful lampoon of wine snobs, but Mountain Dew does not merit a treatment ordinarily reserved for wine. For the same reason, there is something that fits about luxuriating on a waterbed that does not fit about trying to luxuriate and savor a sleeping bag on a hard floor. There is no moral obligation to seek out a waterbed or even a bed, but there's a difference between a waterbed and a floor. Similar things could be said about painting with oil paints versus trying to paint with SAE 10W-40 motor oil. There's something there to animals that means that they make much better pets than shampoo bottles, so that being

an animal lover is a fitting response whether or not it is a moral obligation. And that "something there" is present whether or not you are an animal lover.

There's something there. The "something there" of animals undergirds the possibility of people enjoying pets as some of us do, a "something there" that is not human and is less than humanity, but is something more than almost anything else in nature. There is also "something more" than machinery, and while there are not ethical problems about cruelty in how we treat machinery, there is a dimension to a farm animal that isn't there for economic assets in general. That means that there are ethical concerns surrounding meat and animal products even after some of us acknowledge that God has given us authority to slaughter his creatures.

Animal rights activists tend to think animal rights means treating animal rights as human. When people have treated me as human, they have given me a bedroom and made other rooms available. They have spent time with me, and made good food available—not raw unless there was good reason to serve it raw. They have given me Christmas presents and a million other signs of respect that animals do not merit. If I looked at things in terms of rights (**I don't**), I would draw a much narrower and much more modest list of rights for animals: being part of a herd, moving about out doors, seeing sunlight during the day, and so on. Nothing about beds and cooked foods, but treated like an animal, which is much less than being treated as human, but it's also different from being treated like a mere piece of machinery.

This leaves loose ends untied. I haven't explained why the breeding that went into the breed of 96% of turkeys sold in America (which causes an ungodly amount of meat to grow on a

skeleton and beast that really aren't built to carry anywhere near that much weight—imagine the frame of a compact car supporting the bulk and weight of a full-fledged SUV) is cruel, and the breeding of housecats (which also introduces profound changes that some animal rights activists call out-and-out cruel) is appropriate stewardship with regard to God's creation. And this article is dense enough without exploring all of those.

Environmentally conscious readers may not be pleased to note that my ranking of cruelty encourages people to buy foods that have some of the worst environmental footprint—a pound of beef is said to require 4000 gallons of our scarce water. You can make meat with less impact on the environment if you are willing to cut corners, not only economically but morally. But I would argue that cruelty concerns are heavier than even environmental. And those are presumably not the only loose ends I've left. But there are a couple of points I would like to underscore.

First, thinking in terms of "raw material" is inappropriate. Destruction may be justified, but if so it is justified destruction of items that have something to them besides what economic use we might be able to find. The whole system of factory farming treats animals as mere economic assets who cannot suffer or whose suffering is not as important as making the most money.

That causes terrible, usually lifelong suffering. Cruelty to animals matters.

Second, cause as much cruelty as you need to, but not more. Try to have the lightest footprint that doesn't cause trouble to you—trouble meaning something more than "A cheese and bacon omelet would really hit the spot." (In my case trouble meant difficulty concentrating on my studies, and since then I've learned what my body can handle.) Eat to live. Don't live to eat. Remember that not all foods are created equal. Aside from soy,

organic animal products and meat, and sea-caught fish and seafood are by far the least cruel; beef is more cruel than these, but less cruel than animal products like milk, cheese, and eggs; dairy and other animal products are less cruel than most meats, including turkey, pork, chicken, and especially veal. If you are eating meat because it tastes good and not because your body needs its nutrition and energy, that is unnecessary.

Third, caring about the living conditions of farm animals has been framed as a liberal thing. That may be because there's a problem which arose, and liberals have been better at waking up to something conservatives should have been noticing. If you are dubious of my credentials as a conservative, I invite you to read [Our Food from God](#), published in a Christian journal that argues long and hard against even the more moderate forms of feminism. It's not just liberals who have a strong moral ground to criticize factory farming. It's just that liberals have been quicker to wake up and say, "Houston, we have a problem."

Seeing animals only as financial assets whose suffering is not important, instead of God's treasures which may be judiciously destroyed but have value independent of their economic usefulness, is the same basic error as seeing a person in terms of financial worth. The error is more grievous in seeing a person in terms of money, but that same basic error—as opposed to keeping a light footprint and trying to keep to justified destruction—has caused terrible animal suffering. Consider ways in which you might limit suffering you cause, and consider emailing a friend a link to [cjshayward.com/meat/](http://cjshayward.com/meat/). And maybe visit the store locator for [Whole Paycheck, er, Whole Foods](#).

# Memory and Prayer

**Note to people searching for "please pray for me right now":** I pray for all of my visitors each day. I am already praying for you. Please [send me an email](#), if you like, so I can pray for you more specifically.

I'll explain that in just a moment. Before I explain what it is, I want to explain why it is here. That is something deeply connected with prayer.

For much of my life, I have irregularly prayed one simple prayer. What is it? I'll skip the first minute. After the first minute, it goes, "Um, God, let's see... I want to talk with you... um, uh, help me to be a better person... and help my friend's knee to get better... um, uh, I really want to pray more..." It would start whenever I remembered to pray, which was inconsistent, and continue for as long as I could stand praying without anything to say, which wasn't long. Even though I have much experience with this prayer, it's not one I recommend.

If you pray that prayer, I do not want to criticize you for it. What I do want to do is give you a real alternative, so you can pray something else if you want. There is a connection I made which allows me to have an hour of good prayer each night. I'd like to share it with you. There's a little bit of a story.

One time at lunch, my best friend Robin gave me a pen and a piece of paper, and asked me to name twenty items (whatever I wanted) for him to write down. He looked at the paper for about a minute, and then handed it back to me. Then he recited all twenty items. Then backwards. Then he invited me to quiz him. If I gave a number, he gave the corresponding item. If I gave an item, he told me its number.

He explained that he was reading a book of powerful ways to apply a simple memory technique. That particular book wasn't magical; any of several others would have worked just as well, but there is useful memory technique that isn't taught as widely here as it has been. Later, I asked for the title, and read the book. I stopped partway through, but the portion I read and acted on was very useful.

When I go to a library, I no longer need to write call numbers down. It's quite a convenience not to have to hunt for pencils and paper. It's nice, when I'm falling asleep and remember something for tomorrow, to know I can remember in the morning without writing it down. I've learned to read Latin in a month, which may help me get into a good graduate school.

Before I go further, I want to address one concern a friend raised. In essence, she said, "You can use this, but you're brilliant. Will it work for the rest of us?" The answer to that is a resounding yes.

This works on the same principle as material that is taught in special education so mentally retarded students can helpfully interact with the rest of us. It doesn't require an abstract mind because it works very concretely, and I had to work a little harder to use them than most other people would. You don't need to think like me to use it; it works for all kinds of people.

There's a way of linking two things together, called pegging:

you have some pegs that you can hang things on. To do that, you represent each one with an image, and imagine some vivid, ludicrous, surreal, dreamlike image combining those two. Suppose that you want to peg the word 'transcribe' to your toes. How can you do that?

Remember when you were a child, and played with rebuses. You see an image of a hat next to several ones. Does it make any sense? At once! Or, more properly, you looked at it a little while, and then realized that "hat ones" sounds almost the same as "At once!" And you solved the rebus.

I want you, after reading this, to close your eyes and imagine something. We're going to break down the word 'transcribe' into 'train' and 'scribe'. To put them together, imagine that there's a commuter train rushing by, and on top of it is a giant scribe, sitting so he straddles the train, writing great, flaming letters on top of the train. He starts at the front, and slides back until he falls off the last car. Close your eyes and imagine for a moment; that's the representation of 'transcribe'.

Now imagine that your big toenail is a tunnel, like a train's tunnel into the mountain, and imagine that just after the scribe falls off the train, it vanishes into that hole. Imagine it vividly.

Or for another example: suppose you need cucumbers for your kid's project, and want to remember them when you stop by the grocery store. Imagine an inch-long black spike growing out of your heel, pointed down and back. Now imagine you are kicking and puncturing a cucumber with your heel again and again, until the cucumber looks like Swiss cheese—and then you use the spike to cut away one end of the cucumber and hollow it out, and slide the end over the spike so you have a Swiss cheese cucumber peel sticking to your foot.

Now imagine that you also need butter, so you imagine that

you have a stick of butter on your knee, which you are using like an ice skate, kneeling, to move around a giant frying pan.

Think about your toes. What do you remember? Your heel?

Your knees?

That's the basis for pegging. You can use different parts of your body to store things, and now when you think about your toes, you'll remember the train with flaming letters disappearing, and the scribe, and you can solve the rebus to remember the word: transcribe.

I suggest the following list of parts of your body to use as pegs. Stand alone somewhere and say, "One, toes... Two, heel..." aloud while touching that part of your body. I felt sheepish when I did it, but that gives you and me a solid place in memory to put things, and it's well worth it:

1. Toes
2. Heel
3. Ankle
4. Knee
5. Thigh
6. Waist
7. Ribs
8. Spine
9. Fingertips
10. Knuckles
11. Palm
12. Wrist
13. Elbow
14. Shoulder
15. Neck
16. Chin

17. Lips
18. Nose
19. Eyes
20. Ears

Print this page out if you need to. It's worth it. If you'd like a book that explains this more easily, something meant to be doable and practical, I've found [Kevin Trudeau's Mega Memory](#) (available on [audio cassette](#)) to be an excellent introduction. Pick up a copy and give it half an hour a day.

Each day, add to that list one thing to pray for. I knew well enough that prayer was good. I wanted to, but when I found something I wanted to pray for, I forgot it; when I wanted to pray, I could never remember what I had to pray for. You can avoid that. I now have a nice, long list of things to pray for—that God would bless certain people, or that he would make me the sort of person that will make Heaven real to others, or that people around me would sense God's presence, or simply enjoying God's presence myself. I pray for an hour before falling asleep at night. What about waiting? I don't fidget as much; I can use unexpected waits as a time to pray. I count myself much better off that way.

There are other ways as well. Jerry Root, a teacher at Wheaton, mentioned that you can pray for one person when you brush your teeth, another when you turn on a light switch, another when you open a door. When you have a time to pray and have learned to pray for that list, add to it. One day decide what you will pray when you put on your shoes. Add your own list of daily activities. When that's in place, why don't you pray when you see certain things?

The contraption at the beginning of this page is a tool I

created to practice this pegging. You can create a list, commit it to memory, and be quizzed on it. If a twenty item list is too much to start off with, start with three: you can choose how many items are on the list. Add one more each day. Before you know it, you'll be able to handle twenty items. Bookmark this page so you can come back.

I've heard people say a lot of good things about prayer. They've said, for instance, that prayer is not just a celestial vitamin, something good if unpleasant, but a great kindness. They've said it's a privelege to bring requests before the King of Heaven. They've said it's part of how God works with us, and makes us ready to be with him. All of this and more is true; Richard Foster's [Prayer](#) is one of many books if you wonder, "Why do Christians say prayer is good?" I have written this especially for people who want to pray but have trouble praying when they can't remember what to say. Now you can. Thanks to V.V. on Sun's Java forum and all my beta testers.

# On Mentorship

The specific principles which I see as applicable to mentorship are as follows:

- Love is the foundation to all healthy human relationships. The mentoring relationship is first and foremost a human relationship, and will function best if it is a relationship between whole persons built on love and friendship.
- Effective teaching in that context begins, not with the mentor talking, but listening. There are at least three reasons for this:
  - Listening is valuable in and of itself.
  - When a person is listened to, it helps him to trust and open up. This will help the teacher to gain a very important trust in instructing the student.
  - It will give the mentor a basis to connect with the student, and tailor messages to him.
- Beauty is forged in the eye of the beholder. A willing student can be powerfully shaped by a mentor who looks at him and sees him, not merely as he is, but as he will become.
- Effective mentoring is not only teaching of one specific area, but first and foremost a teaching about life. It is teaching of life and wisdom in such a way as to usually take the form of a kind of specific lesson.

- The mentor should approach the relationship as being for the student's benefit, and only incidentally for his own. He should be willing to do things that are difficult for him, and he should be happy for the student's success — even (especially) when the student does better than him, or catches him in error.
- The mentor should not only be concerned with imparting knowledge, but more importantly concerned with helping the student to think and use knowledge effectively.
- The mentor should not be trying to clone himself or make the student an extension of himself. He should try to help the student be the person God created him to be, not who the mentor wants to be or in fantasy would selfishly like him to be.
- The student should not be passive, regarding the mentorship as something which is done to him. He should regard it as a resource to take advantage of in his efforts to actively learn. He should take responsibility on himself for his own progress. He should concentrate on actively listening, and asking intelligent questions. The student should be like Prometheus, looking for every opportunity to steal knowledge from his teacher.
- Both parties should work hard — not asking "Can this work?", but "How will we make this work?" Persistent in making things work, the mentor should none the less vary his methods of explanation, like water flowing down a hill — it will get around obstacles, and it does so by flowing around and through them, which is in turn accomplished by adapting its shape to whatever there is, and thereby slipping around obstacles that would stop a rolling rock.

[N.B. The following segment refers to the following joke/story, recounted in Reader's Digest:

A professor believed that his students were mindlessly copying too much of his lectures instead of thinking and then writing down key points. One day in class, he interrupted his lecture and said, "Stop. I want you to put down your pens and pencils and listen to me.

You are not here to transcribe my lectures. You are here to think first and foremost, and only then to write down the essence of what I am saying. You don't have to write down every word I say verbatim. Now, any questions?"

One student raised her hand. "Yes?" "How do you spell 'verbatim'?"]

- A rare but important part of teaching is shattering limits on the way a person is thinking ("How do you spell 'verbatim'?"). This should never be done lightly or as a first approach, nor should it be done carelessly or insensitively. It needs to be done with the utmost care, and is probably very difficult to do well. That stated, a mentor does a student no service by helping him to write down an hour's worth of requests to stop writing and start thinking.
- Metacognitive thought is important both for mentor and apprentice. The mentor should be thinking about both his own thought and the student's, and when the student isn't hearing what the mentor is saying, the mentor should ask, "How am I thinking? How is he thinking? Why are we not connecting?" — but he should primarily be concerned for the student's thought. The student should be thinking about both people's thought as well — the mentor's, because it is

an example of how an expert thinks, and his own, because if he understands how he is thinking he will be better prepared to transcend his current limits. Both of them should expect the other to periodically have an alien insight to share that won't fit in their present mindsets.

- The mentor should be emotionally intelligent, and be sensitive to the emotions and emotional needs of the student. If the student is not in the right emotional state, learning will be almost impossible. We are not just pure, emotionless minds, and we can be far more effective if we care for emotions and use them then if we act as if emotions were not a serious part of us. If either person is not able to give full attention, a meeting should be either shortened or postponed.
- The mentor, precisely because he is a unique leader, should take the attitude of a servant to the student, just as Jesus washed his disciples' feet.
- The mentor should realize that the lesson he is teaching is first, who he is; second, what he does; third, what he says. The mentor should model an excitement and interest in the material, and focus less on what to think than how to think. He should also model before the student effective human relationships with other people.
- In the beginning especially, the mentor should not deluge the apprentice with information. Assimilating new and foreign information — particularly when you don't have a framework to put things into — is hard, and overloading a student prevents him from learning anything. A mentor should begin by asking questions of the student, trying to understand him better, and only slowly ease into talking about philosophical frameworks and then details of the subject area of the

mentoring.

- The mentor and eventually the student should know not only their cognitive strengths, but at least as importantly their cognitive weaknesses — both those that are part of being human, and those that are specific to a person. Code Complete (referenced below) says that there is a tenfold productivity difference made when programmers use principles and techniques grounded in a respect for cognitive weaknesses.
- The mentor should be an expert in his field, and should also be continuing to learn and do research. Graduation is not the end of learning, but a beginning of a new kind of learning.
- The mentor should help the student to put the day's lessons into practice. The student should be asking the question, "How can I apply this? How can I practice it?" Homework will help the student to learn, although perhaps shouldn't be started until the mentor has earned the student's trust and the student is motivated to use homework assignments to squeeze every last benefit out of time with the mentor.
- The student should be safe and free to make mistakes, for a couple of reasons. First, if he isn't making at least some mistakes, he probably isn't being challenged enough or learning enough new material. Second, a mistake is a tremendous educational opportunity. It provides a unique insight into the student's thought, and therefore should be treasured, grasped, analyzed.
- There is no quick fix. The most effective (and, for that matter, even the fastest) way to get results is to work slowly, patiently, unhurriedly towards achieving mastery. There is often a tradeoff between optimizing for short term and long term effectiveness; patiently working for long term

payoffs will ultimately produce the highest dividends.

I will also mention several books which provide a backdrop to my comments, three that I would strongly recommend and four that I would suggest:

Strongly Recommended:

- The Bible. That has provided the theological and philosophical grounding to my thought as a whole; it gives the structure/meta-structure which I fit the other points into. (This is the most important, but it is not necessary to read cover to cover before beginning anything. Fifteen or thirty minutes a day will add up to a lot if continued for a couple years.) Particularly relevant passages that come to mind are Matthew 5-7 (the Sermon on the Mount), I Cor. 13 (the hymn to love), much of the Johannine writings (esp. John 13-17), and certain areas of Proverbs.
- Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. A classic.
- How to Win Friends and Influence People. Although much of the influence it deals with is persuasive in character, the same principles apply to the kind of influence necessary to effectively mentor.

Suggested:

- Listening, A Practical Approach. Probably one among many books on listening, this deals with an extremely valuable and neglected area of communication.
- Emotional Intelligence. We are not pure minds, and we can cripple ourselves terribly if we do not handle our emotions effectively. If we do, they will help us greatly.
- Code Complete: A Practical Handbook of Software

Construction. In computer science, most of the programming materials talk about how to effectively use computers, taking advantage of their strengths and dealing with their weaknesses, to get a computer to do something. This book talks about how to effectively use your mind, taking advantage of its strengths and dealing with its weaknesses, to get a computer to do something. The kind of thinking involved is applicable far beyond computer science.

- Gandhi's writings. I could mention specific chapters in what I've read, but I will say that there is a general theme of spiritual force instead of physical force, and the spiritual force which he advocates (which helped him to turn bitter enemies into warm friends) has tremendous relevance to mentorship. In *Autobiographical Reflections*, in a chapter entitled "Ahimsa or the way of nonviolence", he comments that when a parent slaps a child, what affects the child is not so much the sting of the slap, as the offended love which lies behind that slap.

# Modus Tollens

## *Meandering Reflections on Life, Faith, and Politics*

### Modus Tollens in Propositional Logic

In the pursuit of knowledge,  
Every day something is added.  
In the practice of the Tao,  
Every day something is dropped.

The Tao Te Ching, 48

$\hat{a}_{\frac{1}{4}} \sim \hat{I}^3 \check{I} \check{Z} \hat{I} \mu \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{4}} \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{4}} \hat{I}^1 \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{4}} i \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{4}} \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{4}} \check{I} \in \hat{I} \mu \hat{I} \gg \hat{I} \check{I} \check{I}, \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{4}} i$   
 $\hat{a}_{\frac{1}{4}} \in \hat{I} \gg \hat{I} \cdot \hat{I}, \hat{I}^1 \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}} \hat{I} \textcircled{R}, \hat{I}^{\circ} \hat{I} \pm \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}} \eta \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}} \diamond \check{I} \in \hat{I} \pm \check{I}, \hat{I} \textcircled{R} \check{I} \diamond \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{4}} \hat{I} \check{I} \check{I} \dots \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}} \diamond$   
 $\hat{I}^3 \hat{I} \mu \check{I} \% \circ \check{I} \diamond \hat{I}^3 \check{I} \textcircled{O} \check{I}, \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{4}} \diamond \check{I} f \check{I}, \hat{I}^1 \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}} \hat{A} \cdot \check{I} \in \hat{a}_{\frac{3}{4}} \eta \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}} \hat{I}^{\circ} \hat{I} \gg \hat{a} \check{I} \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{4}} \hat{I} \pm$   
 $\hat{a}_{\frac{1}{4}} \diamond \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}} \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{4}} \diamond \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{4}} \hat{I} \check{I} \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}} \eta \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{4}} \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}} \check{I} \dagger \hat{I} \check{I} \diamond \hat{I} \check{I} \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}} \hat{I}^{\circ} \hat{I} \pm \check{I} \diamond \check{I} \in \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}}, \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}}$   
 $\hat{I} \pm \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{4}} \check{I} \diamond \hat{I} \mu \hat{I}^1 \hat{I} \pm \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}} \diamond \check{I}, \check{I} \textcircled{O}, \hat{I}^{\circ} \hat{I} \pm \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}} \eta \check{I} \in \hat{a}_{\frac{3}{4}} \eta \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}} \check{I}, \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}},$   
 $\hat{I}^{\circ} \hat{I} \pm \check{I} \diamond \check{I} \in \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}}, \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}} \check{I} \dagger \hat{I} \check{I} \diamond \hat{I} \check{I} \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}} \hat{I}^{\circ} \hat{I} \pm \hat{I}, \hat{I} \pm \hat{I} \check{I} \diamond \hat{I} \mu \hat{I}^1$   
 $\hat{I} \pm \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}} \diamond \check{I}, \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}}, \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{4}} \mu \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}} \hat{I} \pm \hat{I}^{\circ} \hat{I} \pm \check{I} \diamond \check{I} \in \hat{a}_{\frac{1}{2}}, \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}} \check{I} \in \hat{I} \gg \hat{I} \mu \hat{I} \check{I} \check{I} \hat{I}^{\frac{1}{2}} \hat{I} \pm$   
 $\check{I} \dagger \hat{I} \check{I} \diamond \hat{a} \check{I} f.$

I am the true Vine, and my Father is the Vinedresser.

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, He takes away,  
and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may  
bear more fruit.

John 15:2

Tolle, lege.

Take, read.

A child, to the Blessed Augustine

In the steps of logic, interestingly claimed by both the disciplines of mathematics and philosophically (or perhaps, disowned by both disciplines), the proof of any great theorem has something paradoxical. Step by step, you go from one statement to another that is more general and asserts less, until at the end you reach a significant and quite specific conclusion at the end. At each step of the way, there is something you lose and something you give up. But when all the blocks are in places, you have a conclusion that is far more substantial than any of the losses ensued.

Modus tollens, for which this piece is named, is one of two prominent "inference rules" in logic. Modus ponens, the way of adding, powers such syllogisms as, "If all men are mortal and Socrates is a man, then Socrates is mortal." Modus tollens, by contrast, is the way of taking away, and it powers such syllogisms as, "If all men are mortal and the Archangel Michael is not mortal, then the Archangel Michael is not a man." Now symbolic logic does not deal too much in concrete syllogisms; it is often concerned with more abstract pursuits, but these provide at least slightly concrete of an illustration of two of the major workhorses in symbolic logic. And they are not mutually exclusive to use; I may take modus tollens as my point of departure for

this work, but please understand that it would be absurd to say that a logician who agrees with me would stop using modus ponens in proofs and argument.

## Blinding light

When I was young I enjoyed night and darkness, and the beauty that things have once your eyes are accustomed to the night. When driving at night, I loathed headlights: I used them in full accordance with the law, and I was glad that other drivers would see me, but I was painfully aware of something I am much less aware of now: headlights effectively limit my vision to where they are pointing; if I want to look to the side of the road, I see far less than my eyes can see when they are accustomed to darkness. I wrote in [my cynical dictionary](#),

**Flashlight**, n. An instrument of imperception which obscures vision by producing a concentrated glare at one point which is sufficiently intense to prevent the user from seeing anything else. Environmentalists have brought the cleverness of this device one step further by producing the solar powered flashlight.

It was much later that I would learn that as far as core insight goes, I had reinvented a basic building block of ninjutsu. Ninjutsu recognizes that we see optimally in the dark when we have not seen strong light, such as that produced by cars and flashlights, for at least 20-30 minutes (some would prefer longer). The optimal condition from a ninja's perspective is to retain such night-optimized vision, while any opponents would see

bright lights enough to lose that vision. And there are many layers of insight in that basic perspective: a flashlight is not simply, as a naive user would expect, something that lets us see where we could not see. It works in a way that shuts down our natural night vision, the vision that not only ninjas but a million years of our human race had as the only, and best, way to see in the night. If I may put it in these terms, the ninja preference for "natural night vision" should not be seen as a distinguishing feature that sets ninjas apart from other people today, but a retained continuity with the only game in town for well over 99% of the times humans have walked the earth. I don't want to downplay or diminish the achievement represented by the whole suite of ninja stealth skills, but trying to retain one's natural night vision is not so much a matter of "Wow, what insight and skill!" as "They have a clue!"

## A supreme instance of a universal law

In the [Arthurian Torso](#), C.S. Lewis makes a point about vicarious salvation: "He saved others, himself he cannot save," the wicked barb of sarcasm unleashed as Christ hung on the Cross with nails through his wrists and labored breaths piercing his lung, is a definition of the Kingdom. All salvation, everywhere and in every place, is vicarious. Every man may paddle his neighbor's canoe but not his own. And as regards Anselm, who argued that the race of men owed a debt that could only be paid by a man and simultaneously could only be paid by God, so only God made man in Christ could pay the debt, did not describe a fundamental exception that is irrelevant to the workings of the universe, but the supreme instance of a universal law. "He saved others, himself he cannot save" is written lightly in small letters in our lives and deeply engraved on the most monumental scale in Christ, but we participate in what Christ has offered.

I have referenced Western symbolic logic, the Tao Te Ching, and ninjutsu in connection with "Every branch that bears fruit, [the Vinedresser] prunes that it may bear more fruit." But the intent is not syncretistic. It is to point to the supreme instance of a universal law. A ninja instructor teaching stealth, I would imagine, might tell someone eager to use a flashlight, "Let me show you what things look like if you put that flashlight away for

20 or 30 minutes." Robb Wolf, in advocating a neo-Paleo human diet that consists of the same sort of things people ate for a million years before the extremely recent agricultural revolution, says, "Put down that donut. For that matter, put down that organic whole wheat bread, even if it's not modern wheat but spelt. Would you please try eating just the fuel the human body is made to run on?" But this is not with an intent of syncretism to write some hymn that begins praising Christ and melts into praise of Krishna. The universal law is a law that plays out in many places and is recognized in many ways outside of the Church. For that matter, quite a lot of the Church's wealth is to be found outside of its proper boundaries; at one place Chesterton defends the Church against things it is charged with simply by calling on [The Witness of the Heretics](#). The boundaries of the Church may rightly be retained, but the Church found Christians before Christ among the pagans as well as among Israel. And pruning is at one stroke a treasure of God in the Church and something forever to be found across the realms of men, who are in any case made in the image of God.

## The age of the damned backswing and *modus tollens*

The damned backswing is a real phenomenon, but it need not be the last word; every thing that is taken away can be a cutting of the Vinedresser.

Since ninjutsu decided that it is better for a ninja to have real night vision, artificial light, even of fire, was treated as something that would quench natural night vision. But in our time the pure organic light of incandescent bulbs has been progressively phased out in favor of the plastic light of fluorescent bulbs, whose buzzing is a nuisance even to the blind.

There are further steps away from the organic white of incandescent bulbs; LED lights offer a lunar white which is not helpful if you wish to pick out an outfit where the colors fit with each other instead of clashing; lunar white looks white but it provides a greyscale vision with colors barely discernible. (And is there a hint of the future in that lunar white light bulbs have no mercury and take a fraction of a CFL's power draw?) Once conservatives balked at the brightness of new (incandescent) light bulbs, offering vision comparable to sunlight at any time and any place. But the stern hand of a government that believes it knows better than us may be wielded by one who knows better than government. This One who knows better than government

might use the pest of the fluorescent light to draw people to use the day as day and the night as the night. And that may be gain and not loss. We may lose the organic light of incandescent light sources to gain the Organic light of the Sun.

## The many ages of *modus ponens*

Reading, on a doctor's advice, [The Paleo Solution](#) rumbled with a few implications. Probably the biggest change in perspective was that I viewed the New Testament as incredibly ancient, and the Old Testament as even more ancient. [The Paleo Solution](#) suggests that the most profound change in the time humans have been around has been the agricultural revolution, which took place after 99.5% of the time people have been around. While *Genesis* may place nomads alongside builders of cities, *Exodus* fairly clearly assumes the agricultural revolution has taken place. And even on purely secular grounds the New Testament exists in a closer-to-modern era. Historians may note that people in the U.S. made a very conscious technological decision to have roads connecting places. In the time of the New Testament, there were Roman roads which vastly outstrip any transportation technology in the Old Testament, and the spread of the New Testament, which includes letters to diverse cities, was partly affected by the Roman roads.

And all of that is to look without enlightenment at the Old and New Testaments as well-preserved signposts to where we are technologically today. But let us continue without enlightenment for a moment.

## **Plastic for breakfast, lunch, snack, or dinner**

The book [It's Getting Better All the Time](#) could helpfully be placed alongside [Nourishing Traditions](#). The Powells' "Publisher comments" on [It's Getting Better All the Time](#) states:

### **Publisher Comments:**

There has been more material progress in the United States in the 20th Century than in the entire world in all previous centuries combined.

### **Book News Annotation:**

This work by economist Julian L. Simon (d. 1998) was left unfinished at his death but was completed and prepared for publication by his colleague, Stephen Moore. The title states the bias, which is further explicated in the introduction: "...there has been more improvement in the human condition in the past 100 years than in all of the previous centuries combined since man first appeared on the earth." In support, 100 trends pertaining to the health and welfare of, mainly, US inhabitants are presented in graphs, with interpretive text that maintains the "getting better" thrust (and the conservative orientation of the author and the publisher).

Interestingly, Simon's wife injects an alternate view in a brief foreword in which she discusses her reservations about describing the 20th century in the positive terms used in the book, and she tells of her conversations with her husband on the subject. Annotation c. Book News, Inc., Portland, OR (booknews.com)

### **Synopsis:**

There has been more material progress in the United States in the 20th century than in the entire world in all previous centuries combined. Almost every measure of health, wealth, safety, nutrition, affordability and availability of consumer goods and services, environmental quality, and social conditions indicates rapid improvement.

With over 100 four-color figures and tables, this book shatters the myths about progress that are often perpetuated by doomsayers in the media and academia.

[Nourishing Traditions](#) takes the agricultural revolution as a healthy starting point, but it offers something, even to someone following the Paleo diet, that [The Paleo Solution](#) does not. It discusses progress that has been made, and what comes clear is that this is progress from a corporation's perspective, not progress from a human health perspective. Factory farmed milk, for instance, is not the natural health food it is presented to be. Never mind the question of whether milk represents a part of the Paleo diet. Factory farmed milk has such substances as pus mixed in with the milk from the unnatural condition the cows are under, and 2% milk has its skim portion mixed in from powdered skim milk, and on this point [Nourishing Traditions](#) effectively says, "Cholesterol is your friend. Oxidized cholesterol, such as

that produced in powdered skim milk, is your enemy." I remember one time taking the claim that organic food tastes better as one more marketing ploy to justify Whole Paycheck's heavy costs. Then, after a time of eating only organic strawberries when I ate strawberries—out of a dutiful sense that it was better for me—I ate a conventionally farmed strawberry and wondered, "What is this that I have bitten into?" My concern here is only incidentally about pleasure, which really does not help us as much as we think. It is something deeper. If you want a rough, unscientific but accurate gauge of how nourishing fruit is, taste how sweet it is. It's that simple. The taste is not simply a pleasure delivery system; it is also a signal about how nourishing things are for you. And I remember commenting to one parent who was concerned about his children's sweet tooth, "That sweet tooth is a God-given aid. It should be rewarded, not with candy, but with sweet fruit." And candy is as bad as nutritionists say it is, but you'd be amazed how sweet the best organic fruit tastes.

I remember picking up a bottle of Aldi's "Fit and Active" French dressing to read the ingredient list, and stopping at the first ingredient because the first ingredient was corn syrup. This may be progress from a corporation's perspective, to sell a product consisting large of corn syrup as a health food; it is not progress from a health-oriented savvy consumer perspective.

What has happened with all foods where I live, unless you specifically know what you are doing and are looking for exceptions and are willing to pay noticeably more, is that food is manipulated by chemical wizardry much like a plastic replica. It may be obvious to the discerning that "cherry flavored XYZ" does not exactly has the taste of cherries. The reason why this is the case is that if anything is produced on a mass scale, the

engineering process for food finds out what the chemicals are that combine to give a cherry its flavor, and then the cheapest way is found to add these chemicals so that there is a cherry-like taste, but one that heralds none of the health benefits of eating cherries.

And this is, if anything, the subtle objection to [It's Getting Better All the Time](#). It is the objection that moving from something flavored with cherries to something engineered to taste like it was flavored with cherries is a negative amount of progress. The more obvious objection is not to point to plastic-like engineered foods—or plastic-like engineered pop culture—but to say that we are in an unmistakable global financial crisis, and none of the upward trends discussed in the book are enough to take away the quite bleak economic picture in the U.S., which less than twenty years into the third millenium, is quite drastically failing to retain the prosperity and security of the twentieth century heralded in [It's Getting Better All the Time](#). If the twentieth century brought more change than anything before, it may be the change that precedes [the damned backswing](#). I know that there are people who like to put a positive face on things, especially with the current president Barack Obama, but I have yet to see a journalist say that the present employment picture and number of people out of work is better than in the 50's and 80's. As far as journalists go, I have seen the shift from a war in Afghanistan under Bush that was something we should never have gotten into, to one Nobel Peace Prize later, a war in Afghanistan under Obama with vile enemies who cut off the nose and ears of a woman portrayed on the cover of Time Magazine, because she ran away from an abusive husband. Now I have little doubt that the Taliban did all that and worse, but it was doing all that and worse when the war in

Afghanistan was Bush's war. And with the shift from Bush to Obama, significant progress has been made in reduced jobless statistics, with perhaps the exception of your family and those people you know who are trying to find a job. Not that this is all Obama's responsibility, regardless of the charge some people make that he wants to make America into a third world nation.

The U.S. economy would presumably also be in hard times if McCain had won the election, and it was really quite nasty before Obama took office. But [It's Getting Better All the Time](#) champions "change," and President Obama champions "change," and both seem to invite multiple aspects of [the damned backswing](#).

In my early work [The Grinch Who Stole Christmas](#), I wrote a story, not of a Grinch trying to kill Christmas by stealing presents, but of a Grinch trying to kill Christmas by overwhelming it with more presents than people would imagine. It tells a story of taking away by giving, and the real story of the twentieth century may not be the logician's proof that gives away more and more until something substantial is proven, but the opposite story of receiving more and more until true poverty comes, both on a spiritual and on a material level.

## Embracing *modus tollens*

There are many layers to things; there is at least one material layer to the U.S.'s economic condition, and at least one spiritual layer, and the best picture is one that recognizes what is going on materially but recognizes that the outer shell has an inner sanctum and in this struggle *we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*. Politics is important, but even with the best candidates in high political positions the struggle is not about flesh and blood, or about logistics and voting trends. On that score I would quote an Orthodox priest who said, "Whatever happens, I will vote and go to confession."

And in an age of *modus tollens*, Satan is nothing more than a hammer in the hand of God. There are layers to events, but not only a material and a physical layer. St. Joseph's words to his brothers, *As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today*, has more than one dimension, and one dimension is that what Satan means for evil, God means for good. That is the entire point of *God the Spiritual Father* and *God the Game Changer*.

We tend to think of God's Providence in terms of what he gives, but the same Divine Providence that gives also takes away.

St. Job lost all of his possessions and then rid himself of the one outward possession the Devil could still take from him, and said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." He lost massive wealth, but the story in its end is not of the Devil's victory, but of God's victory in St. Job. Perhaps St. Job never on earth knew what we are told from the beginning, that Satan, the Accuser, the Slanderer who stands before God slandering his saints day and night, found no one he considered worthy of temptation and God allowed his property and his health to be taken away, **not** as punishment for his sins, but as a champion who held fast to worshipping God no matter what happened to him. By the end of the book, the Devil is made ridiculous and is all but pushed out of the picture; his slanders against St. Job were just that, slander. God changes the game in speaking out of the whirlwind, but the St. Job who lost everything is the St. Job who gained a place standing before the throne of God in glory. God wins, and God wins in and through St. Job.

St. Paul writes of "want" or lacking things, **Not that I complain of want; for I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me.** The Providence of God is not only in what we think we need; it also comes with *modus tollens*, when God takes away what we think we need. St. Paul elsewhere says, **There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content.** That's a much shorter list of what we consider

essentials even for the poor; those who give of their own to care for the poor would generally like to see the poor have housing, for instance, with heating and air conditioning. The general list of things one may have around the poverty line are much longer than "but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content." And some of our luxuries are less edifying than they may seem to us; in some sense the Providence of *modus tollens* may be God taking away a bottle of wine and saying, "You've had enough."

## The prophetic word

In Malaysia, one cartoon portrayed Americans at a lavish banquet with half-eaten plates of food set aside casually, while a television showed an emaciated child holding out a hand to give. And where America stands now is a place which the prophetic voice has much to speak to. (Note that by saying this I am not claiming to be a prophet; merely restating what the prophets would have said based on what is on the public record.) We encourage, foster, and nourish narcissism, with each generation more proud than the last. We use our money for ourselves when we could give much more to the poor. We have a number of abortions that exceeds the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust, not to mention embryonic stem cell research. We have the Internet as a porn delivery service, so that a basic household utility now includes unsolicited pornography. We have accepted sodomy as normal, as an alternate lifestyle that others rarely speak out against. It is considered normal for a Christian to practice (Hindu-derived) yoga, and such things as alchemy (celebrated in a patchwork quilt at the American Medical Association headquarters) and Freemasonry increasingly come out, too. Any one of these things would be grave enough; taken together they represent a fall off a moral cliff. And it is old news at best that we patronize sweatshops and otherwise enjoy comfort at the expense of preventable human misery. And God

does not let such things slide forever; he gives opportunities to repent, perhaps, and then judgment so that under an iron hand people may learn what they refused to learn by the law of grace.

Perhaps, or perhaps not, "[E]ven if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness, says the Lord GOD... Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, as I live, says the Lord GOD, they would deliver neither son nor daughter; they would deliver but their own lives by their righteousness." applies to our situation.

The righteous may be saved by their faith in any case. "The righteous shall live by faith" is originally a quote from the Old Testament when God's judgment was about to be unleashed.

In any case, after we have gone apostate under *modus ponens*, it looks as if we shall experience the refining fire of *modus tollens*, of God providing as he chastises. Not that Barack Obama is devoted to doing the Lord's will; Buckley's quote, "I would rather be governed by the first two thousand people in the Boston telephone directory than by the two thousand people on the factory at Harvard University," applies in full force, and if you say that it seems an extremely uncharitable reading, and unreal, to say that Barack Obama wishes to make the U.S. a third world nation, I would say that you do not understand Harvard Ph.D.'s. Wishing the U.S. were a third world nation is nothing strange for a graduate of Harvard. When he announced that health plans could no longer discriminate on the basis of pre-existing conditions, my first thought was, "He is banking on the premise that Americans can't do basic math." Speaking as someone who has worked briefly in the insurance industry, one of the basic rules if you are going to run a profitable insurance business is that you exclude bad risks: if you are an auto insurer, you want people who have few accidents, if any, on their record,

and not daredevils with a stream of one accident after another.

And you charge less for people with a squeaky-clean driving record than you do to someone who you're willing to take on but has a few accidents. It may be a wonderful thing in the short term for people with pre-existing conditions to now be able to get coverage, but unless insurance is going to cost vastly more, it cuts away the ability of non-government insurers to do business —as has already started to happen. Fewer businesses are offering health insurance plans.

But this is almost a side point, a distraction. Let us assume the worst, that the President holds no love for America and is re-elected at the next election. The same rules apply.

## Tools of God

C.S. Lewis said that all do the will of God, Satan and Judas as instruments, Peter and John as sons. And it is a fundamental mistake to think that Barack Obama is too bad to be an instrument of the Lord's action. No one, not Satan, is too bad to do the will of God. I'm not sure how to put this delicately, but it is not at all clear to me that it is to the U.S.'s edifying benefit to be a first world nation. Some have said that across history powerful nations have played the role of gangsters and weaker nations have played the role of prostitutes. In [The Last Battle](#), enemies push true Narnians to a stable said to be devoted to the demon-god Tash, and we read:

"I feel in my bones," said Poggin, "that we shall all, one by one, pass through that door before morn. I can think of a hundred deaths I would rather have died."

"It is indeed a grim door," said Tirian. "It is more like a mouth."

"Oh, can't we do anything to stop it?" said Jill in a shaken voice.

"Nay, fair friend," said Jewel, nosing her gently. "It may be for us the door to Aslan's country and we shall sup at his table tonight."

Jewel spoke only a guess, but none the less spoke words of

truth. It is through that door they meet Heaven, and God's providence will not be thwarted by leaders who are questionable in their pursuit of goodness. God's providence is not just for when we have good presidents; it is equally true if we have not-so-good presidents. It has been twice or thrice that modern medicine saved my life, first-world medicine that I doubt I could afford if the present economy worsens and worsens and worsens. But this will not be responsible for my death: all of us die, save one or two like Elijah; mortality is total in every generation. My death may be sooner if good medicine is denied me, but it is inevitable by some means, and as one Orthodox priest said, "There's nothing that goes wrong in Orthodoxy that a funeral cannot solve." We will be judged by how we live with the hands we have been dealt, not whether we could have been dealt a better hand, or rather a hand that was more to our liking.

**Everything that happens is  
either a blessing from  
God, or a temptation that  
has been allowed for our  
strengthening**

Still God reigns sovereign. Still he rules. Persecutions may come, but only if God allows it, and only the degree that he allows. Persecutions have been one of many ways God has strengthened the Church, and the normal condition of Orthodoxy is to live under hardship, with such things as fasting and voluntary self-deprivation existing as surrogate hardships. And if God's Providence comes by taking away one thing we think we need, this is not a failure of his Providence but as much a success of his Providence as when he answers our prayers. We may lose artificial light and find our true night vision. All of this is a Providence that whispers in the way of adding, *modus ponens*, and shouts in the way of taking away, *modus tollens*.

It has been said, "Whatever you focus on, that is your God." We are not to focus our attention on the demons; the [?Ladder?](#) says that the proper use of arrogance is towards the demons. Focus on God, and the demons themselves will be ministers of trials and temptations that make you stronger in the sight of God. And while I intend to vote, in one of the most monumental

elections in U.S. history, it is a mistake to believe that God will only provide if the election goes as I would wish it to; God's providential love is not so fragile, nor near to being so fragile.

**God the Spiritual Father ever provides, is ever loving,  
ever Light.**

# **Monasticism for Protestants**

## Alice in Wonderland

I was given a copy of [Singled Out: Why Celibacy Must Be Reinvented in Today's Church](#). I've read some but not all of it, and I've read the introduction in full. I really have more to say than that the Orthodox tacit response to hearing an Evangelical say, "I've been reading the Fathers" when they have only been reading the Blessed Augustine is, "Ouch!" Saint as he may be, the Blessed Augustine is not any kind of legitimate polestar for navigating the Fathers, and when [Singled Out](#) deals with a Tertullian who fell into heresy and gave Augustine a singularly bad precedent, the best thing to say to Evangelicals is, "You do not understand monasticism as it exists in the Orthodox Church." Possibly parts of the book I didn't get to start to bring in quotes from the Orthodox Church's Greek Fathers, but I have not found such a passage and it certainly doesn't set the stage. Alan Perlis said something entirely relevant to Protestants who wish to understand Orthodox monasticism: "The best book about programming for the layman is [Alice in Wonderland](#), but that's just because the best book about anything for the layman is [Alice in Wonderland](#)." And the best book for Evangelicals on Orthodox monasticism is decidedly [Alice in Wonderland](#).

I wish to state briefly, and without explanation, that the first step in understanding Orthodox monasticism is understanding it is nothing Protestants can project. One routine

moment in a conversation with a respected parishioner, informally called "the godfather of us all" within the parish, came when he had said he wanted to understand Orthodoxy and asked an Orthodox Christian what books to read, was told, "You don't understand Orthodoxy by reading books. You understand Orthodoxy by participating in the services." And if the Orthodoxy of the parish is not something to analyze, it is all the more confusing to understand monastic Fathers without even being Orthodox. Regarding sexuality, for instance, monasticism knows as well as anything else that sex is a powerful impulse, and it has powerful built-in features intended, ultimately, to transform carnal desire into a desire for God. Part of this is an extreme caution in monks' dealings with women, but the same caution is present in the (admittedly less numerous) warnings by Mothers for nuns dealing with men. One nineteenth-century Russian monk compared the Christian living in the world to a wildflower, with the monastic (male or female) compared to a flower that needs to be in a "hothouse" (i.e. a heavily curated greenhouse) to flourish. Marriage is a good and honorable thing, but it's not just marriage where sexuality serves a legitimate purpose. Monasticism does not provide a track where sexual impulses become simply absent or unimportant; it provides a track where sexual impulses are to be one of several areas where the human is transformed according to divine glory.

## A theology of failure

My first real point about [Singled Out](#) is that is that the introduction does not call for a new theology of celibacy. It calls for an old theology of failure.

Let me take an instance with St. Paul, and for the moment ignore his celibacy completely, which is not my point here. His accomplishments include raising the dead, planting numerous churches, and writing half the volumes of the New Testament. Sometimes people speak of someone having nothing left to prove; on human terms his accomplishments are about as stellar as mortal Christian has achieved. When he wrote 2 Timothy in particular, and knew that his end was near, he had about as much claim as anybody in Christian history to say, "I came. I saw. I conquered." But what he instead says is "I have fought the good fight. I have run the race. I have kept the faith." These words do not bear a whisper of saying, "I achieved." They say instead, "I was faithful."

Saints on the whole are faithful and are not affected terribly differently by success and failure, and this is normative. If we look at school sports, there is a momentous spiritual edifice of sportsmanship, however imperfectly applied: "It's not whether you win or lose; it's how you play the game." Now teams of athletes who have to give a game their best their best may end up winning remarkably often, but this is not a best strategy of

winning. It is a best strategy **above** winning.

Saints seem to exhibit something like sportsmanship in that they are concerned about being faithful rather than succeeding or failing. This adds a certain tint to the whole moral atmosphere, and saints, which one tries to tell even in a work from the Anabaptist tradition like [Martyr's Mirror](#), show in the living color of story what a holy life looks like. "Every Christian must bear his cross," and this applies to successes and failures alike. Marriage is meant to be blessed by as many children as God is generous enough to give, and childlessness is a curse. Some have said that marriage is not an institution for children to grow up in, but an institution for parents to grow up in. To those who are married with children, the children should be a joy, but raising them is the cross by which parents are to be saved. However, God does not always give this blessing, and to parents who want to welcome children but are not able to do so, childlessness is itself a cross by which the parents to be saved. Lastly for now, I would suggest that if there are people who endorse marriage is normal, and want to be married but end up always a bridesmaid but never a bride, lack of marriage is itself a saving cross. Disrespect for marriage is a sin, and the career path of monasticism provides a practical and valuable resource, not just to monastics themselves, but also to devout Orthodox families who tend to visit monasteries. But if, as described in [Singled Out](#) authors grew up hoping for marriage and their dreams did not come true, what is needed is not a new theology of celibacy but an old theology of failure and the crosses by which we are saved. And so far as I can tell, the authors are entirely innocent of contact with Orthodox monasticism.

I am trying to get to Mount Athos and become a member of a respected monastic community. However, I am not obligated to

succeed in connecting with any of the monasteries on the planned pilgrimage. I am furthermore not obligated to succeed in being able to pay for the trip. I am trying, and under the conditions I feel fully obligated to give it my best, but I am not obligated to succeed. (**Willing to make a donation?**)

Here we are still on the outside porch of Orthodox monasticism, and not on the inside. But I would suggest that the Orthodox understanding of monasticism provides a robust and excellent old theology of celibacy, and also that "every Christian must bear his cross" and the old theology of failure have every relevance to those who seek marriage but do not arrive at it.

## Looking at *Stranger in a Strange Land* as an old Western idol

Robert A. Heinlein's cult classic *Stranger in a Strange Land*, a book which was published in 1961, inspired many flower children, and has never gone out of print, is a Western book, and Western in a sense in which most Western Christians legitimately disavow.

Early on in the book when Heinlein is loosening up his readers' boundaries, Heinlein has the hero and heroine basically naked together in the strictest innocence and for entirely legitimate reasons, and the reader is invited to judge the cop who has a dirty mind because of what he reads into them being naked together. When the cop needlessly strikes the heroine, the hero kills him with psychic powers, but only after Heinlein assures us that the cop did not strike her as hard as he used to hit his wife.

The episode serves as a sort of gateway drug en route to a Utopianism in which promiscuity is fãted, and for the only time I've seen in literature being raped is a helpful and invigorating experience, and while Heinlein grinds the most massive axe against firearms for no explained reason, killing (and cannibalism) become even more casual than promiscuity. Charles Manson, a serial killer who viewed murder as just a habit like smoking a cigarette, denied having read the title at all, although the book's influence was in some circles ubiquitous, and one of Manson's own

children bore the hero's first, middle, and last name, "Michael Valentine Smith." All of this makes for a singular profile even as far as Utopias go.

While Heinlein eagerly rips marriage to shreds, there is a covenant (although not called by that name) of "water brotherhood", which is some combination of reinventing marriage, only dumber, and reinventing the Church, only dumber. The "Thou art God!" epiphany Michael shares with the fatherly Jubal and the joke about one worm saying to another, "Will you marry me?" and the other saying, "Marry you? I'm your back end!" are reinventing Hinduism, only dumber. While certain aspects of the book show Heinlein has apparently "taken inspiration" from Hinduism, in the sense a web designer might use as a euphemism from outright theft of their intellectual property, Hinduism itself is deeper than a whale can dive. Now I am not endorsing Hinduism but I recall, if nothing else, words which I thought came from G.K. Chesterton but cannot now trace, that if you are considering world religions, you will save yourself a great deal of time by exploring just Christianity and Hinduism: Islam is just a Christian heresy and Buddhism is just a Hindu heresy. And really, it's not just Hinduism that offers a more interesting theology than Heinlein. Buddhism and Taoism are themselves more interesting than Heinlein's sporadically cherry-picking bits of Hinduism. (And it might at least be helpful to place, "Thou art nothing!" alongside "Thou art God!") I recall one class at Fordham where the professor spoke of speaking with a Hindu scholar (I think he mentioned lots of wine having been consumed), and the professor saying that he was perfectly happy with God being incarnate in Christ, but why only one? (The great teachers in the Western understanding, plus perhaps various mythological figures, are held in Hinduism to be Avatars

in which God / gods came down in human semblance; there are points of contact with Incarnation, although those interested in theological exactness might note that the conception of an Avatar is not that of Incarnation but of the kind of Docetism which sees Christ as human only in a deceptive appearance, the Divine Nature being incapable of being made man.) But let me return to incarnation in a moment.

And finally on the point of this Utopian novel, what [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) offers is a Gospel, but only a Gospel made dumber. One Christian editor, in personal conversation, talked about choosing the name for an article. Editors often do this better than authors, by the way. The title amounted to "Maximum Christology," which asserted that the findings of the Christological Councils are in every way those of a [Maximum Christ](#): maximally God, maximally human, maximally united, with the divine and human natures maximally distinguished. And some of these heroes are of a sub-maximum Christ figure. As I said in [an overly long and complex homily](#) in [The Sign of the Grail](#), the figure of Merlin, if pushed to absolute fullness and depth, becomes the figure of Christ. The same is true of the hero, Michael Valentine Smith. No matter what attacks Heinlein places on Christianity and the morals he falsely assumes to be distinctly Christian (by the way, Christianity is in general much more comfortable about legitimately acceptable touch than Hinduism: if you want touch in Hinduism, [Kali's Child](#) comes highly recommended; Kali is a demon-goddess who wears a necklace of skulls and madness is the special blessing she bestows), Heinlein's debt to the Gospel is incalculably greater than his debt to Hinduism. Even the hero's martyrdom owes its debt to Christianity; the Bhagavad-Gita may have Sri Krishna exhorting Arjuna the Conqueror of Sloth to enter a battle and strike those

doomed to death; I am out of my depth as far as interpretation of the Bhagavad-Gita goes but martyrdom is celebrated neither on the part of divine charioteer nor human noble, even if some commentators (like Gandhi) held martyrdom in the most profound respect. There is no sense I get that either charioteer or ruler gave his life as a ransom for many, nor that martyrdom is the noblest death to die, nor, so far as I know, planted a Church that we marked by referring to years as AD and BC in its infinite shadow. The whole story is the Gospel made dumber, a point I tried to argue in [Looking at Stranger in a Strange Land as a Modern Christological Heresy](#).

But there is one point of redeeming virtue. Michael, the hero, says, **"Happiness is a matter of functioning the way a human being is organized to function... but the words in English are a mere tautology, empty. In Martian they are a complete set of working instructions."** And in fact we have such a complete working instructions in monasticism. Now I would like to underscore that marriage is a sacrament and the normal choice it is expected that most Orthodox will follow; I will not extol marriage at length but it is worth extolling, as in [this beautiful video about Saints Peter and Fevronia \(with English subtitles\)](#).

## Beggars and the divine

There was one point where I was hospitalized with, among others, a woman (a former ballerina, but that's beside the point), bordering on homelessness. I wondered, "Is there any way I can lighten this cross?" and in fact there was, and I did so when closing out the visit. Part of the difficulty was that she needed to keep track of numerous mostly small items, and that is difficult when homeless. I had an item now not available new, a geeky messenger bag, which was then cheap, easily replaceable, and like nothing else I've found anywhere near the price point.

And it had both large capacity and multiple compartments.

Before I gave it to her our dealings were polite if distant; we never connected interpersonally. And after her warm thanks, our dealings remained polite if distant; while I struck up a friendship with another guy, she and I never clicked as friends, let alone something romantic. And I really think neither of us was obligated to any friendship.

Then why the gift?

To put things in melodramatic terms, none of us goes to sleep knowing we will wake up. Were I to fall asleep that night in time and wake up in eternity, I would have greatly preferred the bag to be in her possession than mine.

If that sounds melodramatic, read to this apocalyptic passage from the Gospel according to St. Matthew:

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, *â€˜Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.â€™*<sup>TM</sup> Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, *â€˜Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?â€™*<sup>TM</sup> And the King shall answer and say unto them, *â€˜Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.â€™*<sup>TM</sup>

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, *â€˜Depart from me, ye who are damned, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.â€™*<sup>TM</sup> Then shall they also answer him, saying, *â€˜Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not serve thee?â€™*<sup>TM</sup> Then shall he answer them, saying, *â€˜Verily I say unto you,*

Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.™ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.♦

It is the clear teaching of Westerners I know who care for the poor that giving money to beggars is making a problem worse, and it is the clear teaching of the Orthodox Church to give something. I've never really heard any Orthodox authority say you should give a lot; the suggestion, without a number being ever stated that I have heard, is that you should give a small amount that is entirely within your power. If they use that money to buy drugs that is no more your fault than it is God's fault for giving you free will that you use to commit abominable sins. Furthermore, I have heard even my relatives pronounce the word "**beggars**" like they are some kind of disgusting vermin. They are not. When we answer before Christ's throne, we will answer a great deal more for how we have treated homeless beggars than we will for those in our family and our social circles. I personally view beggars as altars by which I may show small kindnesses to Christ.

A monastic living under a vow of poverty may be under a slightly different set of rules. Monastics are said to be "above alms," and to a visitor of the same sex, the words "Is not a word better than a gift?" apply, the point being that you can meet the dues of hospitality even if there is nothing you could give even if you wanted. But the core principle is this unchanged: beggars, like everyone else, are made in the image of God, and the point of becoming a Christian is neither more nor less to become by grace what Christ is by nature. None of us is divine "without any help," so to speak, and the Hindu "Namaste" meaning "I recognize that the innermost part of you is a drop of God," which I have

only heard from New Agers (Hindus have treated me with respect enough but they usually greet me with "Hi," "Hello," "Good morning," etc.) is not in the literal sense Orthodox. Christ and Christ alone among mankind is divine by nature. However, Christ's action is to make men divine by grace, and ultimately rise above the wall which separates God and Creation. And in that sense, while Orthodox Christianity does not have a great collection of avatars who are all divine by nature, it does have a great collection of saints who are genuinely and properly divine by grace. Even among the rest of us, what is most at our core may not be directly and properly a drop of God himself, but it is to be created in the divine image: to be human is to be a symbol of God in an extraordinarily profound sense, a symbol that both represents and embodies, so that every act of kindness or cruelty rendered to our neighbor is by that fact kindness or cruelty rendered to Christ. My response to my teacher about "Why only one avatar?" and the teacher clarifying that he meant only real avatars, was more than technically correct on my part. "Divine by grace" is real. It is perhaps not, in terms of origins, something that came to be with "divine by nature" built in, but that is not the point. Heaven will be filled by people who were and will be even more "partakers of the divine nature", genuinely and really divine by means of grace, and this is what we were created for in the first place. We were created to come to a place where the very distinction between Uncreated and created is transcended.

## Monasticism as supreme privilege within the Orthodox Church

As I wrote on a social network:

There is a saying that virtue is its own reward, epigrammatic enough that Spaceman Spiff / Calvin wants to teach horrid aliens that virtue is its own reward.

Both physically and spiritually, virtue really is its own reward. Though athletes might train for competitions, the advantages of physical health are not mainly looking better in a swimsuit, but having your body function as it was meant to function and your mind clearer as well. For another example, a recovering alcoholic who has been years sober, or perhaps with slips treated as a real problems and **stopped** as real problems, the main advantage is not removing the expense of heavy alcohol purchases, nor improved nutrition as alcohol is a genuine nutrient that in large quantities can displace alcoholics' intake of more balanced nutrition, nor the annoyance of other people constantly getting on their case for drinking too much. The chief reward for being years sober is that you have abandoned a suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy: the reward for sobriety is sobriety, including feeling much, much, much better. (I

opened with drunkenness in the homily **A Pet Owner's Rules.**)

But without contradiction to virtue being its own reward, virtue is also the reward of repentance. The Philokalia says that people hold on to sin because they think it adorns them.

My understanding is that Evangelicals have said that repentance is an unconditional surrender, and it is. My godfather talked about it as the most terrifying experience at all. God demands an unconditional surrender of us, not for his sake, but for ours. Once we surrender we realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!" The primary Orthodox metaphor for repentance is awakening, and I've been happiest when I've repented of something I've been in the grips of. In one sense I'm at my happiest when I am writing something new. (And in that sense, I wrote, **Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret**")

One last point. The terms of monasticism are the terms of the highest privilege the Orthodox Church has to offer. I also expect that it will cut certain sins much shorter, but there is more than a resource I really think I would wiser not decline. Monasticism is spoken of as repentance, and while it is desirable to have tears and the joyful sorrow of compunction, entering monasticism to repent of your sins ideally bears Heaven's best-kept secret. If you repent, however great the sorrow it straightens out your heart, and commonly straightens out the body somewhere along the line. Monks (actually, all of us) are forbidden ambition to seek any ordination, but seeking to become a bishop, besides being a temptation, is a confused way to drop the real treasure in a perturbed haste to grab a consolation prize. God's blessing may be on ordained monks who just want to be

monks, such as abbots and bishops, but the highest position of privilege is not that of the highest bishop. It is that of a mere monastic whose sights are set much higher than mere ecclesiastical office. And on that note I wrote **A Comparison Between the Mere Monk and the Highest Bishop.**

I am not seeking misery. I am seeking great privilege, much greater privilege than my educations.

## Monasticism as “*a complete set of working instructions*”

The Blue Zones, coming out of a study of where people live the longest, identifies certain hotspots of the map researchers originally marked in blue. There are, according to the Wikipedia entry, nine common themes:

1. Moderate, regular physical activity.
2. Life purpose.
3. Stress reduction.
4. Moderate calories intake.
5. Plant-based diet.
6. Moderate alcohol intake, especially wine.
7. Engagement in spirituality or religion.
8. Engagement in family life.
9. Engagement in social life.

On Mount Athos, the place I hope to go, and God willing repent of my sins into great old age, every single one of these things is present. (I do not know if Athos is an unstudied hotspot; Athos is a bit hard to reach even for Orthodox, and possibly it is a curiosity that was unknown.) Now there is not the usual sense of engagement with family life, but a healthy Orthodox parish, let alone monastery, is in a deep sense family

Orodox parish, let alone monastery, is in a deep sense family and "family" is not simply one metaphor among others. The fact that there are probably fathers and sons, or brothers, or uncles and nephews, on the holy mountain is beside the point. However, I would like to drill down on the least "spiritual" of them all.

In a monastery ([see a video of Holy Cross Hermitage that gives monasticism a concrete face](#)), there is prayer in liturgy and prayer in near-constant work, with no divide between sacred and secular. People, or at least young monks, are kept occupied, but this is primarily for their needs rather than the monastery and there are stories of ancient monks who would rather make an enormous pile of baskets every year and burn them than be idle.

Like in the blue zones, large amounts of time are spent in moderate activity. And one of the things I realized is that "fitness nut" level exercise, with one qualification mentioned below, is really a consolation prize compared to always being engaged in obedience. It's a bit like saying, "Well, I don't have leisure in my schedule for a glass of wine with my dinner, so once a week I'll have 100 grams of Everclear." The analogy may break down in that alcohol is hardly a need, but the point stands that sipping one glass of wine with dinner is for most of us good, while blasting a throat-parching payload of 100 grams of absolute alcohol all at once is for most of us dubiously helpful.

The one exception I will mention is that there are cases where people push farther, but in the long term moderate exercise is better than world-class exercise. Remember the former ballerina I mentioned? She wasn't especially old. Top-notch ballerinas don't retire because audiences don't like wrinkles; top-notch ballerinas retire because you can only put that heavy a load on your body for so many years, and the number of years is short compared to normal aging. The usual lifespan is short among an African people that run around eightv

mesquite is short among an African people that run around eighty miles a day hunting deer by running after it until it collapses from exhaustion; these people don't die old. And I remember one bodybuilder at my high school who looked quite impressive asking if it was healthy to lift weights, and the presentation giver, perhaps insensitively, said that an extra pound of muscle was just as hard on the heart as an extra pound of fat: it may be striking to have incredibly thickly muscled arms and legs, but there's more than an unofficial consensus among women that ridiculously huge muscles are ugly. The human body as a whole is not at its health when those are its proportions. The human body can be pushed to marathons or triathlons, but there are long-term problems that you don't get from hours a day of moderate activity. There are many excesses above near-constant moderate activity that can be sustained at least for a time, but the moderate version is optimal.

And there is a further point I would like to mention, which is simply that the Fathers are very clear that when you are doing an obedience, nine tenths of your attention should be on cultivating and maintaining your inner state, and only one tenth on the physical act. This point was underscored with infinite gentleness when I visited one monastery and the Archimandrite stated that he was assigning obediences for the day and asked if anybody wanted to request anything. I asked him for something with vigorous exercise. He assigned me to work with a monastic aspirant on firewood; what this meant practically was that he and I would work together to gather trees that had been cut up with chainsaws but not further dealt with, and load them into the back of a truck and then unload them at the woodpile. The exercise was delightfully invigorating, and I was able to relieve a partner who was exhausted after being asked to move bigger and

bigger and bigger wood; on my end, there were moments where I knew that my weight plus the wood block's weight amounted to well over three hundred pounds, and it was pushing my feet into the ground hard enough that I worried my workboots might come off when I lifted my feet and pulled them out of the mud they were sunk in. But vigorous as that may have been, there was a significant problem: I wasn't really praying that much. When I mentioned this, the abbot expressed deep gratitude for my work, and apologized for his shortcoming with me, saying he had not served me adequately in what he had asked me to do. The apology was, with infinite politeness and gentleness, correcting me for a basic beginner's mistake: doing an obedience without sufficient prayer, and the next obedience he assigned me was something else that was manual labor but not nearly as much force. While the work he assigned was useful to the monastery and would help keep them warm at winter, he was far more concerned about whether the obedience was a practical help to my prayer than what external work I accomplished. And the practice of assigning obediences to visitors is not primarily a message of, "You are staying with us and we would like you to pull at least some of your weight," even if that may also be true, but "We invite you to join us by praying with us in the temple as we sing our prayers, and we would also like to invite you to join us to pray as you engage in prayerful work with us outside the temple."

And the work is not secular; it is sacred even if it could be performed in a secular way.

Let's look at the three classic vows.

## Obedience

I'm a bit of an outsider looking in as far as monastic obedience goes, but I would prefer that my writing, at least in theology, were something I was working with and receiving a blessing, including periodically being expected to submit.

One sliver of a window came from a remark I needed to explain (as well as translate) to my parents. We were at a Mexican family-run restaurant, and as we were almost heading out the door, I said something that positively lit up the restaurant staff. I said, "La comida esta hecha con amor," possibly making some minor language error; the phrase literally translated was "The food is made with love." Which needed some explanation about why I would say that and why the staff would light up. There is a belief in Mexican culture that food made with love is delicious, while on the opposite end food made in anger and upset will taste terrible and possibly cause indigestion or other nastiness.

That belief is properly part of Mexican culture, but it is of much earlier vintage. One tidbit from monastic literature has a king or someone from a king's court asking an abbot why food at the monastery, which was made from the simplest ingredients, tasted so good, while food at the royal court made with the best ingredients available tasted worse. The abbot said that food at the court could easily be made amidst conflict and anger, while

at the monastery everything was done after receiving a blessing; under normal circumstances "obedience" includes monks seeking the abbot's blessing for essentially any action. But this is more than asking permission, or at least more than receiving permission. If an abbot gives a monk a blessing to do something, the monk has not just gotten an OK to move ahead. The abbot has declared the blessing of God, and one result of obedience and submission that asks blessings is that what you do has many more blessings pronounced on it than most non-monastics ever see.

People who are above my pay grade, who know obedience from within, speak of obedience as utter freedom. I'm not in a place to confirm that firsthand, but I believe I've identified an obedience-shaped void in my life. In writing related to theology, what I have to say is tapering down, but even more than that I want to write in an asymmetrical collaboration of obedience where I am writing under a blessing if I write, and not writing but asking a blessing upon my person if I am not giving a blessing to write. Furthermore, and more poignantly, I've been pretty wrong at certain things, and dangerously wrong at that. Part of monasticism that is most repellent to outsiders is that you don't just confess your sins, but you make a daily confession of all your thoughts to your abbot. I want that. I want to be in a situation where I may still be wrong, perhaps very wrong, but the "wrong" is stopped quickly by an abbot who may see red flags much sooner than I do. And I see monasticism as a sort of ultimate privilege in terms of cleaning house spiritually.

There was one class I remember the professor voicing an existentialist sentiment: "Total liberty is the very worst of prisons." On a not entirely unrelated note, Aristotle said, "He who teaches himself has a fool for a master." Political freedoms

may be valuable, but they are nothing compared to freedom from one's sin and one's passions. The words "May you have all of the wealth in the world and the health with which to spend it" sound pleasant to begin with but they are pure and simple a curse. Being spiritually in such a state is worse than a physical lack of health, and Orthodoxy tries to develop each person as is best for that specific person. It also, like the lighter-grade analog to older spiritual work found in today's non-directive counseling, stipulates that the spiritual healer is to have no interest or personal benefit in directing a disciple. Binding myself to discipleship is placing myself in the care of a spiritual father whose job description is to help me grow into the greatest freedom there is. And right now I do not know what true freedom is. I am the prisoner and slave of my sins and passions, and a good spiritual father has the keys to unlock that prison. I do not expect every freedom that is available from an abbot. **I only expect the one freedom that matters.**

## Chastity

The chief benefit of celibacy is enumerated by St. Paul. He gives no decisive commandment, but clearly outlines a spiritual advantage to chastity. The married person needs to have a divided attention split between *God* and spouse. The celibate person is free to have 100% devotion to *God*.

I might comment briefly that there are three options that can be acceptable, even if it is possible to fail spiritually in all three. The first is marriage, something that is expected of most of the faithful. The second is monasticism, which essentially offers a full complement of spiritual resources meant to entirely maximize the kind of goodness that can stem from celibacy. The third is celibacy outside of monasticism, which is less than ideal but can be appropriate (especially under a theology of failure).

I've been in the third option and am presently wishing I had joined monasticism ages ago. But I cannot change the past; I can only influence the present and the future, aiming for monasticism and accepting a possibility of failure.

## A few details about sexuality:

While I was researching the [the holy kiss](#), I was assigned, among other texts, to read Foucault's history of sexuality. That's one reading recommendation I should have dropped faster than a hot potato. The text may not be in any sense sexy, but it does porn-style spiritual damage well enough. However, I wish to pull one minor point and one major point.

The minor point is that understanding another age's sexuality is an [Alice in Wonderland](#) matter. Meaning that before study you don't understand another world's sexuality and you are wrong about assumptions you don't even have.

In the Greek world, appealed to by those who wish to "re-queer" society, the completion of training might well be a consummation between teacher and pupil. We have dirty jokes about "Confucius say secretary not part of furniture until screwed on desk," but they are "just" dirty jokes, not automatic expectations for practical action. The usual pagan paterfamilias would rape all slaves (male or female didn't matter much) as an assertion of absolute authority over slaves.

And having said this much, I would like to put one particular point pulled from those dreary books: one pagan philosopher was asked, "How often should I have sex?" and answered, "As often as you wish to deplete your energy." This is not an absolute

interdiction, nor does it suggest Christian ideas of marriage between a man and a woman, but it provides a profound glimpse into a monasticism in which, on the Holy Mountain, there are no women, nor youths who may look too much like a woman's beauty, and in monasticism there is an exhortation, almost a leitmotif, of "Refrain from embraces."

Sexuality does not become unimportant in monasticism. It becomes an infinitely sharper peak, and it is transformed to unending desire for God.

## Poverty

Years before I joined the Orthodox Church, there was a Sunday school type class, and I walked in really wincing, expecting a secular investment lesson and knowing that the parishioner who would be giving it was a lawyer. To my astonishment the substance of his lesson, illustrated and underscored with stories from his professional experience, was to say that the book of Proverbs hit the nail on the head in everything it said about wealth. The one sentence I remember from that class was, "Endowments aren't so great." He asked what it meant to be "independently wealthy," and clarified that what that really meant was "independent from God", and state that seeking God's providence was far better than chasing after more and more wealth.

In my own time I have become more and more skeptical about how much wealth and property give us. My work [The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#), which I'm a bit disappointed hasn't received more attention, has as its premise that individual technologies have both upsides and downsides and that the people selling technologies are a whole lot quicker to sell you on the upsides than on downsides that may be terrible but are often not obvious.

Monasticism is in many ways simply living the Gospel, and the Gospel says, "Do not store up treasures on earth." Monastics

take this as straightforward guidance for optimal living. In addition, though I do not know all of what factors into this conclusion, those above my pay grade spiritually seem as quickly to identify monastic poverty with freedom as they are to identify monastic obedience with freedom.

My mother told a story of a friend visiting one of her friends in Puerto Rico. The visitor looked around and said, "You don't have any food in your pantry." The hostess said, "No, I don't, but I will. And why would I need something now? I wouldn't need God."

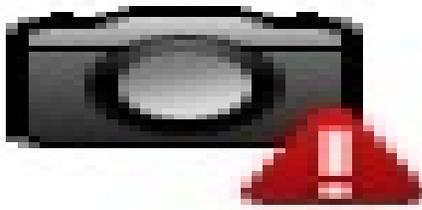
This may be sharper than monastic communities which look after monastics' needs, but to my knowledge the monastic embrace of poverty is an embrace of God that seeks everything needed from his providence, rather than make an ersatz providence by providing for oneself financially.

I'll take an educated guess that some monastics view their poverty as having gotten rid of a great many things to worry about. Almost, if vulgarly, as a man saying, "I lost 235 pounds in one weekend!"

## A note on historical background

To put something baldly, I believe that the iconoclasm of the Reformation was significantly less guilty than the iconoclasm that was rejected by the Seventh Ecumenical Council.

I remember one time going through [Spink's Catalogue of British Coins](#), and watching in horror as the Western understanding of symbol disintegrated across the centuries before my eyes. Originally there were simple figures on coins, but nothing seriously attempting photorealism. Then there was a frenzy of detail that created a "gold penny" (the word "penny" does not automatically mean minimal economic value in the world of those who study coins), and then things settled to such more restrained portraits as adorn coins today.



I saw the same horror and the same story as I visited the Cloisters, New York City's medieval art museum built from bits of monasteries from Europe, and saw the same disintegration across the centuries from icon proper to stronger and stronger (or, if you prefer, stranger and stranger) attempts to be three

dimensional until paintings started to morph into being half-statue. All of this was in late medieval Europe, and the situation was what an Evangelical might call "bankrupt" or "spiritually dead." Some of this I trace in more detail in [Lesser Icons: Reflections on Faith, Icons, and Art](#).

The icons rejected by iconoclasts in the Byzantine Empire at the time were those of full-blooded Orthodox usage, and iconoclasts then were guilty of rejecting the full force of something good. The icons rejected by iconoclasts in the Reformation were "icons" that had been depleted and dead for hundreds of years. If a Reformation iconoclast were to look at the icons around and say, "All those icons should be burned!" one Orthodox response might almost be, "Ok if I bring matches and kindling?"

Something of the same played out in a disintegration of monasticism into proto-University. The Universities we know were started by monks, if later taken over by Renaissance men; monasteries in the West were great centres of learning. Some people have said that after the Great Schism the West got the head and the East got the heart; I have heard an Orthodox parish priest (incidentally, a parish priest with a doctorate) say, "The longest journey we will take is the journey from our head to our heart." His point is not uniquely monastic, but Orthodox monasticism is very directly intended to help those of us who are too much in our heads to reach our hearts.

The difference between Eastern and Western monasticism came to a head in the dispute between St. Gregory Palamas and the Renaissance man Barlaam. The conclusion reached by the Church, even without an ecumenical council, was that St. Gregory was defending Orthodoxy in what he held, and Barlaam was importing a heresy. I do not claim that Barlaam spoke for the

entire Western fashion, nor do I deny the near-certain presence of continuities between Western monastic practice and Eastern hesychastic prayer. However, I do assert that Barlaam represented something that was in the mainstream range of Western monasticism and broader trends.

What did Barlaam teach, some readers may want to know. In a nutshell, it was [the Renaissance ideal](#). The answer I would give is, "Something like the liberal arts ideal today," the cultured liberal arts ideal in so many Christian-founded colleges whose apostasy from any sense of Christianity is documented in [The Dying of the Light](#), in a pattern that sheds unflattering light on how effective it is to found a Christian university. Barlaam taught, like a good Renaissance man, that the noblest exercise of human dignity was to reason and philosophize about God. St. Gregory taught that the noblest exercise of human dignity was to behold the uncreated Light of God and directly experience God. Barlaam wanted monastics to be educated and cultured. St. Gregory wanted monks to prayerfully contemplate inner stillness; Barlaam gave the pejorative term "navel-gazing" for one specific way some people have taught stillness. St. Gregory wanted monasticism to remain what it had always been; Barlaam wanted monasticism to adapt to features of what was then in vogue in the broader European cultures.

One interstitial note as I have at least hinted at Orthodox wariness towards the Blessed Augustine: he is essentially a Church Father as an Evangelical who would conceive of a Church Father. He reasons philosophically about God, and constantly references Scripture. Evangelicals may object to the Renaissance, but the Renaissance and Reformation are tangled with each other more than one might, and Barlaam's approach is not irrelevant to Evangelicalism. The Blessed Augustine is an

astute philosopher and his analysis has layers of depth, but he doesn't have St. Gregory's strengths. That stated, there are also Church Fathers as a Church Father would conceive of a Church Father. [St. Maximos Confessor](#) readily comes to mind, although he's not the easiest author to cut your teeth on. [St. John Chrysostom](#) wrote dozens of volumes, too many for most people to really read, but he is an eminently clear communicator.

At this point I am ready to make some comments about Martin Luther that wouldn't have made much sense earlier. Martin Luther took a vow of celibacy and then had the most prodigious exploits of a man who cannot keep his willy where it belongs. Alongside Reformers destroying icons were Reformers "liberating" monastics, many of whom served Luther's pleasures. (It has been said that Luther's doctrine of the "bondage of the will" is not something you get by reading the Bible, but a theological rationalization that absolved Luther of guilt for his exploits.) This much is not in dispute historically; it's just something his Protestant successors are not eager to divulge. (A study of Luther's incontinence provides the concluding chapter for [Degenerate Moderns](#).)

The Reformers attacked what remained of holy icons, and what remained of holy monasticism. We don't quite have 100% conformity here, as there have been (and are) Anglican monastics, the famous Taizé<sup>©</sup> monastery in France, and perhaps others, but there have also been Mennonites who want to have icons. There remain pockets in Protestantism of almost everything the Reformers ever attacked. None the less, monasticism was a healthy bedrock in the east, then started to become shifting sand in the West, and then for entirely understandable reasons, as understandable as initial Protestant iconoclasm, the Reformers saw monasticism as simply not helpful.

My point in mentioning this offensive point is to say that certain things in Orthodoxy are not something that Protestants have weighed in the balance and found wanting but something not encountered in the first place, and furthermore that the oddities of a Roman Church after half a millennium's separation from Eastern Orthodoxy in fact do not speak for Orthodoxy, no matter how strong the subtle temptation fill in understanding of bottom-up Orthodoxy with top-down Roman assumptions. Monasticism in the Orthodox Church is an [Alice in Wonderland](#) matter for Protestants.

# Repentance

I wrote, [Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret](#), and I almost wish I hadn't.

[Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret](#) argues that repentance is often a gateway to a completely unexpected and unsought joy.

However true that may be, the real reward for repentance is not a pleasant mood. The real reward, and the reward one should seek most of all, is then untangling and straightening out of one's tangled and sinful soul, and being in a better condition spiritually.

(And by the way, there is nothing mercenary whatsoever about repentance out of the hope of being in a better condition spiritually, and gaining more virtue and being cleansed of more sin. Those are right and proper things one should be seeking as rewards for repentance.)

Repentance is foundational to monasticism, enough so that monasticism is spoken of as repentance. In my partially informed opinion, there may be a case to be made that repentance is more basic or essential to monasticism than even the vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity; and that poverty, obedience, and chastity provide a structure or shelter in which the real work of repentance can grow.

And repentance, and live spiritual life after awakenings of repentance, may be the core reality of why monasticism is the

supreme condition of privilege within the Orthodox Church. It is a strong medicine for spiritual health, and I believe it may eclipse even poverty, obedience, and chastity, however cardinaly important each one may be.

## A Utopia that works

I remember one class, years back, where the professor summarized a Utopian ideal that called for (among other things) turning the oceans to sweet lemonade as "a Utopia of spoiled children." And there seem to be a lot of Utopian visions that end up as Utopias of spoiled children.

I'm not current on Utopian visions from feminists (or, if you would rather put it this way, every feminist author and more that I have read in my studies offers some highly unstable Utopian vision), but Utopian visions by men, without such a restraining hand, call for men to have free and easy access to essentially as many women as they wanted. Not, perhaps, that this is a new feature to the Western form of life of Utopian visions; many pre-Christian giants were polygamists and the Solomon who asked for wisdom and left us three books of the Bible lost his salvation after his prolific efforts in this field. I've read, if only in summary form, of a text suggesting that men are capable of great extraneity, summarized some of the people and objects men have used for sexual pleasure, and concludes that a man who reaches a successful marriage does so by a great deal of restraint and discipline, and not by simply laying the reins of male desire on the horse's neck. And even more offensively, the text suggests that gay men are largely capable of straight marriage, have often tasted heterosexual pleasure, and suggests

that the level of discipline for a gay man to have a successful marriage to a woman is really not by leaps and bounds greater than the discipline required of a straight man. (If I recall correctly, the author was not straight. He just chose not to be ruled by base desire.)

[Stranger in a Strange Land](#)'s Utopian vision has a fatherly Jubal and a main hero male readers should identify with who is some sort of superman with a harem of four (or more) women who all worship him and never seem to make real demands or have real needs. (The living situation reminds of one book, by a counselor a good deal to the left of me, who said that as a counselor in California he has seen people in every living situation you could think of and probably some you couldn't think, and the more he has seen other living situations work out in practice, the more he thinks God's rules are meant to help us and not to harm us.) And the grounds of Heinlein's Utopian living situation places his Utopia as a Utopia of spoiled children where boys do not grow into proper men. I would suggest that the Orthodox concept of marriage is fundamentally more interesting. It calls for something the hero never reaches, at least not before provoking martyrdom. It calls for men (and women) to grow up and act as adults. It calls for self-transcendence

[The tale of Saints Peter and Fevronia](#) mentioned earlier has one brief segment where Saints Peter and Fevronia are sailing on a boat, and the man handling the boat starts looking at Saint Fevronia and having ideas. Saint Fevronia tells him to take a bowl and dip it in the water by one side of the boat, and taste the water, and then dip it in the water on the other side and taste it. She asks him if the water tastes the same or different as drawn from the two sides. He says that they both taste the same. She says then, "So it is with women," and asks why he is thinking of

her when he has a wife who is just as much a woman. St. John Chrysostom, in decrying a theatre that was largely that day's version of internet porn, or at least awfully uncensored, constantly spoke of theatre that insulted the shared nature of women. There is a tremendous good that is possible in a man being married to one and only one wife. Is there really more good to obtained from more women? Or do you wish to go to the gas station and spill ten or fifteen gallons of gas on the ground because you keep on pumping twice as much gas as your tank will hold?

Monasticism offers a Utopia for mature adults. Stranger in a Strange land lays the reins on the horse's neck. Monasticism reins things in further and offers a path that is even more a challenge to grow to adulthood. Not that it is a denial of sexual desire; no monastic literature I've read assumes monastics are sexless (most seem to assume monks have plenty of hormones to cope with), and the choice made is to provide a supportive environment to restrain sexual desire and then lead sexual passions, among others, to ultimately be transfigured if it is a successful monastic vocation.

Utopias seem to not work out much as perpetual motion machines do not keep working. Perpetual motion machines are attempted out of confusion about basic physical realities, and Utopias are attempted out of confusion about basic spiritual realities. But monasticism is that odd gem of a Utopia that works.

Becoming a true member of this Utopia, if I succeed, will probably be the hardest thing I ever do, but it is the best choice I can make.

# The Metacultural Gospel

I want to tell you about my best friend, Nathaniel. When we were getting to know each other, Nathaniel told me that he was God come down in human form. I thought for a moment and said, "If that's true, you aren't doing a very good job of it." He laughed, and said, "You're probably right."

Where can I begin to describe him? Perhaps you've had this experience. When there's someone you don't know very well, it's easy to say "Yeah, I know him. He's that hockey player who tells the worst puns." But when it's someone you're close to, best-buddies intimate with, then words fail you. I could begin by saying, "Nathaniel was a construction worker," which would leave most people with two impressions. The first impression is that he was strong and had calloused hands, which is true. The second impression is that he wasn't much in the brains department, which is out-and-out false. He didn't have too much in the way of formal schooling — stopped after getting his high school diploma — but Nathaniel was absolutely brilliant. I still remember the time when I had him over at my place, reached on my shelf, pulled out the Oxford Companion to Philosophy, and read aloud the entry for 'aestheticism', and then began a devastating critique. I don't remember his whole argument, but the first

part pointed out that there was an assumed and unjustified opposition between aesthetic and other (i.e. instrumental) attitudes, with an argument that seemed to challenge aestheticism by pointing out that there are other ways of viewing art. He asked if one would challenge the activity of working by pointing out the legitimacy of eating and sleeping. Nathaniel was the first kindred spirit I found in philosophy and other things; he challenged and stretched me, but he was the first person I met who had also thought things I thought no one else would ever understand.

I'd like to explain a little more about the conversation where I told him that if he was God come down in human form, he wasn't doing a very good job of it. How can I put this? It wasn't that he was inhuman — certainly not the sort of thing usually conjured by the term 'inhuman', with some sort of indecency or cruelty or monstrosity. He was human — he just challenged my conceptions of what it meant to be human. (I thought I was unusual!) Being with him was like realizing one had woken up in a different world — in so many little ways. He fit in, but he wasn't like anybody else.

One of my first shocks came when I saw him chatting, naturally and freely, with some support staff at my office. At first I thought that they were for some reason old friends of his, but he disabused me of that notion. When we talked about it afterwards, I realized the extent to which I had treated support staff like part of the furniture. He seemed to be able to talk with everyone — young (he's one of few adults I've known who could enter a child's world and really play), old, rich, poor, American, international, it didn't matter. He could enter the house of a Klu Klux Klansman for dinner and then leave and spend the rest of the evening with a follower of Minister Farrakahn —

being on friendly terms with both. He was very good at entering other people's worlds — but he had very much his own world. And there were a thousand little things about it — like how, in his letters, he always wrote 'I' as 'i' and 'you' as 'You'.

I was talking with him about Harold Bloom's treatment of cultures as caves (as per Plato's "Allegory of the Television, er, Cave"), when I came to the strangest realization. Nathaniel did and did not live in a culture. He did live in American culture in the sense that he spoke the language, literally and figuratively, enjoyed hamburgers, and couldn't handle chopsticks to save his life. You might say that he spoke the culture as would a foreign anthropologist who had given it a lot of study, but I wouldn't. He owned American culture. But at the same time, he didn't pick up any of its blind spots. I had given some thoughts to something I call metaculture — something that happens when a kid grows up exposed to multiple cultures, or when someone is really smart and just doesn't think like anyone else does, and doesn't breathe his host culture the way most people do. I had been aware of something metacultural in myself, where I felt like I was a composite of cultures and eras, with something that wasn't captured in any single one of them. I was groping towards something from below, when he had it, all of it, from above.

Where I started to climb up to the mouth of the cave, he descended from the world above and met me. I had thought about the phrase "the wave of the past" as an inversion of "the wave of the future", challenging the worship and even concept of modern progress, where each age gets better than the one before; I had been aware of something of real merit grasped by ages past that have been lost in our mad pursuits. And then

Nathaniel showed me the wave of Heaven.

Nathaniel spent most of his life as a construction worker. He

did a better job at seeming ordinary than I do at least; only his mother Camilla seemed to be able to even guess at who he really was. His family was visiting someone at Wheaton College, and — before I go further, there's something I need to explain about Wheaton.

Wheaton College is a devout place, a religious Harvard if you will. And their approach to religion has its quirks. The temperance movement, which condemned God's creation of alcohol as evil, made a practice of having people sign a Pledge to abstain from alcohol. Wheaton College is one of few places where that practice is alive, and required of every member. Of course they say that they are not making a moral condemnation, but only a prudential measure, but their actions, even what they call their prohibition (which forbids most dancing as well), are deafening.

At the reception, they ran out of soda, and ran out of punch. Camilla kept tugging on Nathaniel's sleeve and asking him to do something. Finally he told them to fill a cooler with tap water — then drew off a cup of the beverage and sent it to the administrator in charge.

It was champagne.

The champagne was dumped, the cooler rinsed out, and filled with water, and it somehow held champagne again. I was embarrassed enough to be drinking champagne (the best I ever tasted) out of a plastic cup. But the administration had a more serious embarrassment to deal with — but I am getting off topic.

I was impressed with their response — they are better than their Pledge — and Nathaniel was still welcome on their campus after that happened.

There are other cases where response to his eccentricities did not receive such a positive response. There was one time when we were visiting a really big church, and (after some really

impressive instrumental music) the lights were dimmed, and an overhead projector began to display all sorts of computer graphics, and then there was a gunshot, and another, and another; the overhead image disappeared. The gunshots continued; someone turned on the lights, and there was Nathaniel, holding a powerful handgun, shooting the projector. (It was such a strange thing to see a pacifist holding a gun.) I think he emptied a total of about three clips into it, before putting the gun into his pocket. The people around him were cringing in fear, but not terror, or perhaps you could say terror, but not fear; they were afraid, but not of the gun. I think some of them were a little afraid of whatever would make a man angry enough to fire a gun in a church.

About that time, the pastor got over being stunned and glared at him and asked, "How dare you fire a gun in my sanctuary?" He glared back and said, "How dare you take God's sanctuary and making it into a circus? This is supposed to be a house of prayer and worship for all people, and you are making it into mere amusement, a consumer commodity. Is this church set up because these people do not have televisions, that they can flip on and be titillated? Church is a place to disciple men and conform them to God, not a place to conform religion so that it will appeal to spoiled brats. The reason that you are losing people to MTV is that you are doing a second rate job of being an MTV, not a first rate job of being a church. Cleanse this place of your vaudeville filth and make it a place where men are drawn into God's presence to glorify him and enjoy him forever. If not, much worse awaits you than bullet holes in your projector."

There was another time, when we were out of town for Easter and he came to the city's First Baptist. Everybody was wearing business suits and really nice dresses — everybody but

Nathaniel. Nathaniel was comfortably arrayed in blue jeans, a plain white T-shirt, and big, heavy, black steel-toed workboots.

There was an invisible stir, and about five minutes into the sermon the pastor stopped, and said, "Young man, I suppose you'd like to explain why the best you can give God on the holiest day of the year is clothing that teenagers wear to McDonald's."

Nathaniel, with perfect composure, said, "Yes, indeed. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth, not in this set of clothing or that set of clothing, nor in this or that outer form of worship or ceremonial observance, nor some particular style of music. You don't know who you are worshipping, if you think (because you can worship God by wearing nice clothes) that nice clothes are necessary for worship. The hour is coming, is indeed already here, when God seeks worshippers who will worship him beyond the external shells that their particular traditions have associated with worship. God is calling. Are you ready to answer?"

It was not long after that that we were out in a van, going to this camp. Duncan was driving; Duncan is a devout man, and a proud graduate of Jehu's Driving School. He was blasting down the highway, which was virtually empty, and everyone but Nathaniel was involved in a very intense discussion; Nathaniel (don't ask me how he does this) was in the back seat, with his head up against a pillow, sleeping. By then I noticed that a wind was rocking our car, and I realized why we were all alone on the road. There was a terrific thunderstorm going on all around, and as I looked out the window there was a flash of lightning, and several of us saw this big twister coming right at the van. I was barely collected enough to jump to the back of the van and shake

Nathaniel awake, and asked, "Don't you care if we die?!?"

Nathaniel seemed irritated at having been woken up, and asked,

"What's the matter? Don't you have any faith?" Then he turned to the storm — or the twister, at any rate, and said, "Peace!" And then, all of a sudden, everything stopped. The wind died down, the tornado dissipated, and within minutes we could see the sun shining. It was at that point that I wet my pants.

You have to understand, we were more scared after the storm stopped than before. Before then, we had a purely natural fear, the fear that we could quite possibly die. That was fear enough — I don't mean to downplay it — but afterwards we had a purely supernatural fear, the fear that stemmed from watching a ?man? issue commands to inanimate nature and be immediately obeyed. Vulgar and base fears are about what harm can be done. There is a deeper fear that is a kind of awe, the kind of fear we sometimes experience in diminished form when we enter the presence of someone we respect. And at that point we were absolutely terrified. I don't think we would have been any less scared had he already told us that he was God the Son, clothed in flesh just like you or me; at that point, it was as if a veil was lifted, and we got a tiny glimpse into the glory, the splendor, the light that were hidden in this friend who we ate with, who we talked with, and who could pin any two of us in wrestling. Tiny glimpse as it was, it seared our eyes; in retrospect, I'm surprised nobody fainted.

After Nathaniel let us have a couple of minutes to watch the storm dissipate and let us become properly terrified, he did one of the strangest things you could think of. He rebuked us for our lack of faith. At the time, I just sat there, stunned (so did everyone else), but afterwards, I began to have a glimpse into who he was, into his world, into the world that he invited me and invites you.

I am a metacultural, which means in part that I am able to

think of my culture, and shift my own position in relation to it and other cultures. One of the things I had been thinking about is the strength of scientism in Western culture as it is now and has been for some time (not all of its history — not by a long shot). Many cultures have been cultures in which people can see ghosts, even if they're not there — they are open to the supernatural; it is real to them. American culture is a culture in which people can't see ghosts, even if they're really there — we are closed to the supernatural; it isn't real to us. Contemporary American culture is the result of monumental efforts to shut out the tiniest glimmer of anything supernatural; this affects not only how people think, but on a more fundamental level what they are and are not able to do. And metacultural awareness, and conscious rejection, of the effects of scientism does not translate into an immediate freedom in one's emotions to believe in miracles.

The sobriety of a recovering alcoholic — hard-earned, the result of swimming upstream — is qualitatively different from the sobriety of someone who has never had a problem with alcohol. For the latter person, sobriety is something that flows easily, something that is almost automatic; for the former, it is something that is difficult, possible only as the result of vigilance. Something of the quality of this difference exists between many cultures of days gone by (and other parts of the world) and our own culture, with regards to belief in the supernatural. There have been places that have breathed the supernatural in ways that are not naturally open to us — and Nathaniel was at least a step beyond that. Sometimes I wondered — still do — at the task before us — as if we were recovering alcoholics, and he brought a bottle of 151, gave us each a shot glass, and said, "You are all going to drink some

amount of this beverage and then stop, and not slip into drunkenness." That's something you do with people who don't have a problem with alcohol. It's not something you do with alcoholics. But then, it was just like Nathaniel to believe that we could do things we never would have been able to do by ourselves. And I trust him enough to believe that there was method in what seemed either madness or else the most profound naïveté: "C'mon. I as God incarnate can easily stop a tornado. Why could you possibly be afraid?" Over time, I have even been able to catch glimpses of the method to this divine madness. Beauty is forged in the eye of the beholder; when someone like that trusts you, he makes you worthy of his trust, even if you are not worthy of such trust to begin with.

Anyways, we got to the camp without (further) event, and went into a room; Nathaniel jumped up into the top bunk of the bed in the corner, and curled up so that he was sitting Indian style with his back in the corner, moving his fingers about as if he were playing a keyboard. (This is one of many facets of his private world that people who met him in public might never guess at, but he let his guard down around people who knew him. I'm not even going to try to document all his eccentricities; suffice it to say that this sort of thing was as natural with him as sitting on a chair.)

After changing my pants, I asked him, "What are you working on?"

He thought for a second, and said, "I'm trying to make a free translation of Bach's Little Fugue in G Minor into English. I think there's more of a connection between the muses than we think, enough so to make translation possible in some cases, if not nearly as easy or universal as translation between natural languages. Have you ever had a basic insight that could have

found expression in different forms? I am not exactly trying to translate the finished product of Bach's fugue, as to express in language what Bach chose to express in music."

I asked, "What do you have so far?"

He played the theme and said, "Not much. I'm still trying to figure out whether to translate it as poetry or logic." He paused, and said, "What's on your mind?"

I said, "I was just thinking about church last Sunday. Most of the time I can ignore bad music, but this time the music was bad enough to be a distraction to worship. Why is it that most of the time-honored tunes we use to worship God were never intended to be sung sober, and most contemporary music does not reach even that standard? I don't want to impose a burden on people of 'You must appreciate highbrow music to worship here,' but it seems that there is already a burden of 'You must endure terrible music to worship here.' I know that good music does not make worship, but it seems to me that bad music can break worship. If that music were translated into words, the result would be poorly written and poorly thought out."

Nathaniel looked at me and said, "Sean, the brokenness of this world makes things goofy. I am setting something in motion that will rock the world. Until my work is consummated, until I have returned in glory, there will always be problems. You can see these things perhaps a little more readily than most people; you suffer from them too. You are right to be grieved; the same things grieve me. But you can still live in a world where worship is diminished, where there are laws punishing beggars for begging.

The just have always walked by faith with a pure heart, regardless of how much vice is in the world around them. And they have never left my Father's care."

It was after that that we had a really good talk, and I viewed

my metaculture differently after that point. I had seen it as a separation between myself and most of mankind; I started to see it as a way of being human, and a part of the catholic plan of salvation, even a part of the tools God was choosing to limit himself to in bringing salvation to the world. And I was able to understand how and why Nathaniel respected the monocultural majority as easily as he did.

In the morning, after a night's dream-thought about metaculture, monoculture, and catholicity, I punched his bunk and said, "Hey, Nathaniel! How many metaculturals does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

He said, "I don't know, Sean. How many?"

I said, "It takes fifteen:

- One to evaluate the meaning of the custom of replacing burnt out light bulbs and think of possible alternatives,
- one to drive off to a store to buy a fluorescent replacement to an incandescent heat bulb, judging the higher price worth the lessened environmental degradation and longer time to replace the bulb with one like it,
- one to read McLuhan and light a small votive candle, preferring the meaning of a candle to that of a light bulb,
- one to go outside under God's light and God's ceiling to see as men have seen for the other two million, four hundred ninety-nine thousand, and nine hundred years of human existence,
- one child to pull up a ladder, unscrew the bulb, and then dissect it to see how it works and whether he can get it working again,
- one tinkerer to assemble a portable light center with ten 120-watt bulbs, wired in parallel, powered by an

- uninterruptable power supply and a backup generator,
- five Society-for-Creative-Anachronism style re-enactor-ish metaculturals to try to use the occasion to grasp problem solving as understood by the monocultural mindset — one of them holding the bulb, and the other four turning the ladder,
- one critic to point out that, of the last two segments, one wastes an excessive amount of money that could be put to better use, and the other is elitist and demeaning, monoculturalism being a legitimate and God-given form of human existence that has merits metaculturals cannot share in,
- one to observe the variety of facets of the process of changing a bulb into a list, to become an immortal e-mail forward among metaculturals,
- one to say, 'This joke is taking way too long and is far too complex,' and change the light bulb, and
- one to stick her tongue out at him and say, 'Spoilsport!'"

Without missing a beat, Nathaniel asked, "How many monoculturals does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

I thought for several minutes, trying to think of a good answer, and said, "I give up. How many?"

"One. You're making things far too complex and missing what's in front of your nose."

The problem with people like Nathaniel is that they're just too smart.

We went to breakfast in the dining hall, and after breakfast Nathaniel went up to speak. He cleared his throat and said, "Good morning. Do we have any feminists here? Good. In what I have to say, I'm going to draw heavily on a concept feminism has

articulated, namely that rape happens and it should be worked against.

"The human psyche exists in such a way that rape is a devastating psychological wound. It's not just like the sting of a scorpion, where you have a terrible pain for part of a day and then life goes on as it was before; it is a crushing blow after which things are not the same. Perhaps with counseling there can be healing, but it's not something that gets all better just because time passes. Rape is worse than any physical pain; it is a different and fundamentally deeper, more traumatic kind of pain, a pain of a different order.

"I don't know of anyone, feminist or not, who believes in rape because he wants to, because he hopes to live in a world where such things exist. Everyone I've talked with would much rather believe that there is nothing so dark. But it does exist, and disbelief won't make it go away. That is why feminists are going to heroic efforts to promote awareness of rape, to tell people to be careful so that at least some rapes can be prevented.

"I am here tonight to warn you about a place, which I will call Rape because I know of no more potent image to name it. In fact, it is worse than rape, beyond even how rape is worse than a sting. I have given up much, more than you can imagine, to come here, and I will endure much, more than you can imagine, to finish my work, for one reason: to save you all from Rape. If you believed as I believe, you would crawl across America on broken glass to save people.

"You were created spotless, without flaw, and then you wounded yourselves and began to die. It is a fatal wound, one that causes your bodies to lose their animation after seventy years or so, and one that has far worse effects than the destruction of your bodies. Your consciousness will not end when

you die; it will rot in a fashion that is beyond death, beyond rape, and it will rot forever. You are all headed for Rape, every one of you, unless you believe in me.

"There is much more I have to tell you, much more that I would like to tell you, grander things about a place of light and love. But that comes only after passing through this doorway.

There is a place called Rape, and it is real, and it is more wretched than any vision of torment you can imagine, and I have come to save you from it. Follow me if you want to live."

There was a fairly long and stunned silence after that point; all of the feminists were enraged that a man would take the concept of rape which belonged to feminism and trivialize it like that. All but one. Cassandra neither regarded the concept of rape as belonging to feminism in the sense of an exclusively owned property that others dare not tread on, nor regarded Nathaniel's speech as trivializing rape. At all. This earned censure from the other feminists. She began to follow Nathaniel after that point; she didn't quite believe his conclusions yet, but she had real insight into what would prompt a man to dare to say something like that.

As I reflect back, I can see how someone like Cassandra could live a very lonely life.

That night, Cassandra asked Nathaniel, "What is your favorite movie?"

Nathaniel thought for a second and said, "I don't really have a favorite movie, but I was just thinking for a second about a movie idea that nobody has produced."

Cassandra asked, "What's that?"

Nathaniel said, "Opening scene, there is a prisoner shackled inside a dungeon cell, with armed guards posted around. Then it shows the hero and his assistants, armed with M-16 assault

rities and one silenced sniper rifle. They sneak up to the complex, the sniper neutralizing three watchmen along the way.

One of the men knocks over a glass bottle, and chaos breaks loose when someone hears them and sounds the alarm. There is a big firefight, villainous henchmen dropping like flies. The hero releases the prisoner, and radios for a helicopter to come and pick them up.

"As the last of the hero's friends jump on board the helicopter, one last henchman comes running out, firing a shotgun at the helicopter. The hero takes a .45 caliber handgun, and blasts away his knee.

"The rest of the movie slows down from the action-adventure pace so far, and follows the henchman. For the remaining hour and a half, the movie explores exactly what that one gunshot means to him for the remaining forty years of his life."

Cassandra stood silent for a moment. I could see in her eyes that she was seeing the movie. Nobody said anything for a while; then Nathaniel said, "I want to talk with you more. I need some time by myself now, and then we can really talk."

Nathaniel would depart from us, heading off where nobody could find him, to pray and be with God. This time it was over a month before he returned, and when he did, he looked like a skeleton with skin on — but he had this glow. He was very quiet, and it was a few days before he talked with us about what had happened.

He walked into the wilderness, until he came to a place under some evergreens, by a lake, and by a large stone. He slept on the stone at night, sitting and standing and wandering around in the forest during the day, and praying all the while. He had a sense that something was going to happen — something big, something that would take all of his strengths.

At the end of that time, he was standing and facing God.

AT THE END OF THAT TIME, he was starving, and (on a TITTY degree day) hypothermic. He sat there, hungry, shivering, when the Slanderer appeared before him and said, "If you are God and not just a man, strengthen your body so that it will never be touched by hunger or cold, and then you will be freed from physical distractions to pursue your ministry."

Nathaniel said, "I have come as a real man, with real flesh that feels real pain. My ministry is not furthered by selling it out. I would rather die as a real man than have a long ministry by having an inconsistent make-believe body that only affects me so far as is convenient."

The Slanderer said, "You know, that movie idea of yours was something deep. How would you like to be able to make as many movies as you want, to have whatever influence over television and radio, newspapers, magazines, books and internet you care to have? How would you like — no strings attached — to have as much media influence as you want?"

Nathaniel said, "If my mission could have been accomplished by blasting pictures on the sky, I would have done that. That isn't the type of influence I want. I want a real, personal influence where I teach people face to face and touch them. I want to give my friends hugs and kisses. I want something your media can never give."

The Slanderer said, "My, you are picky about my gifts. Here's a suggestion that should interest you. You are coming to offer a salvation, but a salvation that people can only have if they choose it — else they will suffer a torment beyond rape. Why not make everybody accept your gift?"

Nathaniel glared at the Slanderer and said, "Never! I have come to call brothers and sisters, not make computers. My world can be broken as it is only because my Father and I would rather see it broken than break our creature's free will. The mother

see it broken than break our creatures' tree will. The metaphor of Rape is inaccurate in this, that it describes coercion from outside. The Place of Torment is self-chosen, and its doors are bolted and barred from the inside. Rape stands as the final testament to human free will, that my Father would rather see his creatures in everlasting torment than force them into Paradise. Get away from me!"

When Nathaniel said this, the Slanderer left him and angels attended him.

The next few days on the road were interesting. Several of the students at the camp went and followed us. We were on the road to a campustown, and I was beginning to perceive something different about him, something different in his awareness. He was putting weight back on, and there was something new in his eyes.

We arrived at a college campus; we were walking across the quad, and a young woman came up to us and said, "Help me! I am terribly sick, and neither the doctors nor Wicca have been able to make me better. I don't know how much longer —"

There are times when you want to be someplace else, anywhere but where you are now. This was one of those times. The woman became very pale, and lost consciousness; Nathaniel caught her and lay her down on the ground. Then her body became stiff, and from her still, unmoving lips came an ugly, raspy, man's voice, cursing and blaspheming God. Nathaniel alone was not afraid, but his face bore infinite gravity. He looked, and said, "What is your name?"

The demon said, "Our name in English is Existential Angst.

Our name in our own language is —"

"Stop!" Nathaniel said. "I know that name, and I know that language, and you are not to utter either of them here."

"Our name is Existential Angst," the demon continued, "and

Our name is Existential Angst, the demon continued, and she is ours, all ours, and so is this age."

"She is not yours any more, nor is this age. I have come to set the captives free. Come out of her!"

The voice said nothing more, but there was an unholy presence so powerful it could be felt, and a stench like the stench of rotten eggs, and then they left.

The woman opened her eyes, slowly, as if awakening for the first time, and then looked at Nathaniel. She didn't say anything, just looked, her eyes searching, filled with wonder. Finally, when she had seen what she was looking for, she said, "Thank you."

Nathaniel didn't reply. He didn't need to.

By this time, a crowd had gathered, and Nathaniel told Duncan to get a blanket from the van and buy her some bread and some Sprite. Then he looked around — the crowd was very quiet, with everybody looking at him — and Nathaniel stood up, and said, "You can plainly see that I have given something to this woman. What is no less true is that I have something to give each one of you, and you need it.

"Techies sometimes talk about a group of people they call 12:00 flashers. They call them 12:00 flashers, because their houses are filled with appliances with a flashing 12:00. What they mean by the term '12:00 flasher' is something deeper than just 'someone whose appliance clocks happen not to be set'.

"What they mean by '12:00 flasher' is someone who wants the benefits of technology, but is not willing to try to understand how technology works or how to use it. Their appliances flash 12:00 because they will not in a million years spend five minutes experimenting with the buttons or read the manual to see how to set a clock. This mindset affects every bit of technology they own, and invariably something will break — quite possibly because it was misused — and then they will

quite possibly because it was misused — and then they will invariably wait until the last minute, when there is an emergency, and ask a techie to "just tell me how to fix it." The 12:00 flasher is involved in a desperate attempt to cut a steak with a screwdriver, and when a techie begins to try to explain why he needs to set down the screwdriver and get a knife, the 12:00 flasher tensely replies, 'I don't have time to put down this screwdriver and go get a knife! I just need you to tell me how to cut this steak!'

"Friends, I am here to tell you that the 12:00 flasher phenomenon doesn't just exist in technology. It exists in human relationships. And it exists in spirituality.

"It's possible to get by as a 12:00 flasher. Nobody died because his living room was perpetually dark because he wouldn't sit down and figure out how to unscrew the top of his lamp and replace the bulb. And, when technological disasters become unlivable, it's usually possible to grab a techie, to the rescue. Never mind what it does to their blood pressure, techies usually can reduce an unlivable disaster to a tolerable disaster. But that isn't how we were meant to live, especially not in relationship with God.

"What is a spiritual 12:00 flasher like? Well, they take many forms, but one thing they all have in common is that, consciously or unconsciously, the question they ask of religion is 'What is the least I can do and still get by?' That question is the wrong question. It's like asking what the least a person can eat and still not starve. Never mind the fact that the experiment is quite dangerous; God did not make or want us to live just barely eating enough not to starve. He made us for rich, abundant live, far from starvation.

"Don't be a 12:00 flasher. Don't ask, 'What is the least I can do and still get by?' Don't run to God in times of crisis, and then

do and still get by? Don't run to God in times of crisis, and then when the crisis is over, forget him and go back to life without him. If you have a crisis, by all means, run to God for help. He welcomes that, and sometimes he uses crises to draw people to him as never before. But don't wait for a crisis to seek him out.

Seek him out, prepare your spirit, work at a state of right relations with other people, while the going is easy. Don't wait until you're on a sinking boat to learn how to swim. Learn how to swim when you have free time and a swimming instructor.

"I was at the deathbed of an old man, a quiet member of the community who knew everybody by name, who always had time to listen to little children's tales and who would tell his own stories to anybody who wanted to hear. When he was on his deathbed, someone asked him if he would like to hear some Bible verses. He smiled, and to everyone's surprise, said, 'No.' Someone asked him, 'Why not?' He smiled again and said, 'I thatched my hut when the weather was warm.'

"Dear friends, thatch your hut when the weather is warm. You might not be able when there is storm or cold. What is there to do? I wish to mention two things; they are a lifetime's learning, and have been for me. Those two things are love and prayer.

"God loves you, and you are to love him with your whole being. You are to love everybody. Even your enemies? Especially your enemies.

"Physicists are in search of a grand unified theory, where all of the laws covering all physical phenomena boil down to a few equations that can be written on one side of a sheet of paper. In spirituality, religion, and morality, love is that grand unified theory. There are great teachings — of Creation, of repentance, of worship, of Heaven, of grace, of moral law — and for each of them, if you cut into them, cut below the surface, the lifeblood

that they bleed, the hidden lifeblood that keeps them alive, is love.

"One of the most important expressions of love, one of the most important incubators for love to grow in, is prayer. The Slanderer laughs at our plans, and scoffs at our power, but trembles at our prayers. Wrap yourselves in a cloak of prayer; pray for other people even as you look at them in passing; pray continually. Prayer is a place where God transforms us, and where God and we working together transform the world. It is a time to step out of time and into eternity, and it refreshes and renews us. Pray incessantly, until you have callouses on your knees from unanswered prayers. You cannot change the world, at least not for the better, on your own power. Prayer is how God makes you into his children and prepares you for results, and then (on his own time — not yours) makes a lasting mark.

"Follow me, each of you, and I will draw you into love and prayer, into wisdom and truth, into live everlasting."

The people were impressed with his teaching. He spoke as if he knew the truth, not as if he were just sharing his own perspective, his own personal opinion.

It was perhaps because of this that, when we sat down at dinner, a young man approached him and said, "You spoke unlike anyone else I've heard. Do you claim to know absolute truth?"

Nathaniel said, "Yes."

The man said, "But we cannot know absolute truth, only relative perspectives. The quest for absolute truth has failed; all of the major thinkers of our era have renounced it. Who do you think you are to know absolute truth, God? Don't try the old 'You cannot make absolute statements against absolute truth' card; we have perspectives we expect to be binding without being absolute."

Nathaniel said, "As it turns out, I am God, but that is rather beside the point at the moment. You say that we cannot know absolute truth. I respond with a dilemma: are you making that claim as absolutely true, or as your own personal opinion? If you are making that claim as absolute truth, then it is self-contradictory, and therefore false, and therefore something I do not need to subscribe to; if you are making that claim as a mere statement of personal opinion, like your preference in ice cream flavors, it is therefore something I do not need to subscribe to. Before you respond, let me add nuance to this dilemma. I know that you would not say that your claim is absolutely true or a personal attribute, but somewhere in between. This dilemma gives you the freedom to choose a position somewhere between the two poles of absolute truth and personal opinion. Most dilemmas have a forced choice, one or the other. Not this one. On this dilemma, you may fall at a mixture of the two horns, that is, you are making a statement that is held to be 80% absolutely true, and 20% your own personal perspective.

In which case, it is 80% incoherent, and 20% a personal attribute I can safely ignore. Or is it 30% absolutely true, and 70% your own personal perspective? Then it is only 30% incoherent, but it is 70% a personal attribute I can safely ignore. This dilemma offers you infinite flexibility in choosing how it affects you; the end result, however, is that your perspective is 100% a perspective I am free to ignore."

The young man had nothing to say to this.

There were a number of people who were beginning to follow him at that point, and I began to see a strand running through his teaching. Perhaps the best way to begin with it is by voicing the intuitions it runs counter to.

An obvious reading of what he says is that mankind has

earned everlasting torment in Rape, and he comes through and offers a way of escape — believing in him, and accepting a sacrifice that I didn't understand at the time — and it is worth any amount of earthly effort and sacrifice to save one soul from Rape. So there are these people who have the good fortune to know about the escape, and they should devote their lives to making a difference, to saving as many people as they can.

That is true, and it is deeply true, and there is an opposite insight that is a deeper truth, one that is everlasting.

That insight says that the Father is omnipotent and is drawing people to himself, drawing people to share in the glory that God had before the worlds began, not only in a Paradise after death but here and now, in this world. In following Nathaniel, the escape from Rape is almost incidental in importance to communion with God, and our time on earth is as (Nathaniel was very emphatic about this) apprentice gods, whose time on earth is a time of preparation for the time when we will reign in Paradise.

The primacy of the second, mystical interpretation over the first, pragmatic interpretation is something Nathaniel was very emphatic about, and that has changed my whole way of viewing things. I didn't understand it fully until a moment came when I slapped my head: "How could I not have seen this before?" I had been listening to the stories of a number of incredibly devout and incredibly dedicated people who were operating in the first mode, who were trying to make the biggest difference, and fell flat on their faces hitting futile barrier after futile barrier. It made no sense. Then I heard stories of people — Wesley, for one — who were like this, and fell on their knees and cried, feeling like utter failures, and in a beggarly, ragged, ragamuffin way, became mystics, sought communion with God. And God gave them

that mysticism. Then, sometimes, if he chose, on his time, in his ways, he took some of them and gave them power within the context of that mysticism, and those people shook the world with a force unlike anything they could have ever imagined.

What I came to realize through this is that God wants communion with us, and he wants it so badly that he would rather see a devout, dedicated son working in utter futility, with no results for his toils and watching souls perish, than let some of his children act as mere tools without being drawn first and foremost into communion with him. Drawing people into his presence, not just in the future but here and now, is that important to him. God does not want tools. All the angels in a thousand galaxies are his, and if he needed help, he would not tell us. He wants sons and daughters, and he will have us be that and nothing less. My head still spins a little when I think of this.

This account is written so that you may know Nathaniel and the abundant life that he brings, that you may be drawn into communion with God, not just in the world to come but in this world. Therefore I ask you, when you reach the end of this paragraph, to close your eyes, thank God for ten things you're thankful for, and spend five minutes contemplating God's glory.

Do it now.

Did you do it? If you did, wasn't that wonderful? Wasn't that the best part of the text? Didn't you want to linger? If you didn't — you're not going to get to Paradise if you won't let Paradise interrupt your reading of a text. This text exists to draw you into communion with God, and if you put the flow of reading ahead of that communion, you still have something to learn.

I've been thinking about how to explain what I want to say next, particularly to most Americans... perhaps the best way is to

say that, to the American mind, 'nice' and 'good' mean almost exactly the same thing, and this is a perspective which Nathaniel did not share. Nor do I. 'Nice' is what is left of 'good' after 'good' has been flattened by a steamroller.

Nathaniel was, at times, very nice. He was someone who would look you in the eye and ask, "How are you?" — slowly, because he wanted to hear the answer. He wouldn't just do this with close friends — he was just as ready with strangers whom he could see needed it. But there was something about him that most definitely would not be cut down to fit into being nice. He met with members of the religious community, but his interactions could rarely be described as diplomatic. He lambasted Evangelicals and Catholics on equal terms. He didn't attack mainline Protestants, though. Never. Most of the time, when I mentioned them, he just shook his head and wept.

I'm not going to give a full list of the groups that Saint Nasty offended, primarily because my hard drive only has about nine gigabytes of free space. I do wish, however, to give an illustrative list. There are many more.

- The gay community. After a thousand voices had droned on about how AIDS patients are the outcast lepers of our society, Nathaniel said, "The status of AIDS patients in our society is not that of pariahs, but that of sacred cows." He challenged head-on the status of people who die from sexually transmitted diseases as martyrs, and furthermore laid bare how the movement lumps together acceptance and care of homosexuals, acceptance of them as humans, with a political agenda and lifestyle which kept them dead and miserable in their sins. "Come to me," he said, "and I will give you freedom and vitality such as your movement would never

dream and offer." He loved gays too much not to strike down a whitewashed wall.

- Business. Nathaniel asked, "Was economic wealth created for man, or man for economic wealth?" He called advertising a modern fusion of manipulation, propaganda, and porn, and took it to be the emblem of a mindset in which a business exists, not to serve customers, but to manipulate them into whatever will bring the most money into corporate coffers.
- Consumers. He accused them of entering into a sorcerer's bargain to have wealth in our technology, being concerned with little as long as they had personal peace and affluence, and misusing wealth. He developed an argument, which I am not going to reproduce here, that both individual citizens and communities should take a good look at the Amish, not because they have a perfect solution, but because they are the one major group in America that does not automatically use every technology and service that comes out and that they can afford.
- The tobacco industry. To quote him: "You do something that kills people, for the mere purpose of obtaining profit. You are the largest assassins' guild in history."
- Feminists. His interactions with feminists were a little more complex than with some other groups, perhaps because of how deeply feminism has impacted not just a self-identified minority but the whole fabric of American culture, and because of how deeply he shared the concern of women's status. Some of his remarks were flat-out incendiary. He said that, if feminism has to identify an enemy, a feminism that identified men as the enemy could be tolerable, but a feminism that identified non-feminist women as the enemy was inexcusable. "Any feminism worthy of the name,"

Nathaniel said, "must make the sisterhood of all women a central thesis." I think I saw him weeping over feminism more than any other group: when we talked, I began to see them through his eyes: not Rush Limbaugh-style feminazis, but lost sheep without a shepherd, women struggling to work against a curse and doomed to futility and backfire from the start, because they did not understand the nature of the curse, and so were like a doctor, giving higher and higher doses of medicine for the wrong condition, and wondering why the patient looked worse and worse. He tried to explain the remedy to that curse, and tried to explain it to a great many feminists — a few of them believed him, but the vast majority were offended.

- Academia. The most striking comment I remember him making was, "Hitler now stands as our culture's single most essential symbol of evil, not because he slaughtered six million Jews, but because he does not have any advocates left in academia. There is another ideology more vile than National Socialism, an ideology that exceeds the Nazi body count by a factor of ten and has made blood flow like a river in every single country where it has come into power. Its name is Marxism, and it is considered perfectly acceptable to be a Marxist in academia, a breeding ground of every heresy and intellectual filth our society has to offer."
- Environmentalists. To them, he said, "You have defiled a concern for God's earth not only with nature worship but also with racist, eugenic Malthusianism."
- Media, especially television. Most of what he said there were footnotes to Postman, Mander, and Muggeridge, and the rest wasn't that important.
- Sensitivity police. Nathaniel criticized them for "using

gasoline to extinguish a fire."

- The pro-choice forces. Nathaniel criticized them for making a convenient redefinition of the boundaries of humanity and taking an attitude of "it's not really there if you can close your eyes to it." He said that on any biological perspective even, what grows inside a woman's womb is an organism of the species homo sapiens, and that the question of whether a fetus is human or unwanted tissue is a philosophical question only in the sense that whether a woman is human or just a convenient rape object is a philosophical question — that is, if you deliberately set out to make yourself stupider than you are and tarnish the name of philosophy by making it a smokescreen to hide what is obvious to common sense, then and only then can you satisfy yourself by saying "that is a philosophical question to which my answer is unwanted tissue." Nathaniel had other criticisms — one of them beginning by saying, "A real pro-choice scenario would be an undoubted improvement on the status quo," — but I do not wish to repeat them here.
- The pro-life movement. Nathaniel criticized them "for defending the sanctity of life from conception to natural birth."

Anyone who has not been offended by Nathaniel has failed to understand him.

There are many events which happened which I will not attempt to narrate. Nathaniel was healing people of all kinds of brokenness — physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. He had begun to teach us that he was giving us his authority — even over demons. He was explaining that he would need to die and rise from the dead, although none of us understood — or wanted to

understand — what he was saying. And, through all of that, there were moments, precious, timeless moments, when we could have glimpses of who he was.

To begin explaining one of those moments, let me say that I am not affected by stage magic. It isn't just that I can (sometimes) see how a trick works; the actual illusion is only a tiny part of illusionism. It's indispensable, but it is unbelievably tiny — I know, because I was once an amateur magician, and I disappointed my audiences by performing an uninterrupted display of clever tricks that were nothing more. The real life's blood of a magic show is showmanship, something that is normally invisible: one of the marks of good showmanship is that the audience is oblivious to showmanship and instead wonders how on earth the magician did it. (It is incidentally true that, however much a good magic show makes audiences wonder "How did he do that?", a good magician never tells his audience how it happened.

It's not protection of an initiate brotherhood's closely kept secrets — all such "secrets" are perfectly accessible to someone with a library card and a little spare time, just as the substitution-cipher-weak verification algorithm used for credit card numbers is available to anyone who can go to a search engine and type "mod10" in the query box — but basic entertainment principle: people who find out how magic tricks work are invariably disappointed. That is why I never tell other people how tricks at a magic show work, even when I do know; figuring out one or two minor tricks makes someone feel smug and clever, but knowing how the big trick worked simply ruins it.)

I have spoken as if showmanship's illusion is one-sided, as if it's all up to the magician. And it is, in a sense. But in another sense, it isn't. If I had been better as a stage magician and gotten farther, I would have experienced firsthand the

difference between an audience that is excited, eager to see what is going on, or in high spirits, and one that is hostile, cranky with low blood sugar, or doesn't really want to be there. The illusion is not one-sided; it is the creation of both parties, performer and audience, the result of their cooperation — only the performer's cooperation is conscious and intentional, and the audience's cooperation is unconscious and unwitting.

There is something that happened with me, something that has broken the illusion by breaking my end of the creation — conscious uncooperation instead of unconscious cooperation — something that was closely related to my learning what is actually going on in television, and why I don't watch it. Now magic shows don't work on me. It's not that the illusion is broken because I can see how tricks work; rather, I see how tricks work because the illusion is broken. In Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*, on the nightmarish planet Camazotz, the man with red eyes gives Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace food. To Meg and Calvin it tastes like a wonderful turkey dinner. To Charles Wallace it tastes like wet sand. The man with red eyes can get into the chinks of Meg's mind, and Calvin's, enough to make an illusion mask how ghastly the food is. With Charles Wallace it doesn't work; the illusion doesn't work for him. I have been told I am very like Charles Wallace. I count it worthwhile that I am no longer automatically pulled by showmanship, particularly in an age where showmanship has taken a bloated role far beyond what any sane society would allow it. I count it my loss that I cannot now cooperate with the illusion even if I want to. (Nathaniel understands me on this score, and indeed has experienced the same awakening, but he can cooperate with the illusion. He also watches television for a couple of hours a month, only some of the time as a sociologist would.)

For these reasons, I was less than enthusiastic when Nathaniel showed me a flyer announcing a magic show for "children of all ages" in the bandstand at the park. I told him, "You go; I'll stay home and pray." He said, "Trust me."

We went about half an hour early. Parents were sitting in the bleachers, and kids were running about on the stage. We sat and talked for a few minutes, and then Nathaniel poked a little girl who was running by. She giggled, and he chased her on to the stage, and then started playing with another child, and another. He began to tell stories, ask questions, talk with them, hold them.

It seemed only a moment that the sky turned lavender and fireflies danced, and I looked down at my watch and realized that over an hour had passed. The magician never showed up, but not one of the children went home disappointed.

Whatever Nathaniel had, it was better than showmanship, better than illusion. He had a pull, a charisma, that drew people to him — something that arose out of the love that flowed in his heart. I am no longer drawn by television because television is fake, because television does a spectacular job of covering how empty its center was. Nathaniel wasn't like that. His charisma was an overflow of how full his center was. The meaning of this moment grew on me when I understood what moment it was, what time it was, that he had chosen to spend simply playing with children.

As the sky began to grow dark and mothers called their children home, I could begin to see — why hadn't I noticed it before? Nathaniel was afraid, and emotions of — what? expectation? imminence? trepidation? — were emotions that I could begin to feel as well. There was a sense that something important would happen. He purchased a loaf of bread and a

DOTTIE OT wine, and called all OT us TO come INTO a deserted IOTT. We talked — really talked, about love, about too many things to mention, and then as there was a height of tension, he took the bread, and said, "Take this, and eat it. This is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in memory of me." Then he took the cup of wine, and said, "Take this, all of you, and drink. This is the new accord in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins." Then he passed them around.

I talked with the others, years later; I was the only one who realized the significance of what was going on. There are still many people who have difficulty believing it, which is fine; there are a lot of things about Nathaniel that take a lot of believing.

When I ate his body, I was taking, was drawn into, his community; when I drank his blood, I drank the divine life. The latter especially was precious to me in a way I cannot describe; I am a mystic, and there is something about the blood, hidden in the flesh, that... it is best not to talk too much about these things. I think some of them are things that it takes a child's heart to understand.

He asked us to be with him, not exactly to pray with him (although I am sure he also wanted that), but just to have the human presence of someone who loved him, perhaps just to have any human presence — and all I know I could think about was how long a day it had been, and how much I needed to get to sleep. We were awoken by a knock on the door, and Nathaniel looked at me — ooh! That look broke my heart. He did not say anything. He did not need to.

Nathaniel was shaking when he walked out in front of a veritable mob, and asked, "Who do you want?" Someone in the crowd said, "Nathaniel." He said, "I am the person you want. Get away from the building; you want me, not the others."

*I was watching from the window, and I watched in stupor*

I was watching from the window, and I watched in stunned disbelief what the mob began doing to him. Then I climbed down, and ran as if there was no tomorrow. I had no shoes on, only socks, and when I collapsed, in exhaustion, my feet were bleeding.

Somehow (providence?) the others managed to find me, and we were huddling in a room, the doors locked, bolted, and barred with furniture, all shades drawn, glued to the TV, demoralized, defeated, in abject bewilderment. I had thrown up all I could, and felt sometimes dizzy, sometimes hot, sometimes nauseated, sometimes all three. I was leaning against the window, desperately praying that my head would stop spinning, and that if there were any way possible for Nathaniel to have survived that assault —

Someone knocked twice on the window, right next to my head, and my head cleared.

I was struck with terror, pulled back from the window, and prayed aloud that whoever it is would go away.

I heard Cassandra's voice loudly outside, saying, "It's me, Cassandra! I've seen Nathaniel! He's alive!"

I knew her voice, and my terror turned to rage, turned to what the damned call 'righteous indignation'. I said, "Of all the sick jokes, of all the unholy blows that the lowest schoolyard bully would not dream of stooping to," and poured out a stream of invective unlike any I have uttered before or since. I did not stop, did not even falter, when I heard her crying, nor when her tears turned to wailing. At the climax I said, "Unless Nathaniel stands before me, unless I feel the bones that have been crushed, I will never believe your sick joke."

I felt a tap on my shoulder, and when I turned around, Nathaniel looked into my eyes, gazing with both love and sorrow, and said, "Seen Tom here before you. Tough everyone of my

and said, "Sean, I am here before you. Touch every one of my wounds." Then he touched me, and healed me of the sickness I had been feeling.

What could I do? I fell to the ground, and wept, and when I could stand I immediately left to go out and beg Cassandra's forgiveness. She forgave me — instantly. She gave me a hug, and said, "I had difficulty believing it, too. You are forgiven." I can not tell the depths of love that are in that woman's heart. Then I returned, with Cassandra, and Nathaniel looked at me and said, "Sean, you are a metacultural, but you are also an American. What is real to you is largely what you have seen and what The Skeptical Enquirer says is real. You believe after having seen. God's blessing is on those who can rise above your culture's sin and believe these miracles without seeing."

Nathaniel said and did many other things, far too numerous for me to write down. I have not attempted a complete account, nor a representative account, nor even to cover all the bases.

(Other writers have already done the last of those three.)

Rather, I have written to show you the fresh power of Nathaniel's story, a story that is and will always be here and now. Do you understand him better?

# The Mindstorm

**The Alumnus:** Hello. I was in town, and I wanted to stop in for a visit.

**The Visionary:** How good to see you! What have you been up to? We're all interested in hearing what our alumni are doing.

**The Alumnus:** Well, that would take a bit of explaining. I had a good experience with college.

**The Visionary:** That's lovely to hear.

**The Alumnus:** Yes, and I know that some alumni from our [Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy](#), also known as [IMSA](#), didn't. I got through college the same way I got through gradeschool, playing by the law of the jungle. I stopped and thought about how to approach college. I realized soon that higher numbered courses were easier than lower numbered courses, and how to find professors I could work with. And I understand why one alumna said, "IMSA didn't prepare me for college. It prepared me for graduate school." College will not automatically be a good experience for IMSA students, but there are choices the college won't advertise but could be made.

**The Visionary:** I wish you could speak to some of our

students.

**The Alumnus:** I'd like the opportunity. There are a lot of things to say—that there's a normal scale of elementary-junior high-high school-undergraduate-graduate school, and IMSA doesn't fit on it. It has high school aged students, but it's not a modified high school; it's close in ways to graduate school, but there's something about it that is missed if you put it at any one point on the scale. And this has the result that IMSA students need to realize that when they enter college, they are not going from high school to the next step after high school; they're going from IMSA to something that was not meant to follow IMSA. But something that has opportunities if they knock on back doors and take advantage of some things the university doesn't know they need.

**The Visionary:** If you're serious about talking to our students, I mean talking with our students, I can introduce you to the appropriate people.

**The Alumnus:** Thank you. I was mentioning this to lead up to a gem of a class I took, one on what you need to know to make user-friendly computer programs, i.e. usability. There was something that set me thinking, nettled me, when I was reading through some of the jargon file's Hell desk slang, um, I mean help desk slang. The term "pilot error" meant much the same thing as "ID ten T error".

**The Visionary:** I know what "pilot error" means in some contexts, but what does "ID ten T error" mean?

**The Alumnus:** It's easiest to see if you write it out.

**The Visionary** [goes to a markerboard and writes, "I D 1 0

T" ]: Um... I assume there's a reason you started to say, "Hell desk." Aren't they just blowing off steam?

**The Alumnus:** Yes. Unfortunately, one of the ways many help desk employees have blown off steam is to say, "Ok. If you'll hold for a minute, I'm going to transfer you to my supervisor. Would you tell her that you appear to have an 'eye dee ten tee' error?" And they all gloat over what they've gotten the customer to say. No, seriously, you don't need to keep a straight face.

But what really struck me was the entry for PEBKAC, acronym for "Problem Exists Between Keyboard and Chair." There was an example given of, Did you figure out why that guy couldn't print?

Yeah, he kept canceling the print operation before it could finish. PEBKAC.

This was philosophically interesting.

**The Visionary:** How?

**The Alumnus:** In a computer, you get these time wasting messages where a little window pops up and you can't do any useful work until you click on the button. It becomes noise for the sake of noise; like the boy who cried, "Wolf!", we have the computer that cries, "Worth your attention." After a while, the normal thing most people do is click on the button automatically so they can get back to their work. It's a waste of time to try to decipher the cryptic messages.

So when people go to print, another one of these waste-of-time windows pops up, except that this time, when you do the right thing and click on the button and make it go away, your print job fails. And this specific

example is chosen as a paradigm example of PEBKAC.

For a lot of these errors, there is a problem between a keyboard and chair. But the problem isn't between the user's keyboard and chair. The problem is between the programmer's keyboard and chair.

**The Visionary:** Ouch.

**The Alumnus:** That course was what led to what I did for my Ph.D.

**The Visionary:** And that was?

**The Alumnus:** My discipline of record is philosophy of mind/cognitive science.

**The Visionary:** "Discipline of record?" I'm curious to hear you drop the other shoe.

**The Alumnus:** Usability is connected to cognitive science—an amalgam of computer science, psychology, philosophy, neuroscience, linguistics, and other areas, all trying to understand human thought so we can re-implement it on a computer. It's a fascinating area for interdisciplinary study, and usability draws on it, just from a different angle: instead of making computers intelligent, it tries to make computers friendly to people who don't understand how they are built. And a lot of things which are clear as day if you built the system aren't automatically clear to customers. A system which is usable lets the user have an illusory cognitive model of how the system works that is far, far simpler than how a programmer would understand it. And programmers don't consciously believe that customers understand the innards of their system, but there's an assumption that creeps in, an assumption of, "My way of thinking about it is how a person thinks about it."

**The Visionary:** That way of putting it makes the programmers sound ego-centric.

**The Alumnus:** I wouldn't put it in such crude terms as that; they are thinking in a way that is human.

With languages, there is a lot of diversity. Aside from the variety of languages, there's a difference between the U.S., where the majority only speak one language, and Sénégal, where it is common for people to speak five or six languages. There's a difference between Italy, where people speak one national language in a fairly pure form, and India, where English and Hindi are spliced together seamlessly. For that matter, there's the deaf outlet of speaking with your hands instead of your mouth. But with all these differences, language itself is not something which is added to being human. Language is not a custom that cultures may happen to include. There are exceptional cases where people do not learn a language, and these are tragic cases where people are deprived of a human birthright. The specifics of language may vary, but language itself is not adding something to being human. It is something that is basically human. The details and even diversity of languages are details of how language works out.

And a lot of things are like that. Understanding something that you're working on is not something added to being human; it's an interpretation of something basic. How one thinks, about technology and other things, is not something added to being human.

It's something basically human.

One very natural tendency is to think that "I" or "we" or "people like us" are just being human; we just

have what is natural to being human. The "them" group has all sorts of things that are added to being human, but "we" are just being human. So we expect other people to think like us. We assume it so deeply and unconsciously that we are shocked by their perversity when they violate this expectation.

**The Visionary:** Wow. I hadn't thought of it in those terms before. Do you think IMSA provided a safe haven from this kind of lockstep thinking for its students?

**The Alumnus:** I think it provides a safe haven for quite a lot of its students. But getting back to my Ph.D. program—

**The Visionary:** Yes?

**The Alumnus:** So I began, encouraged by some initial successes, to try and make the first artificial mind. For a while I thought I would succeed, after overcoming some obstacles that couldn't have been that bad.

**The Visionary:** What were these obstacles?

**The Alumnus:** Just a special case here and there, an unrepresentative anomaly. But when I worked, I had a sneaking suspicion dawn on me.

Freshman year, I had a college roommate who was brilliant and eccentric. He turned out stunning proofs in math classes. He was also trying to build a perpetual motion machine. He was adjusting this and that; I listened, entranced, when he traced the history of great experiments in physics, and talked about how across the centuries they went from observing obvious behavior to find subtle ways to trick nature into showing you something you weren't supposed to see.

Think of the ingenuity of the Millikan oil drop experiment. And so he went on, trying to adjust this and

that, seeking to get things just right for a perpetual motion machine. There were times when he seemed to almost have it. It seemed there were ten things you needed for a perpetual motion machine, and he had an almost working machine for any nine of them. But that tenth one seemed never to fall into place.

And I had a sneaking suspicion, one that I was going to try awfully hard to ignore, that for a long time I convinced myself I didn't know what I was expecting. But *deja vu* kept creeping in. I had just succeeded with a project that met every clearly defined goal I set for it... but I had just found another way not to make artificial intelligence.

The crusher was when I read von Neumann's 1958 *The Computer and the Brain*. Then I stopped running from *deja vu*. Here was crass confidence that in 1958 we discovered the basis for all human thought, and all human thought is add, subtract, multiply, and divide. Here was an assumption in lieu of argument. And here was the air I breathed as a cognitive science.

**The Visionary:** But I've looked at some reports, and artificial intelligence seems to be just around the corner.

**The Alumnus:** Full artificial intelligence is just around the corner, and it's been just around the corner since at least the fifties—arguably much longer, because for a hundred years before the brain was a computer, it was a telephone exchange. (I think that's why we talk about a person being "wired" a particular way.) The brain is always understood as the state of the art technology we're most proud of.

I hit rock bottom after thinking about how I had convinced myself I was creating a working artificial intelligence by obtaining results and reinterpreting results as success. It's very seductive, and I was thinking about what some skeptics had said about magic.

What emerged was... The effort to make computers think has found ways that the human mind is much more interesting than we thought. And I began to push in a new direction. Instead of trying to understand human intelligence to make computers more intelligent, I began to try to understand human intelligence to make humans more intelligent.

**The Visionary:** What exactly do you mean?

**The Alumnus:** There are a lot of disciplines that teach you how to think. I think scholars in many disciplines see their discipline as the discipline that teaches you how to think, where truly different disciplines are a sort of no-man's land that doesn't qualify as "how to think." But these are a coupled subject matter and how to think about the subject matter. This was, in abstracted, crystalline, and universal form, "How to think." The analogy I used at the time was that it was the elementary school number line (1, 2, 3, ...), abstracted from sets of one physical object, two physical objects, three physical objects...

**The Visionary** [pausing]: It sounds like you're pioneering a new academic discipline. Would you like IMSA to highlight this?

**The Alumnus:** I am working that out. Not exactly whether what I am doing would qualify as an academic discipline—I'm pretty sure of that—but whether going down that

route would be the wisest choice. For now, I'd rather wait.

**The Visionary:** Are you sure you wouldn't want the prestige? Hmm... on second thought, I can see that. What are the scientific underpinnings of your discipline?

**The Alumnus** [pause]: That question is one of the first ones people ask me. It's automatic.

In tandem with what you might call my loss of faith in cognitive science, I began to question the cultural place of science. Including that in a question like this, the nearly immediate question people ask is one that assumes the answers are fed by science. Three of the most difficult mental accomplishments I've made are learning to think like a scientist, crafting this discipline of how to think, and learning to genuinely ask "How else could it be?" when people automatically go charging in with science.

**The Visionary:** But don't you think it's important to understand what's going on in the body?

**The Alumnus:** Both your questions, "What are the scientific underpinnings of your discipline?" and "But don't you think it's important to understand what's going on in the body?" are examples of the tendency I'm talking about. Your latter question assumes that "understanding the body" and "study the science of the body" are interchangeable terms; they often are treated that way in Western culture, but they need not be.

**The Visionary:** But how else could it be?

**The Alumnus:** In journalism and some writing classes, students are taught a technique of cubing, which asks

six questions, one for each side of the cube. The six questions are all "w" words: who, what, when, where, and how.

In most aboriginal cultures, for instance, people ask more than one question, but the big question is, "Why?" The stories provide explanations for why the world is as it is.

In science, the big question is, "How?" Laws and theories provide mechanisms for how things happen. "Why?" isn't just de-emphasized; it's something people learn not to ask, something that is subtly stamped out like much of a child's creativity. Asking "Why?" is a basic error, like asking how much an idea weighs. One philosopher of science I read gave an example of a father asking a teenaged son, "Why is the living room light on?" and getting the answer, "Because the switch is in the 'on' position, closing the circuit and causing electricity to flow through the bulb." That isn't why, that's how. And if students are taught science without being taught how to be independent from science, or for that matter if they are in a culture influenced by science as ours has been, they'll come to share the assumption that this is the one and only serious answer to, "Why is the living room light on?"

That puts things too simply, but my point is that science does not represent the full range of inquiry. Science has cast a powerful shadow, not just in that science is scientific (which is as it should be) but in that non-scientific inquiry is not as independent as it should be.

But I'm getting off topic. What I was meaning to say

was that I use science, but my discipline is dependent on an independence from science as well.

**The Visionary:** Could I backtrack a fair distance?

**The Alumnus:** Sure, to what?

**The Visionary:** There was something in the back of my mind when you answered my question about IMSA shielding its students from a lockstep environment. May I ask a more specific question?

**The Alumnus:** Certainly.

**The Visionary:** Did IMSA shield you from a lockstep environment?

**The Alumnus:** IMSA was unquestionably a better environment for me than a mainstream school.

**The Visionary:** You're being diplomatic.

**The Alumnus:** Ok. IMSA tries to be a magnet school serving the gifted population. Instead of memorization, it tries to produce critical observers, right?

**The Visionary:** Yes, and this isn't just for IMSA. We want to be a beacon of hope, for educational progress to the state and to the world.

**The Alumnus:** IMSA still doesn't have a football program, right?

**The Visionary:** IMSA students still don't really want one. If there was enough demand, we'd have one.

**The Alumnus:** What would you say to a football coach who wanted to liberate the tough, aggressive quarterback struggling to get out of every IMSA bookworm?

**The Visionary:** I think I see where you're going. Let me play devil's advocate for the moment. Our society has recognized football as an endeavor for some. But don't we recognize that education is a goal for all?

**The Alumnus:** All analogies break down, and I can't force you to see my point if you don't want to. My reason for drawing that analogy is that the average mind learns by memorization of given material, and that mind is ill-served by trying to liberate that critical observer just as many bookworms would be ill-served by trying to liberate that hidden quarterback. The kind of student that does well at IMSA doesn't do so well with the memorization that serves the average student. But it's a two-way street.

**The Visionary:** And I think I see a connection to what you said about programmers assume that how they think about a product is how everybody will think about it.  
And...

**The Alumnus:** Yes. But there's something else.

**The Visionary:** So how do you think IMSA's outreach should be changed? Should we stop outreach?

**The Alumnus:** I'd want to give that some thought. That isn't why I brought this up. I brought up this two-edged sword to make it easier to see another two-edged sword.

The two-edged sword I've suggested is that, just as IMSA students tend to be uncomfortable with the instructional methods at most schools, average students would be uncomfortable with instruction that seeks to liberate a hidden critical observer. It's a bad match both ways. The other two-edged sword has to do with the nature of giftedness. How would you define giftedness?

**The Visionary:** I try not to, at least in not as strong terms as you do. IMSA is trying to liberate the genius of

every child.

**The Alumnus:** I think your actions are wiser than your rhetoric. How much thought goes into your admissions decisions?

**The Visionary:** Our admissions staff give a great deal of thought! Do you think we're careless?

**The Alumnus:** I would have been disturbed if IMSA made a random choice from among the students whose genius would be nurtured. Are you sure you don't want to define giftedness?

**The Visionary:** Every child has some talent.

**The Alumnus:** I agree, although your words sound suspiciously like words that many IMSA parents have learned to wince at. There are a lot of parents who have bright children who have learned that "All of our children are gifted." means, in practical terms, "Your daughter will be educated according to our idealization of an average student, no matter how much it hurts her, and we won't make accommodation."

But you are, unlike me, an administrator whom everybody blames for problems, and you know that there are many occasions where coming out and expressing your candid opinions is an invitation to disaster. I groused about the administration to no end as a student; it is only as an adult that I've come to appreciate the difficult and delicate task of being an administrator, and what kind of performance on an administration's part lets me focus on my work.

I'm going to put on my suspicious and mistrustful observer cap and read into your actions that it would be politically dangerous for you to say "This is the kind of

gifted student we look for at IMSA." But I am not an administrator. I am more of a private person than you can afford to be, and there are more degrees of freedom offered to me. Would you mind my giving my opinion on a matter where you in particular need to be very careful in what you say?

**The Visionary:** I'm always open to listen, and I'm not just saying this as an administrator.

**The Alumnus:** I should also say that because something is politic, I don't automatically translate "politic" to "insincere." I believe you've been as successful as you have partly because you sincerely want to hear what people have to say. When someone says, "political sensitivity," I've learned to stop being a cynic and automatically hearing, "Machiavellian intrigue."

But when I teach, I try to have a map that accomodates itself to terrain, both old and new to me. There are surprisingly many things I believe that are human universals, although I won't discuss them here. But diversity is foundational to how I communicate, and in particular teach.

By "diversity" I don't just mean "affirmative action concerns." I read what I can about minority cultures, and how Asperger's or ADD minds tick. That much is important, and I'm not just jumping on the bandwagon. But diversity doesn't begin when a student labeled as "minority," "different," or "disadvantaged" sits down in your classroom. Diversity begins much earlier. Diversity is every person. I'm fond of books like David Kiersey's *Please Understand Me II* which explore what temperament and Myers-Briggs types mean for

personhood. I want to appreciate learning styles. I absolutely love when students come in during office hours, because then I can see exactly where a student is, and exactly how that student is learning and thinking, and give an explanation that is tailored to the student's specific situation. I like to lecture too, but I'm freest to meet student needs when students visit me in my office.

And one very important facet of that diversity is one that is unfashionable today, more specifically IQ.

**The Visionary:** I remember seeing a report that your IQ was so high it was untestable by normal means. I've heard that polite drivers value politeness, skillful drivers value skill, and safe drivers value safety. Is there...?

**The Alumnus:** If you want to dismiss what I'm saying because of speculation about my motives, there's a good case to do so. I know that. But please hear and accept or dismiss my arguments on their merits, and if you read books like James Webb's *Guiding the Gifted Child*, you'll see this isn't just my idea. I accept multiple intelligence theory as a nuance, but I would point my finger to the idea that a single IQ was an adjustment in theory, made by people who started by assuming multiple intelligences.

But with all the debates, and in particular despite the unfashionability of "IQ", there is excellent reason to discuss giftedness in terms of IQ. IQ may not be the whole story, but you're missing something big if it is treated as one factor among others.

Several caveats deleted, I would point out that

giftedness is not a binary attribute, any more than being tall is binary. There may be some people who are clearly tall and others who clearly aren't, but regardless of where you draw the line, you can't divide people into a "tall" group of people who are all exactly 190 centimeters tall and a "non-tall" group of people who are 160 centimeters tall. There is diversity, and this diversity remains even if you restrict your attention to tall people.

**The Visionary:** So then would you say that most high schools serve an average diversity, and IMSA serves a gifted diversity?

**The Alumnus:** Umm...

**The Visionary:** Yes?

**The Alumnus:** An average high school breaks at both ends of its spectrum...

**The Visionary:** Yes?

**The Alumnus:** Um...

**The Visionary:** Yes?

**The Alumnus:** And IMSA breaks at both ends of its spectrum.

**The Visionary:** If there are some students who the administration overestimates, this is unfortunate, but—

**The Alumnus:** That's not my point. Ignoring several other dimensions of diversity, we don't have two points of "average" and "gifted" defining a line. Giftedness, anyway, is not "the same kind of intelligence as most people have, only more of it and faster"; it's a different kind of intelligence. It diverges more the further you go.

Instead of the two points of "average" and "gifted",

there are three points to consider: "average", "gifted",  
and "profoundly gifted."

I think it is to IMSA's great credit that you have a  
gifted education, not a pullout tacked on to a nongifted  
education. Serving gifted needs isn't an adjustment;  
it's the fabric you've woven, and it is impressive.

But "profoundly gifted" is as different from the  
"moderately gifted" as "moderately gifted" is from  
"average"...

...and IMSA attracts a good proportion of the  
profoundly gifted minority...

...and the position of the profoundly gifted at IMSA  
is exactly the position many IMSA students had in TAG  
pullouts.

**The Visionary:** May I say a word in IMSA's defense?

**The Alumnus:** Certainly.

**The Visionary:** IMSA began as a dream, a wild, speculative,  
powerful, risky vision. From the beginning, its place was  
tentative; some of the first classes did math problems  
before the state government because IMSA was  
threatened with closing. IMSA makes things happen  
that wouldn't happen anywhere, and for all we've done,  
there are still people who would remove us from the  
budget. I've talked with alumni, both those who like and  
dislike the school, and I see something in them which I  
didn't see in other places.

**The Alumnus:** And IMSA is a safe place to learn and grow,  
and IMSA alumni are making a powerful contribution to  
the world. All of this I assume. And IMSA seems like  
the kind of place that could grow, that does grow.  
IMSA could offer the world certain extraordinarily

talented individuals that have been stretched to their limit, who have spent certain very formative years doing things most people don't even dream of, and doing so not in isolation but guided and supported as powerfully, and as gently for their needs, as IMSA already offers to so many of its students.

**The Visionary:** If you have any plans, I would like to hear them.

**The Alumnus:** Before I give the plans as such, I would like to give a brief overview, not just of the average, moderately gifted, and profoundly gifted mind, but of the average, moderately gifted, and profoundly gifted spirit. Keep in mind that this is not a trichotomy, but three reference points on a curve.

The average mind is concrete. It deals in practical, concrete matters. There was one study which posed isomorphic problems to people, one of which was stated abstractly, and one of which asked in concrete terms who the "cheaters" were. The average respondent did poorly on the abstract isomorph, but was astute when it was put concretely. The average mind is more practical, and learns by an understanding which gradually emerges by going over things again. The preferred learning style is oriented towards memorization and is relatively slow, concrete, and (on gifted terms) doesn't make connections. This person is the fabric with which society is woven; a person like this tends to understand and be understood by others. The average mind concentrates on, and becomes reasonably proficient, in a small number of skills.

The moderately gifted mind, around an IMSA IQ of

140, deals with abstractions. It sees interconnections, and this may be related to why the moderately gifted mind learns more skills with less effort. (If this is true, an average mind would be learning from scratch, while a moderately gifted mind would only make adaptations from similar skills.) This person is likely to have a "collection of skills", and have a low self-assessment in those skills. (Today's breathtaking performance is, tomorrow, marginally adequate.) Self-actualizing concern for becoming a particular kind of person is much more common. The moderately gifted mind enjoys an advantage over the average mind, and is different, but still close enough to connect. This person learns more quickly, and most of society's leaders are moderately gifted. (Some have suggested that this is not just because people above that range are much rarer, but because they can easily connect.

There is controversy about how isolated the profoundly gifted person is, with an IQ around 180. Some researchers believe that the greater gap is bridged by the greater ability to connect; Webb suggests otherwise, saying that children with an IQ above 170 feel like they don't fit in anywhere. He asks what the effects would be if a normal child grew up in a world where most people had an IQ of 50-55. Some profoundly gifted have discussed the feeling that there's an instruction manual to life that everyone but them has. The unusual sense of humor that appears in the moderately gifted is even more pronounced in the profoundly gifted. Average people tend to believe some tacit and naively realistic philosophy. Moderately gifted

people tend to believe some conscious and creative reinterpretation of realism. Profoundly gifted people tend to believe an almost automatic anti-realism. The realism assumed by most people doesn't resonate with them. And I need to explain what I mean by "believe" here. I don't mean that someone engaged them in a discussion and are convinced by logic or eloquence that an anti-realist philosophy is true. I mean something close to experience, as we believe that a radiator is hot after we touch it. Realism is obvious for someone of average intelligence. For someone profoundly gifted, coming to that perspective represents a significant achievement.

Furthermore, where the moderately gifted person has a "skill collection", the profoundly gifted individual has what might as well be magic powers—

**The Visionary:** You mean is involved with the occult or psychic phenomena?

**The Alumnus:** Not exactly. Profoundly gifted individuals have been known to do things like reinventing the steam engine at age six. Some of them can walk into a room and in an instant infer what kind of presentation is going to be given, and what kind of organization is going to give it. They have been known to make penetrating observations of connections between vastly different disciplines. Some have written a book in a week. Others remember everything they have read. Verbatim. Another still has invented a crude physics and using it to solve problems before she was old enough to talk. It's entirely plausible for a profoundly gifted individual to think for a few hours about a philosophical school

he's just read about, and have a better grasp of the assumptions and implications surrounding that school than scholars who have studied the discipline for years.

Many accomplishments are less extreme than that. Some are more extreme. I said that they might as well be magic powers because they are no more believable to many people than levitation or fairies granting wishes. Moderately gifted achievements are envied. Profoundly gifted achievements are disbelieved, and one social lesson the profoundly gifted learn is that there are certain accomplishments that you don't talk about... which feels the way most people would feel if people were shocked and offended when they tried to say, "I can read," or for that matter, "I can breathe."

These people do not think of themselves as having magic powers. Their impressive abilities are no more breathtaking or astonishing to them than our impressive abilities of walking through an unfamiliar room or understanding a children's book are to us—and if you don't believe that walking through an unfamiliar room or understanding a children's book is an astonishing mental feat, just spend a year in artificial intelligence. Artificial researchers know what kind of achievement is represented by these "basic" tasks. The rest of us misunderstand them as mundane. If you can understand how you can be better at understanding emotions than any computer in the world, and not think of yourself as gifted, you have a good start on understanding what it's like to feel that it's natural to tinker with your hands, imagine who you're going to be when you grow up, enjoy cooking, and have dreams where your brain creates

languages on the fly.

It's a commonplace that the gifted can have a rough time of school. What IMSA does is place the profoundly gifted in the position of fixed pace classes designed for people significantly less intelligent than them.

It's easier to criticize than it is to give a positive alternative; let me give a positive alternative.

First of all, profoundly gifted students can pick things up much more rapidly even than most IMSA students. Something like a factor of four speedup can happen again and again. Many of these students would tear through textbooks if you let them.

**The Visionary:** But at IMSA we don't dump textbooks on students. We provide an environment where they can discover things for themselves.

**The Alumnus:** They will discover things for themselves. But if you look at learning styles, the profoundly gifted are some of the most able to understand a crystallized abstraction, and the most likely to work ahead in their textbooks.

IMSA may have a dozen or so profoundly gifted individuals at any one time.

**The Visionary:** And we've provided accommodation for a bright sophomore physics class.

**The Alumnus:** Yes, it is possible for students to lobby for accommodation on a specific point.

But it's possible to go further, as IMSA has gone further than TAG pullouts.

There could be a small number of people who serve as tutors, in a sort of tutorial system as can be seen in Oxford's and Cambridge's history. They would be like

thesis advisors, less responsible for knowing what the students need to learn than offering direction and referrals.

**The Visionary:** What would you have them do if they tear through IMSA's curriculum sophomore year?

**The Alumnus:** Students that bright are likely to have their own axes to grind—good axes, axes which they should be encouraged. I really have trouble imagining a student flying through IMSA's normal curriculum and then wanting to watch TV for two years. The problem of motivating these students is like the problem of defending a lion: the first thing is to get out of the way.

The teachers themselves should offer the kind of individualized instruction that is basic to special education, and deal with the "magic powers" that the main curriculum doesn't know how to deal with.

**The Visionary:** Would the teachers have to be profoundly gifted?

**The Alumnus:** I don't know. I would place more emphasis on understanding profoundly gifted students than necessarily being profoundly gifted oneself.

Furthermore, as well as standing in need of conceptual education, profoundly gifted students could benefit from personal development to help them meet the rest of the world. I don't know whether it would be correct to say that average education should be about knowledge, gifted education should be about how to think, and profoundly gifted education should be about personal development. I think the idea is worth considering. And I would try to develop some things that aren't needed in average education and less

needed in moderately gifted education, such as how to bridge the gap and meet the rest of the world.

**The Visionary:** I'll think about that. I would be delighted to say you've shown me how to solve this problem.

**The Alumnus:** I'd be surprised if I've shown you how to solve this problem. If I were asked what I could guarantee for this model, it would be that some part of it is wrong. I would ask you to consider what I've presented you as a rough draft. In my opinion it is a rough draft worth revising, changing course in midstream if need be, but it is a rough draft.

**The Visionary:** This is all very well for office hours, but how do you teach a class? You don't try to individualize a lecture twenty different ways, do you?

**The Alumnus:** I believe what I said about diversity as foundational, but I also believe there are things that are common. I believe there are significant commonalities as well as significant differences.

What would you say is the dominant educational philosophy at IMSA?

**The Visionary:** There are several philosophies we draw on, and several things vary from teacher to teacher. But if I were to pick one school, it would be constructivism.

**The Alumnus:** Does constructivism see the student as an empty pot, to be filled with knowledge?

**The Visionary:** Quite the opposite. Constructivism sees the students as agents, trying to actively construct their models of the world, not as empty pots to be filled, or as formless clay for the teachers to shape. We see the teacher as supporting the student in this active task.

**The Alumnus:** And I agree that students should be active

and encouraged by teachers. A related question—do you believe mathematics is something that research mathematicians invent, or something that they find out?

**The Visionary:** Well, the obvious answer would be that it's something constructed.

**The Alumnus:** I disagree with you, at least about the "obvious" part.

**The Visionary:** Then I'll trust your judgment that it's something mathematicians discover. You've probably thought about this a lot more than I have.

**The Alumnus:** You don't need to agree with me here. There are a lot of good mathematicians who believe mathematics is something invented.

**The Visionary:** Are you saying I should believe mathematics is constructed?

**The Alumnus:** No. There are also a lot of mathematicians who understand mathematics and say mathematics is something that's found out.

**The Visionary:** Now I'm having trouble seeing where you're going.

**The Alumnus:** There's a debate among mathematicians as to whether mathematics is invented or discovered, with good mathematicians falling into either camp. The word 'discover' itself is ambiguous; one can say "I discovered the TV remote under the couch" and have "discover" mean "dis-cover" or "find out," but one can also say, "I discovered a way to build a better mousetrap," and have "discover" mean "invent". "Invent" derives from the Latin "invenire," which means "come into", i.e. "find," so that it would be more natural in Latin to say "I just invented my car keys" than "I invented a useful tool."

**The Visionary:** I think I see what you are saying... Are you saying that there is a single reality described both by discovery and invention?

**The Alumnus:** Yes. Now to tie in with constructivism... What are students doing when they are constructing models?

**The Visionary:** They are shaping thought-stuff, for lack of a better term, in a way that's different for each learner.

**The Alumnus:** And this is to break out of the Enlightenment/Diderot encyclopedia mindset which gives rise to stuffing the learner with facts?

**The Visionary:** Absolutely.

**The Alumnus:** Where would you place Kant? Was he a medieval philosopher?

**The Visionary:** He was one of the Enlightenment's greatest philosophers.

**The Alumnus:** And Kant's model of ideas was unchanged from Plato.

**The Visionary:** Um...

**The Alumnus:** Yes?

**The Visionary:** What Plato called "Ideas" and Kant's "ideas" are two different things. For Plato, the Ideas were something strange to us: a reality outside the mind.

**The Alumnus:** Um... Plato and Kant would equally have affirmed the statement, "Ideas are internal."

**The Visionary:** I don't think so. Plato's Allegory of the Cave suggests that the Ideas are part of something that is the same for all people.

**The Alumnus:** If I may digress for a moment, I think that famous passage should be called "the Allegory of the

Television." I appreciate your limiting the place of television at IMSA. But back to the topic, for Plato the Ideas were internal, but were not private.

**The Visionary:** Huh?

**The Alumnus:** Kant was a pivotal figure in our—the Enlightenment's—idea that the only real stuff outside our head is matter. When Kant says "internal," he says "private," and when we say "internal," we say "private." If you think this way, then you believe that thought is something done in a private corner. This privacy may be culturally conditioned, but it is privacy. And yet, however self-evident this seems to us, a great many philosophers and cultures have believed otherwise.

There is a private aspect to thought, but my research into how to think has led me to question the Enlightenment model and believe that we all think on the same contoured surface. We can be on different parts and move in different ways, but in thinking we deal with a reality others deal with as well. And I'm going to sound like a kooky philosopher and say that you have a deficient cosmology, and therefore a deficient corollary understanding of how humans are capable of learning, if you believe that everything is either inside the mind or else something you can kick.

**The Visionary:** But we're questioning the Enlightenment model, and rejecting parts of it that have problems!

**The Alumnus:** I know you are. And I would encourage you to question more of it.

**The Visionary:** How does this belief affect teaching for you?

**The Alumnus:** Most immediately, it helps me say ways to

identify with students—connect with their thought. There are some things that pay off long term. But in the short run, when a student makes a mistake, the student is not bad, nor is the mistake is not an anomaly to push away. A mistake is an invaluable opportunity for me to understand how a student is thinking and draw the student to a better understanding.

In terms of base metaphor, if you look at Dewey's foundationalism, what it is that bothers many IMSA teachers and IMSA teachers are working to change, the basic idea is that the teacher is building up knowledge, from its foundations, in the student's mind. If I were to try and capture it in a metaphor, I would say that the student is an empty lot, and the teacher is building a house on it. The teacher is actively doing teaching to the student.

The constructivism that resonates with many IMSA teachers doesn't like the idea of the teacher being active and the student being the passive receptacle of teaching. It's fine for the teacher to be active, but they don't believe the student is passive because they were quite active learners themselves. Constructivist writers don't refer to 'students' so much as 'learners;' they emphasize that the learner is active. The basic idea is that people are actively trying to build their own unique understandings of the world, and a constructivist teacher is trying to support learners in this endeavor.

If foundationalism is crystallized in the image of a teacher building a house on an empty lot, constructivist learning theory is crystallized in the image of learners picking up what they can to build their own private

edifices of thought, their interior castles.

**The Visionary:** What do you think of those?

**The Alumnus:** I think we're comparing a hammer with a screwdriver. If you read debate on the web, you'll see people who think constructivism is a hazy and incomprehensibly bad version of foundationalism, and people who think foundationalism is a hazy and incomprehensibly bad version of constructivism. The truth is neither; good foundationalist teaching like Direct Instruction is doing one thing well, and good constructivist learning is doing another thing well, and different people learn differently.

**The Visionary:** But do you have an alternative?

**The Alumnus:** Yes, and it is again suggested by basic metaphor. Instead of building a house, or helping learners construct their private models, I would suggest looking at a single word, *katalabein*. I am using a Greek word without an exact English equivalent, because it ties together some things that are familiar—part of the shared inner human reality which we can recognize. It can be translated 'overcome' or 'understand', and it provides for a basic metaphor in which what is understood is actively acquired, achieved even, but it is not necessarily idiosyncratic and private. We still have an active learner, and implications for how a teacher can support that active learner...

**The Visionary:** Go on.

**The Alumnus:** But it's different. I was fascinated with one constructivist learning page that recast the teacher as a sort of non-directive counselor. They facilitated learning experiences, but they realized that students

came in with beliefs, like "Weeds are not plants because they don't need to be nurtured," and what really fascinated me was that some of them found themselves in an ethical quandary about the appropriateness of using a science class to influence student beliefs, say to agree with a botanist that dandelions are plants.

**The Visionary:** None of the IMSA teachers are that squeamish about influencing student beliefs.

**The Alumnus:** One alum made a comment that "looney liberals" seemed to him to offer a similar service to coal miner's canaries. It wouldn't be fair to accuse most liberals of their excesses, but it was still worth keeping an eye on them: they could be a warning that it was time to rethink basic ideas. Even if those web pages may fall more into the "canary" category than anything else...

**The Visionary:** But what do you have instead of helping students build private world-pictures?

**The Alumnus:** Instead of helping students build private world-pictures, helping students grapple with, in the overcoming that is understanding and the understanding that is overcoming, the katalabein of material. And this is material that always has a personal touch, but is understood to be internal in a way that is not simply how one has arbitrarily exercised privacy, but connects with a sort of inner terrain that is as shared as the outer terrain. No two people are at—no two people can be at—the exact same place in the external, physical world, nor can two people see the same thing, because their personal bodies get in the way. But that does not mean we inhabit our own private physical universes. I can tell

you how to drive to my house because to get there, you would be navigating some of the same reality as I navigate. But somehow we believe that our bodies may touch the same doorknobs and our shoes may touch the same carpets... Somehow we believe that when we turn inside, the "reality" becomes impenetrably private, influenced by culture perhaps but shared to so little an extent that no two people shares the same inner sun and moon.

**The Visionary:** But that's the external world! You're not talking about when people can make up anything they want.

**The Alumnus:** Hmm... As part of your job, you field criticism from people who want IMSA to be shut down, right?

**The Visionary:** Yes.

**The Alumnus:** And a good portion of that criticism comes from people who are certain you've never considered the objection they raise, right?

**The Visionary:** You've been reading my mail!

**The Alumnus:** And how many years has it been since one of those letters contained a criticism that was new to you?

**The Visionary:** You've been reading my... um... [pause] Wow.

**The Alumnus:** The introduction to the Handbook of Special Education tries to make a point by quoting the opening meeting of the International Council for the Education of Exceptional Children. The meeting had in all respects a typical (for today) discussion of how one should define special needs children. And the meeting was in 1923.

The point was made that special educators assume they're the first people to address new issues, when neither the issues nor their thoughts are new. An old

internet denizen, writing about "the September that never ended", talked about how each year in September new college students would flood newsgroup discussions with "new, new, new" insights that were, in the denizen's words, "exactly the same tripe" that had been posted the previous year.

There is really not that much that is new, and this is tied to another observation. There is really not that much that is private. There is some. Even in the outer world there are some things that are private to each person. But in the inner world—and I am not talking about your inner world, or mine, but a real world, the inner world, a place that has contours of its own and laws of its own and terrain of its own and substances of its own which are no more the subject of an idiosyncratic private monopoly than the outer world's sun and moon. Perhaps it has a private dimension, but to assume that an inner world is by definition someone's most private possession is almost like answering the remark "The Atlantic Ocean is getting more polluted," with "Whose Atlantic Ocean?"

**The Visionary:** Is there a way to integrate the inner world with the outer world?

**The Alumnus:** I am guilty of a rhetorical fault. I have spoken of the outer world as if it were separate from the inner world, and the inner world as if it were separate from the outer world. The real task is not one of integration but desegregation, and that is a lesson I've been wrestling with for years. The biggest lesson I took from my Ph.D. thesis, where I achieved a fascinating distillation of how to think from learning as

we know it, is that how to think cannot be distilled from learning, and learning cannot be distilled from the rest of life. It is all interconnected. It's like a classic plot in fantasy literature where a hero is searching for a legendary treasure, and goes to strange places and passes amazing trials. We're there learning with him, until there is an end where "nothing" happens, but by the time that "nothing" takes place, we've been with the hero all along and we have been transformed just as much as he is, and we see through the "nothing" to recognize the treasure that has been all around the hero—and us—all along.

The real world has an internal and an external dimension, and there is nothing like trying to crystallize purer and purer internal knowledge to see the interpenetration of the internal and the external. I learned that the internal is not self-contained.

**The Visionary:** Is there anything that has been written which deals with this connection?

**The Alumnus:** Are you asking me if you can borrow a truckload of books? There are some cultures where it's hard to find material which doesn't relate the connection in some form.

But let me tie this in with education. Postmodernism is fragmented, so much so that postmodern scholars tend to put "postmodern" in ironic quotes and add some qualifier about whether it's even coherent to talk about such a movement. From the inside, there isn't a single postmodern movement; talking about a postmodern movement is like talking about a herd of housecats. But this is not because talking about being "postmodern" is

meaningless; it's because one of the characteristics is fragmentation, and so if there is anything called postmodern, then it will be much more of a grab bag than something called modern.

Constructivism is postmodern, not in that anything called postmodern must resemble it, but because it can be placed on a somewhat ad hoc spectrum. It is internally fragmented, in that it is not helping students navigate the world of ideas, but in trying to reckon with learners' development of private models of the world.

In typical postmodern fashion, the movement shows exquisite sensitivity to ways in which student constructed models are parochial, and does not inquire into ways in which students may be grappling with something universal. (At best learners' constructs are culturally conditioned.)

In what I am suggesting, learners are active, but students are working with something which is not so much clay to be shaped in the privacy of one's mind. I am aware of the parochial dimension—as a culture, we've been aware of it to death—but I'm trying to look at something we don't pay as much attention to today. I suggest, instead of a basic metaphor of learners constructing their own models, learners struggling to conquer parts of the world of ideas. Conquer means in some sense to appropriate; it means in part what we mean when we say that a mountain climber physically conquered an ascent and mastered its terrain. And this is not a cookie cutter, but it provides serious place for something that doesn't have soil to root itself in in constructivism.

I suspect that this is a lot less exotic than it sounds. Would you say that IMSA teachers often understand their students?

**The Visionary:** I think they often try.

**The Alumnus:** I think they often succeed.

Communication in general draws on being able to identify with the other. It says, "Even if I disagree with you, I understand what it means that you believe differently from what I do." You know what it's like when someone is talking with you and simply cannot identify with where you are coming from. It feels clumsy. Good communicators can identify with other people, and even a partial understanding is much better than no understanding at all.

I think the teachers I had at least showed something wiser than constructivism. Read something like Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and you will see appreciation of incommensurability and a communication divide between opposing camps; unlike the later Kuhn, you will also see that this claim of incommensurability, where opposing sides invariably argue past each other in debates, is applied to both major and minor paradigm shifts. Now if we look at a constructivist approach, where this kind of thinking is applied to individual peoples' models as well as models that are shared across a camp, then we have an excellent reason not to teach.

We have an excellent reason to say that teachers' and students' models are not only conflicting but incommensurable, that the teacher may have more power but in a fair debate they would argue past each

other, and that the basis for the teacher understanding and therefore successfully influencing the student is at very least questionable. In the end, we have something which affects the concept of teaching more profoundly than the observation that students will see things that teachers don't realize. If you look at Kuhn, you will see a remark that the winning side of a scientific paradigm shift will naturally view the shift as progress. This contributes to an account for people thinking science progresses without science actually progressing.

Science shifts. But the shift is not a step forward from less developed science to more developed science. It is a step sideways, from one reigning paradigm to another. And in like fashion, if you follow a natural constructivist path, you have an alternative to saying that the teacher knows more about science than the students. The teacher is more powerful, but there is a way out for someone who wants to deny that the teacher has more desirable knowledge that the students should learn. Not only can we argue that "teaching" communication is impossible, but we can argue that "teaching" communication is undesirable even if it were possible.

**The Visionary:** But that can't be what our teachers believe! You have to be misunderstanding constructivism. That's not how it works out.

**The Alumnus:** I agree with you that that can't be what many IMSA teachers believe. It is only what they say. And what they think they believe.

**The Visionary:** You mean...

**The Alumnus:** Foundationalism is a bad account of how most IMSA teachers learn. They learn actively, and IMSA

students learn actively. And constructivism offers a compelling metaphor for active learning. But teachers at IMSA don't believe all its implications. Like the character in a George MacDonald book who was fond of saying, "Marry in haste, repent at leisure," and had married in haste, but hadn't really thought about repenting, even though she'd had plenty of leisure in which to repent. If constructivism may undercut the possibility of communication, and the possibility of the teacher drawing students to join her in expert practice, this is not yet a problem. In practical terms, teachers believe they can communicate, and they have something to share. And they do this. There may be problems where this goes down the road, but in practical terms IMSA teachers live a philosophy with communication that is often excellent.

And, as far as metaphors go, I think that the katalabein metaphor offers something valuable that the constructivist metaphor doesn't. In particular, the fact that teachers can communicate, and leave students better off, doesn't just happen to be true; it's something that one can delve into. You don't just take the metaphor into consideration when you communicate on a basis that doesn't come from the model; the metaphor itself gives you a basis to communicate. And it's different enough to compete in an interesting way. Or complement constructivism in an interesting way. Even if it's not perfect.

**The Visionary:** Yes, I know. Do you regret the fact that it's so messy?

**The Alumnus:** I regret the fact that it's not messy enough.

When we describe a rainbow, we say that the colors are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. But those aren't the colors of the rainbow. If you pick a color at random on the rainbow, there's a zero percent chance that you will exactly pick one of those colors. A rainbow is a spectrum, and if you have a wavelength for each of those colors, you have seven reference points for a spectrum with infinitely many colors. And a reference point can help you understand a spectrum, but a reference point is not a spectrum.

I've done, I think, a decent job of describing one reference point on a spectrum. But teachers rarely follow one educational theory in pure form; they tend to draw on several, and this is intended not to be a complete theory, but a reference point in a pluralistic theory. Most theories are a single point. This theory is meant to be a spectrum, but isn't there yet.

And as much as a robust theory of education needs to be pluralistic, sensitive to the diversity that is every student, there also needs to be a sensitivity to the diversity of knowledge. English is cursed to only have one word for knowledge.

**The Visionary:** But we have well enough established division of knowledge into subjects. In fact that's what we're trying to teach our students to get past.

**The Alumnus:** That's not quite what I meant.

In most of the languages I know, there's more than one word for knowledge. In French, there is *savoir*, which is the knowledge one has about facts, and *connaissance*, which is the knowledge one has of a person. It's a different kind of thing to know about a

fact and to know of a person, and this is reflected in different words. Conscience is not simply the French word for conscience; it means consciousness, and some of the more ethereal and personal aspects of knowledge. The Latin eruditio and notitia have other nuances. In English we do have "wisdom," "knowledge," and "information," which are as different from each other as an apple, an orange, and a pear.

And this is without treating ways of thought. One of the things I learned was that knowledge and ways of thought could be distinguished but not separated. If you look at Eastern ways, whether they are religions like Hinduism or Eastern Orthodoxy, or martial arts like Kuk Sool Won or Ninpo, you will find quite a different pedagogy from what we assume in the West. Instead of trying to open the mind and dump in knowledge, they begin by training the body, in actions, and then this begins to affect the soul and transform the spirit.

**The Visionary:** Isn't constructivism more like that?

**The Alumnus:** It is. But instead of reinventing experiential learning, Eastern ways preserve a Tao, or for a Western word, a matrix. Most recently in the West, Matrix is the name of a trilogy where each movie was better than the next. But before that, a matrix was a mathematical construct, and are you familiar with what "matrix" meant before that? It was the Latin word meaning "womb." And this concept of a womb, or a matrix, is something which has become alien to Western thought.

A matrix is the medium in which you move, the air in which you breathe. It has the authority of your culture and your mother tongue. It is a very different kind of

authority from the authority of a single leader, or a written rule; a matrix does not consciously command you, but provides you with the options which shape your choice. And the Eastern ways all preserve a matrix, a way, that provides their pedagogy. In a sense the difference between constructivist experiential learning and Eastern experiential learning is the difference between non-native speakers trying to speak a language and a community of native speakers continuing to use their language. Except to make the comparison more fair, constructivists are trying to construct a language, and put together something that works, and Eastern pedagogues have inherited something that works. The difference is kind of like the difference between an experimental kind of baseball glove that someone is trying out and a glove that is not only traditional but already broken in.

**The Visionary:** Um... I'll have to think about what you have said about a "matrix." Ok, you've given me a lot to think about. It would be premature for me to respond now. I'm going to need to think about what you've said. But let me change the subject. What other ideas do you have about teaching, especially concrete ones?

**The Alumnus:** It's a bit like a light—it makes other things easier to see. But let me talk about other ways of teaching, such as listening.

**The Visionary:** I know how you can listen if a student asks a question, but how do you listen when lecturing?

**The Alumnus:** Listening is about trying to understand the other person as a basis for communication. Apart from the feedback that's in student questions—if you look

for it—a person's face is a window to what is going on inside, and a teacher sees student faces frequently. I know the ominous silence when the class is so lost that students are afraid to ask questions. I don't just charge on because it's important to cover the remaining material. I try to stop, back up, and help the students to genuinely understand, and then proceed from genuine understanding. Homework offers implicit feedback on what I succeeded in communicating, and what I did not succeed in. And there's an implicit listening mindset behind trying not to inundate students with too much information at once.

There's a book of little stories, and in one of them, a sage was asked, "What is your name?" He pondered for a moment and said, "My name used to be... Me. But now it's... You." I didn't like that story at first, because I didn't understand it. Now I understand enough of it to see that it has a profound truth. Talking is about "me", and listening is part of a lifelong journey of learning to think in terms of "you." Listening has far more to offer a teacher than a better understanding of student questions.

There are a lot of things I like about how IMSA works—your belief that the needs of the mind cannot be met if the needs of the body are neglected. How this you fit this in with Arbor food service is not clear to me

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**The Visionary:** Thanks, Dear...

**The Alumnus:** Any time. But I really like the understanding you have of the human person as interconnected on multiple levels, including the body and mind. I also take

that as axiomatic, and teach so that students will understand concepts and preferably their connections, and many other things. Just as I haven't read what I just said about listening in anything that came out of IMSA, but the teachers I had at IMSA were all examples of good listening.

**The Visionary:** Thank you.

**The Alumnus:** You're welcome.

But another part of the Enlightenment I reject is its depersonalization of knowledge and teaching. Have you read any Polanyi?

**The Visionary:** Not yet. Should I put him on my reading list?

**The Alumnus:** I don't know. He writes hefty, if understandable, material. It takes time to understand him, but he's worth understanding.

Michael Polanyi was a philosopher of science, and his big work was on tacit and personal knowledge. The core idea is that scientific knowledge (I would say knowledge in general) is not a set of dessicated constructs that can be understood without reference to people; it is enfleshed in people who know it. He talked about how competing swimmers inhale a little more air and exhale a little less, so they always have more air in their lungs and therefore buoyancy than we would, but this knowledge is never thought of in so many words by the coach or by the student who "picks it up" from the coach, wordlessly. I don't know if it's a fair reading to say that the knowledge we can articulate is the just tip of the iceberg, but what I do think is a fair reading is to say that the knowledge we can put into so many words is not the whole picture. I think he would have

liked IMSA trying to avoid teachers mindlessly regurgitating material so students can learn to mindlessly regurgitating material.

In tandem with the Enlightenment depersonalization of knowledge, is a depersonalization of the concept of teaching and a teacher. About two thousand years ago, one teacher tried to demote teachers from being human gods (who were superior to everyone else) to being human like the rest of us. Then, in connection with the Enlightenment there came a second demotion. A teacher was no longer someone responsible for initiating those in their care into humanity, but only a part of a person imparting a skill to another partial person.

That is an illusion; no matter how much keep our mouths shut on certain matters, we are humans teaching. The question is not whether or not teachers will be an ethical force; the question is whether, given that teachers will be an ethical force, whether they will be a positive force or a negative force. Because students are affected by what kind of people their teachers are—as well as what they say—a teacher should try to be a positive force. This means things like a humility that listens and appreciates other people, and caring, and is willing to listen both to "I don't understand partial differentiation," and "I've had a lousy week."

This means that a teacher who sees past the present, and sees students as the concert pianists, research scientists, and ballerinas they can become, will by that very respect help make that potential a reality.

**The Visionary** [looks at watch]: Thank you. I need to be

somewhere in a few minutes; do you have any closing comments?

**The Alumnus:** I think that one aspect of how we speak of teaching is unfortunate. We speak of the active teacher who teaches, and the presumably passive student who is taught. Nothing of this manner of speaking suggests a dialog, a two-way street—but if teaching succeeds, it must be because of a cooperation between student and teacher. Even with constructivist understanding of learning, we're just looking at what the teacher can do.

I spend most of my time thinking about how I can see to my end of the partnership, not how students can handle their job. But there is something I would love to say to students, reinforced by a handout, on the first day of class, some toned-down version of:

Steal knowledge.

Prometheus stole fire. Your job is to steal knowledge.

The wrong way to think is that my job is to teach you, and you just sit there and be taught, and after enough teachers have taught you, you'll be educated.

You will get a much better education if you think that whatever I do, however well or poorly I teach, is simply the baseline, and you can start from there and see what you can do to take as much knowledge as you can.

Listening in class and asking questions is one way to steal knowledge. Is there something I said that doesn't quite make sense? If you just let my teaching wash over you, you've

missed an opportunity to steal knowledge.

If you listen to my words, that's good. It's even better if you think about why I would say what I am saying. There may be a clue, maybe a little whisper in your intuition that something more is going on than you realize. That is a key that you can use to steal knowledge.

When you read the textbook, it will tell you more if you push it harder. Look at the problems. What are they asking you to know?

What are they asking you to think about?

There's a powerful clue about what's important and what's going on, if you're adept enough to steal it.

What do I assume about the material? I make assumptions, and some of those are assumptions I make because of what I know. If you're willing to ask why I assume something, you may steal knowledge of how people think when they understand the material.

My office hours are meant for you. Come in and discuss the material. If I see you make a mistake, that's good. It means you're learning and I have an opportunity to clarify. If you don't understand something, and all of us don't understand things from time to time, it will cost you points to wait until the test to find out that you don't understand it. It won't cost you anything if you come in during my office hours, and I'll be glad you visited. And you might steal some knowledge.

Steal knowledge. There'll be some days when you're a little tired, and you can't look for all the extra knowledge you can steal. That's OK; just try to take the knowledge I clearly set out before you. But steal knowledge when you can.

You've gotten into IMSA, which is one of the best and one of the worst places in the world. Take advantage of opportunity. Learn to steal knowledge. And when you graduate from IMSA... Steal knowledge.

**The Visionary:** I definitely have some food for thought to take into the meeting. Do come and visit again! Goodbye!

**The Alumnus:** That I shall. Goodbye!

# The Minstrel's Song: A Complex Mathematical Model

This model represents a mathematician's second attempt at making a mathematical model, and as such is very detailed, complex, and at times hard to keep track of. It is being kept on the web primarily as a courtesy to people who are already using it. If you are not a heavy gamer, and are not used to complex mathematical models, I strongly suggest that you use [this simpler model](#). This document may still be useful, as a wealth of detail about mechanical devices and other creations, but newcomers are warned that using this as an actual model for game play may be difficult.

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Section I: *General model*  
Section I A: *Getting Started*

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The parts of this document are as follows:

Another document, "From zero", introduces the concept of role play and deals with all of the non-numerical parts of getting started; this document tells how to deal with numbers and dice.

For basic introduction and getting the feel for the model:

Section I B attempts to explain some of the basic concepts. Section IV develops a sample character sheet, a sheet used to store basic information useful to play; it demonstrates what a player goes through in order to set things up. Section II F gives some numbers to use as reference points, for questions like "What should be the difficulty for thus-and-such?" Section III gives a quick key to abbreviations used throughout the work.

For developing a character sheet:

Section II A tells how to generate a character's attributes — numerical ratings that tell how talented a character is in various areas — and section II B tells how to adjust them for age, gender, and race. Section II D gives the basic list of skills and tells how they are to be adjusted by attributes. Section II H gives starting experience, and section II G tells how much experience it takes to raise a skill to a certain level.

For modelling play:

Section II I tells how, when a character attempts an action, to roll dice to decide whether the character, with skill A, succeeds at an action with difficulty B. Section II J deals with combat and damage. Section II K deals with random encounters of animals and people, and describes what animals are in the world. Section II L deals with equipment.

Optional rules and Other:

There are several optional rules which may be used to enhance play and give it more detail. Section I C is the first such

section, dealing with skills ratings. Section II C gives miscellaneous numbers about the races. Section II E gives numbers referenced in II C. Section II M gives rules about the time taken for various actions, and performing actions simultaneously. Section V comments on the model.

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## Section I B: The Basic Idea

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This is essentially a skill-based model, a modified version of another model to use dice. It requires the use of two six-sided dice of different colors — for the sake of simplicity, the two dice will be referred to as r (red) and b (blue), and read as producing numbers ranging from 1 to 6. For example,  $6*r+b$  would be read as ten times the number on the red die, plus the number on the blue die, which would in effect produce a random number from 7 to 42. It is, while not necessary, helpful in some cases to have two ten-sided dice.

In general for skills, attributes, ratings, etc., a 0 is average, and the number (positive or negative) tells how far above or below average that creature is. The scale is exponential; 10 points correspond to doubling/halving. So someone with a strength of 20 and a dexterity of -10 would have a strength of  $2*2=4$  times average, while someone with a dexterity of -10 would be half as dexterous as the average person. The game generally uses the attributes in the form given — essentially, how to adjust an average ability — and doesn't really deal with an absolute scale.

A character's skill will have an av (adjusted value), equal to the bs (base skill), minus the skill's dl (difficulty of learning), plus the character's al (ability to learn), plus the gaa (governing attributes addend). When the character attempts an action, the skill's difficulty will be subtracted from the av, and then dice will be rolled to see if the attempt was successful.

If an action is being taken against another character (for example, haggling), that person's av is the difficulty.

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## Section I C: Additional Rules

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Some skills are related to each other by an Id (learning difference). If skill X and skill Y are related by an Id of 5, then a character's bs (exclusive of experience) in skill x is at least the number five less than his bs in skill Y. So a character who had a bs of 15 in skill X would have a minimum bs of 10 in skill Y. The Id's are additive (if X and Y have Id 5 and Y and Z have Id 10, X and Z have Id 15), but explicitly listed differences supercede the values that are calculated from additivity. If there are two or more Id's contributing point values to a specific skill, and/or a nonzero untrained base, the total is not the sum of the point values. It is the maximum.

Learning may take place under a tutor who has a skill of at least the skill level that the character is training to; in that case, the learning is at half price. The experience given starting characters takes this tutelage into account.

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Section II: Charts  
Section II A: Attributes

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Several random numbers generated as  $r - b$ : the number on the red die, less the number on the blue die.

These values are numbered  $n_1$  through  $n_{36}$ .

The attributes are read roughly as how far above or below the average they are: a +10 would be a fair amount above average (twice the average), while -10 would be moderately below average (half the average), with zero being average. The maximum possible is 25, and the minimum -25.

Here are the calculated attributes:

ag (Agility)	$n_1+n_2+n_3+n_4+n_5$
al (Ability to Learn)	$n_1+n_6+n_7+n_8+n_9$
ch (Charisma)	$n_1+n_6+n_{10}+n_{11}+n_{12}$
co (Constitution)	$n_{13}+n_{14}+n_{15}+n_{16}+n_{17}$
de (Dexterity)	$n_1+n_2+n_3+n_{18}+n_{19}$
in (Intelligence)	$n_1+n_6+n_7+n_{20}+n_{21}$
kn (Knowledge)	$n_1+n_6+n_7+n_{22}+n_{23}$
me (Memory)	$n_1+n_6+n_7+n_{24}+n_{25}$
pe (Perception)	$n_1+n_6+n_{26}+n_{27}+n_{28}$
sp (Speed)	$n_1+n_2+n_{29}+n_{30}+n_{31}$
st (Strength)	$n_{13}+n_{14}+n_{32}+n_{33}+n_{34}$
wi (Wisdom)	$n_1+n_6+n_7+n_{35}+n_{36}$

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## Section II B: Attribute Adjustments

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All adjustments are addends: they are added to a character's base attribute. All adjustments are 0 unless otherwise specified.

Attribute:      ag   al   ch   co   de   in   kn   me   pe   sp   st   wi

Race: Nor'krin 0 0 0 0 0 0 3 5 0 0 5 0 Tuz 0 0 0 5 0 0 0 0 0  
10 0 Urvanovestilli 0 0 2 0 5 5 2 3 0 0 -10 0 Yedidia 0 0 5 0 0 3 0  
0 10 0 0 0 Jec 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 Shal 0 0 0 0 0 2 0 0 0 -5 0  
5 Janra 20 0 5 0 0 4 0 0 2 5 5 0

Gender: Male 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 5 0 Female 0 0 0 0 2 0 0 5  
0 -5 0

Age: Child 5 10 2 10 0 -8 5 0 10 10 -4 -10 Young Adult 5 5 0 5  
5 0 -4 0 5 5 5 0 Middle Aged 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 3 Old -4 -4 0  
-4 -4 -3 5 -3 -4 -4 -4 5 Extremely Old -10 -10 0 -10 -10 -5 5 -8  
-10 -10 -10 10

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Section II C: Racial Non-Attribute Statistics.

A character's actual lifespan is calculated by multiplying the racial base by his constitution (constitution not adjusted for race, gender, or age), except for the border between child and young adult, which is not adjusted. For example, a Janra with a non-adjusted log of constitution of .8 would become a young adult at 16, middle aged at 41, old at 73, and extremely old at 89. A character will die of old age at an age of his maximum adjusted lifespan times the square root of  $x_1$ , where  $x_1$  is uniformly distributed over [0,1].

Age:	Child	Young Adult	Middle Aged	Old	Extremely Old
Nor'krin	0-15	16-30	31-60	61-90	91
Tuz	0-15	16-25	26-40	41-50	51
Urvanovestilli	0-30	31-100	101-300	301-400	401
Yedidia	0-20	21-50	51-120	121-160	161
Jec	0-15	16-30	31-60	61-90	91
Shal	0-50	51-200	201-600	601-800	801
Janra	0-15	16-50	51-90	91-110	111

Speed of movement is given in both miles per hour and feet per second. A character's speed of movement is equal to the racial base multiplied by his speed, adjusted for age and gender but not race. Females suffer a 10% speed penalty.

Speed: mph:	Walk	Jog	Sprint	fps:	Walk	Jog	Sprint
Nor'krin	2	4	14	2	5	21	
Tuz	1	2	8	2	3	12	
Urvanovestilli	3	5	20	4	7	29	
Yedidia	2	3	12	2	4	18	
Jec	2	4	14	2	5	21	
Shal	1	2	6	1	2	9	
Janra	5	7	30	7	11	44	

Adult height is normally distributed with mean  $m$  and standard deviation  $s$ .

Height: Male:	$m$	$s$	Female: $m$	$s$
Nor'krin	6'6"	3"	5'8"	3"
Tuz	4'6"	2"	4'3"	2"

Tuz	4'0"	2"	4'3"	2"
Urvanovestilli	5'2"	1.5"	4'8"	1.5"
Yedidia	5'4"	2.5"	4'6"	2"
Jec	5'6"	2.5"	5'2"	2"
Shal	5'6"	2"	5'2"	1.5"
Janra	6'0"	3"	5'6"	3"

**As is adult weight:**

Weight: Male:	m	s	Female: m	s
Nor'krin	200#	29#	150#	25#
Tuz	200#	28#	150#	22#
Urvanovestilli	100#	9#	70#	7#
Yedidia	150#	22#	100#	14#
Jec	130#	18#	110#	13#
Shal	145#	16#	125#	11#
Janra	150#	23#	130#	22#

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## Section II D: Skills

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Here is a listing of skills/areas of knowledge/abilities. It is meant to be illustrative rather than exclusive. (Partially borrowed from AD&D)

Following most skills are: untrained base (general, and then with values for specific races following, separated by commas if need be: (N)or'krin, (T)uz, (U)rvanovestilli, (Y)edidia, Je(C), (S)hal, and (J)anra); dl; base time (s=seconds, m=minutes, h=hours, d=days; w=weeks; y=years. A hyphen ('-') for untrained base means that an untrained character is incapable of attempting that skill. A trailing c means that an action is continuous and must be checked with that frequency — for example, moving silently); gaa elements.

An untrained attribute of 0 does not mean that a character is incapable of performing that action. It means that he has no special training above what is common.

The gaa element is the number of times that an attribute is to be added. For example, st 2, co 1 would mean that the gaa is twice the character's strength plus his constitution.

(Other comments may follow as appropriate.)

Acquisition, 0, J 10; 0; 1d; ch 1, pe 1

Acrobatics/Tumbling 0, Y 10, J 20; 0; 2 s; ag 1, st 1

Acting 0; 0; 30 m; ch 1

Ambidexterity costs 5 points

Animal Handling 0, Y 20, C 10; 0; 5 m; ch 1

Animal Lore 0, Y 20; 0; 1 m; kn 1

Animal Training 0, Y 10; 0; 3 w; -

Anatomy 0, U 10, Y 10; 0; 1 m; kn 1

Anthropology -, U 10; 0; 1 m; in 1, kn 1, me 1

Appraisal 10, U 20; 0; 1 m; pe 1

Artistic Skill (Specific Medium) 0; 0; 1 d; in 1

Attack (Specific Weapon) 0, N Axe 10, N Knife 10, N Longbow 20, T Crossbow 10, T Dagger 20, J Dagger 10; 0; Axe 2 s, Crossbow 30 s, Dagger (Hand to Hand) 2 s, Fist 1 s, Halberd 8 s, Lance 15 s, Longbow 5 s, Longsword 5 s, Mace 7 s, Rapier 3 s, Shortsword 3 s, Two-Handed Sword 10 s; Hand to Hand de 1, sp 1, st 1 (Lance strength of mount), Missile de 1, sp 1 — Note: Hand to Hand and Missile are each generalizations of attack; if a character wishes to generalize to all weapons, the cost is dl 15 instead of 10.

Balance 0, J 20; 0; 1 s; ag 1

Biology 0, U 10; 0; in 1; 1 m; kn 1, me 1

Blacksmith 0; 0; 1 h; de 1

Blind Action 0, Y 10, S 20, J 10; 0; pe 1 — if a check is made for blind action, an action may be taken blind at twice the normal difficulty.

Bowyer/Fletcher 0; 0; 1 d; de 1

Brewing 0; 0; 1 w; -

Building 0; 0; 5 w; de 1

Carving 0; 0; 30 m; de 1

Carpentry 0; 0; 1 w; de 1

Catch 0; 0; 1 s; de 1

Ceremonies 0, U 10; 0; 1 h; kn 1

Charioteering 0; 0; 5mc; ag 1

Chemistry 0, U 10, Y 10; 0; 30 m; in 1, kn 1, me 1

Climbing 0, J 10; 0; 1 m(c); ag 1, st 1 — this must be checked every 20 feet.

Clockwork Device Craftsmanship/Engineering 0, U 20; 0; 1 d; de 1, in 1

Cobbling 0; 0; 1 h; de 1

Cooking 0; 0; 1 h; -

Cold Tolerance 0, N 20, C 10, J 10; 0; 1 wc; co 1

Cultures (specific culture) 0, U 5, J 10; 0; 1 m; kn 1

Dancing 0, U 10, Y 20, J 15; 0; 5 mc; ag 1

Dodge 0, Y 10, J 10; 0; 1 s; ag 1, sp 1 — if a character attempts to dodge in the middle of an action, that action is lost. Dodging may, of course, be executed concurrently with other actions with both actions at double difficulty. The difficulty of hitting a dodging creature is the difficulty of normally hitting the creature plus the creature's dodge value.

Doublejointedness costs 5

Endurance 0, N 20, T 10, J 10; 0; 15mc; st 1, co 1 — if a character fails an endurance check after fifteen minutes of vigorous activity, he is exhausted and will have all actions at double difficulty until he has rested (not sleep necessarily — sitting or other inactivity) for twice the duration of the exercise. If a second endurance check is failed, all actions are at four times normal difficulty until aforementioned rest time is taken; if a third check is failed, the character falls asleep and sleeps for five times the duration of activity.

Engineering 0, U 10; 0; 1 h; in 1

Etiquette 0, U 10; 0; 1 m; kn 1

Farmer 0, C 20; 0; 1 y; kn 1

Fencing (specific weapon) 0, U rapier or possibly other weapon 20; 5; as per attack/parry (dodge); as per attack/parry (dodge)

Fire-Building 0; 0; 15 m; de 1

Fisher 0; 0; 1 h; pe 1

Gambling 0, U 10, Y 10; 0; 5 m; pe 1

Gardening 0, Y 20; 0; 5 w; -

Gem Cutting 0; 0; 1 h; de 1

Geography 0, U 10, J 10; 0; 1 m; kn 1

Guess Actions — guess from looking at a person what he will do next. 0, U 10, Y 20; 0; 2 s; pe 1

Haggling 0; 0; 5 m; ch 1, pe 1  
Hear Noises — hear almost silent noises. 0, Y 20; 0; 1 m; pe 1  
Heat Tolerance 0, T 20, Y 10, S 20, J 10; 0; 1 w; co 1  
Heraldry 0, U 10; 0; 1 m; kn 1  
Herbalism 0, U 10, Y 15; 0; 15 m; kn 1  
Hide 0, Y 10, J 10; 0; 10 s; ag 1, pe 1  
History 0, U 10, J 5; 0; 5 m; kn 1  
Hunting 0, N 20, T 20, Y 10; 10; 1 h; pe 1  
Illusionism 0; 0; 1 m; de 1  
Improvisation (Musical) 0, Y 20, J 10; 0; 5mc; in 1  
Incense Making 0, Y 10; 0; 1d; -  
Janra-Ball — incomprehensible to members of other races. -, J  
20; 0; 10 mc; ag 1, al 1, de 1, in 1, me 1, pe 1, sp 1, st 1  
Jewelry Work 0; 0; 1 d; de 1  
Juggling -; 0; 1 mc; de 1  
Jumping 0, J 10; 0; 2 s; ag 1, st 1  
Jury-Rigging 0, J 10; 0; 5 m; in 1  
Keen Eyesight 0, U 20, Y 10; 0; 5 s; pe 1  
Languages (Specific Language(s)) 0, J 5; 0, U 10, C -10; 1 mc; kn 1  
— of course, the language(s) the character grew up speaking are  
free with a native proficiency.  
Leadership 0, U 10; 0; 1 d; ch 1  
Leather Working 0; 0; 1 h; de 1  
Literature 10, U 20; 0; 15 m; kn 1  
Mapmaking -; 0; 1 d; kn 1  
Massage 0, Y 10, S 20; 0; 10 mc; de 1  
Mathematics -, U 20; 0; 15 m; in 2  
Mediation 0; 0; 1 h; ch 1, in 1, pe 1  
Medicine 0, U 10, Y 10, J 10; 0; 10 m; kn 1  
Mining 0; 0; 1 d; -  
Move Silently 0, Y 10, S 10, J 10; 0; 1 mc; ag 1, pe 1

Musical Composition 0, Y 10; 0; 1h; in 1  
Musical Instrument (Specific Instrument) 0, U 10 (one specific),  
Y 10 (one specific); 0; 5mc; de 1  
Navigation 0; 0; 1 d; pe 1  
Open Locks -; 0; 5 m; de 1, pe 1  
Persuasion 0; 0; 30 m; ch 1, in 1  
Philosophy 0, U 20; 0; 10 m; in 1, kn 1  
Physics -, U 10; 0; 10 m; in 1  
Poetry Composition 0; 0; 1 h; in 1  
Pole Vault 0, J 10; 0; 10 s; ag 1  
Pottery Making 0; 0; 10 m; de 1  
Public Speaking 0, U 10, J 10; 0; 30 m; in 1, ch 1  
Pyrotechnics -, U 10; 0; 1 h; in 1  
Reading/Writing -, U 20; -10; 10 mc; in 1  
Read Emotion 0, Y 10 (+5 to both Yedidia and non-Yedidia  
females); 0; 15 s; pe 1  
Repair 0, U 10; 0; 30 m; in 1  
Riding (Specific Animal) 0, U Horse 20, Y All 20; 0; 10 mc; ag 1  
Rope Use 0; 0; 20 s; de 1  
Sailing 0; 0; 1 d; -  
Search 0; 0; 5 m; pe 1  
Shouting — shout loudly and prolongedly without tiring vocal  
chords. 0, T 10; 0; 5 mc; -  
Singing 10, Y 30; 0; 10 mc; ch 1  
Smell Creature — smell what creatures are around and have  
passed by. 0, Y 10; 0; 10 s; pe 1  
Sports 0, T 10, J 10; 0; 30 m; ag 1, st 1  
Stonemasonry 0; 0; 1 d; -  
Storytelling 0; 0; 1 h; ch 1, in 1  
Strategy Games 0; 0; 1 h; in 1  
Swimming 0, Y 10, S 10, J 20; 0; 15 mc; ag 1, st 1

Symbolic Lore 0, N 20, U 10, C 20; 0; 1 m; kn 1  
     Tactics 0, U 10; 0; 1; 10 m; in 1, pe 1  
         Tailoring 0; 10 1 d; de 1  
 Technology Identification 0, U 20, J 10; 0; 1m; in 1, kn 1  
     Technology Use 0, U 20, J 10; 0; 1 m; in 1, kn 1  
         Theology 10, U 20; 0; 10 m; in 1, kn 1  
             Throw 0; 0; 3 s; de 1  
 Tightrope Walking 0, J 20; 0; 10 sc; ag 1, sp 1  
     Tracking 0, T 10, Y 20; 0; 5 mc; pe 1  
         Trivia 0, U 20, J 20; 0; 1 m; kn 1  
             Ventriloquism -; 0; 15 sc; -  
     Weather Sense 0, Y 10; 0; 5 s; pe 1  
         Weaving 0; 0; 1 h; de 1  
 Wilderness Survival 0, N 20, T 15, Y 20, J 10; 0; 1 dc; pe 1  
     Withdrawing/Meditation -, S 20; 1; 1 h; wi 1  
         Woodlore 0, Y 20, S 10; 0; 1 m; kn 1, wi 1  
 Wrestling 0, T 20, J 10; 0; 1 mc; ag 1, sp 1, st 1 — a wrestling  
     match can have three states — neutral, one character has  
     advantage, one character has pinned. It starts out neutral, and  
     each minute it goes one increment in favor of the character who  
     wins the check.

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## Section II E: Learning Differences

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Learning differences are an optional rule which players may take advantage of to gain higher skills. Calculating every possible attribute is not necessary; players may simply use what they choose to look for and find in order to gain higher effective skills.

Below are Ids for skills, in dictionary order. Unlisted pairs of skills have no Id except as possibly calculable through chains.

The format is skill, skill, Id.

Acquisition, Persuasion, 15  
Acrobatics/Tumbling, Balance, 10  
Acrobatics/Tumbling, Climbing, 25  
Acrobatics/Tumbling, Dancing, 10  
Acrobatics/Tumbling, Dodge, 10  
Acrobatics/Tumbling, Fencing, 10  
Acrobatics/Tumbling, Jumping, 10  
Acrobatics/Tumbling, Move Silently, 25  
Acrobatics/Tumbling, Pole Vault, 10  
Acrobatics/Tumbling, Riding, 15  
Acrobatics/Tumbling, Swimming, 15  
Acrobatics/Tumbling, Tightrope Walking, 10  
Acrobatics/Tumbling, Wrestling, 10  
Acting, Public Speaking, 10  
Acting, Storytelling, 5  
Anatomy, Massage, 15  
Anatomy, Medicine, 10  
Animal Handling, Animal Training, 15  
Animal Lore, Wood Lore, 10  
Anthropology, Cultures, 10  
Attack, Attack (other weapon which is also hand-to-hand/also missile), 10

Attack, Balance, 10  
Attack, Dancing, 10  
Attack, Hunting, 15  
Attack, Riding, 15  
Attack, Tightrope Walking, 10  
Attack, Wrestling 10  
Balance, Charioteering, 10  
Balance, Climbing, 15  
Balance, Dancing, 15  
Balance, Pole Vault, 15  
Balance, Riding, 10  
Balance, Tightrope Walking, 5  
Balance, Wrestling, 15  
Biology, Herbalism, 15  
Biology, Medicine, 10  
Blind Action, Hear Noises, 10  
Bowyer/Fletcher, Carving, 15  
Bowyer/Fletcher, Carpentry, 15  
Building, Carpentry, 10  
Building, Masonry, 10  
Carving, Carpentry, 15  
Catch, Juggling, 25  
Ceremonies, Heraldry, 15  
Chemistry, Herbalism, 10  
Chemistry, Pyrotechnics, 10  
Climbing, Dancing, 15  
Clockwork Device Craftsmanship, Engineering, 10  
Cultures, Languages, 35  
Dancing, Dodge, 10  
Dancing, Fencing, 10  
Dodge, Wrestling 10

Engineering, Mathematics, 10  
Etiquette, Heraldry, 15  
Fencing, Balance, 10  
Fencing, Riding, 15  
Fencing, Tightrope Walking, 10  
Fencing, Wrestling, 10  
Fisher, Hunting, 25  
Gambling, Guess Actions 10  
Gambling, Strategy Games, 15  
Gem Cutting, Jewelry Making, 15  
Guess Actions, Haggling, 15  
Guess Actions, Read Emotion, 5  
Herbalism, Incense Making, 10  
Herbalism, Medicine, 10  
Hide, Hunting, 15  
History, Literature, 15  
History, Trivia, 10  
Hunting, Move Silently, 15  
Hunting, Tracking, 10  
Hunting, Wilderness Survival, 15  
Improvisation, Musical Composition, 10  
Juggling, Throw, 25  
Jury-Rigging, Repair, 15  
Keen Eyesight, Search, 10  
Map Making, Navigation, 15  
Massage, Medicine, 15  
Philosophy, Theology, 10  
Public Speaking, Storytelling, 10  
Search, Tracking, 10  
Strategy Games, Tactics, 10  
Tailoring, Weaving, 15



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## Section II F: Skill Levels and Sample Difficulties

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An unadjusted skill is as follows:

Untrained: 0

Just beginning: 10

Dabbler: 20

Moderately skilled: 30

Proficient: 40

Expert: 50

Virtuoso: 60

Exceptional: 70

World Class: 80

Greatest Alive: 90

Greatest of All Time: 100

The following are examples of actions of specific difficulties for archery, hiding, languages, rope walking, and wilderness survival. They are intended to serve as a guide to setting general difficulties for actions. Common sense should be used to apply to other skills; throwing, for example, will not have anywhere near the range and accuracy of archery.

Very easy: -40

Archery: shooting a barrel 20 feet away.

Hiding: hiding in a darkened storeroom full of miscellaneous garbage, while clad in black.

Languages: "Hello." Greetings, numbers, etc. Extremely thick accent.

Rope walking: walking across a plank a foot wide.

Wilderness survival: surviving in a Yedidia orchard.

Easy: -20

Archery: shooting a barrel 20 yards away.

Hiding: hiding in a darkened forest, while clad in black/brown/green.

Languages: "Where is the bathroom?" Basic phrases (phrase book style). Accent that can be moderately easily understood by someone used to dealing with foreigners.

Rope walking: walking across a plank half a foot wide.

Wilderness survival: surviving in a Yedidia forest, where fruitful trees and water are reasonably easy to come by, but there are no hostile inhabitants.

Moderate: 0

Archery: shooting an unsuspecting boar 20 yards away.

Hiding: hiding in a forest in normal daylight, while clad in black/brown/green.

Languages: "I don't want this one. I want that one." Short sentences using very simple vocabulary. Normal accent which does not hinder comprehension.

Rope walking: walking across a plank three inches wide.

Wilderness survival: surviving in a Jec forest, where there is nothing hostile, but food and water are not so easy to come by, and the forest may get cold at night.

Difficult: 40

Archery: shooting a running boar 20 feet away.

Hiding: hiding in a forest at dusk, while clad in clothing that does not blend in.

Languages: "I'm glad to hear that you're feeling better. Do you have any idea how the snake got into your house?" Slightly slowed normal sentences using words that would be in the vocabulary of a child. Accent which only shows itself occasionally, or is generally present but faint.

Rope Walking: walking across a tight rope.

Wilderness survival: surviving on the border of the Tuz forest, where the creatures are potentially hostile.

Very Difficult: 80

Archery: shooting a running boar 20 yards away.

Hiding: hiding in a forest in full daylight, while clad in clothing that does not blend in.

Languages: Free, accentless conversation as a native speaker would, using an adult's vocabulary.

Rope walking: walking across a slack rope.

Wilderness survival: surviving in the heart of the Tuz forest, where creatures tend to be hostile and tough.

Extremely Difficult: 120

Archery: shooting a flying bird 20 yards away.

Hiding: hiding in a low cut field or a bare room, fully lit, wearing clothing that does not blend in. Concealing yourself where there aren't any obvious hiding places.

Languages: Technical discussions using complex sentence structure, unusual grammatical features, and vocabulary that most adults wouldn't know. Conversing with some Urvanovestilli philosophers.

Rope walking: sprinting across a tight rope.

Wilderness survival: Surviving in the Ice Peaks in the middle of winter, where the temperature is frigid and wild animals and other food is almost impossible to find.

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## Section II G: Experience Gains

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The basic unit of adventure is the quest. Upon completion of a quest, each character will receive 2 experience points, adjusted as follows (minimum of 0) for role playing, skill use/adventuring competence/party helpfulness, and moral virtue:

Exceptionally poor: -2 Poor: -1 Normal: 0 Good: +1

Exceptionally good: +2

A bonus of 1 point is awarded for an action that solves a substantial part of the quest.

So a character who had role played well, used his skills clumsily, and had shown exceptional heroism and virtue would receive  $2 + 1 - 1 + 2 = 4$  ep for the quest.

(No animal may gain experience.)

Experience may be devoted to some small subfield of a specific skill: specialization. Learning a specialization costs half as much (has half the ldf (learning difficulty factor)) as/of learning the whole skill. Learning the rest of a skill, up to an area less than or equal to the level of specialization, costs half as much as learning from scratch. There are also generalizations of skill (for example, languages as a generalization of a specific language, or musical instruments as a generalization of a specific instrument), which have twice the ldf of the specific skill. A generalization of a skill already learned would cost half as much as learning the generalization from scratch, IE exactly as much as the skill cost. (This applies, of course, only to as many ep as were placed in the specific skill beforehand). A generalization must be a specific and closely related group of skills; a "combat skills" generalization which included anatomy, archery, dodge, horseback riding, and longsword would be inappropriate.

Experience points may be used to increase skills as follows: a current skill's base skill's exponent is looked up (see section II

I). To raise a skill to a new level: look up the exponent of the desired new base skill. The experience point cost is the difference. For example, let's say that a character has a current skill bs of 34 and 2 ep. The exponent of 34 is 11. He adds the 2 experience points, bringing the exponent to 13. The log of 13 is 37, so he has a new skill bs of 37. (It would have cost him 1 point to make the same increase for a specialization, or 4 points to do so for a generalization.)

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## Section II H: Starting experience

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Initial experience is devoted with the character's al adjusted for everything but age.

Age:	Child	Young Adult	Middle Aged	Old	Ex
Points:	20	30	40	50	60

Here are starting experience allocations for the 10 roles outlined in the general description. 10 ep will be distributed; multiply by 2 for a child, 3 for a young adult, 4 for a middle aged person, 5 for someone who is old, and 6 for someone who is extremely old. If there is/are one or two races given for a role, the experience allocation assumes the untrained bases for that race(s). (A character may have experience devoted any way that is desired; this is an example.) Most starting characters will be young adults.

Acrobatic Scout: Hear Noise 1.5, Hide 2, Move Silently 2, Open Locks 2, Rope Use .5, Search 2.

Archer: Archery 10.

Bard: Geography 1.5, Hero's Tales 1, Mediation .5, Musical Instrument 2, Persuasion 2, Singing 1, Storytelling 1, Trivia 1.

Hunter: Attack (one missile weapon) 2, Hunting 5, Tracking 2, Woodlore 1.

Interpreter: Acquisition 1, Etiquette 1, Haggling 1, Languages 6, Persuasion 1.

Jack-of-All-Trades: Attack .4, Blind Action .4, Climb .4, Dodge .4, Endurance .4, Fire-Building .4, Guess Actions .4, Haggling .4, Hide .4, Hunting .4, Jump .4, Jury-Rig or Repair .4, Languages 2.4, Move Silently .4, Open Locks .4, Rope Handling .4, Search .4, Smell Creature .4, Tracking .4, Wilderness Survival .4.

MacGyver Chemistry 1, Engineering 1, Hide 1, Jury-Rig 5, Move Silently 1, Search 1.

Non-combat Blind Action 1, Guess Actions 2, Hear Noise 1, Know

Perceiver Blind Action 1, Guess Actions 3, Hear Noises 1, Keen Eyesight 1, Read Emotion 1, Search 1, Smell Creature 1, Tracking 1, Weather Sense 1.

Scholar Geography 3, History 3, Languages 3, Literature 1.  
Wayfarer Acquisition .3, Attack (one weapon) .2, Blind Action .2, Climb .2, Dodge .2, Endurance .2, Etiquette .3, Fire-Building .2, Geography .5, Guess Actions .2, Haggling .4, Hero's Tales .3, Hide .2, Hunting .2, Jump .2, Jury-Rig or Repair .2, Languages 2.4, Mediation .1, Move Silently .2, Musical Instrument .3, Open Locks .2, Persuasion 1, Rope Handling .2, Search .2, Singing .3, Smell Creature .2, Storytelling .2, Tracking .2, Trivia .3, Wilderness Survival .2.

Woodsman Animal Handling 1, Animal Training 1, Hunting 1, Tracking 1, Wilderness Survival 1, Woodlore 5.

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## Section II I: Dice and Basic Tables



## 32,768

Here is the basic check table. When a character attempts an action, the success index is calculated as the difficulty subtracted from his av, and the two dice (red and blue) are rolled. The check value is  $(6*r)+b$ : six times the number on the red die, plus the value on the blue die. The following table gives the minimum value this result must have for the character to succeed at the attempt.

For example, if a character with an av of 57 attempts a skill of difficulty 23, he has a success index of 34. The red die yields a 1 and the blue die yields a 6, so the check value is  $(6*1)+6 = 12$ , which by the table requires a minimum success index of 25. His success index is greater than or equal to what it needed to be, so he succeeds at the check.

	Check Value	Success Index
7	Roll again, with success index 61 higher.	
	8	45
	9	37
	10	32
	11	28
	12	25
	13	22
	14	19
	15	17
	16	15
	17	13
	18	11
	19	9
	20	7
	21	6
	22	4
	23	2
	24	1
	25	-1
	26	-2
	27	-4
	28	-6
	29	-7
	30	-9
	31	-11

31	-11
32	-13
33	-15
34	-17
35	-19
36	-22
37	-25
38	-28
39	-32
40	-37
41	-45

42

Roll again, with success index 61 lower

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## Section II J: Combat

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All characters\* have a maximum health value of  $co+st+ag+an$ , where  $an$  is one half the character's adjusted anatomy skill, rounded down. Skills and attributes of an injured creature function at a penalty equal to the difference between their maximum health value and their current health value. So, for example, an animal with a maximum health value of 55 and a current health value of 31 has skills functioning at a penalty of 24 points.

All creatures take damage as follows: the damage is looked up on the log/exponent table, and its exponent (the value that occurs to the right of the damage) is looked up. The same is done for the creature's current health value. The exponent of the damage is subtracted from the exponent of the current health value. If the value is zero or less, the creature loses consciousness or dies at the game master's discretion. If the value is more than zero, its log is taken and becomes the creature's new health value (rounded up).

So, for example, if the animal mentioned with a current health value of 24 points takes an 8 point damage wound, the exponent of 24 is 5.3, and the exponent of 8 is 1.7. They are subtracted to yield 3.6; the log of 3.6 is 18, so the creature's new health value is 18.

Damage\* for a successful attack is inflicted at a value of  $r+st+wa+de+an+po$ , where  $r$  is the value shown by rolling the red die,  $wa$  is the weapon addend of the weapon, and  $po$  is the poison value of the poison (if any) or other special attack. (Damage for a successful backstab, catching the target unaware, is  $r+st+wa+de+(2*an)+po$ .) If a creature is injured in the course of taking an action, it may complete the action at skill and attribute values for when the action was begun, and the injury will take

effect on skills and attributes when the action is completed.

An injured creature will regenerate at a rate of  $-50 + (2 * co) + st + ms$  per day, where  $ms$  is the medical skill of the creature or other caretaker. The regeneration works as the exact opposite of a wound.

An unarmed character has a  $wa$  of  $-10$ .

\* A creature which has no anatomy skill does not receive agility or anatomy adjustments to health value, or anatomy or dexterity adjustments to damage.

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## Section II K: Animals and Random Encounters



	2: Acid Spitter			2		
3: Anteater		3		1-2	1-2	
4: Bear		4-5				1
	5: Behemoth			6		
6: Boar		7		3-5	3	2-
	7: Bulette			8	6	
8: Caribou	1-10					4-
	9: Carnivorous Log			9		
	10: Carnivorous Tree			10		
	11: Cobra			11		
12: Colorspray					4-6	6
	13: Crocodile			12-13		
14: Cuddler				7	7-11	7
15: Deer	11-15	14		8-12	12-13	8-
16: Dog		15		13	14	18
17: Duck				14	15-16	19
	18: Fog Thing			16-17		
19: Furred Serpent		18		15-16	17-18	29
20: Garter Snake				17	19-20	31
	21: Giant Aphid			19		
22: Giant Firefly		20			21-22	
	23: Giant Land Lobster			21		
	24: Giant Scorpion			22-23		
	25: Giant Viper			24		
	26: Giant Walking Stick			25		
	27: Giant Wasp			26		
	28: Giant Webthrower			27		
29: Glower					23-25	
30: Gorilla		28			26	
31: Griffon		29		18		32
32: Hawk		30		19	27	33
33: Hedgehog		31		20-21	28-29	35
	34: Hnakra			32		
35: Horse	16-25	33-34		22-24	30-31	36
36: Hoverfeather		35		25-26	32	38
37: Hummingbird				27	33	39
	38: Iceflyer			26-39		
	39: Icestriker			40-49		
	40: Ironram	50		36-37	28	
	41: Jewel Serpent			38	29	
42: Jumpcling				30	34-35	
43: Jumper		39-40		31	36	40
44: Kriit	51-41	41		32		41
45: Land Octopus		42			37	
46: Lavishnatim		43		33	38-39	
	47: Leviathan			44		
48: Mile Long Snake		45				42
49: Mile Long Snake						

49: MIMIC		34	40-42	
50: Mimic		35	43-46	43
51: Miroir		36-37	47	
52: Mishraim	46-47		48	45
53: Monkey		38	49	47
54: Mouse		39	50	48
55: Muckdweller		48-49		
56: Obstructor		50		
57: Ostrich	51	40		53
58: Owl	52	41	51	56
59: Panther		53		
60: Parrot		42	52	59
61: Platypus		43	53	66
62: Poison Quilled Porcupine		54-55		
63: Porcupine	56	44	54-55	61
64: Prairie Dog		45	56	63
65: Rabbit	55-74	46-55	57	64
66: Ram	57-58	56-57	58	76
67: Ricochet	59	58	59	79
68: Roc		60		
69: Rock Crusher		61		
70: Rock Thrower		62		
71: Rodent of Unusual Size	63-64	59		86
72: Sand Trapper		65		
73: Sea Serpent		66		
74: Shocker		67		
75: Skunk		60-63	60	81
76: Sloth			61	
77: Soft Rolling Stone		64-65	62	82
78: Sparrow		66	63	84
79: Spinstar	68	67	64	
80: Stegosaurus		69-70		
81: Stinging Insect		70-71		
82: Stoneshell	72		65	
83: Strider	73	68-71	66	
84: Swamp Thing		74		
85: Tail Spikethrower		75		
86: Tar Baby		76		
87: Terrask		77		
88: Thousand Legged Roller	78	72-76	67	85
89: Ticklebug			68-72	
90: Torpor Beast		79-80		
91: Translucent Frog	81	77-79	73-74	86
92: Trin	82	80	75	87
93: Turtle	83-84	81	76	88
94: Tyrannosaurus Rex		85		
95: Warm Fuzzy		82-83	77-80	91
96: Water Sprite			81	

97: Wind Hummer			86	84-85	
98: Wolf	75-84	87-88	86	82-83	92
99: Wyvern		89-90	87		93
100: Game Master's Creation	85-88	91	88	84-85	94
101: Nor'krin Encounter		92	89-90	86-87	95
102: Tuz Encounter	89-90		91-91	88-89	96
103: Urvanovestilli Encounter	91-92	93		90-92	97
104: Yedidia Encounter	93-94	94	92-93		98
105: Jec Encounter	95-96	95	94-95	93-95	
106: Shal Encounter	97-98	96	96-97	96-97	99
107: Encounter, Doubled Attributes	99-100	97-100	98-100	98-100	100

Animal behavior at an encounter is as follows; a number generated in the range of 1-10 tells how it behaves ('special' indicating that the game master should either create a special behavior on the part of the animal, or else simply reroll):

#	Feisty	Herbivore	Pet	Predator	Sn
1:	attack	attack	attack	attack	at
2:	attack	attack	curious	attack	cu
3:	attack	curious	curious	attack	fl
4:	attack	flee	flee	curious	fl
5:	attack	flee	flee	flee	fl
6:	curious	friendly	friendly	friendly	fl
7:	flee	ignore	friendly	sneak attack	fr
8:	ignore	ignore	friendly	sneak attack	sn
9:	sneak attack	ignore	friendly	sneak attack	sn
10:	special	special	special	special	sp

Animal age and sex are rolled separately: 1-2 child, 3-6 young, 7-8 middle aged, 9 old, 10 very old; 1-5 male, 6-10 female.

#### Animal Descriptions

All animals have the following skills: attack 30 (1 s; de 1, sp 1, st 1), blind action 20, dodge 30, hear noises 20, hide 30, move silently 30, and smell creature 20. All predators and small predators can hunt 30, smell creature 30, track 30. Name, attributes, behavior type (feisty, herbivore, pet, predator, small predator), descriptions, comments, and special abilities follow.

Constitution, in some cases, may not indicate exceptional health on the part of the creature, but rather some sort of

natural armor.

The attributes are (no is number appearing, a \* next to po represents a nonpoisonous special attack):

1: Acid Slime Mold  
no po wa ag co de pe sp st  
1 20\* 0 20 10 10 10 20 10  
Predator, 4-8' long, not injured by cutting or bludgeoning. Special acid. (It looks like a pale green blob)

2: Acid Spitter no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 20\* 0 20 20 20 10 10 30  
Predator. 5' high. This creature has a thick torso and head on four stumpy legs, and a tough black hide. Its special damage is acid.

3: Anteater no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 10 10 10 0  
Herbivore. As in real life.

4: Bear no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 20 30 10 -10 0 40  
Feisty. Grizzly in the Tuz land, polar in Nor'krin land, black elsewhere.

5: Behemoth no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 30 20 -10 -10 70  
Herbivore. As in Job.

6: Boar no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 20 10 10 10 10 25  
Feisty. As in real life.

7: Bulette no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 0 30 10 10 10 30  
Predator. 8-10' long. Land shark. A tough, sharklike creature that burrows through earth and has short, strong legs. The hide may be sold for 500 au.

8: Caribou no po wa ag co de pe sp st 30 0 0 10 10 10 10 10 30  
Herbivore. As in real life.

9: Carnivorous Log no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 20 10 0 10 30  
Predator. An animal that looks like a large fallen log. When stepped on, large tentacles will shoot out and drag towards teeth and jaws.

10: Carnivorous Tree no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 20 10

10: Carnivorous Tree no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 20 10  
10 10 40 Predator. Like a carnivorous log, but uses branches  
instead of tentacles.

11: Cobra no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 30 -10 10 10 10 30  
-10 Predator. As in real life.

12: Colorspray no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0\* -20 10 10 10 10  
10 -10 Pet. A short, 2' football shaped, multicolored creature  
with several orifices on its back. A very affectionate pet which  
will spray brightly colored paints on someone it likes.

13: Crocodile no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 30 10 10 10  
30 Predator. As in real life.

14: Cuddler no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -40 10 0 10 10 0 -20  
Pet. A soft, 1' black, furred, round creature that cuddles like a  
Shal and will occasionally squirt water.

15: Deer no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 30 10 10 20 10 20  
Herbivore. As in real life.

16: Dog no po wa ag co de pe sp st 10 0 0 10 10 10 10 10 20  
Predator. As in real life.

17: Duck no po wa ag co de pe sp st 5 0 -20 10 10 10 10 10 -20  
Herbivore. As in real life.

18: Fog-Thing no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 20 10 10 10 10  
40 Predator. a 10' tall beast which emits dense fog, obscuring  
vision in its vicinity.

19: Furred Serpent no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 10  
10 10 0 Pet. 2-20' long, with soft, sometimes brown fur.

20: Garder Snake no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 10 10  
10 -50 Pet. As in real life.

21: Giant Aphid no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 30 10 10 10  
30 Predator. 8' tall if unearthed, in a depressed sand trap  
hidden by a thin camouflaged cover.

22: Giant Firefly no po wa ag co de pe sp st 20 0 -30 10 10 10  
10 10 0 Herbivore. 4' tall. Fly. F

10 10 0 Herbivore. 4' tall, fly 5.

23: Giant Land Lobster no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 50  
10 0 -10 50 Feisty. 20-30' long.

24: Giant Scorpion no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 30 10 10 30 10  
10 10 20 Feisty. 5' long.

25: Giant Viper no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 30 0 10 10 10 20  
10 50 Predator. 50'-200' long.

26: Giant Walking Stick no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 20\* 0 0  
10 10 0 10 -10 Small Predator. 3' long, 2' tall. Poison does not  
cause damage, but hinders for one day as if damage had  
occurred.

27: Giant Wasp no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 30 0 0 10 10 10 10  
10 Feisty. 18" long.

28: Giant Webthrower no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 20\* 0 10  
20 10 20 20 25 Predator. A 10' long spider; special attack is  
throwing webs which do not injure but impair physical action as if  
injury had occurred.

29: Glower no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 10 20 10 20  
Pet. A phosphorescent half sized bear.

30: Gorilla no po wa ag co de pe sp st 10 0 0 25 10 10 10 10 30  
Herbivore. As in real life. Climb 10.

31: Griffon no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 25 20 10 20 20 30  
Predator. 8' long. Half eagle (Fly 10), half lion, loves horsemeat.

32: Hawk no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 10 10 10 10 10 0  
Small Predator. As in real life.

33: Hedgehog no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 10 10 10  
-10 Herbivore. As in real life.

34: Hnakra no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 25 30 10 25 20 50  
Predator. An aquatic creature (Swim 10), a great armored  
shark/sea serpent 50-100' long. As in C.S. Lewis's  
\_Out\_of\_the\_Silent\_Planet\_

35: Horse no po wa ag co de pe sp st 30 0 0 20 10 10 10 10 30

35: Horse no po wa ag co de pe sp st 30 0 0 20 10 10 10 10 30  
Herbivore. As in real life.

36: Hoverfeather no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 20 10 10  
10 10 0 Herbivore. A 3' ball of eyes and feathered wings (golden,  
black, brown, or white).

37: Hummingbird no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 30 10 20  
25 40 -50 Herbivore. As in real life.

38: Iceflyer no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 10 10 10 10 10  
0 Predator. A 6' white arctic bird of prey (Fly 10).

39: Icestriker no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 20\* 0 10 10 25 20  
10 10 Predator. A toothed, clawed 20' acid spitting bird of prey  
(Fly 10).

40: Ironram no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 0 20 10 0 10 40  
Feisty. A 15' long, piglike furred beast that rams with its bony  
head.

41: Jewel Serpent no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 40 0 25 20 10  
10 10 30 Predator. A red, 5-20' serpent with an immense red  
jewel between its eyes which has a phosphorescent glow that  
lasts until an hour after its death. The gem is worth 5,000 gold,  
or 10,000 if it is still glowing.

42: Jumpcling no po wa ag co de pe sp st 2 0 0 10 20 20 30 10  
-30 Pet. A 6" beast with many paws that will jump and cling to a  
person.

43: Jumper no po wa ag co de pe sp st 20 0 -10 50 10 10 10 10  
30 Herbivore. A 4' long beam with two opposite feet that it  
jumps and bounces off with. (Jump 10)

44: Kriit no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 20\* 0 10 10 30 20 15 0  
Predator. A 5' tall, long-armed beast that spits acid from behind  
trees.

45: Land Octopus no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0\* 0 10 10 10 10  
10 20 Feisty. 8-20' spread. Like an octopus, but squirts ink — can  
temporarily blind

temporarily blind.

- 46: Lavishnatim no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -20 25 10 20 10  
10 -10 Pet. An incredibly curious, 2' rodentlike creature.
- 47: Leviathan no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 40\* 0 20 40 10 -10  
10 80 Feisty. As in Job. Special attack is breathe fire.
- 48: Mile Long Snake no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 10  
10 10 80 Herbivore(-like). A 20' high snake a mile long
- 49: Milshh no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -20 20 10 10 30 20  
-20 Pet. A short, 18", round, eyeless catlike creature with long,  
golden fur, and eight short legs ending in round paws.
- 50: Mimic no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 10 10 10 25 10  
-20 Pet. A monkeylike creature that will follow and imitate a  
person.
- 51: Mirior no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 10 0 10 10 10 0  
Herbivore. A humanoid form with mirrorlike skin.
- 52: Mishraim no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 10 10 10 0 10  
30 Pet. Like a giant 5' anteater, but with a shorter snout.
- 53: Monkey no po wa ag co de pe sp st 10 0 -30 20 10 20 10 10  
-10 Herbivore. As in real life.
- 54: Mouse no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 10 10 10 10 10  
-50 Herbivore. As in real life.
- 55: Muckdweller no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 30 10 10 10  
10 30 Predator. A black, tentacled, four legged beast that waits  
in the muck and then draws things down in order to drown and/or  
eat.
- 56: Obstructor no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 30 20 20 20 0  
50 Predator. A giant (20') eight armed apelike creature which  
will use branches, rocks, etc. to form a barrier around prey  
before throwing rocks at it.
- 57: Ostrich no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 -10 0 0 0 30 25  
Herbivore. As in real life.
- 58: Owl no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 10 10 10 10 10 0

58: Owl no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 10 10 10 10 0

Small Predator. As in real life.

59: Panther no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 30 10 20 30 10

30 Predator. Climb 5. As in real life.

60: Parrot no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 20 10 10 10 25

-30 Pet. Fly 5. As in real life.

61: Platypus no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 10 10 10 -10

Herbivore. As in real life.

62: Poison Quilled Porcupine no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 30 0

10 10 10 10 10 0 Herbivore. Like a real porcupine, but three feet

long, and, if struck hand-to-hand without appropriate armor, will

automatically hit attacker. (When it attacks, its attack does not

do poison damage.)

63: Porcupine no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 10 10 10

-20 Herbivore. As in real life.

64: Prairie Dog no po wa ag co de pe sp st 10 0 0 10 10 10 10

10 -15 Herbivore. As in real life.

65: Rabbit no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 20 10 10 20 25

-30 Herbivore. As in real life.

66: Ram no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 10 10 10 20

Herbivore. As in real life.

67: Ricochet no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 30 10 10 20 40

20 Herbivore. A fast, 12 legged (equally spaced) 1' red-brown

creature that quickly bounces off trees and everything else if

threatened.

68: Roc no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 0 10 10 20 -20 70

Predator. 100' tall. A giant bird of prey (Fly 10) that eats

panthers.

69: Rock Crusher no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 -10 30 0 0

-20 80 Herbivore(-like). A giant (40') creature with stony skin

that sits and eats rocks.

70: Rock Thrower no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 20 20

70: Rock Thrower no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 20 20  
10 20 Feisty. A beast with four legs alternated with four arms,  
throwing rocks.

71: Rodent of Unusual Size no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0  
300 10 10 20 25 10 Predator. As in The Princess Bride.

72: Sand Trapper no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 20 10  
30 30 Predator. 10-15' high. Lives in sand and shoots up a green  
tentacle to drag in prey.

73: Sea Serpent no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 20 20 10 10  
0 40 Herbivore(-like). 20-40' long, swim 10.

74: Shocker no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 40\* 10 20 20 10 10  
10 30 Predator. An immense (10') deep green to blue lizard with  
slimy black tentacles that deliver a powerful electric shock,  
capable of throwing many creatures. Any creature hit by a  
shocker and taking over 10% damage will be disrupted in the  
action it was completing, drop what it was holding, and forget  
what it was doing/be momentarily disoriented. Thick clothing  
may function as armor against a shocker's attack, as the  
electrical damage only takes place if electrical contact occurs.

75: Skunk no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0\* -10 10 10 10 10 10  
-20 Herbivore. As in real life. (Special attack, as in real life.)

76: Sloth no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -20 10 10 10 10 -20  
-15 Pet. As in real life.

77: Soft Rolling Stone no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -30 0 20  
0 -30 -10 -30 Pet. A rolling creature that looks like a round,  
mossy stone. Warm and friendly.

78: Sparrow no po wa ag co de pe sp st 20 0 -20 20 10 10 10  
10 -50 Herbivore. As in real life (Fly 10).

79: Spinstar no po wa ag co de pe sp st 50 0 0 30 10 10 10 10  
-30 Pet. A blue (tinged with red) 9" land starfish which whitish  
feet at the end of each limb and a feeding orifice on one side.

Moves by rolling

moves by rolling.

- 80: Stegosaurus no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 0 40 -20 -30  
-10 50 Herbivore. As in real life.
- 81: Stinging Insect no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1000 30 -50 25  
25 10 25 20 -30 Feisty. A swarm as in real life.
- 82: Stoneshell no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 80 10 10 10  
10 Herbivore. A creature with a stonehard shell, 10' tall.
- 83: Strider no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 25 25 10 10 30 20  
Predator. 7' tall. A predator which moves incredibly quickly (85  
mph). It is jet black, has long, strong, thin legs, and will try to  
run prey into trees.
- 84: Swamp Thing no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 20 10 10 10  
10 50 Predator. A huge malodorous mass of beast. 20-50'
- 85: Tail Spikethrower no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 20 0 10 20  
20 10 10 30 Predator. 9' long. Like a scorpion, but throws  
poisoned spikes.
- 86: Tar Baby no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 -30 30 10 10 0  
10 Feisty. A black, tar-covered beast. Any weapon or limb which  
strikes it will stick and require an hour to free.
- 87: Terrask no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 80 10 10 10  
100 Feisty. An immense, dinosaurian creature (200' tall), pale  
grey to black at different spots.
- 88: Thousand Legged Roller no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0  
25 10 10 20 30 30 Herbivore. Great multi-colored 6' ball covered  
with legs, by which it rolls.
- 89: Ticklebug no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 10 10 30 30 10  
-30 Pet. A little, 6" furry creature (white, gold, tan, orange,  
calico, grey, brown, red, or black) with long whiskers, fond of  
touching other creatures very lightly.
- 90: Torpor Beast no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 40\* 0 10 10 10  
10 10 10 Predator. A beast with four limbs and a spiked trunk —  
snikes inject a potent sleeping poison

spines injure a person sleeping person.

91: Translucent Frog no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -10 25 10  
10 10 10 10 Herbivore. An animal such that you can see into its  
body to look at its inner workings.

92: Trin no po wa ag co de pe sp st 30 0 -20 30 10 10 10 10  
-10 Herbivore. This beast is short, round, and flat, with tan fur.

93: Turtle no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 -10 60 0 0 -30 10  
Herbivore. As in real life.

94: Tyrannosaurus Rex no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 0 -10 10  
10 0 -10 60 Predator. As in real life.

95: Warm Fuzzy no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 0 -30 10 10 10  
30 0 -20 Pet. Same colors as a ticklebug, round, 8", with very  
long, very soft fur. Can climb (Climb 2) very comfortably and  
snuggle for hours. Used like teddybears.

96: Water Sprite no po wa ag co de pe sp st 25 0 -20 50 10 10  
10 10 -10 Herbivore. An extremely shy and beautiful form that  
comes out once a year to dance in the moonlight.

97: Wind Hummer no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 30 0 50 10 10  
10 20 -40 Feisty. 1' tall. A quick, translucent (Dodge 50, Fly 40),  
stinging creature.

98: Wolf no po wa ag co de pe sp st 20 0 0 10 10 20 10 10 20  
Predator. As in real life.

99: Wyvern no po wa ag co de pe sp st 1 30 0 20 20 10 10 10  
25 Predator. A flying (10', Fly 10), red-brown stinging reptilian  
predator.

100: Game Master's Creation

Random Person Encounters:

In general, 1-10 people will be encountered. (Hermits will  
always be encountered alone.) Several factors/scales are given  
(race, profession, Myers-Briggs personality type, etc.); the GM  
need only generate as much information as he needs to get an  
idea of how to play it.

Random personal encounters

Random personal encounters are, in essence, an opportunity to role play social interaction, and should be played as such. While there are other possibilities, such as trading for equipment or information, the game master should focus on making the encounter an interaction with interesting people who will make play more interesting.

These tables are for encounters out in the wild — generally, parties of people who are mostly adventurers. Encounters in a city or village should be different.

Character race and roles	N	T	U	Y	J
1: Janra Acrobat	1	1	1	1	1
2: Janra Acrobatic Scout	2	2	2	2	2
3: Janra Actor	3	3	3	3	3
4: Janra Archer	4	4	4	4	4
5: Janra Bard	5	5	5	5	5
6: Janra Dancer	6	6	6	6	6
7: Janra Hermit	7	7	7	7	7
8: Janra Homemaker	8-12	8-12	8-12	8-12	8-
9: Janra Hunter	13	13	13	13	13
10: Janra Idiot	14	14	14	14	14
11: Janra Interpreter	15	15	15	15	15
12: Janra Jack-of-all-Trades	16	16	16	16	16
13: Janra Juggler	17	17	17	17	17
14: Janra MacGyver	18	18	18	18	18
15: Janra Masseuse	19	19	19	19	19
16: Janra Perceiver	20	20	20	20	20
17: Janra Scholar	21	21	21	21	21
18: Janra Singer	22	22	22	22	22
19: Janra Storyteller	23	23	23	23	23
20: Janra Wayfarer	24	24	24	24	24
21: Janra Woodsman	25	25	25	25	25
22: Jec Archer	26	26	26	26	26
23: Jec Baker					27
24: Jec Bard	27	27	27	27	28
25: Jec Blacksmith					29
26: Jec Cobbler					30
27: Jec Farmer					31
28: Jec Fisherman					36
29: Jec Hermit					38
30: Jec Homemaker					39
31: Jec Hunter	28	28	28	28	49
32: Jec Idiot					50

32: Jec Idiot					50
33: Jec Merchant					51
34: Jec Sage					53
35: Jec Stonemason					54
36: Jec Storyteller					55
37: Jec Wayfarer	29	29	29	29	56
38: Jec Weaver					57
39: Jec Woodsman	30	30	30	30	58
40: Nor'krin Archer	31-33	31	31	31	59
41: Nor'krin Bard	34-36	32	32	32	60
42: Nor'krin Hermit			37		
43: Nor'krin Homemaker			38-47		
44: Nor'krin Hunter	48-50	33	33	33	61
45: Nor'krin Idiot			51		
46: Nor'krin Wayfarer	52-53	34	34	34	62
47: Shal Bard		35	35	35	63
48: Shal Farmer				36	
49: Shal Gardener				37	
50: Shal Hermit					
51: Shal Homemaker				38	
52: Shal Idiot					
53: Shal Masseuse				39	
54: Shal Poet					
55: Shal Sage				40	
56: Shal Woodsman	54	36	36	41	64
57: Tuz Archer	55	37-39	37	42	65
58: Tuz Blacksmith			40-41		
59: Tuz Hermit			42		
60: Tuz Homemaker			43-52		
61: Tuz Hunter	56	53-55	38	43	66
62: Tuz Idiot			56		
63: Tuz Scout	57	57-58	38	43	66
64: Tuz Stonemason			59		
65: Tuz Woodsman	58	60-62	40	48	68
66: Tuz Wrestler			63		
67: Urvanovestilli Archer	59	64	41	49	69
68: Urvanovestilli Artist				42	
69: Urvanovestilli Bard	60	65	43	50	70
70: Urvanovestilli Dancer				44	
71: Urvanovestilli Dual Profession	61	66	45	51	71
(roll twice, ignoring non-Urvanovestilli rolls.)					
72: Urvanovestilli Goldsmith				46	
73: Urvanovestilli Hermit				47	
74: Urvanovestilli Homemaker				48-57	
75: Urvanovestilli Hunter	62	67	58	52	72
76: Urvanovestilli Idiot				59	
77: Urvanovestilli Interpreter	63	68	60	53	73
78: Urvanovestilli Jack-of-all-Trades	64	69	61	54	74

79: Urvanovestilli Noble				62	
80: Urvanovestilli Renaissance Man	65	70	63	55	75
81: Urvanovestilli Repairman				64	
82: Urvanovestilli Scholar	66	71	65	56	76
83: Urvanovestilli Servant				66	
84: Urvanovestilli Specialist				67	
85: Urvanovestilli Wayfarer	67	72	68	57	77
86: Urvanovestilli Weaver				69	
87: Yedidia Animal Handler		73	70	58-59	78
88: Yedidia Bard	68-69	74	71	60-61	79
89: Yedidia Herbalist		75	72	62-63	80
90: Yedidia Hermit				64	
91: Yedidia Homemaker			73	65-74	
92: Yedidia Hunter	70	76	74	75-76	81
93: Yedidia Idiot				77	
94: Yedidia Jack-of-all-Trades	71	77	75	78	82
95: Yedidia Masseuse			76	79	
96: Yedidia Perceiver	72	78	77	78	82
97: Yedidia Singer			78	82	
98: Yedidia Woodsman	73	79	79	83-84	84
99: Roll once to determine race, then a second time to determine p	74	80	80	85	85
100: Special	75-84	81-90	81-90	86-95	86
101: Nor'krin Encounter		91	91	96	96
102: Tuz Encounter	85-86		92-94	98	98
103: Urvanovestilli Encounter	87-91	91-94		98	98
104: Yedidia Encounter	92-93	95-97	95-97		99
105: Jec Encounter	94-99	98	98-99	99	
106: Shal Encounter	100	99-100	100	100	100

### Myers-Briggs Personality Type:

Shal: 1-3 Extrovert, 4-10 Introvert; Other: 1-7 Extrovert, 8-10

Introvert 1-6 Sensing, 7-10 INTuitive

Male: 1-6 Thinking, 7-10 Feeling; Female 1-4 Thinking, 5-10

Feeling. 1-5 Judging, 6-10 Perceiving

Handedness: Janra 01-75 left, 76-95 ambidexterous, 96-100

right; other 01-94 right, 95-99 left, 100 ambidexterous

Birth Order: 1-3 first, 4-6 middle, 7-9 last, 10 only

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Section II L: Equipment, Devices, Chemicals, Herbs, and  
Money

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In the monetary system, 1 gold sovereign (au) = 2 electrum sceptres (el) = 8 silver crowns (si) = 64 copper pennies (cu) = 256 iron tips (fe). Price is variable; a device could easily be sold for twice or half its listed cost here. All coins are of the same weight; 64 of them weigh a pound.

Adventuring equipment as a rule is scarce and difficult to acquire. The ad (acquirement difficulty) given for equipment is e (easy), m (moderate), d (difficult), vd (very difficult), and ed (extremely difficult). The races in whose homeland the items are easily found are designated by first initial ('J' denoting Jec rather than Janra, as the Janra have no homeland); items may be found in other lands, but at a difficulty one notch higher (so difficult becomes very difficult, etc.).

The following are illustrations of devices and equipment available. Other equipment in the same spirit (as described in the game master's introduction, section IV) is encouraged with game master discretion. Each device is slightly different; they may well have modifications (such as a tiny hidden compartment). There should ideally be thousands of unique devices, of which the listed examples are but a tiny hint. Chemical prices, unless otherwise specified, are per fluid ounce, and herbs per ounce. Chemicals which temporarily affect attributes do *\*not\** affect st and co contributions to health value.

Armor made not out of steel but out of special alloys may be found, at one notch higher ad and ten times the price, with all the protection but only half the penalties. When armor reduces damage by a fixed percentage, it should be read as the exponent of the damage which is reduced.

Animals (trained or otherwise friendly) may be acquired at a difficulty of the sum of the squares of their attributes, for half

the ad if their behavior type is pet, ad for behavior type herbivore, twice the ad for behavior type small predator, three times the ad for behavior type predator, and four times the ad for behavior type feisty.

What is listed is specifically equipment which will be useful to adventurers. There are an infinitude of other objects which exist — clockwork devices which are built up to perform various tasks (such as play music or be a moving model of the solar system) much as a computer programmer assembles instructions to make a program; herbs which act as spices, or which, when drunk as a tea, have a mild narcotic effect (which herbs are carefully and temperately used, just like alcohol), or chemicals which, when mixed, turn a complex rainbow of scintillating colors — and they would take forever to list. Here is a simple example of what may be useful to adventurers, to give the game master a feel for the spirit of creation.

### Devices and Equipment

	Cost	ad	Name
5 au	m		Axe/Hatchet (wa 0) (N, T, U, Y, J, S)
	3 au	d	Backpack (T, U, Y)
20 au	d		Belaying Device, automatic — a springloaded box with at one end, a crank on the side, and which shoots grappling hook. This device catches a climber who preventing injury, and allowing him to try again in grip (thereby effectively doubling climbing skill)
4 au	d		Camouflage cloak — usually forest green, dark grey occasionally brown, these can lower the difficulty one notch (T, U, Y, C)
8 au	d		Cat's Claw — an angled iron or steel clawed boot and glove which is highly effective at attaching to surfaces; someone wearing a Cat's Claw has a climb increased by 10. (T, U)
50 au	d		Chain Mail: -20 to sharp damage suffered, and -5 to damage; 5-st penalty to ag, de, sp; -20 to Move Silently (For instance, a character with st -5 would suffer 10 to ag, de, sp).
500 au	vd		Chain Mail, "feather": -15 to sharp damage and -3 to damage; -10 to Move Silently (U)

damage; -10 to move silently. (U)  
 5-20 au m Chest, Locked, Reinforced – size varies with price  
 5 au d Cloth tape – 50 yards (U)  
 400 au vd Collapsible rowboat – skeleton of iron bars and j  
 oil skin surface, when taken apart and packed away  
 large back pack. (U)  
 3 au d Compass (U)  
 10 au m Crossbow (wa 0 Urvanovestilli, 10 Tuz; strength di  
 load 0 Urvanovestilli, 10 Tuz) (T, U)  
 200 au vd Crossbow, Pump-Action – a pumping action loads the  
 so that the time to load and shoot is 5s instead c  
 0, loading requires action of strength difficulty  
 400 au vd Crossbow, Spray – a cup on the front of the bowstr  
 20 bolts which, when fired, fan out in a spray. w  
 effectively increases firer's skill/accuracy by 10  
 cannot be gainfully used with a telescopic sight)  
 3 cu m Crossbow Bolt (T, U)  
 1 au d Crossbow Bolt, Exploding (+20 to wa) (U)  
 1 au d Crossbow Bolt, Harpoon – a fine wire or silk cord  
 inside the shell, and an end can be attached to th  
 other anchor.  
 1 au d Crossbow Bolt, Poison Injecting (U)  
 5 au d Crowbar (T, U)  
 2 au m Dagger (wa 0 hand to hand, -10 thrown) (N, T, U, J  
 80 au vd Dagger, Obsidian, Razor-edged (wa 5 hand to hand,  
 (U)  
 40 au vd Dagger, Poison Injecting (wa 0) (U)  
 60 au vd Directional mechanical listening device – a pair c  
 for the ears. It has a sight and a hard parabolic  
 a tube which goes to the ears at the focus – incom  
 from the direction it faces is echoed into the tub  
 with exceptional sensitivity.  
 15 au d Earhorn – effectively doubles hear noises skill  
 2000 au ed Firestar – a longsword with a hollow, insulated ha  
 network of veins inside the blade leading to a por  
 which will be covered in burning oil (po 20, hotte  
 more damage possibly available upon searching).  
 25 au d Fishing Rod, collapsible (U)  
 6 au d Goggles, Waterproof (U)  
 2 au d Grappling Hook (T, U)  
 1 el d Gunpowder (U)  
 30 au d Halberd (wa 15) (T, U)  
 200 au d Hang Glider (U)  
 600 au vd Hang Glider, Collapsible – can collapse to backpac  
 pop out at the push of a button (U)  
 60 au d Herbal/Chemical Medicine kit – medicines allow an  
 character to heal faster. (Easy medical skill che  
 causing damage (prevents healing that dav). diffic

skill check to double rate of healing) (U, Y)

3000 au vd Hot Air Balloon (U)

150 au d Hummer – a small device which emits a high and low (inaudible to humans) which is 90% likely to repel animals. (U)

1000 au vd Jack/Rabbit Tool – This device has two hardened st each shaped like a flattened chisel, and a crank w turned, will slowly (over the course of a few minu the prongs to push apart with very powerful force the strength of the using character), sufficient t force most doors and chests open. (U)

10,000 au ed Juggernaut – a movable room and armored vehicle, c going over all sorts of terrain at the average jog the party inside, which seats 4-8. A very good pl in a Tuz forest. (U)

1 au e Knife (wa -3 hand to hand, -8 thrown) (N, T, U, Y,

120 au vd Ladder, Collapsible – expands at the push of a but can be collapsed to an object 18"x8"x4". (U)

40 au d Lance (wa 3) (T, U)

5 au e Lantern (T, U, J)

10 au d Lantern, parabolic mirror – beam of light comes ou one direction. (U)

10 au e Leather Vest: -7 to sharp damage, -3 to blunt dama penalties (N, T)

5 au d Lighter – like a cigarette lighter, but with a wic instead of butane. (U)

30 au d Lock Picks (U)

10 au m Longbow (N, T, U)

1 si m Longbow Arrow (N, T, U)

10 au d Longsword (wa 10) (T, U)

5 au d Mace (wa 5) (T)

1000 au ed Manual of Skill (specific skill) – A Manual of Ski instructions and insights into one particular skill after a month's usage a character will gain five e points in that skill. Unless the game master expl specifies otherwise, all manuals of skill when fou in extremely poor condition and will fall apart an completely unusable after one character has used i

80 au d Medical Kit – allows a character's medical skill t in caring for the healing of another. (U)

10 au d Periscope (U)

2 au m Pickaxe (T, U, J)

100 au d Plate Armor, heavy: -30 to sharp damage, -20 to bl penalties 20-st to ag, de, sp; -20 to Move Silentl

200 au vd Plate Armor, light: -15 to sharp damage, -10 to bl 5-st penalties to ag, de, sp; -20 to Move Silently

50 au vd Pneumatic-Powered Liquid Sprayer, glass coated ins

are powered by compressed gas cartridges; some are pumping to build up pressure. (U)

15 au m Rapier (wa 5) (U)

500 au vd Reference Manual (specific skill) – A reference manual consulted, allows a character to make a skill check had five ep more (adjusted for gear but not al) after hour's consultation in preparation for that specific and as if he had ten ep more after one day's consultation.

1 au d Robe, many-pocketed (U, Y, J)

1 au m Rope, 50' (N, T, U, Y, C) 50

50 au d Rope, 50', silk (much thinner, smaller, and stronger than normal rope). (U)

350 au vd Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus (U)

100 au vd Sewing Machine, portable (U)

10 au d Shield – its usage skill (block, works exactly like a shield). (T, U)

3 au m Slide Rule (U)

3 au d Snorkel (U)

2 d Soft cloth/leather boots/shoes – effectively increase wearer's move silently skill by 10. (U, Y, S)

10,000 au ed Spider Silk Robe: -30 sharp damage, -5 blunt damage associated penalties. (U)

30 au d Springboard – with running start, doubles jump skill

300 au vd Staff, Rocket Launching – launches rockets that explode (1 yard r+50-damage fireball) (U)

50-200 au d Swiss Army Knife (U)

1 au vd Syringe (U)

10 au d Telescope, 10x magnification (U)

100 au 64 Telescope, 100x magnification (U)

500 au vd Telescope, zoom, 10-250x magnification (U)

50 au d Telescopic Crossbow sight – allows for a shot taken in time and prone to have accuracy increased by 50 if used with a difficult Urvanovestilli crossbow and adjusted with a difficult device craftsmanship/engineering check. (U)

200 au vd Tent, framed – collapses to fit inside a moderately sized backpack. (U)

1 au e Tinderbox (N, T, U, Y, J, S)

20 au e Tool Kit (U)

50 au d Two-handed sword (wa 20) (T, U)

10 au m Watch (U)

1 au m Waterskin (N, T, U, Y, C, S)

15 au m Winter Clothing – lowers cold tolerance difficultly by 1 notch. (N, U, C)

1 d Wire, steel, 5 yards

10 au d Wire Saw (U)

## Non-Herbal Chemicals

500 au ed Adrenaline serum. One ounce of this hormone per lb of body weight will affect attributes with the following adjustments: ag+5, al+15, ch-10, de-5, kn-8, me-8, st+15, wi-15. At the time of being injected, the character must make one constitution check, of difficulty equal to the number of ounces of adrenaline injected per hundred pounds of body weight. If this check is failed, then the character causes him to run in fear from any threat until it is cured. (Note that this reduces wisdom as quickly as it reduces strength; a character with wisdom reduced to .1 or lower is no longer under the control of the player.) Also, adrenaline causes an injured creature (as long as it's still alive) to function as if not injured.

100 au ed Anabolic steroids. One ounce of this, appropriate for the character and spread over a year with vigorous exercise, will increase strength by 2. (After the year, no further steroid use will bring increase. Increased steroid use will reduce the base strength, unadjusted by steroids). The number of ounces is subtracted from constitution.

1 au d Docility Drug (po 10) – this and other drugs take the drug "damage" combined with actual damage bring the character below zero health value (U)

5 au 64 Docility Drug (po 20) (U)

25 au vd Docility Drug (po 30) (U)

125 au 1024 Docility Drug (po 40) (U)

625 au ed Docility Drug (po 50) (U)

1 si d Glue (U)

1 au vd Glue, exceptional strength (if allowed to set, is stronger than the materials it has bonded together)

8 au vd Nitric Acid – comes in a glass container (one of few substances it will not eat through), with a tiny explosion (U)

2 au vd Compressed Gas Cartridge (U)

1 cu e Lantern Oil (T, U, J)

1 el d Lantern Oil, Extra Bright – when burnt in a lantern will illuminate a room as brightly as daylight. (U)

1 au d Poison (po 10) (U)

5 au 64 Poison (po 20) (U)

25 au vd Poison (po 30) (U)

125 au 1024 Poison (po 40) (U)

625 au ed Poison (po 50) (U)

2 au d Roman Candle (U)

1 au d Sleeping Drug (po 10) – this and other drugs take the drug "damage" combined with actual damage bring the character below zero health value (U)

5 au 64 Sleeping Drug (po 20) (U)

25 au vd Sleeping Drug (po 30) (U)

125 au 1024 Sleeping Drug (po 40) (U)

125 au 1024 Sleeping Drug (po 40) (U)  
 625 au ed Sleeping Drug (po 50) (U)  
 1 au d Smoke Bomb (U)  
 10 au vd Thermite — a mixture of powdered rust and aluminum  
 when ignited with a magnesium fuse (generally available  
 wherever thermite is available), burn through near  
 — steel, sand, asbestos...). (U)

Herbs and Herb Derivatives — some herb effects derived  
 from the net.book on herbs. Herbs, in raw form, may be acquired  
 using the herbalism or woodlore skills as well as acquisition, in  
 which case they are obviously free.

1 sp m Aloe Vera — when rubbed over sunburnt skin, alleviates  
 pain and causes healing to occur at four times the normal rate.  
 50 au ed Angel's Hair — this herb, when dried, powdered, and  
 mixed with water to make a viscous fluid, will, when drunk (one  
 dose per day) reduce aging by 1/4. 1 sp m Coffee — one silver  
 piece's worth per hundred pounds body weight will bring adjust  
 $pe*1.1$ ,  $sp*1.1$ , cube of silver piece's worth per hundred pounds  
 body weight will adjust  $de*.98$ ,  $in*.98$ . Lasts one hour. (U) 1 au d  
 Cofisa Tea — a tea with strong herbal extracts that focuses and  
 intensifies nervous system impulses to the muscles. Adjusts  
 $st*1.1$ , cube adjusts  $pe*.98$ . Lasts 15 minutes. 4 au vd Desp —  
 when an extract of this herb is injected, it causes the person to  
 continue strenuous exercise for ten times the normal duration,  
 after which he will fairly quickly fall asleep. 1 au d Docility Drug  
 (po 10) — this and other drugs take effect when the drug  
 "damage" combined with actual damage brings an animal below  
 zero health value (Y) 4 au 64 Docility Drug (po 20) (Y) 16 au vd  
 Docility Drug (po 30) (Y) 64 au 1024 Docility Drug (po 40) (Y)  
 256 au ed Docility Drug (po 50) (Y) 1 cu d Ficop — A liberal  
 distribution of a paste made of this herb, held on with dressings,  
 (one pound per square foot), will cause burns to heal at four  
 times the normal rate. 1 au m Gentian Violet — this herbal

extract, when applied to a bleeding wound, will cause it to rapidly slow, scabbing unless it is a major vessel. 1 au d Hallucinogenic Mushroom Extract — this and other drugs take effect when the drug "damage" combined with the actual damage brings an animal below zero health value. An animal in combat who hallucinates has a 50% chance of being scared off by hallucinations, and, if not scared, has a 50% chance of attacking hallucinations rather than threats (po 10) (Y) 4 au 64 Hallucinogenic Mushroom Extract (po 20) (Y) 16 au vd Hallucinogenic Mushroom Extract (po 30) (Y) 64 au 1024 Hallucinogenic Mushroom Extract (po 40) (Y) 256 au ed Hallucinogenic Mushroom Extract (po 50) (Y) 2 sp d Hedisc — when rubbed on scars daily (one ounce can cover one square inch of scar for one week), causes scars to heal fully within a month (Y) 50 au d Herbal Medicine Kit (Y) 5 au vd Hesniana — when made into a tea and drunk, this adjusts pe+5 noncumulatively for ten minutes. (Y) 1 el d Hofiu — anti-nauseant (Y) 20 au vd Kedlidi — diminishes by half the effect of alcohol (non-cumulatively). (Y) 1 sp d Locriat Tea — This includes a variety of teas which, a day after drinking, will begin to color the drinker's skin (and, in some cases, hair); the colors will wear off with discontinuation after about a month to half a year (depending on how much has been consumed); possible resultant colors may be described as any color which may be obtained by rubbing a non-opaque dye onto a person's skin. (Y) 2 au m Nesrit — When burned in a fire, the resulting smoke will leave an odd scent in the air which will repel insects and snakes for one hour (Y). 3 au d Plei Kr't Sha — this herb, when taken orally, will in ten minutes cause a person for an hour to be aware of painful stimuli but not feel them as pain, and not to be nauseated by grotesque sights or thoughts; used frequently in surgery (Y) 1 au d Poison (po 10) (Y) 4 au 64 Poison (po 20) (Y) 16 au vd Poison (po 30) (Y) 64 au 1024 Poison (po 40)

(Y) 256 au ed Poison (po 50) (Y) 1 au d Poison Antidote — Poison antidotes are specific to the plant, and/or creature from which the poison originated. There are three or four common poisons of each strength and several uncommon poisons of each strength (price and ad up by a factor of four) (po 10) (Y) 4 au 64 Poison Antidote (po 20) (Y) 16 au vd Poison Antidote (po 30) (Y) 64 au 1024 Poison Antidote (po 40) (Y) 256 au ed Poison Antidote (po 50) (Y) 1 au d Sleeping Drug (po 10) — this and other drugs take effect when the drug "damage" combined with actual damage brings an animal below zero health value (Y) 5 au 64 Sleeping Drug (po 20) (Y) 25 au vd Sleeping Drug (po 30) (Y) 125 au 1024 Sleeping Drug (po 40) (Y) 625 au ed Sleeping Drug (po 50) (Y) 2 au d Solvi — causes internal blood clots to dissolve (Y) 2 au m Stiv Tea — causes neurons in the eye to fire once per photon detected instead of once every seven, thereby causing a person to be dazzled in bright light, see in dim light as if it were bright, and see in very weak light (moonless starlight, indirect candlelight) as if it were dim. 5 au d Talinor Tea — adjusts in+2, pe-1, sp-1, wears off in one hour (U, Y)

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## Section II M: Speed and Simultaneity

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This section is optional:

The exponent of a creature's speed is looked up in the log/exponent table, and actions are shortened in duration by that divisor. For example, a creature of speed 10 has an exponent of 2, so he does things twice as fast (he takes half as long to do things).

Creatures may voluntarily speed up or slow down actions, affecting the difficulty as follows: let's say that a character wants to perform an action 4 times as fast. The log of 4 is looked up in the log/exponent table: 20. This number is added to the difficulty of the action: it is 20 points more difficult to perform the action at 4 times normal speed. Creatures can benefit from slowing down to perform actions, up to a difficulty 10 points lower by taking twice as long.

A character may perform  $n$  actions simultaneously with the difficulty for each increased by the log of  $n$ : 10 points for 2 actions, 20 points for 4, etc. Common sense should be applied to what can be done simultaneously; archery and horseback riding are sensible concurrent activities, while archery and juggling are not. Running while doing other activities does not require an ability check, but does count as a simultaneous activity (increasing the difficulty of the other activities performed).

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## Section III: A Quick Key to Abbreviations

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Here is what each abbreviation means. It may be convenient to print out this page to have on hand until the abbreviations become familiar.

	ad	acquirement difficulty
	ag	agility
	al	ability to learn
an		one half anatomy skill, rounded down
	au	gold
	av	adjusted value
b		number resulting from rolling the blue die
	bs	base skill
	ch	charisma
	co	constitution
	cu	copper
	d	difficult
	de	dexterity
	dl	difficulty of learning
	e	easy
	ed	extremely difficult
	el	electrum
	ep	experience point(s)
	fe	iron
	gaa	governing attributes addend
	in	intelligence
	kn	knowledge
	ld	learning difference
	m	moderate
	me	memory
	ms	medical skill
	pe	perception
	po	poison
r		number resulting from rolling the red die
	si	silver
	sp	speed
	st	strength
	ub	untrained base
	vd	very difficult
	wa	weapon adjustment
	wi	wisdom

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## Section IV: A Sample Character sheet

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Here are parts of a sample character sheet being set up, in order to make the model perhaps easier to understand. I am demonstrating using my stopwatch as a ten-sided die (starting and stopping it, and then looking at the place for hundredths of seconds), and a simple four function calculator. The number of decimal places kept track of is somewhat arbitrary, but I will use two.

First, I decide the character's race, age, and gender (young Yedidia female). We'll call her Ocula. (We should also have an idea of what kind of skills she will have — I'll say a perceiver, although her 30 ep may be devoted any way I want.) Second, I generate 36 numbers as r-b (I roll the red and blue dice, subtracting the value on the blue die from that on the red die — if the red says '3' and the blue says '5', then the number is 3-5, or -2):

n1: 4; n2: 3; n3: 2; n4: -1; n5: -3; n6: 0; n7: 3; n8: -2; n9: 1;  
 n10: 0; n11: 4; n12: -3; n13: -1; n14: 5; n15: 2; n16: 2; n17: 3; n18:  
 0; n19: -1; n20: 1; n21: -1; n22: -1; n23: 0; n24: -5; n25: 1; n26: 2;  
 n27: -1; n28: 4; n27: -2; n28: 1; n29: -3; n30: 4; n31: 1; n32: -1;  
 n33: 0; n34: -1; n35: 0; n36: 2

Now, using those 36 random numbers, I calculate her attributes as given in section II A, and adjust them as given in section II B:

Attribute	Racial	Gender	Age	Adjusted
ag: $4+3+2-1-3=5$	+0	+0	+5	10
al: $4+0+3-2+1=6$	+0	+0	+5	11
ch: $4+0+0+4-3=5$	+5	+0	+0	10
co: $-1+5+2+2+3=11$	+0	+0	+5	16
de: $4+3+2+0-1=8$	+0	+2	+5	15
in: $4+0+3+1-1=7$	+3	+0	+0	10
kn: $4+0+3-1+0=6$	+0	+0	-4	2
me: $4+0+3-5+1=3$	+0	+0	+0	3
ne: $4+3+2-1+4=12$	+10	+5	+5	32

sp:	$4+3-3+4+1=9$	+0	+0	+5	14
st:	$-1+5-1+0+1=4$	+0	-5	+5	4
wi:	$4+0+3+0+2=9$	+0	+0	+0	9

For all unadjusted attributes, 0 is average, and how far above or below 0 the character's attribute is is how far above or below average the character is in that attribute.

Ocula is above average in virtually everything; this is unusual even for a heroine. (If the player does not like the first attributes generated, he may generate new ones — while Ocula is unusually gifted, heroes should be above average.) Ocula is, as compared to other young Yedidia women, mentally sharp, moves quickly, healthy, and exceptionally perceptive.

Now it is time to allocate initial experience. Ocula has 30 points to distribute on skills (above and beyond her untrained bases as a Yedidia female). Using one of the given roles, she will be a perceiver (her experience devoted, as listed in section II H, are blind action  $3*1=3$  ep, guess actions  $3*3=9$ , etc.).

Now, for a daily encounter check. Will there be an encounter?

1. Encounter. What kind of encounter? 2. Animal. What animal? 19. Duck. How will it be/ behave? 3. It is curious.

Upon seeing the duck, she will guess actions to see what it will do. Now we will calculate her guess actions skill.

Her untrained base for Guess Actions is 20. She has 9 ep devoted, so we calculate her bv as follows, consulting the log/exponent table: the exponent of 20 is 4.  $4+9=13$ , so this is what her experience does. The log of 13 is 37, so she has a base skill of 37 for Guess Actions. Her al is added to this (11), and her gaa as well (32). Her av (adjusted value) for guess actions is 80.

Guessing actions for a person under normal circumstances would be of moderate difficulty; guessing the actions of a nonhuman animal is difficult (difficulty 40). Her success index is

$80-40=40$ . The dice are rolled; red yields 4 and blue yields 1.  $(6*4)+1=25$ , and looking at the table, she needs a success index of at least -1. Ocula succeeds in guessing what the duck is going to do, namely try to figure out if she is going to attack and, if not, if she is safe to approach.

Later, a young Urvanovestilli man, in his wanderlust, comes through to visit. He has a pianoforte music box which entrances her. He is a bit of a maverick, and tells her that he will bet the music box against a well aged bottle of strawberry wine that he can beat her in a gambling game. She agrees.

He is a good gambler (gambling 30), and has an unadjusted perception of 3, adjusted 8. His  $al$  is 5, so his gambling skill is 43.

Ocula is not particularly skilled at gambling, but she can guess actions well — a skill closely related to gambling — and guess actions and gambling have an  $ld$  of 10, so she can gamble 70. Skill against skill; she has a success index of 27. Red rolls 5, blue rolls 2, for a roll of 32. She needed a success index of -11 or higher to win, so she won.

Ocula completes a quest, gaining two experience points. She decides to devote both of them to guessing actions. Her  $bv$  is 37, which has an exponent of 13. Adding the two experience points make it 15, which has a log of 39. With this two point increase, her new  $av$  is 82. (If she had trained with a tutor of sufficiently high  $av$  (84 or more — which would have been found on an acquisition skill check of difficulty 84), she would have gotten double benefit out of her experience, adding 4 to the exponent instead of 2, yielding 17 with a log of 41, so her new  $av$  would have been 84.)

Ocula's initial character sheet (without experience from the quest) is as follow:

Ocula Yedidia Female Age: 33

Attribute	Racial	Gender	Age	Adjusted
ag: 4+3+2-1-3=5	+0	+0	+5	10
al: 4+0+3-2+1=6	+0	+0	+5	11
ch: 4+0+0+4-3=5	+5	+0	+0	10
co: -1+5+2+2+3=11	+0	+0	+5	16
de: 4+3+2+0-1=8	+0	+2	+5	15
in: 4+0+3+1-1=7	+3	+0	+0	10
kn: 4+0+3-1+0=6	+0	+0	-4	2
me: 4+0+3-5+1=3	+0	+0	+0	3
pe: 4+3+2-1+4=12	+10	+5	+5	32
sp: 4+3-3+4+1=9	+0	+0	+5	14
st: -1+5-1+0+1=4	+0	-5	+5	4
wi: 4+0+3+0+2=9	+0	+0	+0	9

### Health Value: co+st+ag+an=48

Skill	ub	ep	bv	gaa	av
Anatomy	10	0	10	2	18
Animal Handling			20	0	
Animal Lore			20	0	
Blind Action			10	3	
Dancing			20	0	
Dodge			10	0	
Endurance			0	0	
Fire-Building			0	0	
Gardening			10	0	
Guess Actions	20	9	37	32	80
Haggling			0	0	
Hear Noises			20	3	
Herbalism			15	0	
Hide			10	0	
Hunting			10	0	
Improvisation			20	0	
Jumping			0	0	
Massage			0	0	
Medicine			10	0	
Move Silently			10	0	
Keen Eyesight			10	3	
Musical Instrument (Recorder)			10	0	
Navigation			0	0	
Philosophy			0	0	
Read Emotion			15	3	
Search			0	3	
Smell Creature			10	3	
Theology			10	0	
Weather Sense			10	3	
Wilderness Survival			20	0	

Inventory Herbal medicines Pet puma, young male, named Liki  
n1: 5; n2: 0; n3: 0; n4: -4; n5: 0; n6: 2; n13: 2; n14: 0; n15: 0; n16:  
-3; n17: 2; n18: 0; n19: 1; n26: -4; n27: -1; n28: 2; n29: 4; n30: 3;  
n31: 1; n32: 1; n33: 5; n34: -5 unadjusted species gender age  
adjusted ag:  $5+0+0-4+0=1$  30 0 5 36 co:  $2+0+0-3+2=1$  10 0 5 16  
de:  $5+0+0+0+1=6$  20 0 5 31 pe:  $5+2-4-1-2=0$  30 0 5 35 sp:  
 $5+0+4+3+1=13$  10 0 5 28 st:  $2+0+1+5-5=3$  30 5 5 40 Health Value:  
56 Damage: r+40 Skill Points gaa av Attack 30 99 129 Blind  
Action 20 35 55 Climb 20 76 96 Dodge 30 64 94 Hear Noises 20  
35 55 Hide 30 71 101 Hunt 30 35 65 Move Silently 30 71 101  
Track 30 35 65 Purse (4 silver pieces, 3 copper pieces, 8 iron  
tips) Recorder

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## Section V: Notes and Properties

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These are my comments about the model — about properties that I see as desirable and undesirable, plus miscellaneous comments.

It is a discrete, integer, dice-oriented translation of a continuous, real-valued model having the following properties:

Miscellaneous: The model (or, more properly, the racial and age attribute adjustments and racial base skills) is not balanced. I intentionally placed realism above balance in model design.

Undesirable properties:

Desirable properties:

The model is continuous and real-valued.

Related attributes are correlated in value.

What attributes are, and their impact, is appropriate.

Adjustments take the form of multiplicands, rather than addends.

Adjustments make a substantial impact on individual checks, rather than just being a subtle and minute increment.

Attributes adjust skills.

Experience devoted to skills produces an appropriate law of diminishing returns — it takes a little while to learn a little, and a long while to become a virtuoso.

Related skills apply to each other.

The model is simple and unified — one model fits all — and can be easily programmed into a scientific calculator.

Once a character's skills are calculated, there is no more calculation for a while.

I like the way it handles time and actions.

Having listed other little virtues that this model possesses, I wish to delineate one virtue which I consider cardinal.

This model is small and incomplete; it possesses a limited

domain.

It is the wide consensus of gamers that r-o-l-e-play is infinitely superior to r-o-l-l-play; this model is a miniscule thing which governs a tiny part of play, and calls for contrainte in use. It governs certain natural abilities and certain developed skills; I would like to point out two major areas of play that it doesn't touch.

The first is something which is traditionally a part of play and which mathematical models are kept out of: tole play: who a character is, what his personality is, what makes him tick, what his spiritual state is. It is something which is governed by an understanding of how things are done that cannot be reduced to rules and algorithms. On this point, I don't feel the need to explain further.

The second is something which is traditionally a part of play in some form or other and which is traditionally governed by mathematical models, much to the detriment of play. It consists of things like the motion and gifts of the Spirit, the prayer of faith, divine intervention, etc.

In D&D, a cleric's prayer power is reduced to another form of mechanized spell casting: a cleric gets such and such many prayers of the following power levels per day, as a function of his wisdom and the number of creatures he has killed. Star Wars is no better: using the Force is just one more skill which happens to be accompanied by some more rules about conduct. Neither is GURPS.

God is good and he is reliable, but he is not safe and not tame, and certainly not predictable enough to reduce to a model. While God is not predictable, incorporating a great deal of randomness in a model won't cut it. God, when listening to prayers, weighs the petitioner's faith and motives, the situation, and then makes

a decision that, while unpredictable, is governed by infinite love and wisdom. This is, if anything, less, not more, reducible to algorithms than personal interactions. This calls for the *GM* to pray, rely on the Spirit, and think. *God's* action must be handled as the most challenging and delicate role to portray, and it takes a game master created in the image of *God* to do.

# Further Notes

## The Minstrel's Song: Further Notes and Musings

A note on magic...

Most people reading this have probably noticed the absence of anything magic.

This absence is quite intentional, and of it I would like to say a couple of things.

First of all, magic is sin. It's that simple.

But, you may say, playing a character who uses magic does not mean that the player is tracing runes in the air, drawing chalk circles, and so on.

If you mean in the hands, granted. But there is something more to say.

One of the themes in the Sermon on the Mount is that purity belongs not only in the hands, but is to penetrate to the heart. Listen to how this precept is applied to sexual purity: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already

committed adultery with her in his heart."

That is to say, sin does not begin with the full act of sexual intercourse (outside of marriage); it is sinful to use the imagination to commit adultery in the heart — and a man who so much as casts one glance in lust has already done so.

The application to magic means that sin does not begin with chanting the words in a spellbook; it is wrong to use the imagination to use magic in the heart... and, just as lust does not begin after spending several minutes imagining every last instant and detail of foreplay and intercourse, pretending to use magic does not begin after imagining every last detail of casting a spell.

Role playing games provide a way to pretend, to use the imagination to become the great explorer who voyages into the unknown, the romantic bard whose tales spin beauty and wonder.

Nobody wants to play a scullery maid or a cobbler who makes shoes day in and day out; a character who is played for enjoyment is someone whom it would be enjoyable to be. To play is to pretend; to have fun by playing a magical character is to have fun by committing the sin of sorcery in the heart. (The same also goes for violence, deceit, thievery, etc.)

The second thing to say is this: God creates. Satan only mocks. forming counterfeit substitutes.

Lust is not a wonderful creative flair which Satan came up with. Marriage, including sex, is God's good creation; it is sacred, so much so that the Song of Songs (a Hebrew superlative meaning the greatest and most beautiful of songs) is devoted to eroticism. Lust is a cheap substitute, a cold prickly where God intends warm fuzzies. It can only be appealing because of the goodness of sex.

If the analogy is extended to magic, several useful things can be drawn from the analysis.

The question, "Why do people derive pleasure from pretending to use magic?" has two answers which I can immediately see.

The first is "Power." Magical powers enable characters to do amazing things.

Power is certainly not innately evil — God is all-powerful, and the believer who walks in the Spirit grows in power — but Satan often twists it to do what it was never meant to; function as a substitute for love. Totalitarian dictators and despots are rarely described by psychologists as having spent childhood surrounded by warm and compassionate friends; they are rather described as having been picked on and bullied. Power has a place in life, but role play is not enhanced by making characters into demigods.

The terms 'munchkin' and 'Monty Haul' do not describe a solid campaign. Perhaps a character is less powerful in some ways if he does not have a cloak which turns him invisible, but that does not make him a boring and pointless character.

The second, and in my estimation far more informative, answer to the question is, "Wonder."

In common speech and in literature, words such as 'magical' and 'enchanted' are used to describe things that are spectacular, awe inspiring, breathtaking.

God created people to be filled with wonder. Wonder fills pious living, and one of the many evils of looking to magic is that it has a grievous potential to blind people to the wonder God wants to fill them with.

There is wonder in little things that often go unnoticed; in the dance of a candle's flame and the feel of a gentle breeze. The created order — from the deep majesty of the starry vault, to the height of the mountains, to the depth of the oceans — is, as the human body, fearfully and wonderfully made.

There is also wonder in music, in art, in dance, in the form of ideas. It lies in personality, in the beauty of the human spirit. Finally, above and beyond these and many other things, is a source of wonder greater still.

The final and greatest source of wonder is God himself.

It is the motion of the Spirit which animates worship; indeed, Spirit-filled worship is probably the most wondrous element of human experience. It is the motion of the Spirit which enables men to speak in the tongues of men and angels; it is the motion of the Spirit which transported Philip from the Ethiopian eunuch to Azoth.

One need only read the story of Elijah and the prophets of Ba'al to catch a little of this. Elijah summoned the four hundred and fifty prophets of Ba'al, and asked the people of Israel, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, worship him, but if Ba'al is God, worship him." He proposed a contest: each would have a bull to offer in sacrifice; the hundreds of prophets of Ba'al would ask Ba'al to send fire to their sacrifice, and Elijah would ask Yahweh to send fire to his sacrifice, and the one who answers with fire — he is God.

The prophets of Ba'al went about for hours dancing and gashing themselves, taunted by Elijah: "Surely Ba'al is god! Why don't you cry a little louder? He could be asleep, or traveling.

Who knows? Maybe he's sitting on his porcelain throne."

After a while, it was Elijah's turn. He told the people, "I don't want to bore Yahweh. This is too easy." So, after preparing the sacrifice, he made the people thoroughly drench it in water, and drench it again, and then drench it again. Then he prayed, and fire came down from Heaven, consuming the bull, the wood, and all of the water.

It is not in magic, but in the Spirit — always faithful and

never predictable — that the believer finds wonder.

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One more note on magic:

There are certain elements of magic which seem to recurrently appear in Christian-designed fantasy role playing games.

I am referring in particular to magic in which the Bible or some book of liturgy becomes a spellbook, and verses/prayers/quotations become runes, incantations, etc.

If I may provide an analogy...

Creating a pornographic film is wrong.

Creating a pornographic film which has as its characters the characters of the Gospel (ergo, where it is Jesus, his disciples, Mary Magdala, the prostitutes and tax collectors whom Jesus said were entering the Kingdom of Heaven ahead of the Pharisees and so on who have an orgy, instead of random 20th century people having an orgy), is still wrong.

What is wrong with the latter mentioned pornographic film is not that it contains characters from the Gospel. What is wrong is that it is a pornographic film. Using Gospel characters within the context of a pornographic film does not make everything OK.

The context of a pornographic film is wrong, even if the characters who appear in it are perfectly fine.

Now, to extend the analogy to gaming...

It is wrong to play a character who spends time studying dusty spellbooks, from which he learns a magical incantation which, once per day, will cause a fireball to explode in the midst of the enemy, or enable him to fly, or create a magical shield about him.

That stated, let me quote the LightRaider Net fanzine, for the Christian DragonRaid game, (c) 1996 Jill Oviatt (oviattws@alaska.net) and Charlie Banders (charlie@mat.net).

An important WordRune that I think goes hand in hand with #55 Purge Evil WordRune (covered in issue #5) is #49, No Sweat WordRune.

NIV Romans 8:31b "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

This simple and easily memorized scripture (especially if you know the D+K song) is good by itself, but also a good balance to #55. Whereas #55 helps with the offensive strategy of the LightRaider, #49 helps with the defensive side of a battle. The No Sweat WordRune will allow you to raise your LightRaiders 'Shield of Faith rating by 3 for the duration of one encounter'. This Wordrune may only be used once per day so use it wisely.

Even in an allegorical situation... This is still magical. It does not involve prayer which rests on faith and which God grants, but memorization, recitation, words which bear power in and of themselves, and in terms of description and game mechanical effects is indistinguishable from a wizard's spell in Dungeons and Dragons.

Prayer is powerful, and memorization of Scripture is good. But the essence of prayer does not stem from the words in which it is spoken: when Jesus gave a model prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, he chastened people who babble because they believe they will be heard for the many words, and reminded his disciples that their Heavenly Father knew what they needed before they began to ask. When the Samaritan woman asked Jesus which place was the true place to worship, on this mountain or on that mountain, Jesus answered that the true place to worship was in Spirit and in truth. Does one do justice to these teachings of Jesus by saying that specific words spoken in

These teachings of Jesus by saying that specific words spoken in prayer have a power in and of themselves, residing the words, that would not be found in any other words? No. The New Testament teaching is that the power resides in the prayer and in the faith of the believer, to which God responds as a loving father, which is anything but governed by mechanistic rules as given in such games.

This kind of thing is, just like taking characters from the Gospel and incorporating them into a pornographic film, taking words from Scripture and incorporating them into a system of magic.

This is not how God works and answers prayer.

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A note on stories (note: this falls into the category of half-baked musings and suggestions rather than moral compulsions, and I may well be speaking of the impossible)

There was one professor of music who said of worship song that, rather than thinking "Here is the song on paper; we start it at time X and finish it at time Y", it might be better to think of one neverending song that always has been and always will be rising in the presence of the Eternal; people who sing step, for a while, into this song.

My story is like a thread being woven into a great tapestry; beautiful in and of itself, it is being led into contact with other threads, and slowly woven into a magnificent whole. It is not the Story before which there was no world; it is a story which is rather included in a beauty it could never attain on its own. It is not really that God is a part of what I am doing, so much as that I am a part of what God is doing.

Something of this might be brought into play; rather than one party in the world which acts upon a static situation (and in which other events occasionally happen as needed as plot devices for the story of the one party), there might be a Copernican revolution to the point where the world is full of interconnected stories which are parts of the one great Story; the characters and the party are dancing the great Dance.

I'm not entirely sure how to implement this — I'm netter at designing worlds than telling stories; my mind is more shaped around what is, than what happens — but the following seem to be at least promising:

- Just try. In the absence of detailed instructions, simply attempting and keeping it in mind may do a lot.

- Russian author solution. *Chez les e'crivains russes*, characters, plots, and subplots abound. It may be a lot of work/a headache for the game master, and having several round, many flat, and numerous functionary non-player characters may be a feat not to be attempted by non-Russians, but at least a little hint of this might add a bit of color.
- Multiple parties/numerous characters. This is probably the most promising, and the most capable of generating a nightmare. There are a couple of things that I've observed as tendencies in existing game play:
  - The shortage is of game masters, not players. If there is a reasonable way for a game master to deal with more than one party (2-7 characters), it's probably worth exploring.
  - The basic unit of play is either the whole party, or one player (solo).

In real life, I enjoy time spent with a group of friends and time spent in solitude — and, very much, time spent in a smaller group, and, especially, time spent alone with one person.

If the characters have a strictly professional relationship — I'll keep track of where we are, deal with organization, and talk with the locals; you'll take care of food and other supplies; Jim will work on puzzles and jury-rigging something to do the trick when we're up against a brick wall, etc. — then that may be feasible. Indeed, working together to solve a puzzle is a quite enjoyable experience. I think, however, that rich role play should have friendship as well, which will work out to personal relationships more complex than

individual/group.

I think that email may be able to bear \*some\* of the load. Letters from one character to another/others (cc'd to the game master) are a substantial tool for character development and role play. They can carry some interpersonal conversations very well, and are wonderful, to speak in a timewise manner: each player sends his character's words when he is free, and the additional strain on the game master is negligible.

This should not supplant the traditional mode of play. Face to face interaction, the general social environment, munchies and something to drink — this is an enjoyable atmosphere, and a part of why the game is enjoyable.

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A note on puzzles...

"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, and the glory of kings to search it out."

Proverbs 25:2

After role play, an orientation towards puzzles should be an important constituent of enjoyable play. There is a certain pleasure that comes of a challenge mastered, and that pleasure is particularly sweet when it comes from the mastery of a puzzle. (The balance which should constitute play, as I envision it, would consist of role play, exploration, wonder (motion of the Spirit and detail in the world), and problem solving)

The following are suggested examples of puzzles:

Riddles: These could be posed by a gatekeeper as a requisite to crossing a bridge etc.; alternately, a door could have a riddle engraved on it, the answer to which would tell where the key may be found, or what button to press, or...

Logic puzzles: See Raymond Smullyan, *The Lady or the Tiger?*; a good library, in that section, should have other books with other appropriate puzzles.

Mazes: twisty passages, secret doors...

Cryptogram: On this point, I would issue a strong warning, from personal nbobi experience, that the objective is *\*not\** to protect information, but to es"Ni provide a puzzle which can be solved in a reasonable amount of time. er"nt Ergo, simple and relatively easy: substitution ciphers, something where eeytl the direction is reversed and the vowels are deleted, a creative ntofe rearrangement where "Ninety nine bottles of beer" becomes the contents of the square to the right, a text where the first letter of each word spells out the message, etc. It is

THE FIRST LETTER OF each word spells out the message, etc. IT IS very easy to make something which is too hard and frustrating to the players, but care and moderation should make something enjoyable.

Word game: Give a text with one rather bizarre feature — a void to perceive, or an odd pattern — which, when noticed, will be helpful to the party.

Strategy games: Something simple, but different. Examples of such games may be found among mathematical puzzle books in a library.

Spatial/three dimensional puzzles: Sokoban, various disassembly/reassembly puzzles which may be found in shops, Towers of Hanoi... if these can not be acquired, it's not the end of the world, but they should add something.

Guess the rules: A very simple strategy game, with a (non-optimal) algorithm to play against... but the rules are not initially given, beyond a yes/no answer to the question of, "Is this legal?"

Tesselation puzzles: Fit the pieces in place and/or assemble to make a certain form.

(Explicit) mathematical problems: If there's a good way to put them in play, math contest problems of the sort that can be found in books are a lot of fun to solve.

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Charles Baudelaire, in "La Morale du Joujou", made some very interesting observations about children's play and toys... the most notable was that children, when they play with toys, are not really playing with toys.

There are some, to be sure, that, in all of their flash and snazzle, leave nothing to the imagination... but many, perhaps most children's toys as played with mean a manner of play that uses toys as a springboard to play with imagination.

He commented, with a degree of sadness, that many adults who attend theater do not realize that it is possible to faithfully play Shakespeare with a very simple stage and costume setup. I think that something similar is to be seen in our culture's intolerance of puppetry as a serious adult form of drama; only trivia that is small enough to relegate to children may be permitted to leave pieces to be filled in in the viewer's mind. Hollywood in its present form spends who knows how many million dollars (probably enough to feed and clothe a small third world country) per movie on special effects and computer graphics.

The result leaves nothing to the imagination but the plot.

Role playing games are, in a sense, a manner of play which does not directly fall prey to this tendency. Play sometimes involves the use of miniatures, many game books have vivid pictures, and game masters normally generate maps, but the general nature of play finds it entirely feasible to play in a space that exists within the imagination.

I would suggest, however, that this takes a second order form as comes to technical rules and game models. Bad players attempt to use game mechanics as a substitute for playing properly, and proper play — though characters may have attributes and skills to tell the game master what die roll is

necessary to successfully swat a mosquito — does not really consist of it. Just as children use their toys but do not really play with them, good players use game rules but do not really play with them. To role play a believable and rounded character is too complex to reduce to dice and charts.

The one point where it is disanalogous, is strategic complexity. Complex and well-designed rule systems facilitate a high level of mathematical problem solving; I would describe the problem solving side of fantasy and science fiction battles as the intersection between mathematics and military strategy.

I think, however, that that challenge can come into through play through proper choice of puzzles.

# **Game Master's Introduction**

## **Section I: Initial comments.**

The game master should know and understand the material in the general player's section, and in addition the material in the game master's section.

The game master is the referee and the "everyone else", the one who designs adventures and governs the pretend world play occurs in.

## Section II: Designing play

There are several components which should shape play. A proper mixture and balance of these different elements, like a balanced diet, provides the most enjoyable passage of time.

Role play, personal interaction, acting — this is (especially) when characters talk and do things in a way that shows their personality. This is perhaps the most central part of play; it is at least the one which this genre of game is named after. This lies more with the players than with the game master in that it is something the players do; the game master's role here is just to encourage and to provide opportunities conducive to good role play. (Ergo, a quest more robust than two riddles, a logic puzzle, three locked doors, and a maze leading to a chest of gold.)

Challenge, problem solving, puzzles — bring situations where players have to think. The key to keep in mind here is that it is not the game master versus the players, but rather the game master providing puzzles that are difficult but not insurmountable — puzzles which will yield to thought and effort.

More information is provided in section III, puzzles.

Skill use — situations which bring into play the characters' skills. Locks for a scout to pick. A wilderness trek for a woodsman's wilderness survival skills. A maze to map out. Hidden doors to discover. A quest which brings characters into other lands and requires them to use an interpreter. Et cetera.

Word pictures and stories — role playing is, in a sense, a narrative in the second person, and one attribute of good literature is skillful and beautiful use of words. A description of situations which is beautiful and moving is preferable to one which is dull and mechanical.

Divine action and intervention — points where characters come into contact with God. Gifts of the Spirit at work. A dream in which a character is warned that he will be badly needed by far away friends. A moving worship service. An angel's appearance to give a party a quest.

Exploration and wonder — a sense of penetration and discovery, venturing out into the unknown, and a sense of surprise, is another color on the game master's palette which is necessary to a good painting.

Rewards — rewards of various sort can be worked in for good and successful playing, and set after significant accomplishments. Good role playing, and puzzle solving, are in a sense their own rewards. Other rewards include experience (the characters becoming better at some skill or skills, or learning new ones), Urvanovestilli devices, friendships and alliances, information, the discovery of wonders...

Faith and morality — Espiriticthus is a world where faith is a part of life and life is a part of faith. Sometimes the motion of God is plainly visible; sometimes it takes more subtle forms, as in the book of Esther, where God is not explicitly mentioned even once. But God moves. Faith, and moral virtue, should be a part of the campaign — the setting in which the adventurers move.

## Section III: Puzzles

"It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, and the glory of kings to search it out."

Proverbs 25:2

The following are suggested examples of puzzles:

Riddles: These could be posed by a gatekeeper as a requisite to crossing a bridge etc.; alternately, a door could have a riddle engraved on it, the answer to which would tell where the key may be found, or what button to press, or...

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Tesselation puzzles: Fit the pieces in place and/or assemble to make a certain form.

(Explicit) mathematical problems: If there's a good way to put them in play, math contest problems of the sort that can be found in books are a lot of fun to solve.

## **Section IV: Urvanovestilli devices, etc.**

Urvanovestilli devices may be very useful to players. Devices may include anything which could plausibly be made given a mind like that of Leonardo da Vinci, finely machined gears, levers, springs, etc., and the dexterity of a microsurgeon. (Be creative.) The price of devices should take into account materials cost and amount of skill and labor; in general, they should be rather expensive.

Sample devices include a sewing machine, a Swiss Army Knife, a hang glider, a device which (when pulled along on a leash) leaves an ink trail on a floor to indicate where players have been, a Babbage-style analytical engine, a collapsible ladder, a spring loaded automatic belaying device which (once the springs are pumped up) will shoot up a grappling hook and then automatically pull in slack in a rope (until a certain button is pushed and held, at which it will feed out rope at a slow rate (given over 50 pounds pull — well below the weight of any adventurer) and reset the springs)...

(Unacceptable devices would include a mechanical thinking person, a machine to turn lead into gold, or something else which could not plausibly be made under the technology parameters given.)

The Urvanovestilli also have a knowledge of chemistry which

allows the creation of many chemicals — pyrotechnics, glues, acids, chemical (phosphorescent) lights, and drugs being among the more useful to adventurers. (Drugs, if combined with the fruits of Yedidia herbalism, would be roughly on par with what exists in the modern world — for example, medicinal drugs would include antibiotics, antishock drugs, etc., but would not include something to make a third degree burn instantly heal — only the gift of healing can do that). Chemicals in general are expensive. Hormones exist, but are prohibitively expensive, as they can only be gathered in minute amounts each day at butchers' shops, and require a degree of skill and labor to extract. Much of the more powerful drugs and hormones, as well as being extremely expensive, have side effects or potential to backfire — ergo, anabolic steroids having the same problems as in real life, adrenaline speeding up reflexes, increasing strength greatly, etc., but unpredictably causing either a fight or flight reaction — so a calm and controlled adventurer injected with adrenaline could start running as fast as possible away from all danger.

# General Comments and Theological Groundings

I'm going to attempt to explain a reworked concept of role playing games.

Let me preface this by saying that:

- I'm toying around with ideas; the best that I can offer now is unpolished and half-baked.
- Explaining this in terms of extant role playing systems will be something like explaining non-verbal communication in terms of the logical reasoning of geometry.
- If, by *God's* grace, I manage an explanation that is not too clumsy to understand, and lay out a system which is not too incomplete to use, it will still be very challenging and require much thought to play.

I have played AD&D extensively, and Star Wars a fair amount. In addition, I am marginally familiar with GURPS, Shadow Run , Amber, and a couple of home brewed systems. I am most familiar with AD&D as the grandfather (technically, basic

D&D, BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER FOR WHAT I WILL BE SPEAKING OF), AND  
will speak of it as the basis.

I have enjoyed many hours of rich role play; I believe it to be immensely valuable. Not only is it enjoyable, but it develops and strengthens imagination, emotion, and reason. That alone is a needed flash of light at a time when imagination and reason are dying, and emotion is reduced to a tool to influence your choice of shampoo.

When I find problems in existing role playing games, therefore, I am not saying, "Role play is evil. Destroy it." Instead, I am saying, "Fix it. Heal it. Complete what is lacking, restore what is askew, remove what is baneful." The basic principle — a game master creates a world, players create characters, and they play out — is very good.

That being stated, there are two basic things that need a major overhaul.

- Philosophical groundings.

Gnosticism, which is perhaps the heresy plaguing Christendom, holds many things, including the following: The final measure and achievement is power. You, a member of the elite, will achieve the final end by making yourself more and more powerful, penetrating successive ranks until you become like a god.

Good and evil are equal and opposite, balancing forces which together make a higher order unity.

If this is beginning to sound uncomfortably familiar, it should. The philosophical groundings of AD&D are Gnostic. Another point of Gnosticism is a morality that is, to put it politely, revised. In AD&D, what are the four classes? Fighter. One whose training is in combat, and kills all the time. Thief. One whose training is in thievery. Mage. One

... whose training is in sorcery. Aah, but we have a relief in the cleric, right? No. Clerics are religious knights who take a vow never to shed blood — and then learn to use blunt weapons with a proficiency far beyond that of most professional soldiers. It is entirely possible for a character to lie, worship false gods, use magical talismans and cast magic spells, wade through blood — and be a hero.

Now to contrast with Christian orthodoxy:

Identity consists not in power or the deified Self, but in Christ. In Christ, after you humble yourself, God will lift you up, by his grace. He will forgive your sins, give you a place in the community of his saints, and call you his son. The Christian's identity is first of all in Christ (hence the term 'Christian'), and second of all in the Church; in that context he is the wonderful new creation.

What then of power? It has no place in identity. Paul, at the end of his life, could have written, "I have written letters outlining the faith, planted churches, served as the Apostle to the Gentiles, cured the lame, raised the dead, and converted more people than Jesus Christ;" in short, "I achieved in power." Instead he wrote, "I have run the race; I have fought the good fight; I have kept the faith," in short, "I obeyed."

Not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit. God has chosen the weak to shame the strong, the poor to shame the rich, the foolish to shame the wise. Look at the disciples Jesus chose — fishermen, a tax collector, one terrorist even! It was a very foolish choice, but it was divine foolishness. God's foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom, and that is why the Church that Christ started with these men is rockina the world.

There is a place for the use of talent, but the talent is empowered by being given over to God and consecrated by him; anything else is but dust and ashes. And it is clear that God has no need of human power to accomplish anything. Good and evil are not equal forces; evil is an absence or a twisting of good. Satan cannot create; he can only mock. God creates worship; Satan mocks with idolatry. God creates sex; Satan mocks with adultery. God creates truth; Satan mocks with lies. Evil has no substance or creation of its own; it exists in terms of good, twisted, distorted, absent. Good exists on its own terms; it existed long before evil, and it will exist long after evil has no existence save torment in the lake of fire. But then why do good and evil fight? Evil fights good because it stands in rebellion against good. Good has its own purposes, and, because evil stands in the way, fights evil as an obstruction. It is not defined by this fight, and will not lose anything of itself when the last battle is over; in the New Jerusalem, we will see good in its truest and purest form.

And what of the teaching that great men are not bound by the "mere" constraints of traditional morality? I can only say that fulfilling the "mere" requirements of morality was a major part of the accomplishment of Jesus Christ, the greatest man who ever lived.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump, which is why every thought must be taken captive to the Lordship of Christ. The system must be built from the beginning, not on heresy, but on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

- Mathematical modeling.  
Advanced Dungeons and Dragons, the grandfather of all role playing games, established a detailed mathematical model:

the process of generating a character is set according to a system of rules, in a manner that can be accomplished by an algorithm; indeed, it has been accomplished in algorithms, and I have seen several computer programs capable of generating and describing everything but the personality. I might add that the First Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* had an appendix which contained an algorithm to randomly determine non-player character personalities as well.

Play follows in which players make choices according to an algorithmic set of rules, and dice rolls are used according to charts and rules to decide what happens of attempts to do this, that, and the other thing. This is the way that events' outcomes are usually determined, and, again, computer programs can do this quite effectively. This basic premise has been imitated in every RPG I know of; in this sense, AD&D still IS the de facto standard. Amber diceless role play made a big splash — by introducing an algorithmic set of rules which used player bids instead of dice to operate. The question asked of a new game system is not "How does it handle things? Does it use a mathematical model?", but "How exactly does its mathematical model operate?"

I would like to draw this mode of thought into the light for a minute. First of all, I would like to draw attention to DikuMUDs and the various computer games such as *The Eye of the Beholder*, *The Curse of the Azure Bonds*, etc. They have all of the stats and THACOs and ACs and damage ratings that anybody could possibly want. Yet they pale in comparison with true role play.

The reason is that the heart of role play consists in what can not remotely be reduced to rules. It has something to do with an imaginative world, characters who are realistic, and a

plot. To technically administer rules is easy; to have good role play requires experience and calls for thought. What author ever began to weave a tale by using charts, rules, and dice to determine that the main character would have a strength of 7 on a scale of 1 to 10, a 43% chance of successfully picking a lock, and could quickly tie any one of 21 different knots?

"Christianity is not a statistical view of life."

-G.K. Chesterton

If we look to Scripture, we see that there is more rejoicing in Heaven over one filthy sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous men who do not need to repent. We see that a day and a thousand years are the same in the sight of the Lord. We see that many wealthy men made ostentatious and showy gifts out of their excess, and a poor widow dropped two pennies, all that she had to live on, and surpassed them all. I could go on for pages, but eloquence does not consist in a multitude of examples.

One is required to conclude from these things that either God is an incompetent mathematician, or that the measure by which he sees the world is something greater than mathematics.

Therefore, in establishing a system to play with, we should seek not so much to imitate mathematical models and computer programs, as something else: I would (loosely) propose children's games of make-believe and books.

Having stated what I believe is necessary, let me attempt to lay it out.

It begins with prayer. This is not a question of a waste of

power, or annoying God by interrupting him with something trivial. He wants to be involved with the most intimate details of our lives. If we, who are evil, know how to give good things to those whom we care about, how much more will God, who is good, know how to give good things to his own children, for whom he did not spare his only Son? So let us begin by asking his blessing.

Father, bless us in this endeavor, bless it, and bless its fruit.

The divine name is Yahweh; "HE IS." God is spirit, profound, deep, eternal; a substance more real than even the physical; the Rock upon which rock stands. Beyond actions, beyond time, beyond even attributes such as power and wisdom, HE IS.

It is possible, especially in our culture, to be distracted of this, to let doing displace being and accident displace substance.

The question of "Who are you?" has been usurped by "What do you do?" This is wrong. The proper place of doing is to point to being, and of accident to point to substance. When I fill out details, I will ask that you not only look at "What does this detail look like?", but "To what, beyond itself, does it point?"

We are created in the image of God; that is, in the image of the Creator. Thence comes our imagination and our power to create. And we hold the power to create in the image of his Creation.

History contains four events: the Creation, the Fall, the Incarnation, and the Second Coming.

In the Creation, God filled his universe with infinite order and beauty and color. In *That Hideous Strength*, C.S. Lewis said, "God does not create two blades of grass alike, let alone two angels, two saints, or two nations." Light is the presence of all color; black is the absence of color. If there is light, then there will be red and yellow and magenta and silver and polka-dot green. The body of Christ lives and breathes, not as four

thousand, nine hundred and twenty two left thumbnails, but as a unity of variety. If the world is to be ordered and beautiful to point to God, then color is not simply permissible but mandatory.

Unless the characters are to be wayfarers, wandering over the face of the earth (in which case there will be many places and cultures for the game master to exhibit), there should be a culture, a nation, a land set for the characters to live in.

What is the nature of the spiritual life there? Do the people live in community, loving each other? Do they look after each other's needs, present in time of weakness, and holding each other accountable? Do they spend time in silence, stillness, meditation, looking inside themselves? Do look — at souls, at birds, at shining stars — and both enjoy their beauty and stand in awe of the Creator whom they reflect? Do they worship in spirit and in truth? What points of sound doctrine do they emphasize? What virtues shine forth? How does the Spirit move among them?

What is the culture like? What is their music? Is it solemn and stately, telling of the great and majestic King? Is it vivid and lively, telling of the Lord of the Dance? Is it soft and still, telling of the Eternal? What is the life of the mind like? Is the thought logical or symbolic? What of imagination? What emotions flow forth? Do the people learn to be ancient, gentle, and wise, speaking the words of a sage? Do they learn to be like little children, dancing without end and staring in wonder of the beauty of Creation? What kind of art do they have? What senses do they focus on — sight, to see and behold; hearing, to listen to music, words, and silence, to hear birds chirping and the voice of a friend; smell, of flowers, food, and people; taste, to savor meat and bread and wine; touch, to feel water and stone and cloth and the soft warmth of human skin?

What is the land like? Is it lush forest, filled with warm rains? Is it arid desert? Is it cool and misty? Is it flat, or hilly, or mountainous? Are villages near or far apart? Is there a body of water nearby? What plants and animals are around? How much does the weather change? What special natural features are there?

In thinking about questions such as these, and perhaps others which have not come to mind, it should be possible to get a beginning picture of what the world will be like.

Creation was not the only event; there was the Fall, and its twistedness. The very way in which man was created as the holy image of God is the very means used by evil as instruments of wickedness. Created with the power to love, we hate. Created with the need for worship, we whore after idols. Created as sexual creatures, we commit adultery. Created with a tongue to bless the Lord and Father, we curse men, made in God's image. Created with a mind to know the truth, we embrace lies. Created with hands to build up, we kill.

The characters, therefore, are fallen and will walk the dust of a fallen world. The next questions will give shape to that as well:

What moral sins, vices, and heresies are there? Are the people split into ten thousand factions, each one bickering and claiming, "We know the truth?" Have the people turned their back on God as irrelevant to their lives? Do they chase after money? Are they shallow? Are their friendships trivial? Do they throw the mind and scorn wisdom? Do they worship the mind as supreme above God, pursuing religion within a context of reason? Are they self-righteous prudes, tithing mint, dill, and cummin, and neglecting justice, mercy, and faith? Do they pray for their neighbor one day in seven and prey upon him the other six? Do

they pursue a false wisdom which scorns the body and objects of sense, which "God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth?" Do they know nothing beyond the physical? Are they proud, lecherous, manipulative, hateful, duplicitous? Do they cut others down with the tongue? Do they lie, cheat, steal? Do they dishonor their elders? Do they crush the weak? Do they commit adultery? Do they kill in their worship of power? What good things do they neglect?

When man had turned away from God and forfeited everything, God paid for redemption at the price of his Son. The Word became flesh, and walked among us. Now, we know Jesus Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins.

Are the people willing to confess their sins — all of their sins — as sin, and repent of them, in order to receive forgiveness?

Are they willing to open themselves to the motion of the Holy Spirit, and be filled with his mighty power? Do they take up daily the Cross, to come and die? Do they know his passion, his agony, his suffering? Have they given him everything?

What color does the new light shine in them? What fruit and gifts? How do they live in the freedom that Christ has given them?

Now, I think, would also best be answered the questions of, What is their history? Have the people been peaceful or violent? Have they changed or stayed the same? Have the changes been for better or for worse, or both? What are their traditions? What do they commemorate? What are their customs? Have they interacted with other nations abroad, or stayed within their own borders? What other cultures have influenced them? What influences have they brought? Where does their language come from?

After all has passed will come the final end: the Second

Coming. The old order of things shall pass away. God himself will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more evil, no more crying, no more pain. The saints will enter into joy and life eternal.

This has not yet come to pass, but it still has a mark on the present. One of the great themes of Christian thought is the Kingdom of Heaven — "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as it is in Heaven." Bringing Heaven down to earth is expressed by one relief worker who said, "I'm going back to Hell, to plant some flowers." Worship is a piece of Heaven, brought to earth. The prime citizenship of the believer is the Kingdom of Heaven rather than any worldly kingdom; "in the world, but not of it." Believers carry little pieces of Heaven with and about them.

Do the believers carry with them a sense of timelessness? Do they witness to the world with what the world has never seen? Do they escape entrapment by material possessions, enjoying them but sharing generously? Do they sow a spark of joy? Do they meditate on the blessed hope of the resurrection? If this is the light that they shine, with what color do they radiate?

After the game world is designed, the players should spend a time — perhaps an hour or two — with the game master. In this time, the players will learn of the world, and the game master will help with any incomplete areas of character development.

This should not become a haggling over power.

In a game which revolves around power and struggles for it, it is important that there be a balance of power. Here, that should not necessarily be the case. In *A Wrinkle in Time*, of many characters — a boy genius with second sight, scientists of worldwide renown, mighty and majestic angels — it is a stubborn and impatient ten year old girl who rescues Charles from the

power of IT; the weak and foolish chosen to do what the strong and wise could not. The game should not be about power, and if either game master or player focuses on it, something is wrong.

Here, then, are some questions to use in the formation of a character:

Who is he? Does Jesus sit enthroned in his heart? How does he try to imitate Christ? How does he see the world? Where do his loyalty and his love lie? How does he use his talents? What virtues does he embody? Is he temperate, controlled, balanced? What vices does he still hold on to? What sins does he struggle with? What does he search for in other people? How deep are his friendships? How deep is he? How strongly does he embody the qualities he holds? What community is he a part of? What is his family, his liege, his birthplace? What inhabits his thoughts? How does he embody what is truly masculine (she embody what is truly feminine)? What fruit does he let the Spirit work in his life? What is his name?

What is his story? What interests, goals, and desires does he have? What does he cherish? What special twist does he put on things? How does he pray? What is his role in the Church? What does he create? Of what would his friends look and say, "That is him?" What is his story? What (if any) visions has he had [this question is more the focus of the DM than the player]? If he were an animal, what animal would he be, and why? What are his hobbies? What is his favorite story? What does he like to present to other people? What is he afraid of other people knowing about him? What memories does he cherish? How old is he? How has he changed over the years? How has he remained the same? What are his loyalties? Who lies closest to his heart? Who does he exist in relationship to? What communities is he a member of? How does he spend his time? What are his hopes

and dreams?

Only then,

What is he naturally gifted at? What skills has he developed? What would traditional game systems attribute to him? What gifts has he received in the Spirit [again, this question is more for the DM]? Prophecy? Faith? Wisdom? Knowledge? Healing? Miraculous powers? Leadership? What are his weaknesses? Does he have any handicaps? What can and can't he do?

What does he look like? What is his manner?

After the world is created and the characters are established — not as isolated islands, but in relation to their culture and each other (Brother and sister? Friends from childhood? Father and son? Mentor and student? Reconciled enemies?) can play begin.

The game master, as an authority, is to exhibit Christ's model of authority: not an iron fist or a lording of power, but "he who would be great must be a servant, and he who would be first must be a slave," just as the rabbi who washed his disciples' feet. The game master holds the most power and has the final say; he is therefore the most bound to humility and service.

The play itself should consist of that which is wholesome: the playing out of personas, the exploration of a world, the spiritual warfare against the invisible forces of darkness, the participation in the great dance. The game master can do special things — shape the plot, send dreams and visions, people and events — but the world is created not only by the game master but also by the players, by the richness of their dialogue and the miniature world they create among themselves. In this manner good books may be taken as a model, and, after all things, prayer.

This, I believe, will make it work.

# The Treasury of Humility and the Royal Race

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

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

"Yes," I said.

He poured me a cup of wine. "Here, take this." No sooner had I drunk it than I became aware of a crystal globe forming around me. It began to expand until finally it surrounded him too. This monk, who a minute before had seemed so commonplace, now took on an astonishing beauty. I was struck dumb. After a bit the thought came to me, "Maybe I should tell him how beautiful he is—perhaps he doesn't even know."

But I really was dumb—that wine had burned out my tongue! But so great was my happiness at the sight of such beauty that I thought it was well worth the price of my tongue. When he made a sign to leave, I turned away, confident that the memory of such beauty would be a joy forever.

But what was my surprise when I found that with each person I met it was the same—as soon as he would pass

unwittingly in my crystal globe, I could see his beauty too.

And I knew it was real.

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

[Tales of a Magic Monastery](#), Theopane the monk

To even get near [humility], even for a moment, is like a drink of cold water to a man in a desert.

Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call "humble= nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody.

Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him.

If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.

Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less.

C.S. Lewis

These two striking Western quotes need some counterbalance. Orthodox confess before communion: "I believe that thou has come into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." And though this is above my pay grade, there are some very important words (in [The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#), for instance) about longing for the cup of dishonor as if it were honor, an experience that I believe is very different from the inside and from the outside. The experience of reaching a new

level of pride may be exultant for an instant, but the natural course of that sin, if we do not repent of it, is to hold on to the sin while its pleasure necessarily vanishes. My suspicion that those who long for the cup of dishonor as if it were honor, retain the virtue while its sting gives way to joy. [Repentance is Heaven's best-kept secret](#), and the monastic longing for dishonor may also bring joyful surprises.

With all of that stated, the story about the globe is the best picture I've seen of the heart of humility. And the humblest people I have known don't really try to impress upon me how horrible people they are. They bear a striking resemblance to the figure Lewis describes: hospitable, generous, open, welcoming, listening, wanting to understand what you have to say, and wanting to understand you. Their style, the practical living effect of their belief that God is everything and they are nothing, is marked by joy in whatever person's company God deigns to grace them with.

One verse that I've found profoundly difficult to appreciate is, "In humility consider others better than yourself." I suspect others don't find it pleasant either. But there is treasure inside.

I'd like for you to imagine yourself sitting next to your hero: your favorite person, past or present, near or far, someone you know or someone you might never meet. What is it like to be next to that person?

Now imagine someone who is a jerk and acts like an absolute scumbag. Do you enjoy the company?

Which one of these two is humbly considering others better than yourselves?

Pride is blinding; the term "hubris" refers to a blinding arrogance. The greatest degree of pride that has a label I'm aware of is called "prelest" or spiritual illusion, a term that

doesn't even mention self-opinion but describes being completely and destructively out of touch with reality and what will benefit oneself and/or others.

But with humility it is quite different. Some have said that the only true intelligence is humility. Humility opens people's eyes, and it opens them to everything that is beautiful, honorable, and noble in others.

Humility allows us to see and enjoy the royal race.

## The royal race

What do I mean by "the royal race?"

Let's visit Confucius.

One nice, opaque snippet states that Confucius learned of a fire in the horse stables. Confucius asked, "Were any people hurt?" And we are explicitly told that he did not ask about the horses.

Today this story lends itself to thinking, "I guess Confucius just wasn't the world's biggest animal lover," and trust me if I say, "Please ignore that; something completely different was going on culturally."

In the China of Confucius's day, a stable worker was a slave, here meaning a mere commodity worth only 20% of the value of a horse. **Please contrast this with U.S. Southern slave owners who rationalized slavery at infinite length because they knew it was wrong, and they rationalized because they knew that it was morally wrong to keep African-American slaves in conditions unworthy of human beings and unfit for human consumption.** In Confucius's day, they didn't even know it was wrong. The socially expected response from Confucius, upon hearing that there had been a major fire in the horse stables, would be to ask about what was the most valuable and important: the precious horses, not the expendable stable hands.

Confucius's question about people in the stable left the

obvious, socially expected response highly conspicuous by its absence. The point he sledgehammered was of the supreme value of every human life, whether at the top of the social scale, or the bottom, or anywhere in between. He didn't say that all human life is sacred, and possibly it would not have occurred to him to connect life with the sacred, but the essential point he drove home is the supreme value of human life.

And that is really a dignity of the royal race.

Having mentioned race, I would like to comment something on the biology of the royal race. If we lay out on a football field the whole millions of years since humans first appeared, the first ninety-nine yards, or perhaps even the first ninety-nine and a half yards, show to the best of my knowledge our ancestors as living in Africa in the Sahara Forest. Then, a geological eyeblink ago, there was an Ice Age, and some of our ancestors bundled up against the cold and migrated under sub-Arctic conditions to what was eventually Europe. And they suddenly changed from needing lots of dark pigment to block out the mighty African sun, to vastly decreased levels of our built-in sunscreen because they needed to get as much of the precious little sun as they could. The whole change was only reducing the amount of one particular chemical: that's it. And that is one major factor of the difference between dark and light skin.

What I would like to comment here is that this is an extremely shallow biological adaptation. Never mind that a dark-skinned and a much lighter-skinned person look quite different to the uninstructed. The biological difference is shallow. It is quite literally only skin-deep. None of us as the royal race grow feathers and have the ability to fly like birds, or can breathe underwater without technology, or can sleep while standing up unsupported. Nor, apart from birth defect, accident, etc. have

we lost toes, or lose the full support of a circulatory system, or anything like that. Unless age, disability or adverse circumstances stop us, we all walk and we all trade in the miracle of language. There is one set of human anatomical features to be had, with distinction between the sexes. We all need food, water, sleep, and so on. We tend to think we are very different because we look different, but the adaptations we have are biologically the shallow adaptations of a single, royal human race. There are admittedly other adaptations besides the pigments in our skin, but race as we know it hinges on people leaving Africa an extremely short time ago on geological terms and not enough time for much of any particularly interesting evolution to have occurred. We are all from the same species, *Homo sapiens*. For that matter, we are also all from the same, more specific subspecies: *Homo sapiens sapiens*!

Now I would balance my remark in biology and acknowledge any number of the most profound cultural differences across the world and possibly right in each other's back yards, but again this is the royal race. Humpback whales have a culture; wolves have a culture; but there is essentially one culture for an animal community in a wild ecosystem. So far as I know the vast number of cultures that exist today attest to an unparalleled flexibility built into the royal race.

And if we look at *Genesis 1*, perhaps the two biggest takeaways are that we are made in the image of *God*, constituted by the divine presence in us, and that the entire human race is one family. The person before you is great: and he is your brother.

## A note on beggars

And I would like to make one comment, very specific: "He is your brother" includes beggars.

I know some people, who do or do not give to beggars, who have made a careful and considerate decision and act in a situation where evaluating the best action is hard to do. I know of some people whose considered judgment is that giving money to beggars does more harm than good, and their refrain from giving is harder to them than giving would be. I might also suggest that one could give things other than money; one can carry a bag with [easily peeled Cuties citrus fruit](#), or a Halloween-style bag of tiny chocolate bars if the weather won't melt them.

**However, I have heard, and wince, when someone says "beggars" like they are some kind of disgusting vermin.** They are not. They are made in the image of God, as you, and the Orthodox Church's teaching is that you should give, and when you give, you are respecting others made in the image of God. It is possible that their begging is sinful; that is not your concern and you do not share in the guilt by a gift. I've heard multiple Orthodox priests address the topic, and they never seem to suggest giving particularly much; the specific suggestion is to give little at least most of the time, without any suggestion that you have to furnish all that a beggar with a story of need lists as the needed expense.

But there is a more basic concern than meeting beggars with an open hand, and that is meeting them with an open heart. Monastics are said to be "above alms": those who have placed themselves above possessions may not have a single bite of food to offer at the moment. But the literature quotes, "Is not a word better than a gift?", with the implication explicitly explored that if you have nothing you could give (or, perhaps, you have a \$20 bill but have run out of the quarters or singles you carry in a separate pocket to give), a warm welcome is itself giving a gift. Monastics are spoken of as "above alms", but they are not above loving beggars. Those monastics, perhaps more than people who are not above alms, are called to fit the picture of humility towards beggars: hospitable, generous, open, welcoming, listening, wanting to understand what they have to say, and wanting to understand them. This kind of warm welcome is a much bigger gift than a quarter.

But may I suggest a view of beggars that has more sharply defined contours?

**Look at beggars as altars.** The beggar, regardless of religion, is made in the image of God and can never be rightly understood without reference to God. He who despises the poor shows reproach for their Maker; God loves everybody at every level of the social scale, and to show kindness to a beggar is to show a kindness to God. It is possible to embrace without touching, or embrace in an offered fist bump. Insofar as you are able, give a quarter or dollar (if you are in the U.S.) / a Cutie / chocolate / ..., and what is more, try to give in the generosity of a monk above alms who meets the dues of hospitality.

Look on beggars as altars on whom you can show kindnesses to God.

## One more quote to squirm by

Here is one more quote that makes people squirm; it is a personal favorite (Mt 25:31-46, NIV):

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.=

Christ, in his own person, has no needs beyond the Trinity and could not possibly benefit from any generosity from any person.

But Christ in the person of a beggar is another story. There we can welcome him as Christ; there we can ease his hunger; there we can show a million kindnesses that will answer for us on that dread day when we are judged before his throne.

Someone who had a large collection of books asked, "Will I have any of these books with me in Heaven?" The answer came, "Probably." The book lover then asked, "Which ones?" The answer came, "The ones you gave away."

When our life is spent, none of the possessions we cling to will offer us any hope. However, even the tiniest of gifts given in the right spirit will answer for us. Even a smile, when you didn't have change available, counts!

In humility consider beggars better than yourself. They, too,  
belong to the royal race!

# **Player's Introduction**

## Section I: What is role play?

What is role play?

When you read a book, your imagination transports you to the long ago, the far away, the fantastic. You are there with the characters, listening and feeling with them, watching as the story unfolds.

Role play takes another step. You are still imagining goings on in a fantasy world, but not just as a passive observer: you are an active participant whose actions affect the twists and turns of the story. You aren't just pretending to be with the great explorer, the brave adventurer, the charming minstrel; you are pretending to be that character, and he does what you decide.

The essential premise is that you have a made up character, with his own personality, likes, dislikes, goals, dreams, skills, abilities, attributes, etc. You are playing that character: you are told what your character sees and hears, what happens around him, and you choose what he does.

Your character is in a party of other player characters; these are companions and fellow adventurers who are working together towards a common goal. There is also a game master, whose role is not so much like that of one character as of the author: to serve as a referee as to events in the external world, telling what happens, what non-player characters do, and so on. (When

the party walks into a town and starts looking for a tavern, an inn, a supply shop, etc., I'm the one who tells if/when they find it, who they meet on the street, what the bartender/innkeeper/shopkeeper does, and so on and so forth.)

The character should be a person, an entity, within the game world: a member of one of the seven races (Nor'krin, Tuz, Urvanovestilli, Yedidia, Jec, Shal, Janra). (A part of the character design is that it be from within one of the peoples there: a Nor'krin archer would be far more appropriate than a New York City cop who happens to have the body of a Tuz. (That's a part of the fun of role play.)) He should also, as well as a race, have a role within the game: an adventuring related profession. (For example, archer.)

What you will do in setting up a character for my game is decide what kind of person you want her to be. To this end, I am furnishing a list of personal questions about her, and a list of skills, attributes, and virtues. In the interest of not intimidating you, let me say that they are given, not to tie you down, but to help you. I don't expect a 500 word essay in response to every single question; my intention is rather that the questions help you think about your character — that they will spark an "Aha! I want to play a character who ...". Likewise with the skills and attributes — if you don't need it, you're more than welcome to play without it.

## Section II: What do I need to do to start?

To start playing Hero's Quest, you need to define a character. After the character is defined, role play can begin. Here is roughly what should be defined in setting up a character.

- Personality. Identity. A sense of who the character is. To help define characters, there is a list of questions to that end, and a list of virtues. A personal history is also an important and helpful part of the character's identity.
- Race. This is an important part of who the characters are; players should read at least the description of the race that your character is a member of, to understand part of the character's identity.
- Role and abilities. What skills the character has; what he can do. The list of roles and the list of skills is intended to help define this part of a character.
- Attributes: what the character is naturally gifted at, and naturally not so gifted at. An idea of how strong or weak the character is in the listed attributes.
- Other miscellanea:
  - Physical appearance.
  - Possessions.

○

Name.

## Section III: Sample roles

The following roles are samples of what a character might build himself into. They are meant not to be a definitive limit, but illustrative of possibilities. If a particular race is especially appropriate to a role, it will follow the race. (Of course, other races could learn as well; it's just that the particular races are especially well suited).

When a character's role/selection of skills is being determined, one dimension worthy of consideration is whether the character will be a generalist or a specialist. On his own, a generalist is likely to be the most effective character; with a party, it is probably more useful to have specialized characters who excel at diverse skills.

**The Acrobatic Scout (Janra)** If you're a Janra, you're an acrobat. The scout in particular can roll down the passages of a cavern and maze, keeping a good sense of how to get out; he can climb walls and trees, pick locks, disappear into the shadows.

**The Archer** The archer can handle a bow with a virtuoso level of skill. An Urvanovestilli crossbowman has no trouble with parlor tricks such as whipping out a one-handed crossbow and shooting a coin off a child's ear.

**The Bard (Yedidia)** The bard knows tunes to soothe the savage beast. He knows legends and lore, the tales of heroes; he has a decent chance of knowing at least a hint about where lost

treasures might be. From extensive travel, he knows the lay of the land and pieces of local color, which inns will give you a night's lodging if you sing for their visitors and which taverns have the best beer. The bard is an excellent storyteller and a master of words; to him, mediation is easy, and he has a most persuasive tongue.

**The Hunter (Nor'krin, Tuz)** The hunter is good at providing food for a whole party, and a decent woodsman to bat — can track, knows how to handle a bow (Nor'krin) or a dagger (Tuz), and knows the tricks of the wood.

**The Interpreter** In a world full of different languages and cultures, a party which does not all speak a common language or which is going to go to different lands will benefit immensely from having an interpreter. The interpreter will be a student of the different languages, know enough of etiquette and customs to avoid offense, and likely be a good general party mouthpiece: know how to secure provisions and a night's roof, how much to haggle for, how to persuade people to do favors...

**The Jack-of-All-Trades (Janra)** The jack-of-all-trades is a dabbler who knows a little of this, a little of that — what would come in handy for an adventurer. He can track, hunt, smell creatures, move silently, hide, dodge, and handle a bow; he can pick locks, search, climb, use ropes, jump, function tolerably well in the dark... He's in decent shape; he doesn't wear out that quickly. He can guess what others are going to do, haggle, and knows a smattering of all the languages. He can survive in the wilderness, build fires, knows first aid, and can repair broken equipment (or at least jury-rig it to work for the moment). None of this he can do spectacularly — he is a jack of all trades and master of none — but he's pretty good on his own and is likely to be able to do at least tolerably what nobody else in the party

knows how to do.

MacGyver 'nuff said.

The Scholar (Urvanovestilli) The scholar is a very literate person who knows a lot about history and geography. He can read and write, and given time can decipher at least some of each language (and is conversant with the different literatures). It is often sages that Nor'krin seek out for advice in fulfilling their quests; they have sharp minds and extensive knowledge, which can help guide any party.

The Wayfarer The wayfarer is somewhat the jack-of-all-trades adventurer, somewhat the interpreter, somewhat the bard... He has travelled to many places and knows the different lands extensively; he's made friends across races and has a lot of open doors.

The Woodsman (Yedidia) The woodsman knows the secrets of the wood. He knows which plants are edible, can find water without difficulty, knows which animals have passed by and which are nearby, knows a decent bit of mountaineering... He is able to track and hunt, of course, but is more than just that. He can calm animals, and enjoys having them eat out of his hand. He is at peace with the wood, and sees a great deal of beauty in it.

## **Section IV: The Spirit, and its Gifts**

All characters are believers. As such, they have the ear of an omnipotent Father; Christ Jesus dwells in their heart; they possess the Spirit as the structure of obedience and as a power in their lives. Prayer and the motion of the Spirit are to be manifest in play; this is not included in the mathematical model, not because it is not important enough to model, but because it is too big and too important to model. (See model, section III)

The one Spirit that is present gives different gifts to specific believers; Paul, after laying out the teaching of one body whose different parts serve to a higher and necessary unity, writes (I Cor. 12:27-28, NIV):

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

For game purposes, a character (if so desired) may pray, asking for a specific gift or gift(s), which may or may not be given. (If something else is given, the character/player has not been bad or anything like that: it's just that a different gift has

been given.) One, or occasionally two or three gifts should be given. The gift should be appropriate to the character — his whole personality and identity — if there is one which is fitting. Gifts should not necessarily center around what is \*useful\* to play; it is unbelievably vulgar to think of the Spirit as a power source which is useful to characters. It is fine for not all — for that matter, none — of the characters to have gifts that happen to be useful to play. Gifts may also have different strengths, and/or different frequencies of operation, in different characters.

The gifts mentioned in the Scriptures may be given; other appropriate ones may also be given (for example, the touch given Curdie in *The Princess and Curdie*). I'm not sure exactly how to define appropriate, but one obvious point is no imitation magic: no incantations and material components, no items with strange properties. In general, Spirit-given gifts which are consistent with how God has revealed himself in Scripture.

#### Specific gifts:

- Administration:  
A Spirit-given leadership ability.  
Note that it is possible to have natural leadership talents without this gift of the Spirit; like several other gifts, it may not be obvious whether a person is exercising a gift of the Spirit or natural talent. (Some gifts, such as faith and helping others, are Spirit-given strong measures of qualities that all believers should have.)
- Apostleship:  
Paul stated that he was the last of the apostles, so this gift is different from the others in only applying to a very small group of people at a very specific time. For the sake of

simplicity, I will assume that player characters are not apostles.

- Discernment of Spirits:  
As this gift applies to the discernment between angels and demons, it will not appear in its current form in the game. It will appear, however, as an ability to sense — perhaps even see, in a person in whom the gift is strong — angels.
- Evangelism:  
A Spirit-given gift to effectively evangelize. This would not appear in a sinless world.
- Faith:  
Someone with the gift of faith possesses a great measure of faith, and unusually powerful prayers.
- Healing:  
The Spirit-given power to heal people.
- Helping Others:  
A special Spirit-given ability and energy to help others, flowing out of an endowment of love.
- Interpretation of Tongues:  
The Spirit-given ability to interpret what is spoken in tongues.
- Knowledge:  
This gift appears in two forms.  
The first is a knowledge of sound doctrine — a gift that is at times not clearly distinguishable from prophecy, preaching, and teaching.  
The second, "logos gnosis" (word of knowledge), is a Spirit-given insight into facts about the external world, about other people's needs. (This is also not always clearly distinguished from prophecy)
- Miraculous Powers:

Look to the Old Testament narratives surrounding Elijah for a picture of a person in whom the gift is strong.

- Pastors:  
The gift of overseeing and caring for and nurturing the spiritual conditions of others.
- Preaching:  
The Spirit-given ability to preach the truth in a way that is powerful and shows its relevance to believers' lives.
- Prophecy:  
Prophecy, Biblically speaking, is somewhat broader than the contemporary understanding of "Spirit-inspired prediction of the future."  
The first and foremost meaning, of chief ecclesiastical importance, is a Spirit-inspired telling of the truth. In this aspect, I am not sure how to clearly distinguish prophecy from preaching and teaching.  
The second part of it is things such as dreams, visions, the voice of the Spirit speaking.  
The specific form the gift of prophecy takes when given to a character will take some form like this.
- Speaking in Tongues:  
Spirit-given (moment-by-moment) speech in the tongues of men and angels.
- Teaching:  
The Spirit-given ability to teach and impart the truth.

ONE FINAL NOTE ON THIS POINT: I am placing the Spirit in play, with greatest reverence, as someone too important to leave out. The Spirit is too big and too important to reduce to just another kind of power or just another element of play. Do not do it. Give the Spirit in play a treatment that is nothing

short of worship.

I cannot give a rule to make this happen. Walk in the Spirit,  
and it will give you the power to do so.

## Section V: A Sample of Play.

Here is a sample of play. The characters are Kendall Lightfoot, a Janra scout given prophecy, Qualinesti (regional name), an Urvanovestilli scholar given knowledge in the first sense, Pirt, a Jec wayfarer given faith, 'Limna, a Yedidia interpreter given healing, and Torv, a Tuz hunter given the gift of help. They are currently in a Tuz village on the Urvanovestilli border. As they have been together for a while, they have all studied a common language (specifically Jec), which they have by now learned to speak with a reasonable proficiency.

I would like to emphasize that this is only one of many, many possible kinds of situations.

[...]

**Pirt:** "What did the riddle say, again?"

**Qualinesti:** "As tall as a house, as round as a cup; people drink from me without lifting me up."

**Pirt:** "Hmm... [pauses in thought for a minute] I wonder if it was talking about a well. Why don't we split up, search the village for a well, and meet back here in half an hour, and go to the well if we find one?"

**Qualinesti, Kendall, 'Limna, Torv:** "Sounds good to me."

**Game Master:** In half an hour's searching, you find that the village has one well, next to the miller's house. From the looks of

it, it has been dry for quite some time. Pirt found, from a brewer, that the village now gets water from a valley about half a mile away.

**Kendall:** I'm going to climb down the well and search for any signs of anything interesting.

**Pirt:** "Would you like to borrow my lantern?"

**Kendall:** "Yes, thank you."

**Game Master:** The well is approximately 25 feet deep; after fifteen minutes of climbing and searching, you find that one of the stones has letters chiseled into it in some script, apparently Urvanovestilli, which doesn't spell out letters that you can read.

**Kendall:** "Pirt, may I also borrow your rope?"

**Pirt:** "Certainly."

**Kendall:** I'm going to climb up, take the rope, tie a Swami seat on Qualinesti, and body belay him down into the well.

**Qualinesti:** "Wait a minute. How am I supposed to get back up? I can't climb the way you can."

**Kendall:** "Relax. I can belay you, and if you really can't climb, I can pull you up. But climbing's so easy!"

**Qualinesti:** "I am not a Janra."

**Kendall:** I'm going to wink as I say, "We all have our problems."

**Torv:** I'm going to pick Kendall up and throw him over my head.

**Game Master:** Kendall, are you going to try to dodge?

**Kendall:** Given an opportunity to fly through the air? No way!

**Game Master (to himself):** Why did I even ask? (to Kendall) Sure enough, you find yourself flying through the air, and land in a couple of somersaults.

**Kendall:** I'm going to saunter back. (to Qualinesti): "So, how about heading down to read the inscription?"

**Qualinesti:** OK, I'll head down.

**Kendall:** Once he's down safely, I'll climb down as well.

**Game Master:** After a little while of identifying the script — it comes from some weird dialect — you are able to decipher the message. It reads, "Do the opposite of usual to what is opposite me."

**Kendall:** Hmm... no buttons to push this time. I'm going to inspect the stone again.

**Game Master:** You don't find anything new.

**Qualinesti:** Are the stones arranged in any kind of orderly pattern?

**Game Master:** Yes; as a matter of fact, they are. There are thirty-two in a circle.

**Qualinesti:** I'm going to see if I can do anything to the opposite stone — especially pull it out.

**Game Master:** You can't budge it.

**Kendall:** I'm going to give it a try.

**Game Master:** You are able to pull it out one inch, at which point you hear a sound of some kind of stonework moving. After a few seconds, the base of the well beneath you begins to tremble, and slide to the left.

**Kendall:** I'm going to jump up and shoot my feet out to the sides so that they catch on a foothold, and shoot an arm around Qualinesti's waist to hold him up.

**Torv:** I'm going to grab the rope and brace myself so that I can pull up Qualinesti and Kendall, if need be.

**Game Master:** Ok. (To Qualinesti and Kendall) The stone beneath you slide out to the side, revealing stone steps receding into the darkness.

**Kendall:** I'm going to shift Qualinesti to my back, and climb down to the stairs, and head down.

**Game Master:** At the end of the stairwell is a closed door, with twenty buttons and what appears Qualinesti to be a cryptogram. It says, [hands sheet to players]

Up pqfo uif eppxbz, qsftt jo cvuupot uxp, uisff, gjwf, ojof, boe pof npsf cvuupo. Uijt pof npsf cvuupo dpoujouft uif qbuufso.

**Qualinesti:** [looks at it] "Both 'uif' and 'pof' are repeated; I'd be willing to guess that one of them is 'the'. ('npsf' and 'cvuupo' are repeated, but I don't know any four or six letter words as probable as 'the'.) For 't' to go to 'p' is back four; 'h' going to 'o' is forward seven; 'e' to 'f' is forward one. That doesn't help us any. 't' to 'u' is forward one, 'i' to 'h' is... T-o o-p-e-n... Got it!

"To open the doorway, press in buttons two, three, five, nine, and one more button. This one more button continues the pattern.

"Hmm. Two plus three is five; five plus three is eight. No, that's not it. Two plus three is five; two plus three plus five is ten. Now if we could only find a happy medium."

**Pirt:** "Two times two minus one is three; two times three minus one is five; two times five minus one is nine. Hey! I think I've got it. Who's for pushing buttons two, three, five, nine, and seventeen?"

**Qualinesti:** "Hmm, that's a little complicated. If we add, two plus one is three, three plus two is five, five plus four is nine... it doubles, so nine plus eight is seventeen."

**Kendall:** "I think you agree. How about if we try it?"

**Others:** "Ok." **Game Master:** Gears begin to turn, and the door hinges squeak as the door turns back.

[The party enters the underground, and after a while of puzzles and exploits, locates the map which they had been in search of. Coming out after a couple of days, they go to an inn.]

**Game Master:** Jim, could you come with me for a second? [pulls Kendall's player, Jim, out of earshot of the rest of the players.] During the night, you have a dream in which an angel appears and tells you to go the cave of Munra, a great prophet and sage, which is indicated by the notched circle on the map. He tells you to examine carefully and heed the information on the map, and says that on the way you will meet three trials, which must be overcome.

**Kendall:** I'm going to ask the angel what the trials are.

**Game Master:** "That is for you to discover." [They return to the players.]

**Kendall:** "Last night, I had a dream. An angel told me that we must seek out the cavern where Munra lives, which is marked by a notched circle on the map. Munra is a great prophet and sage. We need to try to understand and pay attention to the map on the way there. We will meet three trials on the way, which we must overcome before arriving."

**Qualinesti:** Are there any caravans or other wayfarers travelling in that direction from the village?

**Game Master:** No.

**Torv:** "How 'bout if we all buy five days' provisions and set out?"

**Others:** "Ok."

**Qualinesti:** Is there a path to the cave indicated on the map?

**Game Master:** Yes, there is.

**Qualinesti:** "I suggest we follow the path."

**Others:** "Ok."

**Game Master:** You begin to follow the path. Along the way, Torv finds an adequate supply of rabbits, boars, and so on to keep you fed, as well as springs and streams sufficient to always have at least some water in your waterskins. After fifteen days'

travel, you come to the place indicated on the map as Riddler's Pass. There are two ridges coming together, forcing any travellers to pass between them, and between the mountains lies a yawning chasm.

The weather is an intense thunderstorm.

**Kendall:** Can we climb the ledges?

**Game Master:** There is only sheer rock, and the top seems to be angled so that there's nothing for a grappling hook to catch on to.

**Kendall:** Is there anything to secure a rope to?

**Game Master:** Yes; there are trees on both sides.

**Kendall:** I'm going to toss my grappling hook and attempt to secure a rope on the other side, then tie a noose on the other end around the rope, and attach another rope through the loop of the noose so that I can pull the rope back from the other side.

**Game Master:** Done.

**Kendall:** "How about if I shuttle across giving you each a piggyback ride, and then carry across our gear?"

**Others:** "Ok. We'll wait by the edge for you to get back"

**Game Master:** You get Torv, Pirt, and Qualinesti over; while you are carrying 'Limna over, a bolt of lightning strikes the tree on the far side. The electrical spasm causes Kendall with 'Limna to jump off the rope, and the thunder blast knocks Torv, Pirt, and Qualinesti over the edge. You fall seventy five feet onto rock.

Qualinesti has a fractured femur.

Torv has a tibia/fibula fracture, and some broken ribs.

Pirt has unknown injuries; he is knocked out by the impact.

'Limna has two broken arms.

Kendall is able to roll and reduce the damage, but he will have

some severe abrasions.

**Limna:** I'm going to pray over myself, and then lay hands on Qualinesti, Pirt, Torv, and Kendall.

**Game Master:** You feel a lessening of pain as the bones begin to slide into place.

**Kendall:** I'm going to search around the sides for a route up.

**Game Master:** The sides are sheer rock and slippery rock; you can see almost nothing now. It's unclear whether you'd be able to find a route up on a sunny day; you can't climb out now.

**Kendall, Torv, Pirt:** We're going to search for a way out.

**Game Master:** You don't find anything.

**Pirt:** I am going to pray that a way out may be found.

**Game Master:** The rain begins to grow less intense, and, after about an hour, the sun begins to shine. You notice that the walls have streaks of talc reaching up to the top.

**Kendall:** Are there any visible climbing routes?

**Game Master:** No.

**Kendall:** "Torv, may I borrow your dagger?"

**Torv:** "Here you go."

**Kendall:** I'm going to start seeing if I can carve holds in the the talc, hoping to find a way to the top.

**Game Master:** In about three hours, you get about two thirds of the way up, before coming to the end of a streak which is not within any reasonable distance of any other.

**Kendall:** I'm going to climb down and rest for a while.

**Torv:** What's the status of the rope?

**Game Master:** It's lying coiled at the edge.

**Torv:** Are there any small rocks around?

**Game Master:** Yes, there are.

**Torv:** I'm going to throw rocks at it to knock it down.

**Game Master:** You can't throw any rocks higher than about

thirty feet.

**Kendall:** I'm going to stuff rocks in my pockets, and climb up the talc trail to throw rocks at the rope.

**Game Master:** You get about halfway through before knocking it down. It falls about ten feet to your right, and goes down about twenty feet.

**Kendall:** "Geronimo!!!"

**Game Master:** You barely manage to stop yourself sliding before you reach the tip.

**Kendall:** I'm going to climb up, scare away any animals, and ferry the gear across, then from the other end, pull across and reanchor the rope, and help the people up. [pause] Wait. I'm going to rapell down the side and carve handholds.

**Game Master:** There are a couple of raccoons who have helped themselves to your food, but no other animals. You manage to do what you wanted to.

**Kendall:** "Thanks for letting me use your dagger, Torv. Here it is."

**Torv:** "You're welcome."

**Game Master:** You continue on, and early the next day come to a fork in the path.

**Pirt:** What does the map say?

**Game Master:** The map shows only one path.

**Pirt:** Is one side more sharply angled, or wider, or more worn?

**Game Master:** Both are equally angled, equally wide, and equally worn.

**Pirt:** I'm going to study the map to see if I can find any hints.

**Game Master:** [pauses] You don't find any.

**Qualinesti:** I'm going to do the same.

**Game Master:** You don't find any, either.

**Kendall:** I'm going to pray for a word on which path to choose.

**Game Master:** You remember the words of an author:

And I said to him, "Sir, give me a light, that I may tread safely into the unknown."

And he said to me, "Put thy hand into the hand of God. That will be better to thee than a light, and safer than a known way."

**Kendall:** Do I receive anything else?

**Game Master:** No.

**Pirt:** "God has sent us on this quest, and I am sure that he desires that we succeed. I think we should just pick a path, and trust God that it will be the right one. Which one do you suggest?"

**Kendall:** "Say, left."

**Torv:** "How do you know? Did you receive a word from God?"

**Kendall:** "I don't. I didn't. But I'm trusting in him."

**'Limna:** "Is that okay for everyone?"

**Others:** "Sounds fine."

**Pirt:** "Well, let's go, then."

**Game Master:** You go along, and as you go the hunting becomes more difficult. You come to the last village before the cave, where you purchase five days' worth of provisions, and go along... four days later, you're almost out of water, having just enough to get back, and haven't been able to find any along the way. It looks like another good week's journey until you get to the cave.

**Pirt:** Has there been any rain or any indication of rain?

**Game Master:** No. You've come across a couple of dry creeks.

**Pirt:** "I say that we go along and pray to find water."

**Qualinesti:** "We could go back to the village and ask about

water sources."

**'Limna:** "Yes, we could, but that would mean taking a few days' recovery from dehydration. It would mean a long delay."

**Kendall:** "Point."

**Pirt:** "I think that this is the third test."

[After a continuation of deliberation, they decide to continue.]

**Game Master:** Two days later, you come across an abandoned well which, while the wood holdings, the rope and the bucket are hopelessly rotted, Kendall is able to climb down into to replenish your waterskins. Four days later, you come across a cavern twisting into the earth.

**Pirt:** I'm going to light my lantern, hold my breath, and walk in.

**Game Master:** It takes your eyes a little while to adjust to the semidarkness, and then you see an old man with a flowing, white beard, wearing a coarse woolen cloak, sitting in a chair.

There is a fire in the corner of the cave.

He stands up, raises his hand in benediction, and then says something in his tongue. [pulls Jane, 'Limna's player, aside.] He said, "Greetings, travellers. I have been waiting for you."

**'Limna:** Unless I indicate that I'm having a private conversation with Munra, I'm going to interpret so that you can just speak for him. [to others] "He said, 'Greetings, travellers. I have been waiting for you.'"

[ 'Limna interprets for the interaction.]

...

## Section VI: Character definition.

Here is a battery of questions designed to help players think about who the character they are designing is:

Who is he? Does Jesus sit enthroned in his heart? How does he try to imitate Christ? How does he see the world? Where do his loyalty and his love lie? How does he use his talents? What virtues does he embody? Is he temperate, controlled, balanced?

What does he search for in other people? How deep are his friendships? How deep is he? How strongly does he embody the qualities he holds? What community is he a part of? What is his family, his liege, his birthplace? What inhabits his thoughts? How does he embody what is truly masculine (she embody what is truly feminine)? What fruit does he let the Spirit work in his life? What is his name?

What is his story? What interests, goals, and desires does he have? What does he cherish? What special twist does he put on things? How does he pray? What is his role in the Church? What does he create? Of what would his friends look and say, "That is him?" What is his story? What (if any) visions has he had [this question is more the focus of the DM than the player]? If he were an animal, what animal would he be, and why? What are his hobbies? What is his favorite story? What does he like to present to other people? What is he afraid of other people

knowing about him? What memories does he cherish? How old is he? How has he changed over the years? How has he remained the same? What are his loyalties? Who lies closest to his heart? Who does he exist in relationship to? What communities is he a member of? How does he spend his time? What are his hopes and dreams?

What is he naturally gifted at? What skills has he developed? What would traditional game systems attribute to him? What gifts has he received in the Spirit [again, this question is more for the DM]? Prophecy? Faith? Wisdom? Knowledge? Healing? Miraculous powers? Leadership? What are his weaknesses? Does he have any handicaps? What can and can't he do?

What does he look like? What is his manner?

What are his relationships to other characters?

Here is a listing of skills/areas of knowledge/abilities. It is meant to be illustrative rather than exclusive. (Partially borrowed from AD&D)

(A following parenthesized letter indicates that a skill is common to all members of a race: (N)or'krin, (T)uz, (Y)edidia, (U)rvanovestilli, Je(C), (S)hal, (J)anra. Other parenthesized information may follow.)

- Acrobatics/Tumbling (J)
- Acting
- Ambidexterity
- Animal Handling (Y)
- Animal Lore
- Animal Training
- Anatomy
- Anthropology

- Appraisal
- Archery
- Artistic Skill (Specific Medium)
- Balance (J)
- Biology
- Blacksmith
- Blind Action (S)
- Bowyer/Fletcher
- Brewing
- Building
- Carving
- Carpentry
- Catch
- Ceremonies (U)
- Charioteering
- Chemistry
- Climbing (J)
- Clockwork Device Craftsmanship (U)
- Cobbling
- Cooking
- Cold Tolerance (N)
- Cultures (specific culture)
- Dancing (Y)
- Dodge (J)
- Doublejointedness
- Endurance
- Engineering
- Etiquette
- Farmer (C)
- Fire-Building
- Fisher

- Gambling
- Gardening (Y)
- Gem Cutting
- Geography
- Guess Actions — guess from looking at a person what he will do next.
- Haggling
- Hear Noise — hear almost silent noises.
- Heat Tolerance (T,S)
- Heraldry (U)
- Herbalism (Y)
- Hide
- History (U)
- Hunting (N,T)
- Illusionism
- Improvisation (Musical)
- Incense Making
- Janra-Ball (J) — incomprehensible to members of other races.
- Jewelry Work
- Juggling
- Jumping (J)
- Jury-Rigging
- Keen Eyesight
- Languages (Specific Language(s))
- Leadership
- Leather Working
- Literature (U)
- Mapmaking
- Massage
- Mathematics (U)

- Mediation
- Medicine
- Mining
- Move Silently
- Mountaineering
- Musical Composition
- Musical Instrument (Specific Instrument)
- Navigation
- Open Locks
- Painting
- Persuasion
- Philosophy (U)
- Poetry Composition
- Pole Vault (J)
- Pottery Making
- Public Speaking
- Pyrotechnics
- Reading/Writing (U)
- Read Emotion (Y)
- Repair
- Riding
- Rope Use
- Sailing
- Search
- Shouting — shout loudly and prolongedly without tiring vocal chords.
- Singing (Y)
- Smell Creature (Y) — smell what creatures are around and have passed by.
- Sports
- Stonemasonry

- Storytelling
- Strategy Games
- Swimming (J)
- Symbolic Lore (N,C)
- Tailoring
- Technology Use (U)
- Theology (U)
- Tightrope Walking (J)
- Tracking
- Trivia
- Ventriloquism
- Weather Sense (Y)
- Weaving
- Wilderness Survival (N,T,Y)
- Withdrawing/Meditation (S)
- Woodlore (Y)
- Wrestling (J,T)

Here is a list of some attributes, to think about how strong or weak a character might be:

- Ability to Learn
- Agility
- Charisma
- Constitution
- Dexterity
- Intelligence
- Knowledge
- Memory
- Perception
- Speed

- Strength
- Wisdom

Possible virtues to think about how a character embodies goodness:

- Balance
- Chastity
- Compassion
- Contrainte
- Courage
- Faith
- Faithfulness
- Forgiveness
- Generosity
- Gentleness
- Honesty
- Honor
- Hope
- Humility
- Joy
- Justice
- Kindness
- Mercy
- Moderation
- Love
- Obedience
- Patience
- Peace
- Penitence
- Purity

- Self-Control
- Simplicity
- Submission
- Wisdom

# A Simple Mathematical Model

After having made an exquisitely complex mathematical model, I am trying to make something simple that will take a back seat to role play, and not confuse new players. It is modelled after White Wolf, and in another sense after the computer language Smalltalk; I am trying to make a rule sheet that is very short and sweet.

In this model, you have four attributes: Physical, Mental, Social, and Other. Each of those attributes is rated 1 to 5: 1 is below average, 2 is normal, 3 is typical for adventurers, and 5 is highest possible. The value of these attributes is determined by you and the game master, at whatever most appropriately represents your character. The Other attribute is one you specify: could be charisma, or understanding of other people, or dexterity, or knowledge. It should be chosen in an area that tells more about your character than just Physical, Mental, and Social would have. You also have skills/abilities, each rated at between 0 and 5; skills can be anything appropriate; a suggested list is as follows:

Acrobatics/Tumblina Actina Animal Handlina Animal

Training, Anatomy, Anthropology, Appraisal, Artistic Ability, Attack, Balance, Biology, Blacksmith, Blind Action, Bowyer/Fletcher, Brewing, Building, Carving, Carpentry, Catch, Ceremonies, Charioteering, Chemistry, Climbing, Clockwork Device Craftsmanship/Engineering, Cobbling, Cooking, Cold Tolerance, Cultures, Dancing, Dodge, Endurance, Engineering, Etiquette, Farmer, Fencing, Fire-Building, Fisher, Gambling, Gardening, Geography, Guess Actions, Hagging, Hear Noises, Heat Tolerance, Heraldry, Herbalism, Hide, History, Hunting, Illusionism, Improvisation, Incense, Janra-Ball, Jewelry, Juggling, Jumping, Jury-Rigging, Languages, Leadership, Leatherworking, Literature, Mapmaking, Massage, Mathematics, Mediation, Medicine, Mining, Move, Musical Composition, Musical Instruments, Navigation, Open Locks, Persuasion, Philosophy, Physics, Poetry, Pole Vaulting, Pottery, Public Speaking, Pyrotechnics, Reading/Writing, Read Emotion, Repair, Riding, Rope Handling, Sailing, Search, Shouting, Singing, Smell Creature, Sports, Stonemasonry, Storytelling, Strategy Games, Swimming, Symbolic Lore, Tactics, Tailoring, Technology, Technology, Theology, Throw, Tightrope Walking, Tracking, Trivia, Ventriloquism, Weather Sense, Weaving, Wilderness Survival, Withdrawing, Woodlore, Wrestling

You start with a total of 10 points to distribute between all your skills; you will earn from 1 to 3 experience points between sessions, depending on how well you role play. It takes 1 experience point to raise a skill from 0 to 1 points, 2 experience points to raise a skill from 1 to 2 points, and so on, 5 points being necessary to raise a skill from 4 to 5 points.

When you attempt to do something, the game master will assess a difficulty level from 1 (easiest) up to 10 (most difficult).

You will add up the relevant attribute plus skill level (-1 if you have no skill points for that skill), and then add a die roll (divided by 2 and rounded down) to your sum, making your total; the game master will add a die roll (divided by 2 and rounded down) to the difficulty, making the difficulty total. If your total is greater than or equal to the difficulty total, you succeed at the action.

Injury is intentionally left out of this model. It is intended to be role played — if you fall when climbing the wall, the consequence is not that you're three hit points lower; the consequence is that you've got a broken leg. The point of this model is not to govern role play; it is to support it, not representing in full so much as evoking just enough chance to lend uncertainty to events in role play.

# A Voyage in Espiritichthus

I was running a play by e-mail adventure in the world Espiritichthus. Basic documents for [The Minstrel's Song](#) (the game) are on its page. The campaign is closed.

## **Character descriptions:**

The characters are [Caroline](#), [Hood](#), [Jeff](#), [Xingu](#), and [Zakhs](#) online.

## **Turns:**

*A First Meeting*

*A Contest*

*Seeking Rozimald's Keys*

*A Hermit*

*An Encounter*

*A Bear*

*Continuing On*

---

**Name:** Caroline Leof'degn

**Race:** Nor'krin

**Age:** 24

**Gender:** Female

**Physical Appearance:**

Caroline is 5'10" and 160 pounds. A little tall even for one of the 'northern giants'. Her sun bleached blond hair is kept in a neat and tidy braid down her back, reaching down to the small of her back. Her clothing tends to be practical and designed to hold up in all kinds of weather. Her eyes are blue and in times of deep emotion yellow flecks seem to rise and burst upon the surface.

She travels very light with a backpack of various healing tools and herbs, a bow, and a long sword. Her iron cross given at becoming an adult at first appears very plain and only with close inspection do the tiny designs show.

**Personality:**

Started out her life, very concerned with the law and facts. Things of practical use. Used to consider things that were not of obvious practical use as wasteful. She was all the more shocked when at 16 her challenge for becoming an adult turned out to be learning to sing. She left to go live with the Yedidia people, since logically they would be the best ones to show someone how to sing. It was not that simple. Yedidia sing because they enjoy life, and to show Caroline how they sing, she needed to learn about enjoying life. Not enjoying a particular activity or helping someone, but life and living itself. By the time Caroline left, five years had passed and Caroline was starting down the path to understanding and enjoying life. She had finally learned how to sing.

### **Profession/talents/skills:**

Healing is her first vocation. The taking care of wounded and sick. She is fairly skilled and tended of the physical wounds, and is slowly learning to identify those hurt in other ways. Protecting and taking care of other physical needs is the use she puts her weapons skill too. Singing.... singing she does for joy of life, in answer to the beauty of a sunrise or rose.

### **Miscellaneous:**

Caroline has an true enjoyment of herbal teas. While she still enjoys crisp cold water that her race normally favours, during her five years with the Yedidia one of the pleasures of the senses she learned to enjoy was tea. She has tea either hot or chilled, enjoying not only the taste but the smell as well. She remembers her time spend learning with the Yedidia with every cup.

### **A quote:**

"Sometimes we become so consumed with what we believe we should be rushing to do, we forget to listen in silence to the voice of God."

---

**Name:** Hood Natheel

**Race:** Tuz

**Age:** 25

**Gender:** Male

**Occupation:**

Blacksmith

**Appearance:**

Hood is a shorth stocky fellow. He is bald but do have a large jetblack beard. He usally wears a pair of short grey trousers and buff coloured sleeveless leather vest with a sort of flap hanging down on the knees( it a kind of blacksmith protection wear that is quite common among the Tuz, also known a "Tuulth")

**Personality:**

Hood Natheel got a personality similar to the iron he usally work with. He is strong willed, cold in the face of danger and if someone heats up his heart it will melt and the somewhat cold front will disappear and show the true Hood. Usally his temper is very balanced, but on occasions he will emotional outburst( either of joy or if he is really displeased with something)

Hood is a curious fellow always eager to seek answer to the questions he is confronted with. An ability that might put him in jeopardy sometimes. Usally he sort these things out.

He is also looking for solutions to his community, so his curiosity is not at all self centered. If a problem occur among the his friends neighbors or someone else he usally seek out to find an answer to the question at hand.

He is perhaps not the most intelligent being in the creation, but since he is a patient man he usally ends up with the answers in the long run.

The solutions that Hood comes up with are usally based on

simplicity and he often hard to understand more complex reason. Therefor he might feel a bit uneasy with the company of scholar and highly educated men an women. As usual he tries to compensate this weakness with the usual patience. Cooperation comes before confrontaion so Hood would probably not start a confrontaion with people who does not share he way thinking.

Hood usally speaks in a laconic way. He seldom expresses more than absolutely needed. That makes him a rather bad preacher and he is not the type of person that tries to impose his ideas on others.

**A typical Hood quote:**

"Eeh..Wait...I think I got it!!..eeh.or perhaps not"

**Background:**

Hood is born in a small Tuz village called Haahem. He has very seldom left it when he entered the game. On occasions he has visited other villages. He is the eldest son of a Tuz blacksmith named Holth Natheel. Just like his father(and numerous generations before him) Hood is a blacksmith. The silent steady nature of the Natheel family has given them a good reputation in the home village and the surrounding area. For the moment the Natheel family consist of 15 persons, grandpa Oothol Natheel, Holth and his wife Holthina and their 12 children( among them you can find Hood).

**Inventory:**

- sledge( used as a protection weapon)
- knife
- tinderbox
- rope 50'
- lantern
- leather protection

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**Name:** Chimera Antonio Pbrush Petra Mistrelli Charleston  
Jeffery Mirrorman

**Race:** Urvanovestilli

**Age:** 35

**Gender:** Male

**Physical appearance:**

Chimera is 5'3" and weighs 101 pounds. He has clear white skin and long jet-black hair pulled back in a ponytail. When he is out in the sun, he will have a wicker hat on with a long brim that hides his face, and wears a pair of dark sunglasses. He wears all white satin clothes and carries his tools in a backpack along with several blankets that he uses when there is no place to lodge. He walks with a long metal walking stick that is wrapped with a leather strap. His shoes are made of a cotton black clothe with very thick leather souls. He has emerald green eyes and claw scar across his left forearm.

**Personality:**

Chimera is very quiet, but a very hard worker. When he does talk, it is with a very soft and tender voice. His love for God can be seen deep within his eyes and in the fact that he spends much time in prayer and study each day. Once you get to know Jeff, he is very friendly and very willing to offer his hand to assist others.

**Profession/talents/skills:**

Like his father, Jeff will one day take over the maintenance and construction of the labyrinth of the city Mistrelli. He has been brought up on the studies of Ceremonies, Clockwork Device Craftsmanship, Heraldry, History, Literature, Mathematics, Philosophy, Reading/Writing, Technology Use, and Theology. Jeff is also Proficient at Illusionism, and Moderately Skilled at

Opening Locks and is more than just a Dabbler when it comes to Jury-Rigging.

**Background:**

My name is, Chimera Antonio Pbrush Petra Mistrelli Charleston Jeffery Mirrorman. My friends call me Jeff. I am an Urvanovestilli from the city of Mistrelli. Christ is the center of my life, for I try to live as He would have by giving all that I have and all that I am to helping others. The world is a great place, with many mysteries and wonders. I am but a young adult at the age of 35. I have been on many journeys to see the world and to meet the other cultures that God has created. In this part of my life, I am still filled with the wanderlust that is engraved upon my soul, but I find greater fulfillment when I can help others as I see the world. My family has been apart of the creation of Mistrelli, therefore, I have grown up creating many unusual devices for traps and secret passages. Some of the devices that I have personally developed were the search light for wandering around in the tunnels, and a mirroring device that allows one's image to be projected at a distance, but my most fun device was a box with a button on it, that when pressed, entangles the holder of the box with strong wires that could not be broken, not even by a Nor'krin. Since I have been on many journeys, I have also been able to help others with minor problems such as water irrigation and food storage. Some of the virtues that I embody would be Contrainte, Faith, Forgiveness, Generosity, Gentleness, Honesty, Honor, Humility, Joy, Love, Patience, Peace, Self-Control, and Wisdom.

I search for Honesty in other people. I have only a few relationships with others, but they are very deep. I think that quality counts much more than quantity. In my spare time, I love to think about the mysteries of God and the universe. How He

has created such a symphony of life with as much diversity.

I am my father's first born, and will return one day to become his assistant, and eventually, take over for him. Even though I might look helpless, I would have to disagree. In my travels, I have been able to study and master the Martial Art form Akido, which is a very soft a non aggressive form. Although non aggressive, it is very useful when being attacked. The attacker when only get hurt accordingly to how much force he put into the attack.

I enjoy life very much. One of my favorite games is Imperial Kingdoms, a more complex version of Chess. My other hobby is creating a machine that will allow me to fly. My favorite story is about Eistinia, one of the great inventors from my town. He created a balloon that could carry a basket into the sky with several people. After his first attempt, he landed in a far away place, because he forgot to setup a way to go down. Anyway, he came across a small village that knows nothing of God and was able to share the God news with them. How exciting. I too, want to be able to help others, both physically and spiritually. I like to present others with my gifts of service, to help them in their needs.

I cherish the memory of my great grand father, because it was he how taught me that God and Science are the same, for we would not have Knowledge if it were not God's will. I have grown much since that time, and I have helped many people because of that. But one thing has not changed, I have always wanted to know why I believe what I believe, and never just accept anything as that was how it has always been.

There is a girl back home that has also left following her wanderlust, her name is Tia Carolina Pamelita. It would be my desire to win her heart and to ask her to marry me. But before I

do, I must find out who I am.

I am a typical Urvanovestilli standing at 5'3" and weighing in at 101 pounds. I might seem very quiet, but I am really very bright and well cultured. I have studied Ceremonies, Clockwork Device Craftsmanship, Heraldry, History, Literature, Mathematics, Philosophy, Reading/Writing, Technology Use, and Theology. But I have also studied Anatomy, Biology, Chemistry, Cooking, Herbalism, Illusionism, Improvisation, Jury-Rigging, Languages, Massage, Mediation, Medicine, Musical Composition, Piano, Open Locks, Poetry Composition, Pyrotechnics, Strategy Games, and Trivia.

Ability to Learn - Good

Agility - Fair

Charisma - Fair

Constitution - Fair

Dexterity - Fair

Intelligence - Good

Knowledge - Good

Memory - Good

Perception - Good

Speed - Poor

Strength - Poor

Wisdom - Good

**A Quote:**

"To study what God has created and how it works is to understand who God is just a little bit more"

---

**Name:** Xingu  
**Race:** Shal  
**Gender:** Male  
**Age:** 232  
**Weight:** 135 lbs  
**Height:** 5'5"

Xingu is, for a Shal, of medium height and weight, with soft, penetrating blue eyes. If one wished to know his age, one would be confused by the contrast of his frame - that of middle age, with well-defined muscles in his upper forearms - and his skin whose aging has been accelerated by the salt breeze of the sea; yet Xingu possesses an air of timelessness that makes even thinking of age superficial. He wears a dark green cloak and carries a walking stick of gnarled wood.

Xingu doesn't have as much a personality as he has a presence. One can be with him, and not a word need be spoken before his presence - a feeling of warmth, compassion, love, serenity, peace, and timelessness - is felt.

Xingu lives in the Shal port village of Vis. There he was a sailor and fisherman. Like all Shal, he lives his life in serene mysticism, possessing a timeless wisdom - not exactly logic, not exactly intelligence, but a wisdom much like the Tao masters. As per his trade, he is skilled at fishing, sailing, rope handling, and navigation, the latter based more on intuition than calculation.

Like most sailors, Xingu is passable at some musical instruments, singing, and sea lore. Traditional Shal music is less outwardly joyous; it is more peaceful, serene, and inspiring of meditation.

The Shal sail largely by intuition, by becoming at peace with the ocean. While one certainly should not sail with a Shal if

speed is the end goal, there's no person better to be with should the seas get rough. Many a Shal has been known to survive storms which should have cracked a boat to bits, by holding the helm in one calloused hand, the main sheet cutting into the flesh of the other hand, muscles straining to keep the ship under control, and yet maintaining a look of utmost peace and tranquility, a lack of fear, and a faith strong enough to move mountains. The Shal sail, and weather storms, simply by staying in harmony with the sea and remaining at peace. Xingu is certainly no exception.

Xingu will always welcome a stranger into his house, or sail a foreigner to any destination. Long days and nights on a ship with guests, repeated for nearly two centuries, combined with seemingly infinite patience have made Xingu quite well-versed in the languages, customs and ways of the other cultures, and he has come to appreciate the different races greatly.

One day when withdrawing from his community and the rest of the world, Xingu felt a calling to leave his boat and travel away from Vis, which he had never before left by land. It was then that he happened upon the city of Mistrelli.

Xingu carries just enough possessions to survive - a hunting knife, a tinder box and flints, and a canteen of water. At his home in Vis is moored his simple 16 foot yawl-rigged boat with tan bark sails, his ropes and net.

**Quote:**

"I feel, I sense, and I live. I am, and He is, hence I know."

---

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**Quote:**

"I feel, I sense, and I live. I am, and He is, hence I know."

---

**Name:** Zakhs

**Race:** Tuz

**Age:** 28

**Gender:** Male

**Physical appearance:**

Zachs is of medium height and stocky build. His broad grin (his usual expression) is nestled in his thick black beard, and his eyes have a humorous twinkle. When he laughs, it is long and loud. He carries a stout walking stick made of a dark-colored wood, and his clothes are well-worn and comfortable looking.

**Personality:**

He is not naive, for he has seen much of the world, but he is a basically trusting person. He gives people the benefit of the doubt until they prove him wrong. He greets everyone he meets as a friend until proven otherwise, and he is a hearty and enjoyable person. His special gift is the ability to help others, and he takes great joy in this. When he comes across someone working in his travels, he pitches in and helps them finish a job. In this way he can raise goodwill as well as food and a place to sleep for the night.

**Profession/talents/skills:**

He is a wanderer and a pilgrim, seeking through the world in order to broaden his experience. He has the standard skills of a Tuz; Heat Tolerance, Hunting, Wilderness Survival, and Wrestling. He is also skilled in Animal Lore, Brewing, and Endurance. He is good with his hands and likes to Build and Carve.

**A quote:**

"Greetings, Friend! Care for some help with that?"

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Mistrelli lies in the heart of the Fog Valley; a shroud of mist cloaks the ground, out of which rise trees and tall buildings with spires and towers. Inside the buildings are all manner of tunnels of tunnels, secret passages, and trapdoors; there are clockwork devices in each one. Throughout the city are spread a handful of entrances to a vast underground labyrinth, of which the better part is unknown; there are all manner of doors and puzzles inside.

The city is full of rose bushes, climbing up the sides of the buildings, over and around gates; most are yellow, but there are some of every color.

The people take a long time to get to know, and their personalities always have hidden gems. Their study of theology emphasizes mystery and the incomprehensible nature of God; Connaissance, a theologian from Mistrelli, began and ended his magnum opus with the words, "I do not know."

Inside this city, which you have all come to for your various reasons, you are each hailed by a young Janra. He is wirily built, with deep, twinkling blue eyes and a shimmering midnight blue robe. He greets you according to your people's way and tells you in your native tongue, "Greetings. My name is Nimbus. I would like to request the honor of your presence tomorrow, in the third hour of the afternoon, at a meeting in the public square."

Nimbus is apparently an adventurer of some renown. He is said to have gone on many quests, although exactly what is not clearly known; no two stories are alike. He is also said to have a massive vehicle known as the Juggernaut, Nimbus's Roving Citadel, etc.

The following day, in the public square, Nimbus divides those assembled into teams, and announces, "I have hidden three eggs, one gold and two silver, in the labyrinth. A team which returns

with a silver egg I will give forty gold sovereigns and a tour of my fortress. The team which returns with the golden egg will receive a hundred gold sovereigns, and I will take them in the citadel anywhere within a month's journey they wish to go."

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Hood belched a loud belch, and chuckled. He had had little difficulty finding something to do — it seemed that people everywhere had heavy things to carry around — but the dainty little portions he had been served were a surprise. Very cute, the strips of meat arranged across layers of cheese and a flaky bread, but not terribly filling. No wonder all the Urvanovestilli were thin as a beanpole, he mused. He tried to eat with the silver instruments he was given, but the strips of meat kept falling off of the pointy thing. At least the tiny knife was sharp — it cut with a refreshing lightness as compared to the much larger knives he was accustomed to, which assumed that you had a bit of strength.

The chef must have seen him staring in disbelief at the food; he turned the faintest shade red, quickly walked back in the kitchen, and came back holding a pot, by wooden pads, and followed by a little girl holding a miniature bowl and spoon. "I'm sorry; I am used to serving for Urvanovestilli, and forgot for a moment that you were a Tuz," he said through a thick accent. It took Hood a little while to grasp the long sentences, but when he understood them, he smiled. In Urvanovestilli, he tried to say, "Thank you," and took the pot, guzzling the soup from it. The warmth of the steel pot was comforting to his calloused hands, and the steaming soup filled his stomach with a pleasant heat. There was a somewhat awkward moment of silence — the cook staring in disbelief that anybody could touch the pot with bare hands, let alone drink from it, Hood realizing that they had actually intended him to eat the soup with the tiny bowl and spoon. Finally, Hood set the pot down, smiling and again saying, "Thank you," and the cook picked it up, and said, "I hope you liked it."

The soup had had a taste Hood had never tasted before — subtly spiced, with a gentleness to its meaty flavor and salt — and Hood leaned back and belched to express his gratitude. There was a moment of silence, as people turned to him, and the little girl giggled; Hood remembered that the Urvanovestilli had a rather odd attitude about belching. A young man said something rather loudly in Urvanovestilli, and then fluent Tuz: "Aah, yes, I have heard of how the Tuz express their appreciation for a good meal by a good, hearty belch. It sounds like our hard working friend here is quite pleased with the fare!" The cook looked as if he understood, and then tipped his head, walking away with the pot, bowl, and spoon.

Now that the situation had ended, it was far easier to see its humor. Having spent a few days in the forest, hunting his food, Hood had been out of Urvanovestilli culture, and lived much as if he were in a Tuz forest — though even then, he missed some of the tough and rowdy monsters to be found. Have a little patience, he thought, and you'll adjust to a culture, learn to do things their way, while still remaining you — little moments like the one about the meal brought a bit of spice and amusement.

Hood had left his home village Haheem for the first time in his life. The reason was simple. 12 kids could not inherit a single blacksmith workshop. The Tuz living around Haheem has not developed the idea that the eldest son is the obvious heir to his father's possessions. There were actually no clear rules at all regarding this matter. After a short discussion Hood suggested that they all should solve the matter in one big wrestling match - Hood did not win, so there was nothing more to do for Hood than to leave his village and to seek his fortune somewhere else.

Maybe he could start a new workshop in a nearby village one day. Now you're a somewhat young Tuz blacksmith and you need to

get a job, what do you do? Well maybe seek employment in some of the Urvanovestilli cities. The strange inhabitants in these cities sometimes have a need for Tuz artisans. Hood had heard stories about the marvelous city of Mistrelli. A city packed with weird mazes, buildings and other strange things.....maybe the Misterellians needed help with some new constructions.

A couple of weeks later Hood has just entered the city of Misterelli. He has been drifting around a while studying the sites and landmarks of the city when he sees a young Janra. Hood thought for himself.....

"Ahh..a Janra!.... well as we say in Haheem..where there is a Janra there is something going on...."

So now he was at the square, eagerly waiting for things to begin.

There were a few people who stopped to talk with him along the way; the most interesting was an old woman, wearing a black robe with a loose cowl and golden threads woven into its edges, who spoke entirely in questions. She didn't speak any Tuz, but she spoke slowly, loudly, and with simple words, and repeated her questions a few times. It was very difficult to see the person behind those questions, but Hood thought that there was something there, if only he could give it enough time. There was just enough there, for Hood to know for sure that something was eluding him... As Nimbus climbed a tree and cleared his throat to speak, she handed him a piece of paper, and said, "Here's my address; do come by."

The first thing that the young Janra said was, "Brothers and sisters, there are people of many languages here. Please have patience as I explain things in everyone's tongue, and please remain here until I have divided people into groups." He said this, of course, in several languages, but it was not too long before

those gathered heard in their own native tongue: that he had hidden three eggs, two silver and one gold, that a team returning with a silver egg would gain forty gold sovereigns and a tour of his Juggernaut, and the team returning with the golden egg would win not only one hundred gold sovereigns, but a trip inside the Juggernaut to anywhere within a month's journey.

It seemed but a moment before Hood was brought together with a team, and then people began to quickly scatter into nooks and crannies. The others assembled and brought into the team were:

Zakhs, another Tuz, a stocky fellow with a broad grin, twinkling eyes, and a thick black beard. His clothing was well-worn, and he carried a thick, dark walking stick.

Xingu, a young Shal with a very peaceful gaze.

Caroline, a young Nor'krin bearing a sharp sword, a bow, and a box, with braided hair running down her back. She bears with her a slight fragrance of roses; when asked, she explained that she was savoring the roses at the rose garden, and held out her hands; her fingertips were a shade of dark pink, the color of the roses having rubbed off on them.

Hood pulled out his lantern and tinderbox, and with nimble fingers, quickly struck the wick afire. "Shall we go a lookin'?"

The square was already still, the people having departed; only Nimbus remained, perched in the tree, and a few people passing here and there.

As the group began to walk about, Hood's sharp eyes looked in a public square and spotted a statue with a large pedestal, with a rectangular block on one side slightly recessed. He kneeled down, and felt around the edges. The block gave a little when he pressed on it, but beyond a short distance seemed to catch on something. It moved more at the bottom, where it

moved back, than the top, where it scarcely moved at all. "This seems to give, but I can't tell how to trigger it." The statue was a statue of a thin, despairing man, clothed in rags, with hands stretched up towards Heaven.

Zakhs looked around and said, "There's an inscription on the other side. Can anybody read it?"

Hood walked around. The script was long, flowing, and carved in the stone, overlaid with gold leaf. "Pretty letters." He paused for a moment, and then read, "I am [pause] tall. Who will [pause] me receive something for [pause] to drink?" He paused for a second and said, "Understanding these people talking is hard; reading them... I am tall. Who will receive me something to drink? I have at least one word wrong."

Zakhs said, "Pronounce the 'tall' word."

Hood pronounced it, and Zakhs said it a few times to himself, then changed one sound, and laughed. "I am thirsty. Who will give me something to drink?"

Zakhs looked around, and saw a fountain. He cupped his hands, taking water, and stepped up onto the pedestal (with a little help from Hood), opening his hands over the statue's mouth. There was a gurgling sound for a moment, then a click, and a sound of clockwork gears turning. The stone rectangle turned inward and upward, on hinges, revealing a shaft with an iron ladder descending into the darkness.

Xingu opened a hand, and then said, "Shall we?"

Hood hefted his massive sledge hammer, and then said, "I think I'd best go down first, in case there are any nasty critters in there." Xingu paused in thought a moment, considering questioning that — but, given the determination in Hood's words, decided not to. He loosened the girdle of his leather protector somewhat, slid in the sledge, took the lantern in hand, and began

descending the iron rungs.

At the bottom of the pit was a short passageway, ending in an abrupt stone wall. It was dusty, with recent tracks that led under the stone wall — and there disappeared. As the other people came down, they began to inspect the wall and the surrounding areas for some indication as to how one would open the doorway.

After a time, Xingu began to say, "'Tis said that people often pay too much attention to time and the order of things in time. I wonder..." He began to climb the ladder.

"Where are you going?", Caroline asked.

"Wait a moment. I'm checking to see something." He disappeared into the shaft, ascending noiselessly.

There was soon a sound of shifting stone, of gears turning and chains moving, and the stone door glided into the walls of the passageway.

Xingu calmly said, "Shall we go on?"

The passageway came to a T-shaped junction; the tracks went off one way. There was general concurrence to go the other way. As they walked through the long and twisty passageway, Hood's heavy step brought not only the ring of his iron boot, but a slightly different thud than usual. "That stone," said Zakhs, "is different from the others." He knelt down, felt around a little, and then struck one of the stones with his staff. There was a faint echo, a hollow sound. "What are y—", began Caroline, as Hood's heavy hammer came down and slammed into the floor. There was a loud ringing sound, and the stone had several cracks.

Hood began to pull out pieces of stone, then reached into what was a hole, and pulled out a small, shiny steel box. "This shouldn't be too hard to open," he said, setting it on its side.

Caroline quickly snatched the box, looked him in the eyes, and

said, "No." in clearly enunciated Tuz.  
"But it'll be faster than —," Hood began.

"No."

"But why not?"

"Maybe fragile. Break. Shatter."

"I don't think —"

"No."

Hood looked her in the eyes, to stare her down, and saw a will equal to his own. Zakhs put his hand on Hood's shoulder and said, "Brother, it's probably safe to open, but there's just a slight chance that it has something fragile, that is not broken. Why don't we be safe and wait a little while before opening it, just in case?" With that, Hood relaxed.

They went on; the passageway came to a seven way intersection.

The first path led to a circular room with a small, shallow pool in it. The water in the pool was murky, and had a stagnant smell to it.

The second path was long and twisty, but only came to a dead end.

The third path led to a dead end, but coming back, they found a secret door to a long, rectangular room with bas-relief sculpture on the walls.

The fourth lead to a winding circular staircase, heading upwards. As they ascended, they began to hear music. It came to a narrow doorway; opening it, they saw the relatively bright light of dusk, a crimson sunset slowly ebbing away. As they adjusted to the light, the music stopped; Nimbus, holding a lute, came walking up. They were at a hidden door, opening outwards, in the corner of a building in the public square.

"Greetings. How was your time in the dungeon?" He listened

with interest, and then said, "I'm sorry to say that all three eggs have been located. But let me look at that box. I think I can open it, if nothing else."

Nimbus pulled out some metal tools, and in a short time the lid came open.

Inside were several things. There was a tiny porcelain figurine of a deer, a silver bracelet, a rock with some paint on it, a small crystal phial on a necklace, and lastly, a small, curved fragment of parchment with what appeared to be part of a bard's song:

To Rozimald's chambers the keys are three,  
They all upon the triangle mountains be.  
A blue sapphire key beneath a great blue sapphire set,  
A black onyx key, by black onyx is met.  
An emerald key among hanging emeralds does rest.

Nimbus muttered, "Rozimald, Rozimald, Rozimald... Where have I heard that name before... Aah, Rozimald. He was a wealthy Urvanovestilli eccentric long ago, with — never mind that, the tale has probably grown a lot in the telling. Some people know where his abode was, but I haven't heard of anybody being able to get in.

"One thing I will say, though. He is thought to have had a store of a very potent fuel, made of powdered rust mixed with powdered aluminum. I don't remember exactly how much there is, but I can find that out. At any rate, if you bring that to me, I will be glad to train you; I am currently taking a break from adventuring, to train other adventurers.

"Oh, and I almost forgot. I would like to give you something." He reached into the folds of his robes, and produced a white candle with carvings on the sides. "Keep this with you, and may its light remind you of the hour of our meeting "

the night reminds you of the heat of our meeting.  
Nimbus bowed deeply and disappeared into the shadows.

---

Hood said, "My UCLA Zogah always told me and my brothers never to interfere with rich mens secrets....but I am very curious about these Rozimalds chambers.....and Uncle Zogah cannot always be right.....any ideas where to start looking...eh?"

Caroline stopped her exploration of the sight and textures of the various objects including the box itself, and said to Hood "We are not interfering with Rozimald's secrets but answering his invitation. For that is what this riddle-song is, an invitation for those who can solve it. As for were to start, the song says triangle mountains. I guess there are where his home was, so if we ask about the location of Rozimald's home perhaps what the triangle mountains are will be obvious. Nor'krin teaches using stories and remembering the stories help me remember the lessons the stories contained. The Yedidia teach with song. The Urvanovestilli build physical puzzles and riddles as part of their teaching. Rozimald's invitation is to learn from him, and the works he created during his life. He has even left the riddle-song with other gifts so that we know we are welcome."

Caroline also discovered that tapping the metal box with a flicked finger can cause an interesting bell like sound.

Hood continued, "...guess your right.....sounds simple enough.....although I must say that the Urvanovestilli are a bit weird...not doing this the Tuz way...much better....can't he just tell his secret with a few simple words....does anyone have any knowledge where to find these triangle mountains?"

Caroline smiled and says "Different things work for different people. Some people lack the wisdom or faith to accept a few simple words and need to learn through trial and experience. These lessons can take a long time to learn, yet in the end the wisdom can be said in a few simple words."

Zachs also smiled at Hood's comments. Then he added, "I have travelled far and wide, and visited many places. I have never heard of these triangle mountains. Perhaps someone here in the city knows of it?"

Hood was a bit unsure about the next step in the research. As usual he started to set his somewhat slowstarted mind of his into motion..... It's easy to see when Hood thinks since the skin on his forehead gets all wrinkled. He also started to pull his hand through his long beard. He was about to say something when he suddenly stopped himself from doing so. It seemed that he was awaiting the the reaction from the other team members to the newly found puzzle.

Caroline suggested "Since it is information that we need, we should ask." She goes and tries to catch a passer by's eye, smiles and inquired, "I am trying to locate Rozimald's home, do you know where it is or who I should ask?"

The passerby, an old man with a white beard, said, "Rozimald. Let me think; I haven't heard that name for several hundred years." He closed his eyes, and a couple of minutes passed. "I'm sorry, I don't know where his mansion is or was. At least not any more; I've long since forgotten it. But if you go to the library's archives — probably here, if not here, at Capitello — and talk with the history librarian, who should be in tomorrow evening, he can look up what is available, and will know whom to talk with.

"The library is under the cathedral, in the center of the city.

"Is there anything else I can tell you about?"

Hood said, "Excuse me Sir! Sorry for my simple Tuz ways and for bothering you with my questions, but may I ask a few questions about the city surroundings?"

The man gently smiled and said, "You need not apologize for your simple Tuz ways, dear friend. The beauty of Urvanovestilli

ways lies in their refinement and complexity; those of the Tuz, in their power and strength. Enjoy the blessing that God has created you as a Tuz. Now what is your question?"

"Do you know where the Triangle Mountains are, or where or how we could find out about them?"

"The Triangle Mountains are about six weeks' walk east of north. I don't remember the exact location, but the mapmaker can tell you." He gave the group directions to the mapmaker. "If that is all you have to ask, I'll be going on."

The last rays of the dying sun painted the cathedral as the group reached it. It was intricate, dark, majestic — carved out of black marble.

Inside the cathedral, everything was cool, still, and pitch black. There were a few sounds of walking; there was a faint smell of dust.

Then, suddenly, the building was shaken by a thunderous blast of music from the organ. The sound was deep, rich, majestic; a turgid fugue of four voices played. The party could feel the vibrations in their bones.

Walking along in the darkness, they found a dry wooden door, and, opening it, descended down a circular staircase until they came to a large, open, dusty room.

Most cathedrals had crypts beneath, a reminder of the community and presence of those departed. This one had row upon row of shelves of books. It was filled by an ageless silence, and lit by the glow of candles.

Almost fearing to break the silence, they moved along until they found a librarian, sitting next to a candle, reading from the pages of an ancient volume. He slowly turned, and raised his hand in greeting, asking what he could do for them.

Rozimald, he said, was a man who had lived in the East Ridge

Mountains, near the Silouni River. He produced a map which showed the region, and indicated where his mansion had been said to be located. "I think I can spare you a trip to the mapmaker, if you can memorize a map", and showed a map of a road, with a trail branching off to a small village, beyond which lay the three mountains where the keys had been said to be located.

They went to an inn to sleep, and the next day set out early. It was good hunting, with deer or boar usually only a couple of hours' hunting, and a pleasant trip to reach the village. Once arrived, they spent a couple of days resting, selling pelts and buying supplies, before going on.

The second day out, the day's hunting was met by a long rainstorm which seemed to grow more and less intense. Hood, moving first, was about to strike a hedgehog, when he stepped and the ground beneath him gave.

Hood, very heavily weighed down, is sinking in quicksand.

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Hood takes some dried fruit and eats.....while he is eating he starts to asking questions to the hermit, without thinking about what his mother said to him about what non-Tuz people thinks about eating and speaking at the same time:

"I very grateful for the food.....You sure seem..mauwauawmm(Hood is chewing) to be a wise fellow....you see we are in need of some information....humrph(he swallows the food)...you see we are looking for a chap...a certain Rozimald.....ancient fellow....Urvanovestilli I believe....and the triangle mountains....he is supposed to have some kind of chambers there..."

Xingu, seeing Hood talking and chewing at the same time, cracks a slight grin. He hugs Hood. Slowly, Xingu says, "One cannot appreciate what one has, till one sees that it may be gone in a moment. We are dust, and to dust we shall return. Hood, you are a light among us, and we must thank Him that you are still with us." Xingu bows his head in silence.

Time passes. Or rather, time stands still.

Xingu looks up, and his eyes meet the hermit's. He takes some food, bows his head deeply in what is taken as a sign of sincere gratitude, and eats.

Xingu then addresses the hermit: "All of us are made in His image, and like a diamond with many sparkling facets, each culture reflects a different aspect of Him. We are on a quest in search of the answer to an Urvanovestilli riddle. My mind does not think as an Urvanovestilli, and I confess that many of their logic puzzles escape me. Perhaps you can help us solve the riddle." Xingu turns to speak to the group, "May I see the box?"

Caroline who seems to have found the box in her presence, if only because she was carrying the lightest load and liked the

noise it made responds "Of course." Her eyes seems to twinkle with an inner happiness and she enjoys the company and the food. Offering as well to the table, herbal teas if anyone wishes to try a blend, as well as any food she carries that they wish to share.

Xingu slowly opens the box, and places on the table the porcelain figurine of a deer, a silver bracelet, a rock with some paint on it, a small crystal phial on a necklace, and reads from the parchment:

To Rozimald's chambers the keys are three, They all upon the triangle mountains be.

A blue sapphire key beneath a great blue sapphire set, A black onyx key, by black onyx is met. An emerald key among hanging emeralds does rest.

"These are the clues to our quest. What can we make of them?"

He pauses....

"What strikes me first is a feeling that this is the trinket box of a little girl. Bracelet, necklace, little odds and ends, and a poem; all things that one would expect to find. Yet the poem is a puzzle. It could possibly be a puzzle a small child kept in a trinket box.

"Where was it found? In a labyrinth, a large puzzle. Finding the paper in the labyrinth, one would think it a puzzle. Finding the metal box in a labyrinth, one would think the box a puzzle. Finding the same metal box in the room of a young girl, one would find the box as normal, but the paper a puzzle.

"What are the keys? Something we must find on the three mountains? Are they already found, stashed in this metal box by a past adventurer and hidden in the labyrinth? Are they symbols, or metaphors, found by an interpretation of the poem, or the

items within the box? Are the items in the box there by chance? Are they needed to find the keys? Are they a part of the puzzle, if not the keys themselves?

"Puzzle within puzzle within puzzle...."

He pauses.

"I also see a similarity in both the poem and the items; I sense a strong feeling of nature. Deer, stone, crystal, mountains, gems...."

Xingu picks up each item, including the box itself, and slowly examines them, looking not only for clues to the mystery, but also admiring the beauty of each object. He passes them around the room to the others.

The hermit looks at the poem, thinks for a time, and then says, "Oh, so you've finally found a good-looking clue to Rozimald's chambers. Let me think."

He leans back, and then closes his eyes for a moment. "Aah, yes. One moment; I'll be back."

He goes into a corner, and returns with a black, frosted glass bottle with a seal on the front. "I had almost forgotten," he says. "A Porto would be quite appropriate to this discussion."

After serving everyone a glass, he leans back, and says, "There are many poets that I have heard of, and some of them spend a great deal of attention on drawing out the wonder in the world around. They are working to open people's eyes, to fight off the ever threatening grey murk which threatens to cloud vision and make even the sun look dull and drab.

"Some of that group evokes the things that we most regard as precious — gold and silver, diamonds and rubies, wines and delicacies. Those things, perhaps in part because they are rare, are not so often looked at as dull and drab.

"There was one poet — I have forgotten his name — who

spoke of gems, describing the world as if it were composed entirely of gems. And the fragment of song which you describe appears to be some of his work."

He opens his mouth to say something, but you cannot hear his words due to a loud growl and sounds of a scuffle coming from outside.

Outside, as soon as your eyes can adjust to the brightness, you see a young Urvanovestilli being attacked by a bear. He is masterfully dodging, but the bear seems to be very determined in its attack.

They are both about a hundred feet away.

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Xingu starts singing, and the bear seems to be beginning to slow down — but it is not clear how quickly it will slow down. As people pour out of the cave and begin to fan out, the bear's paw comes down on the young Urvanovestilli's arm. He winces, and jumps back.

As he jumps back, Caroline manages a fair shot into the bear's heavy bulk. It rears, and begins to sniff around.

Hood's heavy armored steps ring as he runs forward. He swings a heavy blow at the bear's chest; it connects solidly. The bear crouches down to dodge; Hood's sledgehammer slides down a side.

Zakhs has by now run up, and swings his staff, hitting the bear on the head. The staff vibrates in his hands.

The bear swings at Hood, and hits solidly, his claws scraping across his armored chest. Hood is knocked on his back.

Caroline hits the bear again, and hits solidly.

The bear lunges at Hood, who has by now prepared with a blow of the sledgehammer, and has his ironshod feet up in the air. The sledgehammer hits the side of the bear's head, and glances away. His knees buckle into his chest, winding him.

Zakhs swings his staff again, and hits the bear, distracting him from Hood.

Hood is gasping and struggling to breathe, but even so begins to roll towards his feet, sledgehammer in hand. He hits the bear in the back, winding it in turn.

Caroline shoots at the bear again, but misses.

Zakhs swings at the bear, and also misses.

Hood, weakening in his struggle to breathe, swings at the bear, but only grazes it.

The bear swings at Zakhs, but does not move quite quickly

enough to hit it.

Hood, beginning to turn blue, swings again, and hits. Zakhs lifts his staff from below, hitting the bear in the mouth.

Caroline shoots another arrow solidly, hitting the bear in the back of the neck. It immediately falls over.

Hood, turned a deeper shade of blue, finally manages to inhale. He drinks the air in deep gulps; slowly his breathing and his skin color return to normal.

After a little while, your attention returns to the young Urvanovestilli, who was mauled by the bear. He introduces himself.

---

Zakhs steps over to the young Urvanovestilli, after pounding Hood solidly on the back (to help him regain his breath). He will examine the young man's arm and see if there is anything he can do for the boy.

"What could have riled that creature up so much?" he will wonder aloud as he examines the Urvanovestilli's arm.

Hood cleans his sledge by rubbing it to the ground....then he comments the whole thing.....

" Tough bear...."

He turns towards the the young Urvanovestilli.

".....you are still alive...glad to see it.....it was a close thing....."

Caroline introduces her self to the young Urvanovestilli. She the proceeds to tell him a story about a brave young person from her tribe, while she tends his wounds. She seems to have more than herbs for tea in her pack. The story and the treatment end at the same time.

Hood brushes off some dirt from his clothes...and continues to adress the young Urvanovestilli.....

"I haven't introduced myself.....I am Hood"

Hood reaches out a hand.....

"I know not what riled it up, but the poor fellow will make quite a delicious meal. Of course, we may not have enough to go around, with only one bear and two Tuz."

Xingu, with a wide grin, gives Zakhs a friendly punch in the gut.

Xingu then walks toward the Urvanovestilli, and greets him with a raised hand and three kisses, as is the way of Urvanovestilli culture, and speaks to him in his native tongue.

"Hello, my name is Xingu. I thank the Lord that you survived this encounter without greater injury. We are a band of

adventurers, following clues to discover Rosimald's chambers. Please stay, eat, and join us; we welcome your insight in solving this puzzle."

The little man looks as if he was coming out of his daze for the previous brush with death, then he stands up to introduce himself, but then sits back down, and says, "Greetings and salutations, you may call by the name that my friends call me, which is Jeff. I am still a little bit shaken by the whole ordeal, so I feel that I would be unable to fully express who I am in an intelligent manner, therefore, could you tell me a little bit about who you are? Just in case if you were wondering, I was sent to help you on your quest."

The hermit walks around and begins collecting branches to make a fire; in a couple of hours, there is roast bear for all to eat their fill of (even the Tuz). Caroline has bound the wounds; the young man's arm is set and healing, and Hood doesn't seem to have taken any grave injury (although his chest will have some nasty bruises).

As you eat, the young man begins to introduce himself.

"Hello, my name is Chimera Antonio Pbrush Petra Mistrelli Charleston Jeffery Mirrorman, but you can call me Jeff. I am from the city of Mistrelli, sent to help you on your quest. I believe that my understanding of Illusions can help you on your journey.

"I am my father's first born, and will return one day to become his assistant, and eventually, take over for him. But for now, I want to continue to see the world, and meet the different races and creatures that inhabit it.

"I also love to play, Imperial Kingdoms, which is a complex version of Chess. I am also working on a flying machine, although it is far from being able to work, it is a hobby that I enjoy."

The hermit asks for the rest of the bear's carcass (after you have taken a good chunk as food for the journey), to make jerky and a rug out of. "I'd heard from other people that there was a rather cantankerous bear around here, and I'd seen a few tracks, but I'd never met it..."

"Come with me. Let's stand in a circle around Chimera, and lay hands on him."

As you do so, the pain in Chimera's face begins to ease, and he sits back.

The hermit sits back, after the meal, and begins to talk about the local geography; he describes a few paths, and landmarks for you to find your way on. "Do stop back here after you have looked around, and I wouldn't mind hearing how you mean to set about finding the keys in the forests. See you later." After a night's rest for all, he sees you off again.

# Why Play?

Why play The Minstrel's Song? The following is an edited excerpt from a letter written introducing some people to the topic; it gives seven reasons why a person would want to play.

1. It is an opportunity to get connected with people and get to know them a little better. In the very beginning of high school, I met a group of people who had become good friends by the end of the school year through role play... Role play is a social activity, and when you play, you get to know the people you're playing with. (Enough so that I would much rather play with people who are friends or people with whom I wish to cultivate friendships than with a group of strangers that I had nothing in common with.)  
As well as a sociable atmosphere, role playing games provide a unique opportunity to see how people think. While most people's characters are not exactly themselves, most people are still reflected in their characters.
2. It is an exploration into the nature of goodness and virtue. The nature of uniqueness in goodness is dealt with explicitly a little at the end of the document describing cultures... Trying to explore a character who is a hero, who walks in the Spirit, who embodies moral virtue, who does good deeds is an interesting and edifying exercise. Phil. 4:8 says,

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

I have found my role play to be a way to do that.

3. It is a challenge. A part of what I try to do as a game master is make an interesting, feasible but still conquerable challenge to the player's intelligence. You'll find puzzles to think about in the game. It stretches the mind.
4. It is an opportunity, by imagination, to visit another time, another place, another world. A vivid book lets you almost feel like you're there in the action... role play is like that, except that you're not just observing; you take a part in the story; you help create. It is like travelling inside the mind's eye to a fantasy world. It stretches the imagination.
5. It is an opportunity, by imagination, to be someone else — to be a great explorer, to be a romantic bard. It allows the player to imagine not only observing but playing a part in an unfolding tale.
6. Unlike nearly all other games, it is cooperative, rather than competitive. Rather than (for example) Monopoly, where you are trying to gather as much money as possible and force the other players to go bankrupt, you are playing a character who is working together with other characters who are friends and allies to achieve a common goal. Role playing games do not foster a mindset of "them versus us" or "I am competing with the rest of the world"; it fosters a mindset of cooperation and teamwork.
7. It's enjoyable. I do know a couple of people who don't like role play, and I wouldn't by any means say that if you don't

like role play something's wrong with you, but... I have found that a majority of people whom I've convinced to role play, ergo people who wouldn't have done so were I not to extend an invitation, have enjoyed it. I as the game master have the most difficult task, and I found the game to be quite refreshing, one of the highlights of the week. It's a nice change from hitting the books, and an enjoyable way to spend part of the day of rest. So, while I wouldn't bet my life on your liking it, I think it's worth a try.

# The Modern Baccalaureate

Baccalaureate:

I am the very model of a modern baccalaureate;  
I know of data structures, algorithms, a-and languages;  
I know of the-ory's giants, and I quote programming idioms,  
From foo or die to for loop, arrang-ed by a radix sort;  
I'm very well acquainted, too, with matters theoretical,  
I know many algorithms, both the simple and quadratical,  
About exponential time I'm teeming with lots o' news,  
With many cheerful facts about the problems intractaloose.

Chorus:

With many cheerful facts about the problems intractaloose.  
With many cheerful facts about the problems intractaloose.  
With many cheerful facts about the problems  
intractatractaloose.

Baccalaureate:

I'm very good at top-down and bottom-up appro-o-oaches;  
I know the technific terms for things very numerous:  
In short, in data structures, algorithms, and languages,  
I am the very model of a modern baccalaureate.

Chorus:

In short, in data structures, algorithms, and languages,

He is the very model of a modern baccalaureate.

Baccalaureate:

I know the classic games, from ro-o-ogue to moria;  
I answer challenge problems; I've a pretty taste for recursia;  
I quote, in great detail, all the flaws of frightful Windows;  
In tuning I can bring speedups incredibles;  
I can tell classic code from tha-at of a fre-eshman  
I know the tables ASCII and EBCDIC in base 10!  
Then I can tell a joke of which I've heard the theme afore,  
And recite all the words from the UL spam recipe!

Chorus:

And recite all the words from the UL spam recipe!  
And recite all the words from the UL spam recipe!  
And recite all the words from the UL spam recirecipe!

Baccalaureate:

Then I can write a rot-13 in x86 assembler,  
And tell you how to list a set's every member,  
In short, in data structures, algorithms, and languages,  
I am the very model of a modern baccalaureate.

Chorus:

In short, in data structures, algorithms, and languages,  
I am the very model of a modern baccalaureate.

Baccalaureate:

(Slowly)

In fact, when I know what is meant by "person" and "humanities",  
When I can tell at sight if someone's a smi-ilin' or a weepin',  
When such affairs as songs and friendship I kno-ow of,  
And when I know precisely what is meant by "sociology",  
When I guess what depth hides in real community,  
When I know more of French than a young boy watching tele-vee

In short, when I've a smattering of thoughts from the  
humanities—

(Vivace)

You'll say a better baccalaureate has never sat a gees—

Chorus:

You'll say a better baccalaureate has never sat a gees,

You'll say a better baccalaureate has never sat a gees,

You'll say a better baccalaureate has never sat a sat a gees,

Baccalaureate:

For my liberal arts knowledge, tho' I'm clever and intelligent,

Fails to include many things the most magnificent;

But still, in data structures, algorithms, and languages,

I am the very model of a modern baccalaureate.

Chorus:

But still, in data structures, algorithms, and languages,

He is the very model of a modern baccalaureate.

# Monarchy

I wanted to give a meditation on the mystical theology of kings and monarchs.

As a starting point, I would point out that bishops rightly wear the regalia of the Byzantine Emperor, and the government of the Orthodox Church is monarchical: her bishops are monarchs. And I would like to make a few observations about my own bishop, for whom I am grateful: His Grace Bishop Peter of Cleveland and Ohio (ROCOR). He offers a point of departure for understanding monarchy.

His Grace Bishop Peter's public bearing is quite regal, and he receives honor publicly. But privately he acts differently, and in quite the opposite way as a Hollywood celebrity who is sympathetic and modest in front of the camera and haughty in private. Quite the opposite, His Grace Bishop Peter is a monk, and like a good monk he tried to run away when he found out he was going to be made bishop. He sleeps in a chair, in a modest apartment. One gets the impression, not so much that he is a bishop, but that he is a monk fulfilling the obedience of serving as a bishop when he would rather live as a more ordinary monk—the kind of monk who may be the best kind of bishop!

All this is in accord with the *Philokalia*, which prescribes that monks who are in authority publicly act as their office requires,

but privately not see themselves as any greater than anyone else. Perhaps some may covet the office of bishop because they see in it a chance to see themselves as greater. But that is something that cannot exist. In a certain sense Bishop Peter's fine robes are meant for others to see and not him: I may admire how great he is, and be edified, but he may not do so, and it is spiritual poison if he does. There really is something great about being clergy, or bishop, or king, but that greatness should be invisible to the person in the office. It is a trustworthy saying, and worthy of all acceptance: "[Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.](#)" Being a bishop or king is no exemption to this rule; if anything, it is a greater demand. Being in office does not make it legitimate to see yourself as better; it just makes this spiritual poison harder to avoid and a greater threat. I may admire how fine His Grace Peter looks in his vestments, and be spiritually nourished by it, but to him it would be poison: there exists no legitimate spiritual license for self-admiration, not even if you are a bishop or a king!

I have coveted the status of being a knight; when Google AdWords advertised "English titles of nobility", I wish my eyes had not lingered. But this is folly. Wishing a title without responsibilities is like hoping to be married without a spouse. And I think that confusion is a sign of our times: perhaps people have always coveted honor, but if men covet honor when they are taught to be humble, what will they do when schools teach "self-esteem" and pastors encourage "Godly self-respect"? Now to enter a role of service, as servant leader, is another matter: ordination is not at its core about acquiring the honor of a title as entering a role of service (the whole "servant leadership"), and the title that is conferred is for the benefit of others; the honors conferred are a gift to those the candidate is to serve.

To be clergy or monarch is privilege, but the privilege is for others, not for oneself. The question, "Is the king for the kingdom, or the kingdom for the king?" is rhetorical: the king is for the kingdom. The reason the Orthodox practice is to have bishops selected from among monks is not an indictment of marriage; St. Peter the Apostle, the Rock upon whom Christ built his Church, had a mother-in-law, and every bishop today is less than him. That monks are to be chaste is one part of a deeper reality: a monk is to be a whole burnt offering without remainder, and the reality in the Orthodox Church is that married men may be among the clergy, but its highest rank in particular is chosen from the monks who are peculiarly called to die to the world and be a whole burnt offering without remainder.

[The Akathist to the Theotokos](#) tells of the Magi, "The sons of the Chaldees saw in the hands of the Virgin Him Who with His Hand made man. And knowing him to be the Master, even though He had taken the form of a servant, they hastened to serve Him with gifts, and to cry to Her Who is blessed... Rejoice, Thou Who didst enlighten the initiates of the Trinity!" There is a link here. The sons of the Chaldees came bearing gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Each of these gifts is an emblem: gold of royalty, frankincense of divinity, and myrrh of suffering or sacrifice. And in this trinity of gifts, you cannot rightly pick up one without picking up the others. Every Christian must bear his cross, and if you read the lives of the saints, those who are fragrant with Heaven's incense are fragrant after a life with deep suffering: they are fragrant with myrrh as sacrifices. And if the question is, "What is a king?" one answer would be, "One whose spirit is gold, but gold that is of one substance with frankincense and myrrh." It is confusion to want to be a king, but

have gold without myrrh. Better to recognize that kingship, divinity, and suffering are of the same substance as they appear in the great hymn to humility:

Let this mind be in you,  
Which was also in Christ Jesus:  
Who, being in the form of God,  
Thought it not robbery to be equal with God:  
But made himself of no reputation,  
And took upon him the form of a servant,  
And was made in the likeness of men:  
And being found in fashion as a man,  
He humbled himself,  
And became obedient unto death,  
Even the death of the cross.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him,  
And given him a name which is above every name:  
That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
Of things in heaven,  
And things in earth,  
And things under the earth;  
And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is  
Lord,  
To the glory of God the Father.

Here is humility. Here are gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

## Mystical theology to live out

There is something we are missing if we understand monarchy only as a system of government. The Orthodox Church has words about how oil is used to anoint kings and priests, but these words are from when all the faithful are summoned to be anointed in Holy Week. The image we are made in is not only divine: it is royal. Myrrh is the emblem of sacrifice, of human approach to the divine; oil is the emblem of the divine approach to humans, and it is no mistake that anointing chrism is for all Christians: from ancient times Christ, which is to say the Anointed One, was understood to be anointed with the sacred oil that made prophet, priest, and king. And from ancient times the Church sees that anointing as given to Christians too. It is fashionable to claim a Facebook profile religious affiliation that over-modestly says, "Follower of Jesus"; I have wished it would be appropriate to answer with a stated affiliation of, "Alter christus: 'follower of Jesus' means 'another Christ'!" But that could be over-forceful.

If we are kings, what are we kings of? One chief answer is that we are kings over our work. Whether we be working professionally, or homemaking, or learning how to grow up, or job hunting, or retired and volunteering, all of us are called to work and to work is to reign in the activity of the royal image.

Secondly, we are called to rule over ourselves in asceticism. The "Sol Invictus" claim of "I am the master of my fate, I am the master of my soul" is an obscene parody; in quite a different way, in the asceticism of our lives, God summons us to serve as bishop and monarch over ourselves and our passions, conquering them and ultimately being God's co-worker as they are transfigured. He who says "stewardship" says "royal reign": if we are to be careful stewards of our time, treasure, and talent, we are to reign faithfully in these, and in other areas of life, in our relationships and in our solitude, we are to reign. And this is real reign.

When I was a graduate student in theology, I winced when people tried to pay me a compliment by saying that by my obscure sources and scholarly rigor I had a real, serious understanding of the Bible, and they merely had a lightweight, devotional understanding of the Bible. I respected the humble appreciation, but this was an entirely backwards understanding. The Bible in its real and dynamic form is used liturgically and devotionally; my difficult scholarly commentaries had a place but were something dead compared to the living devotional use of the Bible. "In humility consider others better than yourself" is spiritually sound, but I winced that people could say that my academic exercises were serious Bible study and their devotional reading was second-rate and fluffy. And in like fashion, monarchy is misunderstood if it means only that one person out of many exercises a political reign. It is a basic spiritual reality, and God summons all of us to be prophet, priest, and monarch.

## A potent warning

I have written [elsewhere](#):

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

In our time and place, this warning is one well worth heeding.  
One poster I saw showed a picture of Hitler and said,  
"Politicians. The best argument for monarchy yet." I find it  
awfully hard to say that we live under an optimal government. But  
it's an impulse shared with a Western half-converter to organize  
a manifesto to restore monarchy. A manifesto is an axe to

depose kings; it is a fundamental error to try to approach monarchy through political activism as promulgated by the West for when you really care and want to make a difference. The fundamental error is almost:

**Category Mistake**, n. An assumption embodied in an inappropriate question, inquiring about an undefined attribute, such as, "Is yellow square or round?", "Is the doctrine of the Trinity calm or excited?", or "What was the point of that speech?"

To those who are convinced that kingship is ordained by God, I would recall Christ's sharp question: "Which is greater, the gold of the temple, or the temple which makes that gold sacred?" The gold of earthly kingdoms may be sacred as liberal inventions are not. But the temple of the Kingdom of Heaven is greater, and that is a Kingdom that is established in us. Perhaps it is best to have both the gold and the temple that makes the gold sacred, but that does not mean we should leave the temple so we can bring some gold to be made sacred in it. The [Sermon on the Mount](#) bids us, impels us, commands us, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." If there is to be a God-ordained restoration of monarchy, it will be one of "all these things" that "shall be added unto you." It is a matter of "Save thyself, and ten thousand around thee will be saved." If you leave this to be practical, you are picking up an axe that cannot but lay waste when its backswing hits.

There may be said to be two archetypes, the saint and the activist. The saint lives to contemplate God; even if this means a life of asceticism (as one monk described monastic life, "We fall and

get up, fall and get up, fall and get up,"), and never reach contemplation in its pure sense, laity in the world live for contemplation. By contrast, the activist lives to change the world, and the activist impulse is like a hydra: cut it off once, and it resurfaces in two other places. But it is not lawful to Orthodox. Many Orthodox saints have changed the world, but this was only because their goal was the goal of contemplation. Orthodoxy has no saying, with the activist, of "Try to make a plan a reality, and you may save ten thousand people." She only says, and can say, "Save yourself, and ten thousand around you will be saved:" Orthodoxy is not served by the activist, only by the saint.

And be advised that *the wicked axe, ever damned, works just as well when people try to recover past glory as when people try to create something new.* The Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, neo-Paganism, are but reincarnations of one single phenomenon: people trying to recover long past glory, break off continuities with the immediate past, and separate themselves in a schism further from the recent and ancient past alike. If you reconstruct monarchy, be ready for a backswing that will leave a society further, not closer, to the glory of human monarchy.

But there is another option. Save thyself, and *God will change the game.*

# The Monastery

It was late in the day, and my feet were hurting.

I had spent the past three hours on the winding path up the foothills, and you will excuse me if I was not paying attention to the beauty around me.

I saw it, and then wondered how I had not seen it—an alabaster palace rising out of the dark rock around it, hidden in a niche as foothill became mountain. After I saw it, I realized—I could not tell if the plants around me were wild or garden, but there was a grassy spot around it. Some of my fatigue eased as I looked into a pond and saw koi and goldfish swimming.

I looked around and saw the Gothic buildings, the trees, the stone path and walkways. I was beginning to relax, when I heard a voice say, "Good evening," and looked, and realized there was a man on the bench in front of me.

He was wearing a grey-green monk's robe, and cleaning a gun. He looked at me for a moment, tucked the gun into a shack, and welcomed me in.

Outside, the sun was setting. At the time, I thought of the last rays of the dying sun—but it was not that, so much as day giving birth to night. We passed inside to a hallway, with wooden chairs and a round wooden table. It seemed brightly enough lit, if by torchlight.

My guide disappeared into a hallway and returned with two

my guide disappeared into a hallway, and returned with two silver chalices, and set one before me. He raised his chalice, and took a sip.

The wine was a dry white wine—refreshing and cold as ice. It must have gone to my head faster than I expected; I gave a long list of complaints, about how inaccessible this place was, and how hard the road. He listened silently, and I burst out, "Can you get the master of this place to come to me? I need to see him personally."

The servant softly replied, "He knows you are coming, and he will see you before you leave. In the mean time, may I show you around his corner of the world?"

I felt anger flaring within me; I am a busy man, and do not like to waste my time with subordinates. If it was only one of his underlings who would be available, I would have sent a subordinate myself. As I thought this, I was surprised to hear myself say, "Please."

We set down the chalices, and started walking through a maze of passageways. He took a small oil lamp, one that seemed to burn brightly, and we passed through a few doors before stepping into a massive room.

The room blazed with intense brilliance; I covered my eyes, and wondered how they made a flame to burn so bright. Then I realized that the chandeliers were lit with incandescent light.

The shelves had illuminated manuscripts next to books with plastic covers—computer science next to bestiaries. My guide went over by one place, tapped with his finger—and I realized that he was at a computer.

Perhaps reading the look on my face, my guide told me, "The master uses computers as much as you do. Do you need to check your e-mail?"

I asked. "Why are there torches in the room you left me in.

and electric light here?"

He said, "Is a person not permitted to use both? The master, as you call him, believes that technology is like alcohol—good within proper limits—and not something you have to use as much as you can. There are electric lights here because their brilliance makes reading easier on the eyes. Other rooms have torches, or nothing at all, because a flame has a different meaning, one that we prefer. Never mind; I can get you a flashlight if you like. Oh, and you can take off your watch now. It won't work here."

"It won't work? Look, it keeps track of time to the second, and it is working as we speak!"

The man studied my watch, though I think he was humoring me, and said, "It will give a number as well here as anywhere else. But that number means very little here, and you would do just as well to put it in your pocket."

I looked at my watch, and kept it on. He asked, "What time is it?"

I looked, and said, "19:58."

"Is that all?"

I told him the seconds, and then the date and year, and added, "But it doesn't feel like the 21st century here." I was beginning to feel a little nervous.

He said, "What century do you think it is here?"

I said, "Like a medieval time that someone's taken a scissors to. You have a garden with perfect gothic architecture, and you in a monk's robe, holding an expensive-looking rifle. And a computer in a library that doesn't even try to organize books by subject or time."

I looked around on the wall, and noticed a hunting trophy. Or at least that's what I took it for at first. There was a large shield-shaped piece of wood, such as would come with a beautiful

stag—but no animal's head. Instead, there were hundreds upon hundreds of bullet holes in the wood—enough that the wood should have shattered. I walked over, and read the glass plate: "This magnificent deer shot 1-4-98 in Wisconsin with an AK-47. God bless the NRA."

I laughed a minute, and said, "What is this doing in here?"

The servant said, "What is anything doing here? Does it surprise you?"

I said, "From what I have heard, the master of this place is very serious about life."

My guide said, "Of course he is. And he cherishes laughter."

I looked around a bit, but could not understand why the other things were there—only be puzzled at how anyone could arrange a computer and other oddments to make a room that felt unmistakably medieval. Or was it? "What time is it here? To you?"

My guide said, "Every time and no time. We do not measure time by numbers here; to the extent that time is 'measured', we 'measure' by what fills it—something qualitative and not quantitative. Your culture measures a place's niche in history by how many physical years have passed before it; we understand that well enough, but we reckon time, not by its place in the march of seconds, but by the content of its character. You may think of this place as medieval if you want; others view it as ancient, and not a small part is postmodern—more than the computer is contemporary."

I looked at my watch. Only five minutes had passed. I felt frustration and puzzlement, and wondered how long this could go on.

"When can we move on from here?"

"When you are ready. You aren't ready yet."

I looked at my watch. Not even ten seconds had passed. The

second hand seemed to be moving very slowly.

I felt something moving in the back of my mind, but I tried to push it back. The second hand continued on its lazy journey, and then—I took off my watch and put it in my pocket.

My guide stood up and said, "Walk this way, please."

He led me to a doorway, opening a door, and warning me not to step over the threshold. I looked, and saw why—there was a drop of about a foot, into a pool of water. The walls were blue, and there was sand at the far end. Two children—a little boy and a little girl—were making sand castles.

He led me through the mazelike passages to rooms I cannot describe. One room had mechanical devices in all stages of assembly and disassembly. Another was bare and clean. The kitchen had pepperoni and peppers hanging, and was filled with an orange glow that was more than torchlight. There was a deserted classroom filled with flickering blue light, and then we walked into a theatre.

The chamber was small, and this theatre had more than the usual slanted floor. The best way I could describe it is to say that it was a wall, at times vertical, with handholds and outcroppings. There were three women and two men on the stage, but not standing—or sitting, for that matter. They were climbing, shifting about as they talked.

I could not understand their language, but there was something about it that fascinated me. I was surprised to find myself listening to it. I was even more surprised to realize that, if I could not understand the words, I could no less grasp the story. It was a story of friendship, and there is something important in that words melted into song, and climbing into dance.

I watched to the end. The actors and actresses did not

disappear backstage, but simply climbed down into the audience, and began talking with people. I could not tell if the conversation was part of the act, or if they were just seeing friends. I wondered if it really made any difference—and then realized, with a flash, that I had caught a glimpse into how this place worked.

When I wanted to go, the servant led me to a room filled with pipes. He cranked a wheel, and I heard gears turning, and began to see the jet black keys of an organ. He played a musical fragment; it sounded incomplete.

He said, "Play."

I closed my eyes and said, "I don't know how to play any instrument."

He repeated the fragment and said, "That doesn't matter. Play."

There followed a game of question and answer—he would improvise a snatch of music, and I would follow. I would say that it was beautiful, but I couldn't really put it that way. It would be better to say that his music was mediocre, and mine didn't quite reach that standard.

We walked out into a cloister. I gasped. There was a sheltered pathway around a grassy court and a pool stirred by fish. It was illumined by moon and star, and the brilliance was dazzling.

We walked around, and I looked. In my mind's eye I could see white marble statues of saints praying—I wasn't sure, but I made up my mind to suggest that to the master. After a time we stopped walking on the grass, and entered another door. Not too far into the hallway, he turned, set the oil lamp into a small alcove, and began to rise up the wall. Shortly before disappearing into the blackness above, he said, "Climb."

I learn a little, I think. I did not protest; I put my hands and feet on the wall, and felt nothing. I leaned against it, and felt something give way—something yielding to give a handhold. Then I started climbing. I fell a couple of times, but reached the shadows where he disappeared. He took me by the hand and began to lead me along a path.

I could feel a wall on either side, and then nothing, save his hand and my feet. Where was I? I said, "I can't see!"

A woman's voice said, "No one can see here. Eyes aren't needed." I felt an arm around my waist, and a gentle squeeze.

I felt that warmth, and said, "I came to this place because I wanted to see the master of this house, and I wanted to see him personally. Now—I am ready to leave without seeing him. I have seen enough, and I no longer want to trouble him."

I felt my guide's hand on my shoulder, and heard his voice as he said, "You have seen me personally, and you are not troubling me. You are here at my invitation. You will always be welcome here."

When I first entered the house, I would have been stunned. Now, it seemed the last puzzle piece in something I had been gathering since I started hiking.

The conversation was deep, and I cannot tell you what was said. I don't mean that I forgot it—I remember it clearly enough. I don't really mean that it would be a breach of confidence—it might be that as well. What I mean is that there was something special in that room, and it would not make much sense to you even if I could explain it. If I were to say that we talked in a room without light, where you had to feel around to move about—it would be literally true, but beside the point. When I remember the room, I do not think about what wasn't

there, but what was there. I was glad I took off my watch—but I cannot say why. The best thing I can say is that if you can figure out how a person could be aware of a succession of moments, and at the same time have time sense that is not entirely linear—or at very least not just linear—you have a glimpse of what I found in that room.

We talked long, and it was late into the next day when I got up from a perfectly ordinary guestroom, packed, and left. I put on my watch, returned to my business, and started working on the backlog of invoices and meetings that accumulated in my absence. I'm still pretty busy, but I have never left that room.

# Money

Today the biggest symbol of evil is Hitler or Naziism; there is almost no bigger insult than calling someone a Nazi or a comparison to Hitler. The Old Testament's symbol of evil that did the same job was a city in which the Lord God of Hosts could not find fifty righteous, nor forty-five, nor forty, nor thirty, nor twenty, nor even ten righteous men. It was the city on which fire and brimstone rained down from Heaven in divine wrath until smoke arose as from a gigantic furnace. It was, in short, the city of Sodom.

Ezekiel has some remarks about Sodom's sin that might surprise you. Ezekiel 16:49 says, This was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, more than enough food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.

These are far from the only stinging words the Bible says to rich people who could care for the poor and do not do so. Jesus said something that could better be translated, "It is easier for a rope to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God." (Mark 10:25). It would take hours or perhaps days to recite everything blunt the Bible says about wealth, if even I could remember so much.

But who are the rich? The standard American answer is, "People who have more money than I do," and the standard

American answer is wrong. It takes too much for granted. Do you want to know how special it is, worldwide, to be able to afford meat for every meal you want it and your Church permits it? Imagine saying "We're not rich; we just have Champagne and lobster every day." That's what it means for even poorer Americans to say "We're not rich, just a bit comfortable." The amount of money that America spends on weight loss products each year costs more than it would cost to feed the hungry worldwide. When Ezekiel says that "your sister Sodom" had more than enough food but did not care for the poor, he is saying something that has every relevance to us if we also fail to care for the poor.

I would be remiss not to mention the Sermon on the Mount here, because the Sermon on the Mount explains something we can miss (Matt 6:19-21,24-33):

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also... No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Do you think that by worrying you can add a single

hour to your life? You might as well try to make yourself a foot taller! And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the Kingdom of God and his perfect righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

This includes a hard saying about wealth, but it is not only a hard saying about wealth, but an invitation to joy. "Do not store up treasures on earth but store up treasures in Heaven" is a command to exchange lead for gold and have true wealth. It is an invitation to joy, and it is no accident that these sharp words about Money lead directly into the Bible's central text on why we never need to worry.

Elsewhere we read, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions," (Luke 12:15), which is not a statement that spiritual people can rise so high that their lives aren't measured by possessions. It is about everybody, great and small. If money doesn't make you happy this is not something specially true about spiritual people; it's something that's true of everybody. But Jesus's entire point is to direct us to what our life does consist in. The words about storing up treasures in Heaven prepare us for the "Therefore I tell you," and an invitation to live a life that is fuller, richer, more vibrant,

deeper, more alive, more radiant with the light of Heaven than we can possibly arrange through wealth.

What will we leave behind if we spend less on ourselves? Will we leave behind the Lord's providence, or hugs, or friendship, or banter, or worship, or the Church, or feasting? Will we leave behind the love of the Father, or Christ as our High Priest, or the Spirit? Will we be losing a Heaven whose beginning is here and now, or will we be pulling out our right hands and our right eyes? If it seems that way, we may adapt C.S. Lewis to say that living the life of Heaven through our finances today may seem like it will cost our right hand and our right eye, or in today's words an arm and a leg, but once we have taken that plunge, we will discover that what we have left behind is precisely nothing.

Or perhaps we could say that we are leaving behind a false Savior who never delivers, but only distracts us from the true Savior in Christ, and the treasure that is ours when we lay our treasures at his feet.

Is there a luxury you could give up in this invitation to joy?

# The Most Politically Incorrect Sermon in History

*A Commentary on the  
Sermon on the Mount*

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

"Blessed are the poor in spirit:" here begin the Beatitudes, a ladder reaching to the expanse of Heaven.

Poor in spirit was the Theotokos whose scandalous pregnancy helped prepare the way for the scandal of the cross. Poor and humble in spirit was the one who humbly prayed [the doxology](#), [the Magnificat](#):

My soul doth magnify the Lord,  
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.  
For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:  
For, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me  
blessed.  
For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy  
is his name.  
And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to  
generation

generation.

He hath shewed strength with his arm;  
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their  
hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seats,  
and exalted them of low degree.

He hath filled the hungry with good things;  
and the rich he hath sent empty away.

To be poor and humble in spirit is the first rung on a ladder  
that climbs to Heaven.

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

This life was given to us for repentance. Repentance is  
terrifying as a prospect; it seems like mournfully letting go of  
something we must have. Then when we let go, we find ourselves  
in a space more spacious than the Heavens, and realize, "I was  
holding on to a piece of Hell!"

To those who mourn their sins, who cry out for mercy, Christ  
answers by pouring out mercy and comforting them. But it is  
nonsense to expect such comfort without mourning; comfort is  
the fruit that men eat when they have planted it as a seed of  
mourning. And the fruit would have no taste to one who had not  
done the work of planting the seeds. Heaven offers nothing the  
mercenary soul can desire, and the Fire of Hell is itself the Light  
of Heaven as it is experienced through the rejection of the only  
Joy that we can have: Christ himself.

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

One person I heard years ago said that the term "meek" in  
Greek was a term one would use of a horse that for all its  
strength was under disciplined control, and so to be "meek" was  
power under control. And that reading, however good or bad it

may be from a scholarly perspective, is spiritual poison: it castrates the words that are meant to be an insult to our pride.

Part of what is not communicated clearly is that a "meek" horse was under disciplined control from another; from its rider: a meek horse was not exceptionally good at marching to the beat of a different drummer! **A meek horse, like you or me, is under authority, under headship, and to be meek is defined by that headship.** And this unfolds in showing meekness before others: the Lord was meek before his accusers because he was meek to his Father and Head. The meekness we are meant to have has an aspect of discipline, even power, but it is neither ungrounded nor headless; it reflects the headship of Christ and others over us.

The Sermon on the Mount is intended to build power in the reader; but part of this power is the power of humility, and to be able to interpret "Blessed are the meek" without seeing a challenge to one's pride is poison. One time I confessed pride in my intelligence, and the priest told me quite emphatically, "The only true intelligence is humility!" Humility is the mortar that holds together all spiritual bricks and stones, the virtues in the spiritual life and the Sermon on the Mount. And we need the humbling spiritual training ground of meekness if we are going to get anywhere. Crediting ourselves with "strength under control" is worthless, penny wise and pound foolish, or worse.

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

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for what is truly good for them: for they shall be satisfied.

The Greek term translated 'blessed' at one stroke means both happy and blessed. So this beatitude could be rephrased, "Blessed are those who seek for the only happiness there is; for they will be satisfied. (Others who seek happiness in the wrong

places can never be satisfied, even if they find it: "Two great tragedies in life: not to find one's heart's desire, and to find it," applies to that case.)

**Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.**

Here and now I would underscore something that may not have needed such emphasis in other times: the word translated "mercy" refers both to God's love, in "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," or giving money. St. John the Merciful and [St. Philaret the Merciful](#) are both called merciful because they are generous to those who beg them.

Now here I am entering a controversial point because many people say that it does no true help to give money to a beggar; and this is not simply an excuse of stinginess. You will hear this argument being made by people who work in soup kitchens and really care about the poor. And I would more pointedly bring something from a conversation with a friend, after we had given some money to a beggar and he quoted an anecdote where two friends were walking, one of them gave a little money to a beggar, and the other said afterwards, "You realize that he'd have probably drunk it?" and the first answered, "Yes, but if I'd have kept I'd have probably drunk it," and I stridently objected to this anecdote. I told him that I would have no qualms about buying my next drink, or my friend's next drink, but I would have every objection to buying the next drink for a pastor we both loved, who was an alcoholic: perhaps he had been stone cold sober for decades, but he was an alcoholic and I saw nothing good in giving him his next drink.

With that stated, all Orthodox priests I've heard on the topic say that you give something to beggars. Money. Not very much, necessarily, an amount that is entirely within your power. But it is worth considering carrying a pouch for change to give.

Maybe it would also make sense to give fresh oranges or clementines (don't give apples; people who have lost teeth have trouble with them), or chocolates. But when you give a beggar money, you are treating that person as a moral agent made in the image of God, and if he uses it wrongly, you have no more sinned than God has sinned by giving you blessings that you use wrongly.

But in any show mercy and give something, with a kind look, as well as being merciful in other areas of your life, and you will be shown mercy in the more serious areas of your own life.

Be faithful to your neighbor in little, and God will be faithful to you in much. Be merciful to your neighbor in little, and God will be merciful to you in much. (Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.)

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

Blessed are those who seek what they ought to seek, for they will receive it.

The saints shall see God: saint and sinner alike shall see the Uncreated Light which shone on Mount Tabor. God is Light; he cannot but shine, and can only shine in fulness, for every creature, for the saved and for the damned. Then why say, "Blessed are the pure in heart" as if they alone will see God?

The answer is that the pure in heart will see God in their ultimate triumph, while the impure will see God in their ultimate defeat. God cannot do anything but shine in his Light; creatures cannot be happy, blessedly happy, except that they see this light. Now it may only be a mediated, dimmed, filtered, metaphorical sight of God who is Uncreated Light, but still: blessedness is the only entryway to happiness. (If in fact they really are two different things.)

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

In English, "peace" often means the absence of violence, though something that is soothing may be called "peaceful." In Hebrew and in Greek, the defining characteristic is not the absence of violence, but a state of well-being where love is manifest. The predominant, though not exclusive, sense is of divine blessing. One may be a peacemaker by quelling violence, but the broader sense is a way of life where divine love is manifest.

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

We are entering a time of trial, when darkness rises. When I was a boy it seemed obvious to me that I had good chances of living to a ripe old age. Now it seems much more possible that I may endure persecution at least. Or at least face persecution; I would compare myself to a poorly trained soldier on the eve of a battle. But the stronger persecutions get, the more powerfully some of these passages speak. The Sermon on the Mount was not given to people whose lives would be comfort and ease. The Sermon on the Mount was given to people where persecution was a fact of life, and this beatitude has good news: persecution for righteousness' sake is the privilege of the Kingdom of Heaven.

We know enough of earthly privileges: a car, a big house, the respect of others. But persecution for righteousness' sake is not meaningless; it is the token by which saints are given the Kingdom of Heaven.

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

In Hebrew, to repeat an adjective three times is to give

superlative force: in [Isaiah 6](#), the seraphs call to each other, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of Hosts." Here we have the same beatitude repeated three times in three wordings. The point is emphasized. The first time, Christ says, "Blessed are they..." as it speaking of others. Now he says, "Blessed are ye..." and addresses us directly. He strengthens those who will be persecuted for the sake of righteousness, and underscores the heavenly privilege of being "counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" ([Acts 5:41](#)).

Persecution and defamation are how the world heralds true sons of God. Satan is the ultimate sore loser, and these blows struck from below acknowledge that one is ascending into Heaven.

**Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.**

During one scandal about baseball players abusing steroids, the question was raised of what a terrible example these athletes were to younger kids looking up to them as role models. Some had the audacity to protest, "But I never tried or sought out to be a role model," and other people said, "Sorry, buddy, you are. The question is not whether an athlete like you is a role model. The question is whether an athlete like you is a good role model, or a bad role model. You are a role model."

The Sermon on the Mount does not say that if we are very

holy we may become the salt of the earth and the light of the world; it says that we are, fullstop. We can lose our saltiness and become worthless as salt; but the question is not whether we are holy enough to be salt of the earth and light of the world. We aren't, but that's beside the point. The only question is whether we exercise this role well or poorly.

**Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.**

**Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.**

Christ changes things, but if you think he is a way to dodge the hard parts of the Law, you have another think coming.

The story of the woman at the well is a story where shame loomed large. The woman came to draw water alone because she had a terrible reputation, and when Christ announced living water, she sought his help running for her shame. [Read her story](#); Christ offers no help in escaping her shame, but instead pulls her through her shame to the other side, when she ran through the village, freed from her shame, announcing, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did!"

If we seek Christ to provide an easy way out of the hard parts of the Law, we seek the impossible.

But Christ can pull us through to the other side.

**Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou**

shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

These are strong words, and if you ask if this is an example of "hyperbole", then if you mean by "hyperbole" a way to dodge their force, then no, they are not hyperbole.

Some of the Fathers look for a more than literal sense:

"Agree with thine adversary quickly" does not refer to a man, but our ever-accusing conscience. And though few have had spine enough to leave a gift before an altar, we offer wrongly if we go to the altar without first coming terms with the other person.

More broadly, these words are not an exaggeration of "First things first." These words are forceful at a point where the truth is forceful, and we gain something when we look for, not less than these words would appear to offer, but more. For one example, when we have offended another person, the wrong thing to do is hope it will go away, hope that if you forget about the whole deal the other person will to. You are in their eyes as one justly in prison, and will remain so until you have made amends,

and that to the uttermost farthing: "almost satisfied" is a very bad resting place.

Even when there was no question of conflict, the principle applies. One of my responsibilities as a web designer at my university was to take portraits of faculty members, and you could tell the difference between when a professor was happy with a picture, and when she was almost happy with the picture.

There were times when a professor was almost happy and thoughtfully talked about wrapping up the photo shoot and moving on, and that was an ending I avoided like the bubonic plague. I would rather spend a full hour shooting photos to get one the professor was happy with, and have both of us walk away happy, than have the professor decide, "I've taken enough of your time," and walk away almost happy. In practice it never took anywhere near an hour, but better devote an hour to getting the other person happy, to the uttermost farthing, and both walk away happy, than say, "Well, I suppose this is good enough."

Better to pay the uttermost farthing.

**Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.**

This being commentary on the world's most politically incorrect sermon, perhaps it might be appropriate to give a few words here on unnatural vice.

In one sense sin and vice are never natural. But there are vices that are unnatural, such as (among sexual vices) contraception. To people who find that identification of unnatural vice, I extend an invitation to read [Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article](#), in which I tear to shreds the article that

defined the (hotly contested) "new consensus" that contraception is permissible to Orthodox provided you follow a few guidelines.

There is a shift between patristic times and our day; it may well be that an Orthodox monk in America interacts more with women than a married Orthodox Christian in patristic times. The old rule was, "Don't go to your wife unless you're going to her to try to make a baby." And over time this harsh position has been progressively softened, and an **I would be overstepping to suggest a reconstitution of the ancient rule.** But there has been a progression over history; once people changed their minds and said that it is permissible to have sex during the infertile period despite the infertility to such acts, to some saying that it is permissible to limit sex to the infertile period in order to enjoy sex without the encumbrance of fertility. **We have no entitlements,** but we believe we are entitled to the pleasure of sex without the encumbrance of fertility. And in recent years we have pursued this sexual perversion further, and a man who has trouble getting it up once is entitled to ED drugs. Far from a St. Maximus Confessor who regarded the pleasure of sex as not spiritually helpful and regarded sex as wrong when a man approached a woman other than his wife or approached his wife for a purpose other than conceiving a child, we understand sex as good in terms of being a potent "pleasure delivery system." **And, pop culture notwithstanding, we don't need a pleasure delivery system.** It is almost an act of counterculture for Orthodox Christians to refuse to practice more unnatural vice than the Greeks of Foucault's History of Sexuality, where one philosopher was asked, "How often should I have sex?" and gave the answer, "As often as you wish to deplete your energy." It's not just that ancient Orthodoxy exercised a tad bit more self-

control in sex than we do; queer Greek philosophers were also just a little more self-restrained than us.

And a note to those anticipating at least a mention of queer sexuality, I will say this. Hillsboro Baptist Church may be Christianity's greatest gift to queer advocacy yet. It spares gays the trouble of wondering whether a God who loves gays infinitely, and a God who wants far better than gay acts for them, might be one and the same God. Before trying to straighten out queers, we might work on straightening those who appear straight.

**And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.**

In ancient times the concensus was that this cannot be taken literally. If you sin with your right eye and pluck it out, you will go on sinning with your left eye. Furthermore, when a man decided to cut off the problem at its root, the Council condemned self-castration.

However, the fact that these words cannot be literal does not mean that they cannot be true. In ascetical

**Once a great teacher and a truth-seeker were standing in a river. The teacher asked the student, "What do you want?" The truth-seeker said, "Truth."**

Then the teacher plunged the student under the water, and let him up and asked him, "What do you want?" The student said, "Truth!" Then the teacher held the student's head under the water, and the student struggled and struggled, and

struggle, there will be some sin, some thing to which one is attached in passion, that it seems we cannot live without. To give it up would be to tear out our right eye or right hand. But the Lord tells us: "Tear out your right eye and your right hand and be free," and we must cut off our own damnation. Never mind that afterwards we realize that we were afraid of letting go of Hell; never mind that once we have torn out our right eye cut off our right hand we find that we have our right eye and our right hand now more than ever: if cutting off our right hand is the price of freedom, cut it off.

And to pick a salient example: if you are one of many men who does not benefit from having a porn delivery service attached to your computer, cut off the sewer of pornography at whatever level necessary to be free. Censorware exists; not wanting to have to bring a sin to confession exists. Canceling internet service and checking email at libraries is better than having full internet access and taking that path all the way to Hell.

**It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.**

Marriage is permanent. Civil divorce exists, and the great mercies of Orthodox oikonomia extend to allowing a second or third marriage after divorce, even if they make clear that this is

finally the teacher let him up and asked him, "What do you want?" The student gasped, "Air!!!" Then the teacher said, "When you want truth the way you want air, you will find it."

The same thing goes for freedom from porn!

oikonomia. But even with divorce in the picture, marriage is indelible: to put it bluntly, when two divorced people sleep together, there are four people in the bed.

But there is another point to be made: the place of marriage, that is real, full, true marriage in the world today is almost like the place of monasticism in the desert in days past. One monk in the Philokalia wrote that the things that are successes for a man in the world are failures to the monk, and the things that are successes to a monk are failures to a man in the world. A man in the world wants a fine reputation and places of honor, a beautiful wife and fine children, a magnificent and luxurious house, to be able to have his way in what happens, etc. And all of these are ruin to the monk. For the monk, success consists in living in obedience and receiving painful commands, having a spartan cell, enduring shame and dishonor, being cut off from his kin, and so on. And if this happens to the man in the world, some have committed suicide. And there is something strikingly similar, spookily similar, with the faithful married life in the world and classical monasticism.

If we ask what is success in the world as a whole, it is sampling various world spiritualities, having a nice car and house, being able to buy the things you see advertised, and so on and so forth. And not all of these are ruin for faithful married life in the world, but at least the price tags are switched. To faithful married life in the world, doing some nice family activity every week, or even just doing chores together, is much better than two high paying jobs and a nanny. A family presumably means some income, but the faithful living married life in the world are probably not going to be good enough at running the rat race to have much more money than they need (and if they are faithful, they will be more likely to open their hands). None of this is

technically a monk's "vow of poverty," but between inflation, low income, and debt, the family may have a "virtual vow of poverty." People in times before have said that marriage and monasticism are two different and possibly opposite ways to reach the same goal, ultimately a goal of living out of love for God. But that's a decoy to my point here. My point here is that compared to the success and standards of the world around us, faithful married life in the world starts to look a whole lot like monasticism and not much at all like people who look to Starbuck's and yoga, perhaps also serial monogamy, to fill their deepest needs.

Marriage is given attention in the quite short Sermon on the Mount, and its sanctity is underscored by underscoring its permanence. Especially today, we should give marriage something of the recognition we give monasticism.

**Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.**

**But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.**

To abolish oaths is to make every statement an oath. An oath is specially sanctioned; by saying "You know I am telling truth because I am swearing," you implicitly say, "This needed because I were not to swear it might be OK for me to lie."

God swears in the Bible, and St. Paul's letters contain much swearing, or language that is close to swearing, but none the less it is not only the radical Reformers' fixation on the Sermon on the Mount that rejected swearing: an Athonite monk refused to

swear in court and went, uncomplainingly, through a four month jail term and said, "It may seem a small matter to you, but we recognize something real and important in it." And, I would expect, truthfulness was enough of this monk's character that to him every statement was made as if it were an oath.

There is also a second layer, which might be put as follows: "Swear even by your head? Guarantee that something will happen? Do you have any idea that you might not wake up tomorrow, that any number of things might change about your circumstances? Don't you understand that you cannot make one single hair white or black?"

**Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.**

**And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?**

**Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.**

Is there a just war? No and never; Orthodox soldiers who kill in war must do penance. The treasury of Orthodox saints includes mighty warriors like St. George, and passion-bearers like the princes Boris and Gleb who allowed themselves to be murdered by wicked rulers usurping their throne. But even St. George did not defend himself from being martyred.

But the point here is not overstated; if anything, it is understated. It may or may not be right to defend oneself, one's loved ones, one's country, by force of arms. There may be oikonomia, leniency, to defend oneself by force even though it injures others' bodies. But the Christ before Pilate not only did not defend himself by violence; he did not resist evil even by words. And Orthodox tradition has picked up on this and said that monks are to remain silent before their accusers and not even defend themselves by words. And it is a strange thing to say that we may never injure another's body to defend ourselves; it is beyond strange to say we may not defend ourselves even by healing another's understanding. But let us recall Christ on trial. Christ did not do what was expected, make any defense against the many allegations brought before him; his entire passion is a living exposition of the claim, "My kingdom is not of this world." And this is not just that Christ's disciples did not defend him beyond cutting off Malchus' ear (whom Christ healed), but there is something positive we will forever miss if we say that in the ideal we may not defend ourselves even by trying to heal the poison others hold in their mind when they accuse us.

When Christ had refused to play along with the Sanhedrin, the astonished Pilate asked him, "Don't you know I have the power to crucify you or to free you?" Or, to paraphrase, "Don't you see that I have all the cards in my hand, and you have none?"

And Pilate was terrified as their exchange unfolded; Christ made no effort to free himself and Pilate did not know what power he was dealing with but knew that he was dealing with a power next to which his power, his pomp, his authority was but dust and ashes. Pontius Pilate sensed that he was a chintzy wooden puppet king passing judgment on the first real man he'd met. After then, Christ was crucified, but the grave was not big enough to hold him, and is the grave, not Christ, that lost in the exchange. In the Resurrection of Christ, when the Devil appeared to have managed a decisive and final victory, "God the Game Changer" trumpeted, "Checkmate!"

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And here we come to something politically incorrect enough that most readers will read the text and be blithely unaware of it. It doesn't even show up as a blip on the radar.

Perhaps the best way to portray it, or at least the best I can find, is to portray two archetypes, the archetypes of the Saint and the Activist, which define a polarity. The Saint, as I use the term here, consists mostly of people who will never see canonization as formal saints, and the Activist includes mostly people who don't think of themselves as activists, not any more than people who use cars, trains, busses, and airplanes think of themselves as "motor vehicle enthusiasts." The Activist prays, if anything, "Lord, help me change the world," and is concerned with the sewer of problems in the world around. The saint prays, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," and is concerned with the sewer of problems within. (G.K. Chesterton won an essay contest, and also wrote the shortest letter to the editor on record, answered the question, "What is wrong with the world?" with a Saint's, "Sir, I am.") The Saint may end up changing the world; in the end the Saint will end up changing the world, but that must never be his goal. "Save yourself, and ten thousand around you will be saved," is not about the need to straighten out ten thousand people, but the need to straighten out one, and the one person you may least wish to correct. The Activist says, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." The Saint says, "[Be it unto me according to thy word;](#)" Could any difference be greater?

Since the Catholic Church, one could say, self-amputated from Orthodoxy in 1054, East and West have been separated by a growing chasm, and in an inconsistency I will use 'East' to refer to the Eastern Orthodox Church (though, in this regard, it

shares much with Hinduism, (more subtly) Islam, Jainism, etc.), while by 'West' I refer to the broader Western society and specifically include elements that the Roman Catholic Church played no part in. There is a reason for this inconsistency in that the fall of the Roman Church deprived the West of a vital nutrient, however I am simply choosing terms inconsistently to best illuminate something.

In the West, the figure of the Renaissance magus looms large and still has a shadow today: job ads I see calling for an Ajax ninja or a Rails rockstar echo the Renaissance magus. The Eastern figure was the humble member of a community, one strand of an intricately woven web, relating to society, culture, and the Church as one relates to a mother. But the Renaissance magus, besides freely engaging the occult, stood over and against society, and regarded one's culture as a sort of a despicable raw material that would gain value only insofar as one would transform it to something better. And this attitude represented a novelty, or at least an aberration, to Orthodoxy. It would come across a bit like telling the mother who gave you birth, "You know, I don't like the way your body is arranged. You have one arm more than you need; we can consolidate the musculature to give you a much stronger arm, and move your fingers to your feet so that you can easily use your feet to pick things up. And your present skin color is not nearly so beautiful as the royal purple with which I would see you adorned; you should go through the pain of a whole-body tattoo so that your skin may be regal in its color. And I would like to rearrange a few things inside." And did I mention that the Renaissance magi claimed equality to Christian saints, saying that the Renaissance magus and the Christian saint were two sides of the same coin?

The Renaissance magus left several strands that are part of the West, and I am not here talking about increasing interest in the occult. I would recall one class where the admittedly flaming liberal professor introduced the topic of "autism and advocacy," finding it patently obvious that if you care about people on the spectrum, "care" translates immediately to political activism.

One of the articles she had chosen was surprisingly a Saint talking about the asceticism of love, the spiritual discipline, of living as a father to an autistic child and facing parenting issues that simply don't come up with autism-normal children. But to an Activist, the obvious response to the autism spectrum, if you have a heart, is political advocacy. But that isn't really from the heart, because Activism is from a head severed from the heart. The response that had a heart was the one she was blind to even as she assigned it: the struggle of a father, in the concrete, to love and care for a highly autistic child. This heart had no grand schemes to transform society, even on a smaller level; it was just exercising a Saint's love and care in whatever concrete situation one is in. Including having a child and discovering that he had some unusual needs and would take a lot of love to care for.

The Activist looms large; it looms large enough that not only do liberals pursue advocacy of liberal agendas, but many conservatives shuffle a few things around and pursue advocacy of a few conservative agendas. This may seem strange enough to say, but I wince at some of the conservative, Christian pro-life advocacy I have seen, because it takes the framework of a liberal activist and fills in the blanks with something conservative instead of something liberal. Being pro-life is an area where political Activism can only take you so far: you cannot reach its heart, until you enter the process of becoming a Saint.

The Saint turns the other cheek. The Activist can only win by

earthly victory. The Saint often wins though earthly defeat.

**Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.**

Feeding the hungry is greater work than raising the dead. the saints tell us. Fasting benefits you alone; almsgiving also benefits your neighbor. And these things cannot be kept secret. The harder you try to keep your almsgiving a secret, the more God will show you off as his faithful Saint.

The spiritual danger of making good deeds a means to praise is like buying food so that you can play with its packaging. It's entirely backwards, and Christ lays the axe at the root of the tree: he does not chop it off above ground so it will grow back, but cuts as deep in the roots as he needs to do uproot a deadly weed. What God does or does not do in terms of publicizing results is his concern and not ours. Our concern is that it shows severely warped priorities to seek commensurate recognition for your goodness.

I remember wishing, years back, to see some Christian institution name a building after a widow who gave \$10 a month that she couldn't afford, out of her husband's pension.

I have not lost that wish, but I am profoundly grateful that the Orthodox Church names parishes not after money bags, but after a saint or feast who has entered the heavenly mansions

and is no longer in danger of sinking into pride from being so honored.

**And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.**

Almsgiving is not to be trumpeted, but few of us are so stealthy as to give alms without the recipient knowing. But prayer can be done in secret, so only God knows we pray. The text does not have mainly unspoken prayers in mind such as those coming from Protestantism may expect; purely mental prayer is one of a number of kinds of prayer there is, and the text does not discuss prayer without opening one's lips, but prayer in one's closet with the door shut, prayer which is presumably spoken aloud. But as with almsgiving, we are to seek secrecy and hidden works, and when we strive to tear away the last shred of wanting to show off our good deeds, God himself will show off our good deeds.

Orthodox writing about "much speaking" take a line of argument one might not get from the "bare text" of "use not vain repetitions." Essentially, the suggestion is that the bedrock of prayer is not from masterpieces of rhetorical excellence, but rather simple, childlike prayers which are repeated over and

over. The Jesus Prayer is the crowning jewel of such prayers. But even then, it is a mistake to think one will be heard for much speaking. The Jesus Prayer is intended to sink down into you from the outside in until it becomes like the blood pulsing through your body, and even in the highest use of the Jesus Prayer there is no expectation that one will be heard from one's many words. The path that is most abundant in repeated words is the one further from thinking one is heard from much repetition.

And furthermore Christ de-mythologizes God. If the Father is seen as an old man with a beard, it may be entirely relevant to inform him what things one has need of. But Christ will not accept this: God knows, before we begin to ask him, what we need, and he knows better than we do. We are urged on every account to pray, but the burden does not lie on our shoulders to instruct God about what we need.

I may comment briefly that before Bultmann went through his campaign to de-mythologize the Bible, over a thousand years before Pseudo-Dionysius had a campaign to de-mythologize the Bible, and did a better job of it. Here Christ instructs us in appropriate prayer to a de-mythologized God.

**After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.**

"Our Father:" in these two words alone is something astonishing, something stunning. This prayer is prayed in the Divine Liturgy in the brief period when the holy gifts have become the body and blood of Christ and before they are consumed. It is a singular prayer. And it may be noted that calling God one's Father is a strong claim in Scripture: to be a son of God is to be divine and from ancient times this prayer was seen in relation to theosis.

The first of seven petitions, "May your name be held holy,"

contains the other six. It is as if the prayer is given here, and then a commentary.

**Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.**

This is an adult prayer. It is not a prayer that everything go according to your wishes, or mine, but God's. It is a prayer that God's reign extend, and the earth that is an icon of Heaven may ever be fuller or more complete.

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

This is the one prayer for material concerns, and it is exceedingly modest. It is kept by us who may have a month's food on hand as a formality; but to many of those who prayed, it was anything but formality. The faithful needed the days' bread.

And here again it is modest, for it does not say "Give us this week a week's bread," but "Give us this day our daily bread." The prayer is almost a goad to say, "Stop scrambling to enlist God as your helper in your efforts to build a kingdom on earth. Don't cling to wants. You have legitimate needs, and you are invited, summoned, to ask for your legitimate need of enough bread for today."

**And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

We ask God for contradictory things, and we do that all the time. We ask for the peace that belongs to people who are not controlling, and we also ask to be in complete control of others around us. We ask God to help a child make independent adult-like decisions, and we demand that their choice agree with ours.

Or we ask God to free us from the misery of alcoholism and addiction, but we ask him to let us keep whatever we are addicted to. With the Blessed Augustine, we pray, "Lord, give me chastity, but not yet."

It is incoherent, contradictory, to ask for forgiveness when

we will not forgive. *We owe God billions and billions of dollars, and when he has forgiven us, we demand repayment from our brother who owes a few thousand dollars.* Not that a thousand dollars is any trifling sum; it is worth months of income, but if we will not forgive, God's grace bounces off of us. The door to the heart can only be opened from the inside, but we are confused if we try to open it when we have bolted and barred it with a grudge.

There are seven petitions in this singularly important prayer, and any of them could be commented on at length. In the Sermon on the Mount only this one receives further comment, and it is a comment stark and clear.

**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.  
Amen.**

The closing note is not addressed to the Father alone, but asserts all kingdom, power, and authority to the whole Trinity.

But the main point I would note is something else.

The prayer is given slightly differently in the Orthodox practice: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One," and then a priest if present adds, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen." "Evil One" replaces "evil" because we are not praying for a delivery from some abstract, depersonalized quality like confusion or misunderstanding, but from the Devil, the Dragon who swept a third of the stars from Heaven.

**For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.**

This is the comment mentioned above. All seven petitions are

inexhaustible, but this one is clear: it is a stupid thing to hold on to a grudge and expect forgiveness. (Tradition preserves the reason why: it's like holding shut the door to your heart and inviting God to come in.)

**Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.**

What has been said first of almsgiving, and then of prayer, is said of fasting, is this: if you try to show off, and your purpose is to impress others, then it is hollow and worthless. That is all the reward you will ever have, in this world or the next. But if you conceal it and perform to an audience of One, God himself, it will be full, invaluable, and God himself will show it off. By all means, choose the right path, and it will never be taken from you.

**Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**

This says more than the [Tao Te Ching](#) which I remember to say, "Halls of gold and jade cannot easily be guarded." (The implication? If you don't have halls of gold and jade, neither can you lose halls of gold and jade.) A net of financial security paradoxically becomes one more thing to worry about.

Christ offers very simple investment advice. This investment advice may be beyond the pall even of political incorrectness, but

here is his investment plan:

1. Do not store up financial resources, but give to the poor.
2. Give freely as an offering to Christ.
3. Christ will receive your gift as a loan.
4. Christ will repay you exorbitantly, but on his time and on his terms.

This cuts against the grain of every worldly advice; financial assets that you hold on to are not an asset but a liability. Now some people have said, "We may have things as long as we are not attached to them," and that is genuinely and fully true, but inner detachment is harder than just getting rid of one's possessions, and easier to fool yourself.

Having an earthly safety net to do the job of God's providence is to have an idol. Earthly worldly advice is about how to have enough treasures on earth to support oneself. But they are flimsy, worthless, and the best way to take yourself is not to store up treasures on earth, not to seek one's providence from earthly treasure, but instead store up treasures of Heaven. And having really and truly thrown yourself on the mercy of God, you will find that God is merciful beyond your wildest dreams.

**The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!**

"If thine eye be single" has an immediate sense and a more profound sense. Marriage is honorable, but St. Paul warns that if a man is married his eye will not be single because it will be divided between the Lord and his wife. He gives advice but not a command. If it is a hindrance to divide one's eye between the

...  
Lord and one's spouse, what hindrance must it be to divide one's eye between the Lord and despicable money!

On a deeper level, I would recall an academic theology who presented as a lesson from computer science that we should switch between several activities rapidly. (In academic theology, the standard way to do name-dropping is to introduce a term from science, usually in a way that scientists could not make head or tail of.) My response was, "This may be true; what it is not is a lesson from science," but I don't believe it is true. Far from it, divided attention is a hindrance to earthly success, let alone Heavenly growth; we fragment ourselves in a way that would be unimaginable millenia ago when philosophers said then that we were fragmented.

Progress in monasticism moves through layers of contemplation that let go of worldly things and even what one has grasped in previous layers of contemplation until one is all eye and all beholding the Uncreated Light. The focus becomes progressively like a laser: the monk, who is all eye, has more and more a single eye.

Perhaps there are other ways; reading the [Tao Te Ching](#)—or, better, the "Nine Enneads" from [Christ the Eternal Tao](#), may not be on par with the Fathers, but if you let them sink in for decades you may gain something. Or simply be under the fatherly guidance of a good priest who appropriately emphasizes the Jesus Prayer. But in any case Lao Tzu complained in his day that people had fallen from an eye that is single—let alone Christ—and if we make the same claim, we have gone from out of the frying pan, not into just fire, but into termite (which has been used to burn through the armor on tanks).

One does not jump in a single moment from dismal conditions to perfection: the standard pastoral advice is to give a little

... perfectly, the servant of passion desires to give a little more or cut back a little further, and we will not leap all in one jump from a divided eye to one that is single. But growing towards an eye that is single is growing towards contemplation in the glory we were made for.

**No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.**

Note that Christ does not call Money a servant, but a master. He says not, "No man can have two servants," but "No man can serve two masters." If your life is ordered so that you have money and the things money can buy all lined up to serve you, it is in fact you who are serving money. And this is not just some sophisticated insight, but something very basic. St. Paul tells us that the love of money is the root of all evil, and the Philokalia describe the demon of loving money as what would today be described as a "gateway drug": once one's spirit is defeated by the love of money, one is passed along to other, worse demons. As regards money, the Sermon on the Mount is uncomfortably clear.

**Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of**

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

Let me make a couple of brief remarks before diving to the core of the passage. First of all, you are making a fundamental error if you assume that "Each day has enough trouble of its own" is only intended for the inhabitants of a mythical and perfect world. It is in fact practical advice for our world, and it is more practical advice for us today than ever. Second, there is a translation issue in that one verse could be rendered, "Which of you by worrying could add a single cubit [a foot and a half] to his height?" or "Which of you by worrying can add a single hour of your span of life," but in fact the word play admits an apt paraphrase: "Do you think you can add a single hour to your lifespan by worrying? You might as well try to worry your way into being over a foot taller!"

Now to the main point: "Do not store up treasures on earth" and "You cannot serve both God and Money" are not a barbed wire fence that serves only to injure. They protect a paradise which we can live in here and now: if wealthy Solomon in all his splendor could not match the lilies of the field, to what height will we ascend if we let go of taking up God's responsibility of

providing for our needs; we will be as the birds of the air or the lilies of the field, as Adam and Eve naked and innocent in Paradise. We cast ourselves out of Paradise when we open our eyes and say, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we wear?" But the entire point of the stark, pointed fence is a buildup to a right and proper invitation to live in Paradise here and now. Not later, when the economy might be better. Here and now we are called to enter paradise and live the divine life.

**Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.**

I read a woman who was a pillar of the church I grew up in, recounting a civil union and saying, "There was not a dry eye in the place." Even after I thought, I held my tongue from adding, "Only the sound of angels weeping."

One of the principles of mystagogy in Orthodoxy is that if you know the truth, and you know someone will reject it, you don't say it. Come Judgment Day, it is better for the other person to not have rejected the truth. And it is better for you not to have put the other person in that position. But even then we are not to judge; we have acted so that another person will not be Judged on Judgment Day, and who are we to judge? Has

God asked our help judging our neighbor?

Someone sins, and that is a stench in God's nostrils. Then we see it and we judge. Now there are two stenches in God's nostrils. Is it better for you to leave God with one stench or two?

**Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.**

Keep on asking, and it will be given to you at a time you do not expect it. Keep on seeking, and you shall find at a place you would never imagine. Keep on knocking, and after you are certain your knocking is not working, the door shall be opened to you.

Sometimes it is less painful than this; but we must ask until our voices fail, because sometimes it is not until our voices fail and our petitions seem to have fallen on deaf ears are we ready to have what we ask for. Keep on asking. Keep on seeking. Keep on knocking. And if it is easier than this, count yourself blessed. If it is harder than this, still count yourself blessed. In all cases it is God's sovereign hand strengthening and growing you in all the ways you would know to ask and all of the ways you would never imagine to ask.

Never stop asking, or seeking, or knocking. And never assume that because you did not instantly receive what you asked, you will never receive what you asked. Never assume that because your request was not granted in the way you envisioned, you will not be given something better that you would never think to ask.

**Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is**

**in heaven give good things to them that ask him?**

We today, in our political correctness, manage others' moods by feeding their vices. We give a stream of compliments so others will feel better. Christ does not give a honey-sweet drone of manufactured compliments; he instead calls us "evil" and elsewhere, though he surely is good, reproveth even the truthseeker who called him "good."

Christ says that if evil as we are, we give good gifts to children, how much will the Heavenly Father who is good give anything but excellent gifts? Quite often he gives us better than we asked and we say that our prayers were denied. We have been corrupt enough to ask for a stone to eat, or a serpent, and his work is to wean us from corrupt foods onto foods fitting in every sense to men. The original audience asked God for loaves and fishes, but we would rather have stones and serpents.

**Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.**

To pick a nit: the text does not say "Therefore all things whatsoever they would that men should do to you," but "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you." The single-word difference is subtle but profound.

wE are to ask for bread and fish. But when others ask for a stone, prayerfully consider giving bread, and when others ask for a serpent, prayerfully consider giving a fish. The time may not be right, or the occasion, but if nothing else we can pray good gifts for them. And do whatever you would want others to do for you if you ARE seeking the Kingdom of Heaven.

**Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and**

**narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.**

At non-Orthodox funerals, I have always heard that the deceased is in Heaven. You die and next you go to Heaven. But there is another quite chilling possibility. Most people go to Hell and perhaps many Orthodox go to Hell. The one time I was closest to dying, I experienced and gave in to extraordinary temptations in my spirit. God graciously provided a way out, but it is common for the dying to be allowed great temptations, and I'm really not sure that if I had died then, in that state, I would be in Abraham's bosom. As Orthodox we do not say that we have been saved; we might say that we are being saved, but even great saints do not enjoy safety. The story is told of a dying monk who stepped with one foot into Paradise, and the demons said, "Glory to you, you have defeated us," and the monk said, "Not yet I haven't," and pulled the other foot completely into Paradise. The story is also told of a monk who experienced high mystical visions and was brought bodily into Heaven, and then fell and was damned.

Heaven is not the final resting place for everybody in our circle. Many we are connected to can easily be damned, and we ourselves can easily be damned. I am very wary of assuming that I am standing firm, because that is how you fall. And it is clear to me now that I could be damned no matter how good my asceticism looks to me.

**Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree**

**bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.**

You shall know them by their fruits: not anything else, even ecclesiastical rank.

We live in an age of false prophets, and not just those promoted on Oprah. These words of Christ have never been wisely ignored, but we need them in particular here and now: **the fruits of rhetoric**, the fruit of people's personal lives so far as we know them, and **the fruit of what happens in their following**. The fruit of honest or dishonest, manipulative, shady rhetoric is perhaps the least important of these three, but it is there. The fruit of personal lives is important, though it may be harder to find since anyone can choose whatever image they want on the network: here "the prophet sees through a glass, darkly, while the archivist sees through a microscope, sharply," (Peter Kreeft), and we do not have an archivist's knowledge. But perhaps the most important fruit of all is another fruit that cannot be hidden, which is what happens in a person's wake. Does the prophet leave behind a following with the fragrance of godliness, or a stench of rotting?

**Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.**

Christ makes his point strongly. He does not say that many whose faith was lukewarm, many whose eyes were not single and whose hearts were divided, will be damned. That is of course

true, although many "unlikely candidates" will feast in the Heavenly kingdom. But he puts the point most sharply: among those who seem to have a faith to remove mountains, who in his name have prophesied and cast out demons, who have performed miracles, will be damned.

There is an old Russian folktale that His Eminence KALLISTOS has what he calls an all-purpose story, where there was a woman who was exceedingly sharp and strict in fasting and every legalistic astonishment, and to her astonishment died and found herself in Hell. She called her guardian angel, and asked about what must be a mix-up. The angel asked if there was anything she had done out of charitable love for another, and she mentioned that she had given a long, thin onion to a beggar once.

The angel reached out into his pouch, took out the onion, and said, "Here it is. I'll hold onto one part of it and you hold onto the other, and I will try to pull you out." The woman took the onion, and the others in Hell saw that she was starting to be pulled up, and began to grab on to her, so that there was a collected web beginning to rise out of the fire of Hell. The woman said, "Stop it! Let go! It's mine!", and when she said, "It's mine!", the onion snapped, and the woman and all those attached to her fell back into Hell.

Fasting and other disciplines are important, but a legalistic fast that does not arise from Christ knowing you is worthless.

Even casting out demons and working miracles is of precious little value if it is not (the power of) [Christ in you, the hope of glory](#). Neither unimpeachable fasting, nor working miracles, nor writing or reading theology, nor even almsgiving, will itself save you from being rightly damned to Hell.

**Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his**

house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

When Y2k was approaching, I believed the grid would go black January 1, 2000. I believed in the worst case scenario, and while I did not have anything near adequate material preparation for this, I was completely wrong.

Completely wrong.

Then why do I feel like I'm crossing my fingers? Every prediction I believed about disaster on January 1, 2000 turned out to be 100% wrong.

The burr under my saddle in saying I was wrong was that I believe I was fully wrong about the details of Year 2000 collapse, but there are still some beliefs I retain. Not, perhaps, that the Y2k prediction was a nice, poetic story, or that I wish to say, Star Wars style, "What I told you was true, from a certain point of view," but let me outline the beliefs I held surrounding Y2k:

1. A great disaster will occur immediately on January 1, 2000, and will shut down Western civilization.
2. If there is a great disaster, we will have physical needs.
3. If there is a great disaster, we will have spiritual needs.

Now as far as the first point goes, I think it was wrong but not entirely off the mark; I don't believe so much that

deterioration will happen as that deterioration is already happening, and this is a point I don't really think I need to argue.

Now as regards the second point, I could find survivalist resources galore; if I had more oomph to my opinion, I would have dug much deeper into the copious literature on how to care for one's material needs if civilization abruptly fell apart on a particular day.

But the third point, the interesting one, is the one I had the most trouble about. It seemed obvious to me that if the grid were to go black, if all normal societal and social patterns were completely disrupted, then we would have other problems besides how much food we had in store and how ready we were to defend our resources. One friend of mine has worked on spiritual retreats for people at the bottom of the totem pole economically socially, recognizing correctly that not only do the people at the bottom of the totem pole benefit from having something in their belly and shelter from the elements, but they could benefit from a spiritual retreat for the same basic reasons middle class people would benefit from a spiritual retreat. And I deeply respect the humanness of that observation. And I asked and poked about psychological and spiritual resources for people surviving disasters, and this point was not one that survivalists seemed to have thought through. The most of a response I could get was, "Buy plenty of condoms and stock up on board games."

I broadened my search, seeing if I could find clues anywhere else, and in fact there were clues. People who had been taken hostage by terrorists for years had established a rhythm of spiritual discipline, and this "treasure from Heaven" fed their spirits in terrible situations. People who survived Nazi and [Marxist concentration camps](#) had a spiritual fire already burning. And the core of this fire is found in the Sermon on the Mount.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

What is the "flood"? Cancer, adultery, divorce, depression, being a hostage of terrorists or a prisoner of Nazis or [Marxists in concentration camps](#): all of these things are storm and flood. That some flood will come is completely non-negotiable. Whether we build on rock or sand is up to us, and as a martial arts instructor said, "The way you practice is the way you will fight:" if you are slow or half-hearted in spiritual disciplines now, you will arrive with disaster on half-baked preparation, whereas if you take to heart the words, "The more you bleed in the dojo, the less you'll bleed on the street," you will come to the disaster as one who has already bled, as someone who is ready for the fight.

There are resources on spiritual struggle that go into more detail than this: The Philokalia immediately springs to mind. But there is no text so central as the Sermon on the Mount.

# Musings

Sunday, 8/13/00

It has been a while since I journalled. I kept some journals after my [Journal of an Awakening](#), but they disappeared when my previous laptop died. I am not sure this is a bad thing; I don't think that what I said in them was on par with my [Journal of an Awakening](#), and certainly not stellar. It is not my talent to be able to continue to produce good writing in a genre of my choosing; writing in a new genre has often been easier than writing in one I have practice in. Or, to put it differently, my writings come to me with the genres they will be in, and if I try to force success in a style that has succeeded for me in the past, I may cause the style, but I will not always cause a successful writing.

Now writing is coming to me — or has been coming to me, I haven't gotten it written down yet, and I fear I may have lost some of it — so it is time for me to get back to journalling, not necessarily on a day by day basis, but when the muse strikes. Tonight will be my first night in my new 1 bedroom apartment, and I will have more time — though I do not know what, or how much, will come to me.

The thing that has brought me back to journalling is as follows:

Last schoolyear, I spoke with a mystic who is a student at Pooh's Corner (the group of people at Wheaton who meets to read children's books aloud), and I talked about how I identify with Charles Wallace in Madeleine l'Engle's *A Wind in the Door*, and Michael Valentine Smith in Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*. I asked him if he knew of any other characters like that. He suggested that I read Steven Lawhead's *Merlin*, where Merlin is portrayed as the last of the Druids, a Christian who has grown up with Druid lore, a mystic, and a politically active prophet. I was disappointed — I had been disappointed at his placement of Merlin with Moses and Elijah as political/leader/prophet/mystic types, because the character of Merlin reeks of magic, a reek that has as little to do with Christian mysticism as astrology does with astronomy. I did not mention this to him, because I did not want to enter a fruitless argument (I have had enough of those to last a lifetime), but I was disappointed.

Recently, wanting to read something that would give me insights into medieval culture (and having learned from another friend that Lawhead did historical research before writing), I checked *Merlin* out at the library, read partway through, and returned it after reading the scene in which Merlin makes the stones fly around in a circle. This was a display of pagan magic, not a Christian miracle, and I read it with a feeling of defilement.

I later waited and picked up the book again, reading it to the end. There were passages that I did not read in good conscience. There were other passages that grabbed me. As I began writing this journal entry, I realized — or, more properly, remembered — something. When I first read *Stranger*, I hated it — I saw its lewdness, its anti-Christian invective, its introduction of psychic

powers in a context that (at least to begin) seemed as out of place, *deus ex machina*, as anything I could think of — and none of its strengths. I was going to say that I didn't know if I was going to read Merlin again, but then I reflected on my actions in the past and how my emotions flow, and I realized that I will probably read Merlin again, but not now. God willing, the time of rereading will be when I know in my heart that God has given me the strength to be ready to read it without being troubled by the parts that defiled my conscience — and God has given me the strength to read Stranger — I was not polluted by it, merely angered.

What about Merlin pulls me, that I am writing about it now? I had that more clearly in my mind a few days ago, when I was thinking, walking about at a classic car show with my parents and one of my brothers, but there are three things:

- Ynes Avalach. Ynes Avalach is the island (Ynes) castle of the Fisher King (Avalach), the wounded king who sat on a boat on his island and speared fish. It was the place of Merlin's childhood, the place where he grew up, and in a world of shifting sands it was steady — even unchanged, a piece of another world.

Ynes Avalach resonates with me; it is a symbol of Heaven, and a place that I believe can be found on earth — but that we can never control. C.S. Lewis wrote about this sort of thing in his introduction to *The Great Divorce*, saying that Heaven is everywhere, but not everywhere is Heaven. I have a great longing for home, a place like Ynes Avalach; the two areas where I most consistently experience it are worship, and in writing and the expectant time when I feel out what I want to write.

- The bard's awen. The awen is an aroused, mystical state that descends on a bard; Merlin felt it when he was close to the supernatural. Two of the times listed, he was fighting in battle and, suddenly, the world around him seemed to slow down, so that he moved rapidly and lightly amongst the sluggish invaders. Other times, it came around a miracle. The awen is also something that resonates with me. A similar state has descended on me, too, at times. It is not something that I can turn on at will, but walking has often been a precursor to its minor modes in writing.
- When Merlin was with the fhain (the people whom other races called the baen sidhe (fairies)), he spoke of learning "that which men call magic". I realized (partly after reading the "How to Become a Hacker" document) that I have picked up along the way a number of skills that are in our world something like magic — I thought most specifically of being able to make web pages.

I also realized that many of the things that are supporting me now are things that I picked up along the way in activities I was discouraged from as distractions from my work. I learned how to program when I wrote [The Minstrel's Song](#) — and it has profited me far more than additional effort on coursework would have.

My writings on my web page are also things I have been discouraged from doing, and in them I believe I am accomplishing far more of lasting value there than in my job. Life is what happens when you are making other plans.

Monday, 8/14/00

There was something else nagging at the back of my mind yesterday, that I wanted to remember, but couldn't. It was the other point that motivated me to want to write in this journal.

On Saturday, my family went out to eat at a nice Italian restaurant. We were all under-dressed and over-smelly from a day's hard work, and I was unshaven. I needed to go to the restroom in the beginning, and (after I washed my hands) I turned to find a towel dispenser to dry my hands. There was a smiling black man in a tuxedo (sans jacket), holding a roll of paper towel, and standing next to a rack of amenities (I remember seeing small cigars, and other things that looked expensive); he was complimenting me on my "PRAY HARD" T-shirt.

I was only marginally able to keep my composure then; I wouldn't have been bothered that much by just having someone to hand me paper towel, but having a black man do it... I was not comfortable. It was patently offensive to me. It felt like having a slave. Semiotically, everything about him said, "I am here to smile and adore you, but I am only here to be treated like part of the wallpaper, to be treated like dirt if you are in a bad mood."

He looked like support staff under the mentality that makes jokes like, "Confucius say, 'Secretary not part of furniture until screwed on desk.'" During dinner, I thought of reading about Gandhi as he was in danger and a rickshaw (a man-pulled cart which aged and wore terribly at its carriers) was offered to him... my feelings were lesser, but they were of the same kind.

After dinner I needed to go to the bathroom and it wasn't

After dinner, I needed to go to the bathroom, and it wasn't until I was almost there that I remembered he was there... I had enough time using the facilities to decide that, if I could not avoid him, I could at least treat him as a peer, not as part of the furniture. So I talked with him, treating him as cordially as he treated me, and he told me that he was a Jew who grew up Baptist, but had never been to a synagogue. He asked me if I was a minister.

I think I missed a witnessing opportunity. The one person I spoke with about it thought I was being too hard on myself — I was tired and in a hurry — but there was an opportunity I missed to speak with someone who had some questions, and who was probably ready to move one step closer to the Kingdom of Light.

I have grown up in an academic context which tells us that witnessing is offensive and evil (at least when done by Christians — when done by environmentalists, it is treated differently). Sometimes it is even necessary to be offensive. But there are also many times when witness is not necessarily offensive, when it is welcome.

I think our equation of witnessing with offensiveness and disrespect for persons should be jettisoned.

8/28/00

I have been thinking recently about the origins of the word 'obscene'. Ob-scene material is material that takes place off-scene.

As the word has developed, it has come to mean "material which should not be portrayed because it is highly inappropriate to portray." (The meaning has narrowed further to mean "inappropriate sexual content". I have not heard any contemporary usage having 'obscene' refer to violent content — probably stemming from the same reason as why there are innumerable films rated X due to sexual content, but almost none rated X due to violent content — the mentality that, in the words of one Christianity Today article, "finds massaging a breast to be more offensive than cutting it off." Dorothy Sayers' essay "The Other Six Deadly Sins" speaks powerfully to this problem.)

The word 'obscene' means "inappropriate content" to us, but placing material off-scene can serve other literary purposes.

Done the right way, off-scene presentation can be more powerful than on-scene presentation. In [Calvin and Hobbes](#), there are references to "the noodle incident", which is never described. Watterson said that he believed it would be better if left to the reader's imagination. For related but subtly different reasons, I am intentionally not specifying small but

significant facets of my second novel — Aed's academic discipline is never explicitly stated.

Giving just enough hints to fuel the imagination can be a powerful alternative to explicit portrayal.

**9/23/00**

There is a musing which I had some time ago, and never recorded.

When I was a TA in UIUC's math department, during orientation, Prof. Weichsel told us, if we had to do something unpopular, to say, "It's department policy," and that he would be the complaints department for us, as well as a resource for questions and problems that came up.

I never said that an unpopular decision was department policy, but there was something that struck me about this, a sense of "You are supported in your good faith efforts." He might suggest a different way of handling a situation if it came up in the future, but he would support us in our efforts.

I believe some of the same beauty is true of God. In terms of dealing with moral dilemmas, I have come to believe that a Christian who listens to the Spirit and makes a good faith effort to do right in a moral dilemma doesn't have to succeed in guessing the right course of action — even if he makes a mistake in judgment, his action is holy, supported by God. There is a story — first mentioned to me, by the way, in a discussion with a Christian who believes in a just war — about one of Corrie ten Boom's family, sheltering Jews when a Nazi soldier came and asked, "Are you hiding any Jews?" She told the truth: "Yes. They're hiding under the table." The Nazis didn't believe her.

They went on their way.

From the other side, there was a Christian couple, the wife pregnant and grievously ill. The doctors told her, "You cannot live and carry this child. You're going to have to have an abortion."

After great prayer and deliberation, they decided to have the child removed from their womb and an attempt made to save his life. The child lived, and is a blessing to those who come into contact with him.

If I were asked, I would have advised both to choose differently. (At least a possibility in the first case, with my mind changing over time, and a certainty in the second case. I have heard of hard cases where not having an abortion would have been very difficult. I have not heard of a case where I would have approved of an abortion, and one person I have known was born out of one of those very hard cases.) Perhaps I am right, perhaps I am wrong; I am not raising these cases to stand in judgment over my fellow believers. The reason I am raising these cases is to say that God supported the believers in their choice.

This is not an occasion for license to do anything and say "God will support me" — in both cases, people were seeking to do God's will; it is necessary to seek out a knowledge of the right action through prayer and the Spirit — but it does mean that we are not going to land in trouble because there was a legitimate debate among believers, and we came down on one side of it, and God came down on another. (And — who knows? Maybe the lines of morality fall differently than any human system; maybe God led and specifically wanted Miss ten Boom to tell the truth about whether she was sheltering Jews, and specifically wanted Dietrich Bonhoeffer to try to assassinate Hitler. I don't know if that is true, but it seems on a surface view to be consistent with how God works.)

Existentialism portrays a picture where we are orphans, who must make any, arbitrary choice because we are abandoned and without guidance. The place I was at for a while, where I believed you had to choose the right thing, believed there was a right choice, but saw us as in a sense abandoned in trying to pick out that choice. It had a ring of existentialism. This is, I believe, removes another layer of existentialism: there is a right choice, but God supports us in our efforts to pursue that choice; we are not abandoned in picking out the right. We are God's children.  
We are supported.

**9/29/00**

After having a rough end of week, I was warmed by one part in particular of a conversation with my friend Heather. She and her boyfriend Josh had independently worked out an idea, which I will briefly summarize here as contrasting a Hellenistic mindset (thinking logically and constructing systems which men can piece together logically — and having difficulty with sets of statements that the thinker cannot reconcile) with a Hebraic mindset (believing that God is sovereign and accepting his sovereignty in a way that is open to paradox — and therefore not needing to fall into e.g. Calvinist/Arminian camps). (Josh wants to do a Ph.D. thesis about this, and Heather wants to write a book together, and Josh wants to have the book wait until the thesis is done — therefore I do not wish to explore details about their idea, which I think is an excellent discovery worthy of development and sharing, at this point.)

When Heather and I were walking, she commented to me that she had realized that talking with me about that idea and about the Hebraic mindset was like talking with a fish about water. I felt very warmed by that comment; it seemed to me a marker of a kind of spiritual success. It seemed to me a sign that I had become steeped in the Scriptures and Christian ways of thought.

There was a classic poster I saw at Wheaton's Computing Services on how to become a Unix wizard. It had, catechism

style, questions of "How many kernels do I have to build?" and "Which books do I have to read?" The last question was, "How can I know when I have become a wizard?" The answer to it was, "Never mind that. Keep on toiling, and some day you will look back and realize the mantle of wizardhood has been on your shoulders since you knew not when." I had not exactly the same experience; the image describes if anything more than I really experienced, but one of similar poetic resonance; I was down, and a comment like that was a pleasant surprise. Thinking Christianly means a great deal to me, and I believe that comment was a part of God's ministrations of grace to me that day.

**9/26/00**

I have been thinking about a distinction for the past couple of days, between what might be termed explicit and implicit, or perhaps strong and weak, awareness. When someone says something that you knew beforehand but didn't have the words to say, that is a transition from implicit or weak awareness to explicit or strong awareness. When you sense something but can't quite put your finger on what, that is implicit awareness.

There are at least two levels of explicit awareness, and two levels of implicit awareness (although they are not in parallel — the difference between levels of implicit awareness is not the same kind of thing as the difference between levels of explicit awareness). The second level of explicit awareness is the one hinted at so far — when an implicit awareness is made explicit. There is also a first level of explicit awareness, where there is explicit expression without implicit awareness. This is what you have when you read a book but don't yet know what it means, when the material has not been digested. The first level of implicit awareness, on the other hand, is what I have hinted at; the second level of implicit awareness lies beyond implicit awareness.

As to what that means — in a certain sense, I don't see through the Hebraic mindset as Josh articulated it, and I don't believe in the seven virtues or the seven deadly sins. I believe

that all of the seven deadly sins are sins, and that the seven virtues are virtues, and I accept a great deal of what is said about them, but I don't think in terms of the lists. You might say that I believe the list of the seven deadly sins, and the list of the seven virtues, are structured mnemonics that let people see a deeper structure, and I believe in the deeper structure, but not the superficial list. Or, another way of putting it would be, the lists of seven deadly sins and seven virtues are organizing lines drawn over a map, and I know the terrain and believe that it has structure, but I believe that the lines drawn (for the most part — not, for instance, the lines between land and water) are at least partially mnemonics, and not purely statements about the terrain. Lao Tze began the Tao Te Ching by saying, "The name that can be named is not the ultimate name," (other translations being possible), and I believe that the deepest levels of awareness are beyond what one can say in words and mental structure. This is not true of God — he can express himself in a Word quite well — but, in the things they know most, such as their cultures, humans are terrible at explanation precisely because they know them too intimately to express them well. TAs are often better teachers than their professors, because they learned the material recently, and are more easily able to recall an explicit form like the way they learned.

Someone can see an explicit awareness instead of seeing through it to a second level implicit awareness. When Heather and Josh presented their thoughts on the Hebraic mindset, I saw the explicit portion — the lines drawn on the map... I think it was an explicit explanation of something I knew implicitly on the second level.

At least that's a rough sketch; someone who saw my point might not subscribe to a number of particulars. There is a link

between the first and second levels of implicit awareness, a continuum perhaps; tighter, at any rate, than between the levels of explicit awareness. Self-consciousness I associate with the second level of explicit awareness; the transition from the first level of implicit awareness to the second level of explicit awareness to the second level of implicit awareness is like the transition from simplicity to complexity to simplicity on the other side of complexity, or (in [Unashamed](#)) Abby's transition from a free lack of self-consciousness to self-consciousness to an ease on the other side of self-consciousness.

At any rate, this insight could be applied to itself, or more properly to my expression of it; I spend a lot of time taking implicit awareness and making it explicit.

It seems a danger of writing that, when you draw lines to illustrate features of the terrain, readers will take the lines and forget the shape of the terrain.

**9/27/00**

The above distinction might be helpful in refuting the teaching that the real test of whether you understand a matter is whether you can explain it well to a layperson — the implication being that, unless you can do so, you don't really understand what you're talking about. One would never tell a sniper that, unless he can convey his skill in five minutes, it doesn't count that he can hit shell casings from across a football field.

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Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living. Life is worth living, intrinsically because of how God created it, but it bespeaks examination highly that Socrates would say that without it, life is not worth living.

What are the other things that a person could love so much as to say, at least poetically, that without it life is not worth living? I put that imperfectly; I could only honestly say "An unexamined life is not worth living," if I were speaking poetically, but I believe that Socrates was speaking quite literally when he made that comment; the difference stems partly from different views of what the basic value of human life is.

I should also like to nuance this by mentioning an old distinction between "Good for all people" and "Good for me." People make an error by going from a realization (true) that something has been highly beneficial to them, to a conclusion (false) that that something would be highly beneficial for everybody. Communion with God is good for anybody, but many spiritual practices are tremendous channels of grace through which God has blessed some people, without being beneficial for everyone. In the list, I will list things which have enough goodness that a poet could say that without it, life is not worth living. Some of these things I will list will be good for all people, and others of them will be good for some people, but not others; I will not distinguish between them.

What are some blessings of which a person who grew in them might say, "Without this, life is not worth living?" I can think of the following:

- Worship/communion with God/glorifying him/enjoying him forever

- Marriage
- Family
- Friendship
- Honor
- Kything
- The aesthetic: art, music, dance, literature, mathematics...
- Touch
- Suffering
- Thought
- Rest

The list is neither definitive nor complete; it has fuzzy borders, and some parts of it might be contested. Being a good means in some sense being a deep good, and some of these goods have more in them than we commonly think. (The flipside, which I don't know how to reconcile, is that some goods will deliver more if we do not have massive expectations of them; romance is this way, and C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves* talks about how appreciation of nature can work this way: a Romantic-style worshipper of nature will be surprised by the beauty of nature less than will a Christian who goes into his garden merely to pray. I think romance is too inflated in our culture; we are to draw our sustenance from a diversity of goods, and (if not romance) I have tried to draw too much sustenance from lesser goods, like putting too much weight on a weak limb.)

**9/28/00**

There was something I thought of in a conversation with Heather that I want to record here. It concerns the sovereignty of God and free will.

The Calvinist-Armenian debate attests to the difficulty we have seeing both at the same time. My present insight is not exactly concerned with that question, or at least not primarily and directly concerned with it, but with the question of guidance, free will, and God's direction for our lives. It concerns how we make decisions. The two major camps on this question are as follows:

- God has a plan for everyone and for every believer's life. When faced with a decision, believers should make the decision by seeking out the Lord's will.
- God has given us free will, and wants us to exercise that free will in the decisions we make. When we are faced with a decision between two good courses of action, God wants us to exercise that freedom in our choices.

It is the time-worn philosopher's trick to say "the two opposing schools are both wrong because of where they both agree: ...", and I was trying to think of a less shopworn way to present where I'm going with this. I won't exactly say "Both schools are wrong because of where they both agree," but I am

going to say "Both schools appear incomplete because of something they both miss." I will leave it to the reader's judgment as to whether I am saying anything different.

What do I think the two camps are missing? When two friends meet, the question of how the meeting will end is not determined a priori. It could be that one of them or the other will have some prior need that says "I have to be somewhere at 3:30," so that that result is fixed at the beginning, but it will often be the case that the friends decide together how long to meet, and that the end time of their gathering is set by the interaction of the two people, so that the question of "Who will end the time together?" may have no fixed answer ahead of time.

The point where I would challenge both camps is that they both seem to believe that the real outcome of a decision boils down to the decision of one fixed party. Either God's sovereignty means that we need to agree with God's one decision in our lives, or our free will means that the decision is ours to make. As an alternative to this, I propose a metaphor of friends meeting: sometimes, God will have a very detailed, specific plan and say "I want you to do this" (Heather pointed out that God is often much more explicit and more likely to use skywriting with young believers), and sometimes, a decision will be left to us, but much of the time, we are invited to partnership, making decisions together with God, in which sovereignty and free will come together, in which seeking out God's will is mingled with responsible exercise of our own free wills.

One might suggest as a description that, instead of saying that the decision is 100% God's and 0% yours, or 0% God's and 100% yours, or even stopping with a compromise that says the decision is 50% God's and 50% yours, a decision instead that is

100% God's and 100% yours, or perhaps 80% God's and 80% yours. God chooses to exercise his sovereignty in a way that respects free will, so that it is possible to submit totally to God (or perhaps I should say, supposing for the sake of argument that we on earth could submit totally to God), and free will still exists and has room to breathe, and that free will, responsibly exercised to its fullest, respects God's sovereignty. The reason I said 80-80 is that there are times when humility before God demands the sacrifice of things that free will has legitimate claim to, and because some people might argue that God lets go of things he has claim to because of people's prayer (but I don't want to discuss here the debate as to whether God ever changes his mind). Beyond that, I believe that the metaphor of friends meeting helps us to see a way in which sovereignty and free will can occupy the same space.

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Another concept I've been drawing on recently involves some mathematical concepts, concerning what is called a function or a mapping.

A mapping is like a black box, where you put something in and you get something out. An example of a mapping might be the height of a person: for each person, there is a height. On the box analogy, you could put me in the box, and out comes a height of six feet. A telephone directory is an example of another mapping: you put into the box a person's or company's name, and out of it you get a phone number.

There are some cases where a mapping is invertible: it runs backwards. A telephone directory represents an invertible function: it is possible to make a reverse telephone directory, where you start with a phone number, and look up a person's name.

Each function has a domain, of what you can put into the box, and a range of what you can get out of it. The domain of a telephone directory function consists of people and organizations, and the range is telephone numbers. The domain of the height function is the set of people, and the range is the set of heights.

Not all functions are invertible. If a function is not one to one — if more than one input has the same output — then it is ambiguous to say "Give me the thing the function maps to this result," because more than one thing might map to the result. If someone says, "Give me the height of Jonathan Hayward," it is a straightforward thing to measure my height. If, however, someone remembers my height but forgets my name, and says, "Give me the person who is six feet tall," then there is a problem. There are many people who are six feet tall; if you

wanted me and reached out and grabbed the first person you saw who was six feet tall, you would probably not get me. The height function is not invertible.

I was thinking, not exactly of functions, but of a related concept in the connection between thoughts and words. We know that if a thought can be expressed in words, it can probably be expressed in different ways, and that that a given set of words is usually at least slightly ambiguous as to what thoughts will correspond to. However, I am setting these observations aside for the moment, as not relevant to the basic insight, and I would ask the reader to accept (at least for the sake of argument) the assumption that a given wording will produce a single interpretation in the reader's mind.

What I saw is this: Say that there are two functions: the function mapping ideas to wordings, and the function mapping wordings to ideas. The first function happens when a person has an idea, thinks about how to explain it, and writes it down; the second function happens when a person reads and gets ideas from it. Then these functions are not each other's inverses, and furthermore there might be no way to express a given idea in such a way that the reader's interpretation is what the writer intended, or (to put it differently) the most faithful expression of an idea may necessarily give rise in the reader's mind to something else. The process might go on like this: One person (writer) thinks of a person and writes down his height. Another person (reader) takes the text and picks out the first person he sees who has the height, and thinks, "This is the person who has been written about." There are many times and places where it works — perhaps a better analogy would be to say that the writer thinks of a person and writes down his first name, and the

reader finds calls out the name and talks with the first person to answer. It works quite well, as long as you don't have two people going by the same name. Get two Robins in the room, however, and things might be more difficult. If my friend David wants to talk about his roommate, he will say 'Robin', at which point I will probably think of my best friend (and his friend, too) Robin.

The first time I observed a phenomenon, or a realization, like this, was a couple of years ago. At the time, I believed in a sort of theistic evolution, and I started to write a story about a world, beginning with its creation. I envisioned that world as having been created by a theistic evolutionary process; when I thought about how to effectively describe it, I could only do it in poetry, and for that matter poetry further on a literal reading from a scientific view of the processes than the *Genesis* accounts are from a picture of evolution. In thinking about an idea — of *God* creating life through aeons and "chance" and natural forces — the best way I could think of to explain it was one that would have (on a literal level) give rise to something other than what I thought. This gave rise to the following insight:

Imagine two scenarios. In the first scenario, *God* creates the world in six days, about six thousand years in the past, as literally described in *Genesis I*. What is the best way to describe it? The text we have now.

In the second scenario, *God* shapes the world over billions of years through natural forces and a subtle but powerful influence over quantum phenomena — "chance". What is the best way to describe it, with all of its majesty, glory, and wonder? Well, when I tried to do that in good faith, I came up with a far less literal account than the *Genesis* account. So probably, something like the text that we have now.

What this means is that the six day creation account is not as informative as it would appear at first glance in our understanding. From one perspective, a direct, naive reading of the text (and, connotations notwithstanding, naivete is often a good thing in reading a text), leads most naturally to a six day creation account, but, with this insight in consideration, the question of "How would you change the text if you were to make it reflect a theistic evolutionary perspective?" meets with an answer of "Not much."

There is something that wants to keep me from settling there; I think it has something to do with crediting a naive understanding and believing that this philosophy does not give us a privileged understanding of the text. In the same way that I believe it misportrays the text to believe it is fundamentally about the scientific details of origins, I believe it grossly misportrays reading of the text to wield such an insight as a weapon against naive readings — God has hidden things from philosophers and shown them to children who have read a text naively. The person who reads a text naively profits from it far more than a genius with a thousand insights better than mine, who is too sophisticated to open himself to the straightforward meaning a child of ten would learn.

This is somewhat of a tangent; I meant it mainly as an example. The direction I was driving towards was to say that we have something to learn from computer tape drives, which often (after writing some information out) immediately read it back to see if what's coming back from the tape is the same thing as what is supposed to have been written on it. I came with this basic insight when I was trying to think of how to express an insight I've now forgotten, and came to the realization that there was no way (so far as I could tell) for me to explain it so

that a natural reading would give another person the thought I had meant to express: every way I could think of to express it, meant something else on a natural reading.

There are two directions in which this can be taken. One is, in communication, to ask "Is this idea expressible in the sense that it is what a person will think of on naively reading my text?" — and, if you go off the beaten path like I do, the answer may well occasionally be 'no,' or (what may be hoped) provide an adjustment for your words to let the reader know that you don't mean the obvious interpretation. The other is, in talking with others, to ask, "What intended meanings, other than the obvious one, could have been meant when so-and-so said X?" Both might cut down on miscommunication.

**9/30/00**

Yesterday night I went to a square dance, and then hung out with some friends and some new acquaintances. I had some thoughts, the last of which I wish to elaborate here.

I was thinking about a similarity between dance and martial arts, both as kinds of kything, and then... connected. Not intensely, but in a relaxed manner. I was in a newer sense able to be at peace with not being in the bard's awen — enjoying the ordinary as just the ordinary. I was thinking in part about how, in Kuk Sool, I was comfortable bowing to the instructor and other students, but not to the picture of the Kuk Sa Bo Nim (grandmaster), because bowing is to me an act so close to worship that it is fitting to bestow on a man but not anything lesser. And then —

The major debates are over an issue of substance. The Calvinist-Arminian debate exists not only because the Scriptures reflect a mystery not easily captured in models, but also because the question of how the sovereignty of God relates to free will is a big enough question to hold a debate over. Both sides know it's important; that's why there are two sides engaged in the discussion. The question of the relationship of faith and works is another area which is debated because both sides recognize it to be a matter of importance. (On that point, I regard it as beautiful and fitting that *The Cost of Discipleship*, one of the

20th century's greatest books about works, was written by the Lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and that *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, perhaps a lesser work, but none the less a powerful inspirational classic about grace, was written by the Catholic Brennan Manning.)

Along these lines, I think that the question of whether or not men may be called gods concerns a big enough matter that it is surprising it is not a matter of debate. There is a terrible truth, a deep magic (to borrow a Narnian image) that we are not gods, that it is blasphemy to arrogate to ourselves the title of divinity.

There is a more terrible truth, a deeper magic, that we are not only gods but more than gods, and that we shall become greater still than we are now. If you take and compare a weak believer — an alcoholic living on the street, someone who doesn't go to church because he feels ashamed to be there, but who loves Jesus, whose eyes will tear up if you begin talking with him about Jesus — and compare him with the beings the Norsemen or the Greeks worshipped as God, the failing, weak, marginal believer is to me more majestic and more worthy of worship. In him is the Holy Spirit; in him is submission to the will of God; in him is in a sense something deeper than virtue, important as virtue may be.

It is not just the Marines of the Army of God — those glowing saints whom we read about, and think we can never measure up to — who are godlike. It is, in a catholic sense, every man and woman of God, those whose faith is far weaker than ours as well as those whose faith is far stronger, who is a god and (invisibly to eyes this side of Heaven, usually) is wrapped in a glory that paganism never thought to give to its gods and goddesses.

I cannot in good conscience give the Sanskrit greeting *Namaste*, "I bow to the divine spirit in you." We are not God, and we fall into trouble to think that we are — and yet the

Scriptures contain so many things that I would think blasphemous if they were found in any other source. We are made in the image, likeness, and glory of God. We are invited to be his sons and daughters. We will judge angels. We are invited (Ephesians 6:11-17) to enter spiritual warfare wearing, among other things, the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation — that is, the armor worn by God (Isaiah 59:17). We have been chosen to share in the divine nature.

I believe C.S. Lewis addresses this basic insight in *The Weight of Glory*, although I haven't read it recently. Each person is on the way to becoming either a being a godlike creature whom, if you saw now, you would be sorely tempted to worship, or else a horror such as you never encountered in your worst nightmares. Lewis wasn't sure whether a person should think as much as possible about his own glory, but it can scarcely hurt to think as much as possible about his neighbor's glory.

Worship is the supreme love reserved to God alone, but man as the image of God may be given a second love that is the image of worship.

This area is addressed more fully in [A Dream of Light](#).

**10/5/00**

It often happens that people's beliefs concerning a question can be placed along a continuum. One example of this may be the question of who may legitimately be addressed as "Father," in light of Jesus' words about "Call no one on earth your father" etc. People wishing to persuade you to shift in their direction may point out an extreme position in the opposite direction as a means of softening you up to slide away from that extreme — such as when a Catholic, after talking about hyperbole, asks what you are going to call your literal father. After reacting to the extreme pointed out — and realizing that you do legitimately call your earthly father 'Father' — the natural tendency is to slide a couple of notches closer to the position being advocated, namely "It is OK to address ecclesiastical authorities as 'Father'." That is a temptation to be resisted. It is in some sense true that "no one on earth" does not refer to one's earthly father, but even hyperbole is a means of emphasizing something important — and it is difficult to me at least to believe that the obvious exceptions to "no one on earth" include all pastors. The context speaks directly about what ecclesiastical authorities may be called — if ecclesiastical authorities are included among obvious exceptions, it is hard to tell exactly what the point of saying that was. Perhaps Jesus was exaggerating, but what important point was he exaggerating, if the exceptions include the most

direct and obvious point of application?

Reacting an extreme position is often a stepping stone to an unnecessary shift. Reacting the position of "Do not even call your earthly father 'Father'" softens people up to say "I guess Jesus didn't really mean absolutely no one when he said 'Call no one on earth your father'," and mean by it, "When Jesus said 'Call no one on earth your father,' he wasn't referring to ecclesiastical authorities."

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The story of the boy who cried wolf has something to do with warnings and legal contracts.

Implicit in a warning message is a claim of "This message says something important and non-obvious about a real danger to sensible use." After reading a certain number of warnings and finding them superfluous, people's trust has been violated. They don't believe warnings are worth reading. And they aren't — usually.

An analogous, but related principle seems to apply in legal contracts. When you have to agree to a license agreement to download free software, and there are several pages of legalese — like the warning, the contract has lost fair claim to be read by the person signing it.

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"A cheap car is rare. That which is rare is expensive. A cheap car is expensive." There are limitations on what can be done by taking reasonable-sounding propositions and working from them logically. The proposition can be basically true — and lead, through a logical argument, to a false conclusion. (I know of at least one person who does not engage in philosophical speculation because of this.) This is not always true — there are cases where logical development from given statements can bring forth highly accurate contents — but care must be taken in logical development from approximate wordings. Sometimes it is hard to tell when words mean something approximately, and when they mean something exactly. In exegesis, I wonder if at least some of our debates stem from reading as exact words which were meant to be read approximately — perhaps partially because it is easy to equate taking a text seriously with reading it exactly — and so we go to as approximate of a reading as we need to to satisfy some texts, but have debates because we can only give certain other texts a literal reading.

On the note of exegesis, I wish to also record that it is bad practice to take some convenient set of Bible verses, those whose literal construal leads most easily to your position, and magnify them along the lines that lead to your position, and then explain away those verses which are problematic to your interpretation. God inspired and meant one as much as another; it is better to say, "I don't understand how it all fits together," or "Such-and-such is as much sense as I can make out of it," than to magnify some verses and raze others. There is a certain bad odor — of contrived explanations, of explaining things away — that is free of logical contradiction, but which signals the

presence of bad exegesis. It's kind of like an announcement of a stunning new discovery that shatters old theological dogmas (as in the beginning of Jesus de Montreal) — even before logical eyes can see exactly what is wrong here, an experienced nose can smell that something is awry.

**10/9/00**

The past few days have been a fertile time for musings. I can't remember everything that I thought, but there is one that I have been thinking about that I do wish to write down.

The best way I see to introduce it is by asking if TCKs (third culture kids — to oversimplify, people who have grown up with substantial exposure to multiple cultures, where their parents' culture was different from the culture of the surrounding people) have a culture, and giving a provocative answer of "No, at least not in the sense that most of the world's people have a culture." The world's majority, people who have one culture, have a space for culture, and TCKs also have that space, and also have something in that space, but that something is not a culture.

I'm hesitant to give a definition of culture, because definitions are finite and tend to take a life of their own, but one facet of culture is that it is something shared by a community, and shaped by that community, rising out of it. There is something that TCKs share, even a TCK community of sorts, but TCKs did not come to what they had by being immersed in it as a culture when they grew up. What they have in place of a culture may draw on two or more cultures, but it is not itself a culture.

I was trying to think of what to call this genus of which culture is a species, these things that can occupy the space

which is in most people occupied by a culture, and I came across a couple of terms which are conceptually related but not identical to it: worldview and personality, as well as metaculture (a concept which I do not wish to describe in detail here, beyond saying that where a person in culture fits into and naturally breathes a culture, a person in metaculture is able to shift and move between cultures, and does not occupy a culture in the same way — is never in a culture so completely as to not see how else it could be), are related, but not the same. Without having a name, I would like to summarize the concept by saying that culture is a species of the genus of things which occupy the space normally occupied by culture.

Being a TCK can provide a person with something else in the place of a culture; so can exceptional intelligence, and possibly some of mental illness/neurological disorders. I think there are other kinds of differences capable of causing this as well; mental illness is relatively well-documented as a kind of difference that has a significant darkside; differences that do not have significant darksides would not seem to draw the same exploration as differences that cause significant problems for the people that bear them. What I realized is that I have something else in the place of a culture. I thought about writing a document about what that something else is, but am waiting on that for now, until some intuitions are more clear.

One question which may be useful as a rule of thumb for whether a person has a culture or something else in that place is, "When he changes something in the culture, does he change from within or change from without?" in a sense related to the distinction introduced by C.S. Lewis in *The Abolition of Man*.

There is a difference between the person who uses materials inside the box to fumblingly try to think outside the box, and the

person who uses materials outside the box to fumblingly try to  
think inside the box.

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One logician I've read was arguing for game theoretical semantics, where a statement under examination is considered to represent a game, and one player is the Verifier, and the other is the Falsifier. The statement is considered to be true if the Verifier has a winning strategy, and False if the Falsifier has a winning strategy. It is possible for a game not to have a winning strategy on either side, and the logician argued from this that there may therefore be statements which are neither true nor false. (This struck me as an example of bad logic — you have a terrain and a standard map, and you suggest using another map, and point out that the second map has a property which the first map did not, concluding that the terrain might have the property indicated on the second map.) If one pursued those lines, though, the definition of a game can be loosened so that a game can at least potentially be won by both parties. This would correspond to games which (in some instances) could have a winning strategy for both Verifier and Falsifier, and statements which were neither true nor false. "This statement is false" could be the canonical simple example of a game which had neither a winning strategy for Verifier nor a winning strategy for Falsifier (a statement which is neither true nor false), and "This statement is true" the example of a statement which has winning strategies for both Verifier and Falsifier (a statement which is both true and false).

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Christianity is a broad thing; individual believers may own the whole, but they live in a niche. Celibacy and married life both belong to all believers, but a believer will inhabit only one of those possibilities. This phenomenon (another instance is different spiritual gifts — no gift is common to all believers) is a part of what is meant by catholicity — the whole faith is to be believed by all believers, even though not every detail will come to play in every believer's life. It is like a culture — it takes a village to transmit a culture, because a culture belongs to all its members, but it is larger than any single member's role in it.

**10/10/00**

Different kinds of writing have, in a sense, different ways of being true. A metaphor embodies or fails to embody truth along somewhat different lines from a literal statement.

Fiction, I believe, can be true or false, even though we do not speak of it much in that way. For a work of fiction to be true does not mean that the events literally happened, but... Fiction presents a world-view, and says that things happen a certain way.

The truth or falsity of fiction is not measured by the literal truth or falsity of what is seen, but the effects it has on the way people see. Action-adventure movies present life as cheap and of little consequence; killing someone is not only permissible, but not that big of a deal and without serious consequences. In so far as that is true, that fiction is false, and it is as false as a report that cigarettes are not addictive and do not pose any serious health threats.

Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* is a curious and powerful mix of truth and falsehood; it is a classic because it is powerfully true in certain ways — the psyche of Michael, especially at the beginning, and the interaction of cultures; perhaps also certain areas of law — but it also lies: the limitless perfectibility of man, a benign nature to promiscuity, a certain arbitrary reshapability to human culture are among its falsehoods.

It is also possible, in this sense, to have false statements

that are literally true. The stories told by the Unman(?) in C.S. Lewis's *Perelandra* to the unfallen, Perelandrian Eve are false even if they are literally true. More to the point, Clinton's electoral stories, television newscasting, or kneejerk conservative tales of welfare abuse are all falsehoods expressed in a way that is literally true. These tales are not only tales of "these details happened", but "this is the way the world works." On the welfare score, the tales of abuse are never tales of just "This abuse happened at this time." The meaning of the tales extends much farther, to "This is how things work. The welfare system is a corrupt system the nature of which is to be taken advantage of by parasites who constitute a massive financial drain on hardworking, honest, overtaxed America, and it is in need of a massive overhaul and massive cutbacks." That is not true.

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There are a number of arguments in principle that are to be made for pacifism, which I will not mention here. I would like to mention one lesser, prudential, argument before I forget.

If you ask two Christian thinkers — one who believes in a just war, the other of whom is a pacifist — what they believe concerning violence and problem solving, the difference between the answers given is never going to be that the pacifist believes in constructive problem solving and the just war believer believes in killing people to solve problems. The difference will rather be something far closer and more subtle: both believe that man is the image of God, that human life is of infinite value, and that people should learn to solve conflict in ways to avoid violence.

The difference is that the pacifist believes violence is never acceptable, where the just war believer, who would much rather die than be killed, accepts violence as a last resort when all else has failed, and the probable destruction caused by acting in violence is less than the probable destruction caused by any other route. So the difference is not a difference of whether violence or constructive problem solving is better, only a very small difference (among people who agree on the desirability of peaceable living) of what will be done in the last resort after every effort at a peaceable solution has failed.

What I would like to submit is that this picture is distorted. It fairly accurately captures the difference in what people say, but not the difference in what people do. Both the pacifist and the just war believer say that they believe in attempting a peaceful solution in a potentially violent situation, and that peaceful conflict resolution is vastly preferable to violence, but only the pacifist normally makes any serious effort to

understand nonviolent solutions that can prevent violence. In my own experience, only pacifist churches and meetings have given any instruction in how to handle a problem solution so as to prevent violence; when I gave a speech at Wheaton on peace making, not one of the members of the audience believed in a just war. Or, to put it differently, in the whole student body at Wheaton, not one of the just war majority thought it worth an evening's effort to attend a speech on peace making. Or, again, those who cared about peaceful resolution to conflicts consisted exclusively of pacifists, even in a student body where the vast majority believed in a just war.

In the stated just war position, the major thesis of the position is that human life is of infinite value, and that Christians should make dedicated efforts towards the peaceful resolution of problems. It is a minor clause that says that violence may be used as a last resort. I would like to submit that the pacifist keeps more of this position, more faithfully, than does the person who holds a just war position. That is to say, the pacifist not only lives up to the pacifist standards better than the one who believes in a just war; he also lives up to the just war standards better.

Sun Tzu, in *The Art of War*, told the general to cut off all hope of retreat from the troops, so that they are cornered and will either win a battle or die. At first this struck me as very strange: doing so limits options and prevents the troops from fighting another day if they lose. Now, though, I understand that it was a profound psychological insight that put those words in such a timeless classic on military strategy: the troops will fight to the death if cornered; they can't fight that hard if there is a way of retreat.

On a naive model, the question of pacifism vs. just war is a

question that has the same answer for most situations, differing only in that (in a small fraction of situations) the pacifist will either not act or else interpose himself in harm's way, and the just war believer will use force. But the difference is not confined to those situations. There is also the difference that the pacifist is cornered and fights to the death in situations where the just war believer, fighting as hard as he can while still preserving a way out, doesn't — can't — try as hard as the cornered pacifist. And so the body count, if you will, from the two situations, cannot stop after taking into consideration the situation where the pacifist refuses to kill a murderer, resulting in his own death and that of the person the murderer set out to kill; it must also take into consideration the situation where the pacifist averted bloodshed by applying training that the just war believer did not take the effort to find out. If this is so, then even if there are some cases where use of violence will save more lives than it kills, it is still quite possible that overall allowing the option of violence kills more lives than it saves.

This ties in to a question in computer science concerning the use of goto statements, an area where I am trying to think of a nontechnical example, and finding nothing as good.

A goto statement is a part of a computer program that tells the computer to go from one part to another (go to, goto). When I was in gradeschool, I thought goto statements were the best thing since sliced bread. But it's not. One classic computer science paper argued that the free-ranging functionality of the goto statement should be replaced with conditional statements (if A is true, then do B, else do C) and loops (while D is true, do E). This kind of discipline does wonders to control certain kinds of hidden nightmares, and all serious contemporary programming I'm aware of uses conditional statements and loops instead of

gotos for the bedrock of computer programming.

The question arises, "Should programming languages allow goto statements, or not?" The reason the question is not closed is that, every once in a blue moon, a goto is out-and-out the best way to solve a problem. A good programmer never uses gotos as a first approach, and bad programmers will only use gotos in ways that are inappropriate, but once in a blue moon, a situation comes up where a goto will solve the problem better than conditionals and loops. So there is a case for allowing gotos. But many languages have chosen to leave goto statements out of the language's functionality — not because a goto statement is never justified, but because if a goto statement is in a language, programmers will use gotos in cases which hurt program quality. So, in isolated cases, it is uncontested that goto statements are sometimes justified, but overall, it is deemed better to rule out all goto statements, including the ones that are justified, than deal with the effects on the programmer and through programming of leaving the statements in the language.

This question has implications for moral reasoning.

I would not place this argument as my primary argument for pacifism, but I would place it as something to think about — and, perhaps, as an occasion for people who believe in a just war to decide what they believe (not "Is violence ever justified?" but "Is violence undesirable enough that it is worth making a serious investigation into how one can prevent it?"), and live up to what I hope a just war position should be.

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The concepts of classical and romantic, discussed in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (a second rate treatment of first rate issues), was something I originally thought of as "classical is concerned with what is below the surface, while romantic is concerned with the surface," but I wish to revise that. Classical and romantic are both concerned with something behind and beneath the surface, but in different ways.

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There is a distinction I have thought of between a logical and a practical conclusion. A logical conclusion answers the question, "What comes forth from this idea if a logician takes it and analyzes its implications?" A practical conclusion answers the question, "What comes forth from this idea if a group of people believe this idea and live with it for some time?" The two are related, but different. Sometimes there are things in a practical conclusion that wouldn't be immediately evident to a logician.

My above musing about a prudential case for pacifism could be portrayed as teasing out of differences between the practical conclusions of just war and pacifist teachings.

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There are at least two ways that a human environment can be hostile — actively and passively.

An actively hostile environment is one in which people are consciously and intentionally hostile to a person or another group of persons. I would take South African apartheid as a paradigm example of this. A passively hostile environment does not necessarily have active hostility, but there are elements in the environment which none the less make it a hostile place. I would take handicap-inaccessible architecture as the paradigm example here.

Active hostility is what is usually thought of in reference to a hostile environment, discrimination, etc. The two other examples I can think of of passive hostility are right-handed technology, and many of the things that make giftedness a burden — an educational system that breaks at both ends of the spectrum.

**10/11/00**

When I wrote the [above](#) material about truth, falsity, and fiction, there was something I realized was not quite on the head. Today I put my finger on it.

Madeleine l'Engle is reported to have said that if an author does not respect his characters' free will, then the story becomes a false story. This, as well as embodiment of a false world view (perhaps moreso), is how a story can be false. Deus ex machina, at least in its bad sense, is a kind of falsity in storytelling.

A large part of the indictment of utilitarian Christian art in Franky Schaeffer's *Addicted to Mediocrity: 20th Century Christians and the Arts* is that it is false art and literature. It brings to mind one interchange I read in a Christian magazine, about the relative merits of Christian and popular music. The argument one person put forth for listening to secular music was that it was better music than the Christian music, and the rebuttal was based on the fact that the Christian music had Christian lyrics. That is to say, the rebuttal to an indictment of musical inferiority was to not argue for the music's quality, or even see it as an issue — the music was only a sugar coating for a doctrinal content of the lyrics. That is a defense and rationale for false music.

Much of the best art and literature stems from efforts at

persuasion; the *Aeneid* and the *Divine Comedy* were both written by poets who wished to prove their languages weren't inferior. The best art is rarely purely for art's sake — but neither is it purely instrumental. Perhaps it comes from the interaction of trying to make good art and trying to serve another purpose. And perhaps the NEA-sponsored exhibits, which are often accused of making a virtue of incomprehensibility, does terrible "art for art's sake", falling into errors that are not possible for someone trying to persuade. But the major error in most of what I have seen is false art that violates the integrity of the artwork in order to do something useful. It kills the goose of art to get all the golden eggs of persuasion — and then bewails the fact that the goose no longer produces golden eggs. It can't. It was killed by its creator.

Bill Watterson's story of refusing to commercialize his comic strip, in a way that he regards as selling out his own creation (recounted, I think, in *The Calvin and Hobbes 10th Anniversary Special*), shows an artist's difficult endeavor to retain the truth of his creation.

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There was a connection which I made recently...

I have problems owning American culture. My heart is in a sense in Europe; partly in a romantic impression, but also and more substantially in a classical look at (especially) philosophy and other aspects of culture (friendship would probably be another).

What I realized, or remembered, was that I once had difficulty owning Western culture at all. I held some interest in Eastern thought, and resonances between Eastern and Christian thought. Part of this was rebellion, pride, wanting to be different and better than other people. But only part. Another part was recognition of the wreckage of the past 500 years of Western philosophical history — I still think the past 500 years of "progress" are mostly something that would best be erased, done over, and that even though Eastern philosophy (pagan virgin) does not measure up to Christian (married) philosophy, it provides a vastly better starting point, and even working medium, than most of contemporary Western philosophy (apostate divorcée). Another part of my difficulties in identifying with the West was that I had some awareness, albeit an unwitting, unconscious awareness that hit the very large nail not quite on the head, of how different I was from other people. I didn't connect it with intelligence, and I did not have the clarity to put my thinking as "I am a Westerner who is more different from most Westerners than most Easterners are;" I thought of myself as non-Western in a way that roughly meant Eastern (and came to a deep understanding of one Eastern philosophy). The second part of the realization is that I have, by whatever means, come to be at home with being a part of the West. Not like everybody else — not by a long shot — but distinctively

Western. I have not, within the West, settled down to accepting being an American yet, in the sense that it naturally flows from me, but I am able to accept, with pleasure, being Western. And I had a breaking point at a square dance when I was able to look and realize that I was enjoying a distinctively American cultural beauty.

Exactly where in the geographical-historical map of the actual West my heart is, is still a little hard to say. In the West, but not at any literal place of it. Somewhere in Europe, probably France, spread out across a few centuries, with a touch of fantasy. I am using the term 'fantasy' in a poor metaphor because I do not see any better way to explain it, but it calls for some explanation. I do not mean the medieval-impression-plus-magic that is commonly meant by fantasy, nor the psychological sense of an escape into unreality. Rather I mean an "impression" (I mean something like what this word means, only deep rather than shallow), both classical and romantic in character (but more fundamentally classical), of a culture and a world that could be real but does not happen to be. The culture that most readily comes to mind is that of Blajeny in Madeleine l'Engle's *A Wind in the Door*.

A certain element of this does not need to change. There are elements of American culture that I do not think I ever need to embody, and others that I may learn to play as a social game (I identify with the youngest star in Madeleine l'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*. She tried to appear human — an eccentric old woman, outside on a terribly stormy night — and quite nearly botched it; the shawl and eating and making sheets look like ghosts was not who she was, was a game she played that did not begin to give even a glimpse of who she really was. This is a picture of an

angel-like being in one sense, but in another sense is a revelation of a real, flesh-and-blood human being out of a human's experience; it is a description not only of angels but of men). There are also a number of elements of American culture that I need to love and own.

There are a couple of things that have happened lately that I am taking as exciting indications that I am beginning to own American culture, and have the discipline to love it even when I do not like it.

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Halloween is, or at least can be, a revelatory holiday.

By this I mean that it is a holiday that provides a social context for people to reveal themselves to other people in ways that would not normally occur in the usual course of interactions. For many people it's not — the costume doesn't say anything — but for me at least it is. My costumes say something about me.

Christmas is also, in a different way, a revelatory holiday. It is not just a revelatory holiday (such a thought makes me shudder), but it is such. Giving a gift is an act of communication; the gift says something about the person who it is given to, but also about the giver.

What other revelatory holidays could be imagined?

I could see a favorite books day, where people read a passage from their favorite books.

Something to draw on the theme of icebreakers at parties. Icebreakers are embarrassing and humiliating; every one I have examined since I made this basic observation crosses some social boundary and make people uncomfortable. I believe this is for a specific reason; pushing people across an internal boundary disinhibits them and opens the door to getting to know the other people. It takes a jolt to break the ice.

Persona day. People do not dress up in costumes, but (in normal wear) role play other people.

Prohibition day. Some common and basic activity or faculty is verboten for the course of the day. The Church does this with fasts and Lord's day rest. I believe there are prohibitions which would force people to operate differently, but I can't think of any (new ones) off the top of my head.

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Baudelaire, in *La Morale du Joujou*, talks about how, in children's play and religious artwork, the toy/art represents a reality, which it suggests but does not fully portray. When a little boy takes a small object (perhaps a spool of thread) and moves it about, making sounds, and pretends it is a spaceship, there is no need for a perfectly shaped model of what appears to be a spaceship — and, Baudelaire argues, it is better that way. It is better to have an incomplete portrayal, in which the imperfect vehicle is taken over by imagination to become what it represents, than a perfect and complete portrayal which leaves nothing left for the imagination to do.

In America, unlike many other countries, puppetry is allowed as a children's art form but not taken seriously as a medium for adults — our loss. Some puppetry (euphemistically called 'animatronics' by people who do not want their use of puppetry to be known) is used in movies, albeit puppetry that has so much technical sophistication that it succeeds in appearing to be something else; we do not have puppets that appear as puppets. This is in contrast to the shadow puppet theatre of Malaysia, to take an instance off the top of my head, where there are beautiful but stylized puppets: they are meant to evoke, but not be mistaken for the real thing. Perhaps related to this, all the non-cartoon movies and television I've seen present as close an approximation to (a romantic impression of) a photorealistic image of what happens. There is no case where, as in child's play, people look at an inverted garbage can and agree to make believe it's a robot. When I watched *The Matrix*, after not having seen any movies in a while, I was distracted by the romantic impression; at times I had difficulty seeing through it to the

characters and concepts. (This isn't because the movie was ineffective within its genre; it's because I had begun to lose touch with the medium, but I think there is something in my having lost touch.)

I think it would be an interesting matter to see a good movie in which there was enough to evoke images in the viewer's minds, but not the complete substitute for imagination in detail — a shooting of a plainclothes rehearsal on an empty set. What would the experience be like?

I think that there is probably a link (both from the same source, possibly) between the fact that puppets that look like puppets are accepted by children but not adults (a sign, not of maturity, but of loss of imagination), and the fact that movies do not call on the viewer's imagination. I know that television is criticized for rotting the imagination, but what if there was television that just showed actors on empty sets, with very crude props that suggested the objects they were to refer to?

It wouldn't be watched (see Mander's argument for why television needs technical events and artificial unusuality in order to hold people in *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*), but it's an interesting concept. Perhaps it would be interesting to go to pre-dress rehearsals of plays.

On a related but distinct note — all movies I can recall seeing operate on a romantic rather than a classical plane, and attempting to interact with a movie on classical grounds (thinking about the science and technology is one of a number of examples) yields frustration. The science in science fiction movies is meant to be awe inspiring and impressive — not (in my experience) for people to try to understand. It would be interesting to see a classical movie — perhaps a classical movie that just had suggestive sets, costume, and props.

**10/12/00**

The image I used in [A Dream of Light](#) for the curse of Babel was a rainbow being shattered and its pieces being scattered across the sky to become stars. There was a fragmentation and a diminution of language.

I do not think that the New Jerusalem will see an exact reversal of what happened at Babel. I don't think the diversity in languages will be reversed, even to restore the language of the Dawn of Creation. I believe that we will have something deeper — even more than in Eden an instrument of communion and not just communication — something that does not have to pass through the pipe of the senses. And I believe that the diversity of human languages, past, present, and future, will be preserved in that fusion. The observation is made of idiolects, that different people will use language in different ways; different idiolects can still be part of the same language in which people understand each other when speaking. In Heaven, I believe I will speak in a way influenced, foreshadowed by, the languages I have worked with here (with various degrees of proficiency — I speak two languages well, and have dabbled in others), and a way that others will understand.

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I wrote about fantasy [above](#). I wish to — not quite explain that theme more (I am having difficulty thinking about it clearly enough to say anything significant) — but talk about related material.

Fantasy is in our minds associated with another era; this is not because people invented a forgotten world, a faroff age and invested it with magic, but because people living in a then-contemporary world saw magic operating on their world. The fantastic element was not conceived to be fixed to their time, and the profession of woodcutter in fairy tales was originally as contemporary and as ordinary as a mechanic in our world. This is why, when C.S. Lewis wrote fairy tales for grown-ups (*That Hideous Strength*), he did not give people occupations from yesteryear; he set them in the contemporary world. The same is true of Madeleine l'Engle's *Time quartet*. The fact that 'fantasy' means 'pseudo-medieval' is in some sense a matter of historical accident.

When writing [A Cord of Seven Strands](#), or more properly when thinking before writing it, I was thinking over the question of whether not to write fantasy. I was sure of a contemporary setting, and I did not want magic in the story. What I was debating was a cultural and geographical bifurcation, something that would feel like our world but be different.

It was a related but different sense of 'fantasy' that I meant [above](#). When I am trying to express something, I sometimes see a visual symbol before I can think of words; the visual symbol I saw was two long rays at a very acute angle. Both rays come from the same source. One ray represents the way things actually happened, the real world. The other represents

the fantasy: it is nearly the same in orientation, but it is displaced, and the further you go, the further apart they are. Something similar may be said for Australian, English Canadian, British, and U.S. culture. They are all bifurcated (albeit interacting) lines from the same source, in a sense almost parallel. Complementary to the usual intuition of Britain being on its historical path and the colonies branching off or doing the same thing, it may also be said that these four countries represent alternate historical and cultural developments of the British culture that existed several centuries ago. To someone with a historical sense who had grown up in one of these four contemporary cultures and been transported to another, each provides an answer of "This is how it might have been but is not." The direction of the angle I see is different — not a "This is how it might have been but is not" of historical and cultural development, but of the different feel brought with intelligence, the part of intelligence that is not connoted or implied by the popular understanding of the word 'smart'. That isn't quite it, or perhaps you could say that that is one facet but not all; at any rate, it is the only one I know how to concretely describe.

I was thinking about the direction of Madeleine l'Engle's fantasy — breaking off from our world (though she would not view it that way) in the direction of (some) non-human characters, of kything and under-hearing. I regard it a valuable question to ask how my fantasy would break off. A part of it is in the direction of pseudo-fantasy, material that reads like fantasy while consisting exclusively of events I could believe happened.

Other parts I can't describe.

**10/14/00**

Recently I found out that a person whom I have been talking with (I won't mention his name) was looking at an area of thought in a way that was fundamentally distorted (I won't give the details on that, either). What I regard as significant is that my reply to him was emotional, only partially logically coherent, and probably not nearly as persuasive as most of what I write.

I was thinking about this, in large part because I was disturbed that I hadn't given him a better answer, a better explanation — I was aware that I was explaining things badly as I wrote, but I couldn't do better. It wasn't because this was an obscure question that I knew little about; anything but. The reflection I had coming out of this was analogous to aesthetic distance: if an issue is too far out, then you do not know it well enough to talk about it effectively, then as it moves closer you can start to talk about it, but if it comes too close, then the lack of distance prevents effective discussion. These are some of the things you know best, but you can't start talking about them.

If this is true, this may mean that on the handful of issues that a thinker becomes emotional and incoherent in argument, the incoherence is not because he doesn't know what he is talking about, but because he knows it so intimately that he cannot discuss it effectively — it is when he is least persuasive that he may be voicing something far more important to him than

what lets him be carried away on the wings of eloquence.

## 10/14/00 and subsequent days

There is a classic Reader's Digest in which a married couple, building their dream house, tells their decorator that they want an authentic early American bathroom. The decorator hesitates, and says, "Ok. Exactly how far away from the house do you want it to be?"

It has occurred to me in thinking about that joke that I have been ungrateful to my own era. Perhaps I am in an era that doesn't really have a place for me, but the Middle Ages wouldn't necessarily have had a place for me either, even if my metacultural perspective is spiritually closer to medieval than modern or postmodern. So I would like to list twenty things about my historical-cultural perspective that I appreciate — partly out of discipline and contrition, but also to draw others (especially those who feel the legitimate pull of metaculture and the recognition that other historical-cultural milieux have legitimate and probably richer spiritual climates, who see in modern progress an illusion and are appalled by the literal and figurative 20th century body count) to an appreciation of the good things our climate uniquely holds. This is a bit like [the 100 ways of kything](#) in that I don't know at the outset what all the entries are:

## **Things I like about my historical-cultural placement:**

1. Medical technology. I do not approve of worshipping technology, but it is not worship to note that medical technology has saved my life more than once, and that if I had lived in another era, then (barring supernatural healing) the bone infection I had in my ankle in eighth grade would have killed me, and I wouldn't have produced any of my writings. In a significant sense, my writings are a ministry: the question is not whether I would have produced my writings, diminished, in the theological crampedness of my age, or produced them on the strength of a stronger age; the choice is between my struggling, fighting uphill, swimming upstream to think clearly and produce my writings (perhaps even doing a better job because I could not simply go with the flow), and being dead before I could mature enough to produce any of them.
2. The internet. In previous technological environments (hand copying and then print), the expense and scarcity of writing materials meant that you had, to share writings, to convince someone with scarce resources that your writing was worth the allocation of scarce resources — and, even now, getting a book printed is more a matter of salesmanship than of

writing. (And I am not an expert salesman.) The internet is the first means in history where a person like me can concentrate almost wholly on the quality of his writings and then, almost effortlessly, without any jumping through hoops, make them available worldwide. There is a kind of sharing and connection, community, made possible by the internet that wasn't possible before. Many great writers of the past were discovered posthumously, by accident. The internet provides a place where writing is far less restricted.

3. **IMSA.** The Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, the magnet school where I went to high school, is a world unto itself. Culturally, and in the way people think, it is one of a few homes to me; the last time I visited campus, there was a shared bond and a rate of connection that affected me as one of those moments that leave you wondering how you could have gotten used to its absence. IMSA has its many flaws, but even with them — it is on the strength of notesfile discussions at IMSA that I learned to write, and if I was able to later read the Bible repeatedly and perform a mental housecleaning to expunge myself of worldview/teachings from IMSA (i.e. the premise that math and science will solve our world's problems), even that mental housecleaning used discipline acquired at IMSA. But IMSA is not to me just the place where I learned to think; it is a place where I met kindred spirits, and (even in its flaws) an Ynes Avalach to me, more of an alma mater than any of the four colleges and universities I attended. I am grateful to my era, and to the state of Illinois and its taxpayers, for letting me have that opportunity.
4. **Computers.** Computers do not need to be an object of

worship or another enhancement to corporate abilities to generate wealth. They can also be seen as a triumph of human culture, and an opportunity for interaction unlike anything any previous aeon has seen. Where else can you interact with a being that can do arithmetic and logic flawlessly but has no intelligence, not even common sense? There is something in interacting with something logical to show you that you are not logical; programming computers provides a new facet to a thinking man's self-understanding.

5. Religious volunteerism. The idea that one belongs to a given religious affiliation because he chooses to belong is, historically speaking, far from universal. There are imperfections — religion as a private choice, religion as something tamed — but they are imperfections in carrying out a great thing.
6. The concept of tolerance. Most readers will know of hypocrisies and imperfections in how this is carried out, the equation of "racist = white", and the problems that have been caused in the name of diversity. I would recall the words, "Hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue," and say that the respect for personhood embodied in diversity concerns is a great thing.
7. Breadth/specialization/academia/diversity. In terms of level of specialization, the present world has quite a few niches that wouldn't exist in most other societies. (This is a mixed blessing, but a blessing.) My choice of professions is better now than in most historical-cultural contexts; in a small village, the selection of available professions (even without any cultural restrictions) would probably not have allowed me anything as thought-oriented as I have now.
8. The value given to an individual life. One person's life is held

to be of tremendous value — not just VIPs, but everyone.

This is far from a cultural universal.

9. Creature comforts and good thinking environments. Creature comforts and a special place have a great influence on how well a person is able to perform abstract thought; creature comforts are nice in themselves, but they also allow people to ignore the absence of discomfort and sink into thought.
10. A native language that is lingua franca throughout the world. This is something very few people in world history have enjoyed. There are any number of arguments that have been made about the dark side of American English steamrolling through half the world's linguistic bases, and I don't mean to make light of that — but to speak the language as your native tongue, and never need to learn another, is a rare privilege.
11. Cheap books. Before the printing press, books were hard to come by; a library of sixty books was quite respectable in the Middle Ages. Books have since then become cheaper and easier to make, which means not only that books are easier to acquire, but that a broader selection of material is liable to be printed. True, much of this material is trash, but there is also material that is not trash.
12. Roads and Other Transportation. Roads take a heavy and non-obvious toll; the Amish do not drive cars because it is their considered judgment that the use of cars tends to degrade the community. That stated, roads provide access to people, more diverse acquaintances than one would have in a small village. I consider my job options to be much better than if I had to choose from positions I could walk to — in which case I'd probably go bonkers.
13. Psychology. Psychology, as all academic disciplines, has its

own special way of being ridiculous. It also has generated an understanding of human nature with some strengths that many cultures do not have. I would hesitate to say that academic psychology has surpassed the insights of other cultures on their own terms, but on its terms psychology has provided us with some good understandings of human nature.

14. Hallowe'en. Every age has beautiful holidays; I like Halloween: not the ghouls and witches and warlocks, but the opportunity to be someone else, to reveal yourself in a different way.
15. Role play. This element of cultural wealth is something that has always been around — in the form of children's make-believe. I am not aware of another cultural context that carries this into adulthood.
16. Recognition of childhood. The non-universal concept of childhood, whose present disappearance Neil Postman explores and laments in *The Disappearance of Childhood*, is of benefit to both children and adults.
17. *Lex, Rex*. The rule of law — the idea that everyone, even the highest governing officials, is subject to the law — is far from common in time and history. Many people from other nations had trouble understanding when Nixon was impeached: how could the highest official of the land be on trial for breaking the law? It struck them as it might strike us to see a family where the parents were grounded — grounding is something parents hand out to children, not something parents are themselves subject to. The rule of law is imperfectly followed — as I write, the chaos surrounding the 2000 American presidential election is just beginning to subside — and the concept has flaws. Yet, even with an imperfect implementation of imperfect ideas,

attempts to follow the rule of law reduce arbitrariness.

18. Bureaucracies. Now I know that some readers are probably wondering why I would put bureaucracies on the list — 'bureaucracy', like 'mother-in-law', carries strongly negative connotations. Do I like pushing through red tape? No. But, to an outsider, working with an American bureaucracy is a positive luxury. One Brazilian student was stunned when he applied for a scholarship without knowing anyone who could pull strings, and then received it; a friend at home couldn't believe him when he explained what had happened. The reason is simple: in Brazil, like most countries across most of time, you need an inside connection to get anything out of a bureaucracy. In the US, it doesn't hurt, but you have reasonable chances of getting a lot of things out of a bureaucracy — enough so that this can be taken for granted, and we can ungratefully grumble about how inefficient bureaucracies are.
19. The concept of genius. The concept of genius is far from universal; while there are problematic developments (the "exceptional man" exposed in *Crime and Punishment*), the boundary between genius and normal (or even just gifted and average), like that between children adults, is one that benefits people on both sides.
20. Mechanical devices to tinker with. When I made [a fantasy world](#), one of the races had tinkering as a national hobby. It's delightful and fascinating to tinker, to fix things MacGyver style, and to have intriguing gadgets. It's not one of the greatest things in life — not up there with faith and friendship — but Legos and knickknacks (Legos being one of my favorite thinking toys as a child) are an enjoyable part of local color.

**10/18/00**

There is a sense in which I think we've swapped the meanings of asceticism and hedonism. On the surface, at least, and as far as we usually look, asceticism is drab and unpleasant, and hedonism is really enjoying things. But this is the inverse of the reality. Hedonism is one of the pessimistic philosophies of life, trying to enjoy sensory pleasures as someone would enjoy his last meal before an execution. Some forms of asceticism are indeed joyless, but others make small sacrifices in the pursuit of something big. In so far as devout Christians live abstemiously, it should not be a rejection of joy, but embracing a bigger joy than comes through hedonism.

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When I came back to my *A Luddite Guide to Technology*, I was amazed at the level of goofiness I had been blind to. I had spoken about the importance of love and forgiveness to all, and in almost the same breath poured out anti-Microsoft invective. Why is it easier to see another's goofiness than one's own?

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Democracy is not coterminous with good government. It is associated with good government in at least one cultural context, and quite possibly others, but the assumption in e.g. TV newscasts that democracy is the one form of government that is best to all countries, and that the political health of a country can be measured by how democratic it is becoming, is worthy of question.

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Earlier I spoke of us as gods. I might want to suggest another helpful picture, that of us as apprentice gods, where this life is an apprenticeship to full godhood in Heaven.

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Zen emphasizes living in the now. I was thinking about that for a time, and came to realize that in some sense I live best when I am spread out over a time, when I am present to a moment that includes but is not limited to the present. A painter may momentarily only be brushing a small area of the painting, but he is throughout time present to the whole painting, in a way that is structured according to the painting rather than according to the path the brush tip may take (he may even forget what the brush tip took). In the same way, through time I have found a magical way of fitting in to time something that doesn't fit into linear time, kind of like a mathematician's Peano curve, where continuous twisting of a curve fills space.

Some theologians have spoken of eternity being without the flow of time as we understand it, where we will no longer have our existence rationed out to us. The Zen approach, where one is totally present to the moment, approximates this in one sense, but in another sense, the perspective I have become aware of (in failing to be exclusively present to the present, and understanding why I failed at it) is something that seems to reflect another aspect of eternity. What I have is something-embedded-in-time, a something that is more than time, and whatever unimaginable thing eternity will be, it will be more, not less, than what we have now. I believe it will be a more natural medium for what is snuck in to time — somehow, probably in a way that we cannot reason out, we will have all of our existence at once, and yet not be limited to a single instant, "ever changing from glory to glory." (God has all of his existence at once, but he at very least interacts with time; his eternality is not a less-than-temporality.)

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In *A Wind in the Door*, the Murrays' having given up money and prestige to work in an obscure stone lab is something I identify with in my present stage of life. What I have is not so much a noble giving up as a loss, it has been a less voluntary moving from heavy-thinking, recognizable academic work to software engineering (which I am not doing as proficiently as well as I expected), and a quiet apartment to write in. But I am at peace. I have thought about (after a couple of years' work) going back to school in cognitive science, and I have gone from enduring it's-only-a-couple-of-years to being able to enjoy and cherish this time writing — something like the Zen koan that set my thinking, where a monk runs from a tiger, jumps over a cliff, and grabs a thin branch holding him above spiked rocks below. What does he do? He cannot climb up the cliff (the tiger — the past — makes this impossible), and he cannot let go and fall down (the spikes — the future — make this impossible). So he grabs and enjoys some strawberries next to him. I do not think it possible to be happy if both past and future are lethal, but I am enjoying the present without being able to go back to the past, or know or control the future. I am looking forward to the hope of cognitive science work, but I am also genuinely enjoying the present.

**10/23/00**

Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance says that there are two types of welders. One is not necessarily better than the other, but it is important to know which one you need, and have the right kind. (I'll transpose the ordering from Pirsig's.)

The first kind prefers to do familiar welds, and dislikes having to figure out a new one. The second kind regards figuring out the weld as part of the fun, and resents having to do a job over again.

What I pieced together is that I'm at least a notch or two past the second kind of welder — in my writing, where a new piece usually comes in a new genre, in riflery and martial arts (as Robin pointed out), in other things.

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I also realized a strange similarity (or perhaps 'similarity' is too strong a word — 'comparable character', perhaps) between the attitudes of an agnostic Jew towards religious ceremony and my own.

Agnostic Jews participate in certain ceremonies that they don't believe in in a religious sense, as a matter of preserving and keeping alive Jewish identity. The ceremonies do not mean, in a sense, the glory and worship of God. At least not primarily and not directly. That is, the agnostic Jew does a ceremony but doesn't believe its direct meaning.

I realized a parallel between that attitude and my own attitude towards religious ceremony. I participate in religious ceremonies, but I do not believe that a given structure is the necessary form that worship takes, any more than the specific words of a given conversation are necessary to conversation between two people. They are to me the outer shell that worship took in that one case; they are not part of the substance of worship.

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The most common use I hear of the term 'semantic' is as in "They were just arguing semantics," meaning that people were having a pointless argument that existed, not because they disagreed over something substantial, but because they were using words differently.

That is in a sense a true use of the term 'semantic', but it is disappointing (especially as the primary way in which the term is used). An unnecessary argument because people didn't know they were using words differently is the pocket lint of things semantic; there are so many greater things that can be referred to by 'semantic', of what people mean and what texts mean.

Syntactic knowledge is shallow, surface knowledge (the connection of the letters l-o-v-e with the concept of love); semantic knowledge is real, deep knowledge (the conceptual wealth that is evoked by l-o-v-e). In computer programming, people who are trying to fill jobs are usually measuring by what syntactic knowledge is possessed (or, more properly, what buzzwords the person can claim); it is semantic knowledge (theory, the knowledge that is not searched for but is the most important knowledge a programmer possesses) that makes for real success.

I like semantic discussions that are something deeper than an unnecessary conflict because people did not understand how each other were using language.

11/2/00

I have spoken with [Josh](#) about disclosing his thoughts about Hebraic and Hellenistic mindsets. (It is Josh's and Heather's idea, but Josh had said something that made me want to ask him before distributing it.) Josh has given me permission to disclose it; my thoughts are a little fuzzy, because it's been a little while since he and Heather explained the concepts, and I only have the one sheet they wrote things down on, but I'll try to reproduce:

Josh began by saying that, with a couple of arguable exceptions, all the books of the Bible were written by Hebrews, operating from a Hebraic mindset, but subsequent Christian thought has largely followed a Greek mold, and that, if we are to understand the Scriptures, we should understand them as seen by the mindset in which they appeared. He then delved into one area where there is a discrepancy between a Hebraic and a Hellenistic mindset.

In the beginning of the explanation, Heather drew a line down the center of a sheet of paper, and began to write words in pairs, one on either side of the line:

works faith

predestination choice

sovereignty free will

truth love

law grace

law grace  
thought emotion  
rhythm rhyme  
line color  
power meekness  
words music  
logic intuition  
left brain right brain  
man woman

Heather then asked me to imagine that I did not know about law and grace, and how they fit together, but only that God was righteous and cannot abide sin, that each transgression demands judgment, and at the same time that God is merciful, and desires to save men. Responses to such a situation show a divergence between the Hebraic and Hellenistic mind, especially in cases where a neat resolution is not known.

The Hebraic mind does not understand everything and does not expect to understand everything, but has a trust and room for paradox that enable them to believe both in God's justice and mercy without having a knowledge of how they fit together. The Hellenistic mindset does not understand everything either, but it expects that it should. As such, and holding both the usual strengths (keenness of analysis) and the unnecessary but usual weaknesses (limiting oneself to it) of logic, it tries to create rational systems accounting for as much of the data as can be cut to fit into a consistent logical system. It is probably due to this phenomenon that people who forget the explanation/principle where perfect law meets perfect grace feel the need to cut one down to make room for the other: legalists cut down mercy to preserve their unyielding law, libertines cut down justice in order to prevent anything from

libertines cut down justice in order to prevent anything from bumping into their cruel mercy, and both sides become more aggravated and more extreme by trying to run away from the excesses of the other side.

This much happens with a paradox to which a logical reconciliation has been revealed in Scripture. It is not much better with Calvinism and Arminianism — both of which live in a mental system that takes certain passages, magnifying them and declaring them to be fundamental, and then play awfully fast and loose with inconvenient others. The same God who inspired one set of verses inspired the others; where the Hellenist needs to have an interpretation cut down enough to fit inside his head, the Hebraist can believe the whole without being able to know how it all works out. Although Josh didn't mention it, there is something here reminiscent of a G.K. Chesterton quote, about how a poet merely wants to get his head into the Heavens, but a logician wants to get the Heavens into his head, and it is his head that splits.

I remember one time when I was talking with another friend (a graduate student in philosophy) and I made a fairly simple argument from Scripture, and he gave an *it's not that simple*, saying that what I was saying was true under the thought-forms that clothed the message of the Bible in its original cultural context, but was not necessarily true if one took the intellectually responsible step of translating the Bible, not only from original to contemporary languages, but from original to contemporary languages. (This argument contains a real and significant kernel of (distorted) truth, but it springs from the same poisoned well as the perspective that dismisses Biblical arguments for traditional gender roles by saying that the Bible was written in a patriarchal culture. Beyond saying that, I do not

wish to analyze either argument here.) The reason I mention this is to say that the language of the Bible is in a sense an outer husk that need not be a focus of attention, but the mindset, the mentality, is considerably less husk-like. The mentality is at times part of the core of what is communicated.

My initial reactions (and here is where I will begin to depart from Josh and Heather), apart from a mild-mannered acceptance (I reacted less than most people because it is an embodiment of something that I breathe — what I have to offer here are refinements, not correctives to something massively flawed), were to think of two things. One was to say that the list was a cultural artifact, meaning that it is a way of codifying truth that can be helpful to most people, but also that it is not an attribute of reality and not something that I happen to describe to — much like the list of seven deadly sins I spoke of [above](#). That observation is trivial. The other one, though, is not, and it is one I would like to develop.

I began to articulate an alternative, in its beginning form, by talking about a chapter in Jeremiah or Ezekiel (Josh's favorites, it turns out) in which the Lord tells Israel, "I did not pick you because you were worthy, because you were mighty or attractive. When I found you, you were a babe rolling in salt and blood..." and then narrates how he raised her to a woman of beauty and grace before she became unfaithful to him. Robert Heinlein, in cult classic *Stranger in a Strange Land*, tells the story of "a Martian named Smith": a man raised by Martians, inculturated into Martian culture and then transported to earth. It is culture shock writ large, the story of an alien culture coming into contact with, coming into, human culture. That provides a helpful perspective for looking at the Bible and especially the Gospel accounts — in both, there is material that is stunningly

countercultural to a reader who understands certain details of cultural context (e.g. how Jesus broke social norms in every recorded encounter with women). If Hebraic culture is a holy culture, it is so not because it (or any human culture) is worthy to be so, but because of uniquely prolonged and deep context with the divine forces. It is like a pet in a human house, tame out of a world of feral kin — its suitability to be with children stems from human contact, not because a feline is intrinsically more man-like than an opossum.

I coined the term 'metaculture' (partially explored in [The Metacultural Gospel](#)) out of seeing a similarity of phenomenon between third culture kids and people who are astronomically intelligent. Both of them are to some extent capable of entering into a culture, including whichever one they've grown up in, but cannot breathe it in the un-self-conscious way of the monocultural majority. One biological principle is that a creature which is particularly adapted to one specific environment will be poorly suited to others; a metacultural is not especially suited to any one environment, but has a certain flexibility. (There are other qualitative differences which escape me at the moment.) I have thought here about whether to use that term or make another (one denoting a kind of metaculture, the kind hinted at in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave"), and I will stick with metaculture.

A metacultural isn't exactly in any one culture; he's in something else, and incidentally in a culture. That, I believe, provides a substantial alternative/refinement to the Hebraic mindset: the step after being in the Hebraic mindset is being in God, and being shaped by the same forces that shaped Hebraic culture. The solution to being in a darkened cavern is not to move into a cavern that someone has brought a light of, but to climb

out of the cavern into the sunlight.

I spent some time thinking, because the metacultural mindset as I originally formulated it seemed accessible only to a minority, not a catholic possibility and therefore not a full solution. I think that the italicized wording, indicates a sense in which the metacultural mindset may be catholic.

That, and in particular the italicized phrase, is a mishnah that requires a Talmud, probably a Talmud with parts that vary from host culture to host culture. I believe it is, in core form, an insight that refines Josh's, perhaps worth further exploration (although I have no further thoughts on it now).

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An "It's not that simple." is when person A says something basic, and person B says, "It's not that simple." What that means, invariably in my experience, is "It really is that simple, in a direct and obvious sense, but person B has found an elaborate way to convince himself otherwise, probably (cognitive dissonance) because there is some advantage or cherished position that is threatened by an acknowledgment of straightforward observation."

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There is an insight I had when reading Em Griffin's *A First Look at Communication Theory* and what it says about persuasion.

The text describes the mechanics of persuasion, with an intended development of more effective influence in persuading others. Those basic mechanical principles can also be used to affect how one is influenced by others — to be more easily persuaded when one should be persuaded and less easily persuaded when one shouldn't be persuaded.

Knowing the communication principles behind, i.e. people losing their faith at school, could be a step towards preparation. Knowledge of psychological principles does not nullify them, but it does give people a greater degree of control in how they act.

C.S. Lewis in *The Abolition of Man* talks about an outward direction/inward direction distinction. It's easy (and sometimes appropriate) to desire outward influence in persuasion. It also strikes me as desirable to have inward influence with regards to persuasion.

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In Matthew 10:30, Jesus says, "As for you, every hair on your head has been counted." This is something that someone in love does.

**11/13/00**

Last night, a friend and I spent a long time trying to use the *GIMP* (GNU Image Manipulation Program) to perform a simple task (swapping colors in a two-color submit button). I came away from the frustrating experience with a new appreciation for what Unix's arcane interface is like to a newcomer.

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Technical support people (and sometimes other hackers) have an acronym **PEBKAC**, short for Problem Exists Between Keyboard and Chair. From [the jargon file](#):

**PEBKAC** /peb'kak/

[Abbrev., "Problem Exists Between Keyboard And Chair"]  
Used by support people, particularly at call centers and help desks. Not used with the public. Denotes pilot error as the cause of the crash, especially stupid errors that even a luser could figure out. Very derogatory. Usage: "Did you ever figure out why that guy couldn't print?" "Yeah, he kept cancelling the operation before it could finish. PEBKAC."

With a great many apparently technical problems, the problem exists between the keyboard and chair. The question I was thinking about is, which keyboard and chair?

On Mac and Windows computers, and to some extent on the web, an alert box will pop up with some snippet of text and a button. The messages that pop up are often not very important — something like the warning labels attached to many products — and, as such, alert boxes carry a nonverbal message of "I am interrupting your work because I have something to tell you, probably not very important, and you can't use your computer until you click my button. Once you have clicked on this button, you can go about your business." When there are a great many alert boxes like this, it is not a stupid thing at all to habitually click the button when the alert box appears... except that, on a small minority of such boxes, the habitual response cancels your print job. The problem with this system exists between keyboard and chair, but not the user's keyboard. The problem with this system exists between the designer's keyboard and chair. A

system exists between the designer's keyboard and chair. A great deal of stupid user errors are not stupid user errors at all, but the results of bad interface design by software developers who did not design with human-computer interaction factors in mind.

That's the thing about people who think they hate computers. What they really hate is lousy programmers.

Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle in Oath of Fealty

PEBKAC.

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I've thought of a hacker's game. Here's the core idea: Alice writes a program. Bob modifies the program in such a way that he can tell the difference between them. Alice wins if she can discern which is which. Bob wins if Alice can't tell, but he can tell. The round is a draw if they both can't tell.

This basic idea is in need of refinement and rules for both parties, roughly speaking in order that there are no obvious and cheap ways for either side to win. (Neither of them should be able to perform direct tests on the compiled programs, for instance, and things like "Click on the upper lefthand pixel of the applet window, and then hold shift and click on the bottom righthand pixel, and a smilie face will appear" aren't the kind of cleverness that is desired.) If such rules are formed, it will take a community's work over time. But I think this could be a good programmer's game.

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I was saddened to learn of the demise of Canada's Rhinoceros Party, a satirical political party with platforms like "Coast from coast to coast!" (after your car has been raised to the top of a giant, Canada-wide ramp), "My platform is the one I'm standing on," and "Legalize pot. And pans. And spatulas. And other kitchen utensils." It's defunct as of the last two elections, and learning of its demise (when doing a web search, because I wanted to show Rhinoceros Party information to some of my coworkers) was saddening, like a child's finding that all the fairies were dead — a learning that a shining part of the world has gone out.

The U.S. still has Dave Barry and his year 2000 presidential campaign (I'm taking an educated guess, as I'm waiting to hear the results of the Florida recount in the U.S. 2000 Presidential Elections, that the final difference between Bush and Gore will be less than the number of votes Dave Barry received), but that was saddening news.

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There is an image I've had (partly from my own experience, partly from other sources) of someone very bright who is off in his own little world, and when he talks with other people, he tries to answer as faithfully to his own world as he can, and people just don't get it. What I realized in my Gospel reading a few days ago is that this happened with Jesus. He spoke from his world, and people tried to interpret his words as what they would have meant from their world, and there was a glaring absence of connection. Examples of this are threaded throughout John's mystical gospel account in particular; one conspicuous example is where Jesus is on trial before Pilate and they are talking about whether Jesus is a king. Jesus is trying to bring Pilate up to his plane, and Pilate is equally trying to understand Jesus's words without leaving his own plane, and there is conflict.

Seeing this in the Gospel accounts, and having things click, gave me a feeling of being in good company.

**11/14/00**

Make-believe is a kind of illusion that implicitly depends on being recognized as illusion. I was thinking about this basic phenomenon in some matters related to [my Halloween costume this year](#). My fun was spoiled when I realized that at least one of the children had literally believed I was Blajeny, that the illusion of my costume had not been recognized as illusion.

**11/16/00**

A while ago, I was having a conversation with Robin (techie) and another friend (Bob, non-techie). We were talking about making custom modifications to software, and I mentioned that a few decades ago, it was common to have computers with their own instruction sets. Robin immediately saw the point I was trying to make; to translate for Bob, I said that for each computer to have its own instruction set would be like each book having its own alphabet.

In places where we've gotten used to standards, breathing them is second nature. There are rare exceptions where it is desirable to break good standards — off the top of my head, I can think of the beautiful Elvish script in J.R.R. Tolkein's Lord of the Rings trilogy — but, in certain areas, standards can be quite helpful. The computer industry is moving towards increasing standardization at higher levels of abstraction — and this is a good thing. Dealing with a locally suboptimal standard solution twenty times involves, among other things, significantly less cognitive strain than dealing with twenty locally optimal nonstandard solutions.

Where I see this argument as applying (technical areas, and human cognitive strain), this is not a death penalty on nonstandard approaches — many of the best technical ideas have been highly nonstandard approaches. I do believe, however, that

things should be done in a standard manner unless there is good reason to do otherwise. For something meant for humans, doing something nonstandard means potential confusion and a probable learning curve.

Web pages that are not designed with a first-time visitor in mind are a prime example of material that breaks this principle.

12/2/00

I have been occupied recently, and have several ideas jotted down, but not taken the time to write them down. I wrote a letter and received an invitation to join a very high-intelligence mailing list; I spent a good deal of the past week worrying about whether I've bitten off more than I can chew. Today, I felt that still, small voice saying, "Get back to writing your musings."

The musing I've been carrying around for a while, has to do with the monoglot and the polyglot (the person who speaks only one language versus the one who speaks several). I debated whether it was worth writing down, and decided for a while that it wasn't worth writing until I came across something in George Steiner's *Errata*. He mentioned the distinction, talked about his own polyglot background, and then poetically and emphatically argued that polyglot is the condition to be in — at one point, he said that the monoglot does not know even his own language.

That bothered me; to explain what bothered me, I would like to bring two brief images to mind: an American who is devoted to his country and holds the kind of patriotism Lewis extolls towards the beginning of *The Four Loves*, and the American who is devoted to his country and considers the natives of other countries to be unfortunate second-class world citizens. The first is laudable (and compatible with respect for the patriotism of other nations); the second is not. It is the second condition

which parallels Stiener's exaltation of the polyglot condition and (unnecessary) denigration of the monoglot condition.

To explain where I stand on this question, I would like to begin with a lunchtime conversation with my best friend (Robin), and an old friend of his (Morris). I surprised Robin by saying that I preferred to read texts in English translation when I had the option — preferably a free translation — rather than reading them in a non-English original.

It's not that I'm afraid of learning another language. There have been times when I found thinking in French to be easier than thinking in English, and there has been a span of several years where my French sounded closer in relation to a typical native French speaker than my English sounded in relation to a typical native English speaker. If one counts mathematical and computer languages, I've worked with more languages than the number of years I've been alive, and this will probably remain true for the rest of my life. I've had the experience of not recognizing which language a text was written in, but still being able to read it. I've lost count of how many languages I've dreamed in, and I occasionally have dreams where my mind makes up a new language on the fly.

Why, then, would I prefer to read texts in English? In a single word, comprehension. I came to realize at one point that my knowledge of French at its best has been a rough equivalent to a native proficiency, but that I will never speak another language as well as I speak English, not if I am immersed in it for the rest of my life. The proficiency I have in English is something beyond what is normally meant by 'native'. There is an additional cognitive strain — so I am spending energy trying to interpret the text (in the direct and mundane sense) rather than on interacting with its meaning (in a deeper sense). I'll

understand a good free translation a lot better.

More broadly, proficiency in multiple languages takes mental energy that could be used to other purposes. There are people that can afford that expenditure of mental energy, and there are definite benefits to knowing two or more languages — the ability to compare ("The better you know another world, the better you know your own." — George Macdonald, *Lilith*), the ability to communicate with more people, the improved ability to pick up other languages. For all that, there is a consolidated energy that comes of having spent your efforts on learning one language and learning it well — and there are a great many people in the world who do not have the excess mental energy to have spare room to learn extra languages.

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Bloom, in the introduction to his translation of Plato's Republic, argued for making strictly literal translations. The essential argument is that the translator, however great a scholar he may be, must have the humility to realize that the student who reads his text may be a greater mind, capable of deeper understanding. As such, the translator should provide the student with what the words say, rather than confining the student to his interpretation. He proceeded to give several quotations from free translations of the Republic which, in trying to make the text accessible to a contemporary reader, succeeded in producing something accessible, albeit inappropriate as renderings of the text. I forget exactly what they were, but they would be comparable to portraying Martin Luther's crisis of faith as a postmodern midlife identity crisis.

I do not believe that choosing between literal and free translations is a choice between a flawed and a near perfect rendering model; a student who wants to really understand a text (which is written in a language he cannot read well) should probably peruse several translations, varying in how literally/freely they render the text. And, if I want to know a short text or excerpt well, my rendering of choice will be a heavily footnoted literal translation.

For large-scale reading — for the kind of reading comprehension that can be sustained for numerous pages — there is a different phenomenon. The danger in free translation is that it can confine the reader to the translator's interpretation. The danger in literal translation is that it can confine the reader to not understanding the text at all. A woodenly literal text, one that's read for dozens or hundreds of pages, brings a cognitive strain and consumes energy that could

be used in thinking about the text. And, for that reason, if I can only choose a single translation, I'll take my chances with a free translation.

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I read a book recently called *Please Understand Me*. It was a valuable resource to read, but it's something I'd prefer to give to others with a complimentary grain of salt.

It's about different personality and temperament types, and one of the central theses is that people have fundamentally different natures, but engage on a Pygmalion project to reshape others into copies of themselves. It is written in such a way that

a reader who is persuaded of the legitimate point (that temperaments are not right or wrong, just different, and it is inappropriate to try to change a person to a temperament that he's not) will (in a similar fashion to the *Green Book* in C.S.

Lewis's *The Abolition of Man*) come to the unjustified and illegitimate conclusion that there is not right or wrong in much of anything, and that it is wrong to try to change a person on any score. It never draws this conclusion in so many words, but a transposition of key takes what Lewis said about the *Green Book* and fits it (quite well) to *Please Understand Me*.

The book is worth reading, if you can resist the conclusion that the flow of the text pulls you towards.

**12/16/00**

There is a distinction I have periodically been thinking about: it is a conceptual distinction between a gentleman's duel and an assassin's duel.

Both represent a kind of contest between two people, but contests of two different sorts. Don Quixote refers to knightly duels in which both parties were meticulously careful to make all things equal: both swords the same length, both parties standing at equal angles to the sun so that neither one would have the sun in his eyes more than the other. This is an extreme form of the basic idea of the gentleman's duel. At the other end, there are no rules and no concept of fairness; an assassin might accept another's challenge, and then arrange to have him shot by archers. Wesley's battle of wits with Vizzini in *The Princess Bride* represents the quintessential assassin's duel.

The two frameworks for a contest, or a test, offer distinct conceptions of how a person's ability may be measured. I have seen a number of gentleman's duel IQ tests, for instance; I am not aware of any established tests that operate like assassins' duels, and the ability to function effectively outside of external structure (the cliché is 'think outside the box') is one of the distinctive features of intelligence.

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Catholics speak a great deal about the primacy of Peter among Christ's disciples, but there is also a primacy to John. Peter had a unique place in the nurture of the church ("Feed my sheep,"), but it was John who was closest to Jesus, John the mystic, who had a stunningly brilliant mind and probably understood him best. In a technology corporation, Peter might be compared to the CEO, and John to the prize research scientist.

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My apartment is a sparse place, slightly messy and having no television. It is not really decorated; an outer austerity conceals an active life of the mind.

People's homes can give insight into those who dwell there.

My apartment does not exude the same romantic warmth as many other places, but that is because my attention is elsewhere.

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I have a different perspective on aging than what I have seen about me. It always makes me slightly sad when I hear my father saying, "We're getting old," not because it is false, but because he says it as a confession of weakness. I view aging as getting closer to Heaven, (as described in Hebrews) as approaching the finish line of a great race. My way of holding this belief has a dark side — I sometimes look on life as enduring time so as to be past it and into eternity — but I still think I am better off not to be approaching my thirtieth birthday as when I will become a has-been.

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I wrote about two types of welder [above](#). I realized a certain affinity between the apostle Paul and myself, especially as regarded the welder distinction. Paul, as an apostle, skipped from place to place and culture to culture, with a veritable rainbow of activities: planting churches and writing were just the beginning.

He certainly travelled more than I have.

Seeing a sort of kindred spirit (even if separated by millenia), and in someone whom I greatly respect, was warming to me.

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I have thought that the entrenched numerical scale of IQs are unfortunate. The numbers corresponding to a person's weight are proportional; one person who weighs 200 pounds has as much body-stuff as two people who weigh 100 pounds each, or four children who weigh 50 pounds each. It is simply not true, in a corresponding sense, that one person with an IQ of 200 has exactly twice as much thinking-stuff as two people with IQs of 100 each. A programmer with an IQ of 150 is quite possibly capable of doing feats that could not be accomplished by any number of programmers with IQ 100. There are not just quantitative differences (for which an exponential scale might be preferable), but qualitative differences as well.

The other critique I have of the concept of IQ is that it equates (for children and adults) higher intelligence with functioning at a more advanced mental age. This is true, in a sense, and brilliant adults grow out of precocious children, but there is an important mental dimension that is well-developed in most children and atrophied in most adults: mental flexibility/openness/creativity/curiosity. Experiments have found gradeschool children to be more creative than professional engineers; it is a rare mind that can enter adulthood without losing childhood creativity. A child with a high IQ, one would hope, is not simply at a cognitive level normally associated with people a few years older; he may be capable of tasks most people cannot complete until a few years older, but he retains the mental flexibility associated with his chronological age — perhaps a younger age. "A more intelligent child mentally functions like an older person" is a good rough take on the matter, but the basic concept of "older [up to mental maturity] = better" has room for further nuance.





introverted nor extraverted — but not what is meant by 'X', namely half-and-half — that is 'C'), or 'B' (both introverted and extraverted, but again not half-and-half).

When I first took the Myers-Briggs, I had difficulty answering the thinking-feeling questions — because I embodied both of the qualities which the test portrays as opposites. I had equal difficulty answering the judging-perceiving questions — but for a different reason: I was not familiar with, and did not identify with, either modus operandi. On a two-dimensional scale such as I drew above, I would be around point B for thinking-feeling, and point D for judging-perceiving.

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My office had a Secret Santa gift exchange, and I got one of my co-workers a boxed set of Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*. I was warmed to find out that she'd been wanting to get that series for a couple of years.

# **Note to Orthodox Evolutionists**

**Stop Trying to  
Retroactively  
Shanghai Recruit the  
Fathers to Your Camp!**

**At least some bishops** explicitly allow their faithful flock to believe theistic evolution, young earth creation, or any of several other options.

This article is not meant to say you can't be Orthodox and believe in evolution. It is, however, meant to say that you can't be

Orthodox and  
misrepresent Church  
Fathers as saying  
things more  
convenient to  
evolution than what  
they really said.

## Two examples of a telling symptom: Fishy, suspicious arguments

Alexander Kalomiros is perhaps a forerunner to Orthodox finding a profound harmony between the Church Fathers and evolution. To pick one of many examples, Kalomiros's [On the Six Days of Creation](#) cites St. Basil the Great as saying, "Therefore, if you say a day or an age, you express the same meaning" (homily 2 of St. Basil's *On the Six Days of Creation*). So Dr. Kalamiros cites St. Basil as clearly saying that "day" is a term with a rather elastic meaning, implying an indefinite length.

Something really piqued my curiosity, because a young earth Creationist cited the same saint, the same book, and even the same homily as Kalamiros, but as supporting the opposite conclusion: "one day" means "one day," period.

I honestly wondered, "Why on earth?" Why would the same text be cited as a proof-text for "days" of quite open-ended length, but also a proof text for precise twenty-four hour days?

So I read [the homily of St. Basil that was in question](#). The result?

The young earther's claim is easier to explain: St. Basil does, in fact, quite plainly claim a young earth, and treats this belief as non-negotiable. And what Kalomiros cites? The text is talking about something else when St. Basil moves from discussing the

Creation to matters of eternity and the Last Judgment. One of the names for eternity is "the eighth day," and in explaining the timelessness of eternity, St. Basil writes, "Thus whether you call it day, or whether you call it eternity, you express the same idea." Which is not exactly how Kalomiros quotes him, not exactly.

Kalomiros offers a quote out of context, and translates in a subtle but misleading wording, leading the reader to believe St. Basil clarified that a "day" [of Creation] can just as well be an "age" [of time]. This is sophistry. This is disingenuous. What is more, I cannot ever remember following one of Kalomiros's footnotes supporting evolution and find an appropriate and responsible use of the original text. When I check things out, little if any of it checks out. And that's a concern. When someone argues like that, the reader is being treated dishonestly, and deceptive argument is rarely the herald of truth.

Let me quote another of many examples celebrating a harmony between patristic Orthodoxy and evolution, Vladimir de Beer's [Genesis, Creation and Evolution](#). He writes:

The account of creation in the first chapter of *Genesis* is known as the Hexaemeron (Greek for 'six days'), on which a number of Greek and Latin Church fathers wrote commentaries. Some of them interpreted the six days of creation quite literally, like St Basil the Great who was much influenced by Aristotle's natural philosophy. Yet the same Cappadocian father insisted that the scriptural account of creation is not about science, and that there is no need to discuss the essence (ousias) of creation in its scientific sense.[1] Others followed a more allegorical approach, such

as St Gregory of Nyssa who saw the Hexaemeron as a philosophy of the soul, with the perfected creature as the final goal of evolution.

It has been my experience that for a certain kind of author one of the cheapest ways to dismiss a Father is to say that they were heavily influenced by some kind of non-Orthodox philosophy. Usually they don't even give a footnote. St. Basil the Great is a Church Father and one of the Three Hierarchy, and if you are going to downplay whether his position is one we should believe, you should be doing a lot more than due diligence than making a dismissive bare assertion that he was heavily influenced by non-Orthodox forces.

But at least de Beer is kind enough to allow St. Basil to believe in six literal days. I am rather mystified by his treatment of St. Gregory of Nyssa, [whose commentary On the Six Days of Creation is here](#). Are we referring to the same work?

St. Gregory's commentary is not a allegorical interpretation, such as St. Maximus the Confessor's way of finding allegory about asceticism and ascetical struggles in the details of the Gospel. It is if anything 90% a science lesson, or an Aristotelian science lesson at any rate, and at face value St. Gregory owes much more of a debt to Aristotle than St. Basil does. (At least St. Gregory spends vastly more time talking about earth, air, fire, and water.) St. Gregory's [On the Six Days of Creation](#) assumes and asserts that the days of Creation were, in fact, literal days. And that's not the end. St. Gregory of Nyssa explicitly ascribes the highest authority and weight to St. Basil's work and would almost certainly be astonished to find his work treated as a corrective to St. Basil's problematically literal *On the Six Days of Creation*;

St. Gregory's attitude appears to be, "St. Basil made an excellent foundation and I want to build on it!" On all counts I can tell, St. Gregory does **not** provide a precedent for treating young earth creation as negotiable. De Beers may well have a friend among the Fathers, but St. Gregory is not that friend. And if this is his choice of friends, maybe he isn't aware of many real, honest friends among the Fathers. St. Augustine may be his friend here, but if the Blessed Augustine is your only friend among the Fathers, you're on pretty shaky ground.

Examples could easily be multiplied, but after a point it becomes somewhat tedious checking out more harmonizers' footnotes and finding that, no indeed, they don't check out.

## Why it matters

Have you read much [creation science seeking to use science to prove a young earth?](#) The reason I'm asking is that that's what scholars do when they use patristic resources to prove that Orthodoxy and evolution are in harmony. The kind of distortion of facts that they wouldn't be caught dead in origins science is the kind of distortion of facts that is routine in those harmonizing Orthodoxy with evolution.

I wrote [a thesis calling to task a Biblical Egalitarian treatment of the Haustafel in Ephesians](#), and it is part of my research and experience to believe that sophistry matters, because sophistry is how people seek to persuade when truth is against them. And when I see misrepresentation of sources, that betrays a problem.

I myself do not believe in a young earth; I am an old earth creationist and have seriously entertained returning to belief in theistic evolution. I stand pretty much as far outside the patristic consensus as Orthodox evolutionists. **But I don't distort the Fathers to shanghai recruit them to my position.**

It may well be that with knowledge that wasn't available to St. Gregory and his fellow Fathers, the intellectual dishonesty and distortion needed to believe in a young earth may be greater than saying, "I know the Fathers' consensus and I remain outside of it." That's not ideal, but it is infinitely better than distorting

the Fathers' consensus to agree with you.

It is better by far to acknowledge that you are outside the Fathers' consensus than make them agree with you. **If you are an Orthodox evolutionist, please stop shanghaiing recruiting ancient Fathers to your camp.**

## **A helpful analogy: What are the elements?**

Some Protestants made young-earth creationism almost "the article by which the Church stands or falls," and much of young-earth and old-earth creationism in Orthodoxy, and evolution, is shaped by that Protestant "article by which the Church stands or falls."

**Today's young-earth creationism and theistic evolution are merely positions on a ballot in single-issue voting, and single-issue voting that was unknown to the Fathers. **There are other issues.****

(What other issues are there, you ask?)

Let me give my standard question in dealing with young-earth Orthodox who are being pests and perhaps insinuating that my Orthodoxy is impaired if I don't believe their position: "Are we obligated to believe that the elements are earth, air, fire, water, and maybe aether?"

If that question seems to come from out of the blue, let me explain:

St. Basil's *On the Six Days of Creation* takes a position we can relate to readily enough even if we disagree:

"And the evening and the morning were the first day."  
Evening is then the boundary common to day and night; and in the same way morning constitutes the boundary of night

IN THE SAME WAY MORNING CONSTITUTES THE APPROACH OF NIGHT TO DAY... WHY DOES SCRIPTURE SAY "ONE DAY THE FIRST DAY"?

Before speaking to us of the second, the third, and the fourth days, would it not have been more natural to call that one the first which began the series? If it therefore says "one day," it is from a wish to determine the measure of day and night, and to combine the time that they contain. Now twenty-four hours fill up the space of one day—we mean of a day and of a night; and if, at the time of the solstices, they have not both an equal length, the time marked by Scripture does not the less circumscribe their duration. It is as though it said: twenty-four hours measure the space of a day, or that, in reality a day is the time that the heavens starting from one point take to return there.

That's on our radar. What's not on our radar is how bluntly St. Basil treats his day's closest equivalent to modern chemistry, and please note that alchemy has nothing to do with this; he does not condemn [alchemy](#) as being occult, but chemistry as atheistic:

Others imagined that atoms, and indivisible bodies, molecules and [bonds], form, by their union, the nature of the visible world. Atoms reuniting or separating, produce births and deaths and the most durable bodies only owe their consistency to the strength of their mutual adhesion: a true spider's web woven by these writers who give to heaven, to earth, and to sea so weak an origin and so little consistency! It is because they knew not how to say "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Deceived by their inherent atheism it appeared to them that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and that was all was given up to chance.

The emphatic alternative he offers is a belief in the four or five elements, earth, air, fire, water, and possibly the aether.

This is something he finds in Genesis:

"And the Spirit of God was borne upon the face of the waters." Does this spirit mean the diffusion of air? The sacred writer wishes to enumerate to you the elements of the world, to tell you that God created the heavens, the earth, water, and air and that the last was now diffused and in motion; or rather, that which is truer and confirmed by the authority of the ancients, by the Spirit of God, he means the Holy Spirit.

St. Basil takes the text to mean more than just that water exists; he takes it to mean that water is an element. Nor is St. Basil the only one to make such claims; as mentioned earlier, [St. Gregory's On the Six Days of Creation](#) is not in the business of condemning opposing views, but it not only assumes literal days for Creation, but the "science" of earth, air, fire, and water is writ large, and someone wishing to understand how ancients could see science and cosmology on those terms has an invaluable resource in [St. Basil's On the Six Days of Creation](#).

Furthermore, the view of the four elements is ensconced in Orthodox liturgy: the Vespers for Theophany, which is arguably the central text for Orthodox understanding of Creation, enumerates earth, air, fire, and water as the four elements. To my knowledge, no Orthodox liturgy ensconces the implicit atheism of modern chemistry.

What are we to make of this? Does this mean that modern chemistry is off-limits to Orthodox, and that Orthodox doctors should only prescribe such drugs as the ancient theory would

justify? God forbid! I bring this point up to say that the obvious answer is, "Ok, there is a patristic consensus and I stand outside of it," and that this answer can be given without shanghaiing recruiting the Fathers to endorse modern chemistry. When science and astronomy were formed, someone was reported to say, "The Bible is a book about how to go to Heaven, not a book about how the Heavens go," and while it may be appropriate to say "On pain of worse intellectual dishonesty, I must accept an old earth and chemistry as worth my provisional assent," it is not appropriate to distort the Church Fathers into giving a rubber stamp to beliefs they would reject.

Drawing a line in the sand at a young earth is a Protestant invention that has nothing to do with Orthodoxy, but casting the opposite vote of theistic evolution in a single-issue vote is also short of the Orthodox tradition. In reading the Fathers, one encounters claims of a young earth. However, often (if not always) the claim is one among many disputes with Greek philosophers or what have you. To my knowledge there is no patristic text in which a young earth is **the** central claim, let alone even approach being "the article by which the Church stands or falls." Single-issue voting here, even for evolution, is not an Orthodox phenomenon except as it has washed in from Protestant battle lines. If an Orthodox who questions the Orthodoxy of old-earthers is being (crypto-)Protestant, the Orthodox who cites the Fathers in favor of evolution is only slightly less so—and both distort the truth.

The young-earth Creation Science makes scientific evidence bow before its will. The Orthodox evolutionist makes the Church Fathers bow before his will. Which is the more serious offense?

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

**"When I became a man, I  
put childish ways behind  
me."**

One Protestant friend said that I had a real knack for insulting analogies. The comment came after I said of mainstream Evangelical "Christian art" that it worked on the same communication principle as hard porn: "Make every point with a sledgehammer and leave nothing to the imagination but the plot." And I have used that ability here: I have said that Orthodox evolutionists writing of harmony between evolution and the Church Fathers are treating patristic texts the same way creation scientists treat scientific evidence. **Ouch.** The Orthodox-evolutionary harmonizers are playing the same single-issue politics game as their young-earth counterparts, and are only different by casting the opposite vote. **Ouch.**

Is there a method to this madness?

I cannot forbid origins questions altogether, for reasons not least of which I am not tonsured even as a reader, let alone being your heirarch or priest. At least some heirarchs have refused to decide for their flock what they may believe: perhaps people are expected to find God's hand at work in creation, but the exact mechanism of involvement, and time frame, are not decided. But I could wish something like the theology surrounding the holy mysteries, where in contrast to the

detailed, point by point Roman account, the Orthodox Church simply says that at one point in the Divine Liturgy the gifts are only (blessed) bread and wine, and at a certain later point they have become the body and blood of Christ, and beyond that point speculation is not allowed.

There are some questions where having the right answer is less valuable than not asking the question at all. Origins questions in the scientific sense do not loom large in the Fathers, and what little there is appears not to match scientific data. But this is not a defect in the Fathers. It is, if anything, a cue that our society's preoccupation with science is not particularly Orthodox in spirit, and perhaps something that doesn't belong in Orthodoxy. Again, [Religion and Science Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution.](#)

But for the interim, for people who need an answer and are good enough scientists to see through Creation Science, please do not ~~shanghai~~ recruit the Church Fathers to rubber stamp the present state of scientific speculation. For starters, science is less important than you may think. But that's just for starters.

# Not Stressed?

You want to know how to deal with stress—if I have anything to tell you. Yes, indeed. Let me pass on some advice I found in a book:

So don't worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, but your Heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth much more than them? And which of you can add another hour to his life by worrying? You might as well try to add another foot to your height! And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, and how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, but I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was dressed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, won't he much more clothe you, you who have so little faith? Don't worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your Heavenly Father knows well enough that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will also be given to you. (Matt. 6:25-33, RSV,

altered.)

Oh, I've annoyed you. I'm sorry. You didn't want me to just quote Bible verses; you wanted something more, well, impressive. How about if I tell you about something I've taken from my travels in Asia?

I spent a summer in Malaysia, and one of the things I learned there is that people interact differently with time. I don't know how to explain that experience: it was as if for your entire life the only music you heard was the music of a banjo, so that to you the sound of a banjo was the sound of music. Then, after its quick strumming, for the first time you heard a violin, later to be joined by trumpets and flutes: a whole orchestra of music you had not heard. My experience of Malaysian time was like hearing the first notes from a violin.

What's special about Malaysian time? Before answering that, I'd like to answer what is special about American time, and describe it as something foreign. If you took geometry and used protractors to measure angles, you may remember how small a degree is. Three hundred and sixty degrees make a circle; if you imagine a cross section of a knife, which would look like a wedge, it's something like a five degree angle. Putting tick marks on the protractor for degrees is awfully precise—more precise than you really need.

None the less, there are smaller angles, a way to measure even more precisely if you've got the tools to do it. You can divide a degree into sixty minutely small parts, called minutes—it would take 300 of them to make a wedge as thick as a knife—and then if that isn't tiny enough for you, you can divide a minute into sixty even smaller pieces, so small that it would take 18,000 of them to make a wedge as thick as a knife. These sort of

"second minutes" are called seconds, and if an angle one minute wide is ridiculously tiny, a second is even more ridiculous.

Yet our watches measure minutes and seconds—a digital stopwatch measures hundredths of seconds. In the Bible, an hour is the smallest unit of time. We have taken an hour and divided it into minute parts, called minutes, and then secondly minute parts called seconds. If I were describing my culture's time sense to an aborigine who understood English, I would say that we have machines that count, and that time is the exact number on a counting machine, and that we are so incredibly attuned to this mechanical counting of tiny time increments that we can ask a machine to cook food for five minutes and count down the last minute in tense agony. And I wouldn't be surprised if he struggled to grasp an understanding of time that is so exotic.

In Malaysia, as in many non-Western countries, things tend to be slower than in America. However, this is something from a detour from a qualitative difference in the experience of time. We are sharply attuned to time as numbers, minutely measured. To the Malaysian, time fades to the background as you try to be with people relationally: you visit someone and it takes however long it takes. You don't say "I'll talk with you for fifteen minutes;" you talk with the person and let the visit itself work out how many numbers a machine would count before you leave. That's a simplified explanation, and I won't try to explain the difference between the Malaysian experience of time and what effect a Western visitor experiences. Instead of explaining that, I'd like to talk about what effect it had on me.

That was my first experience living abroad, and it opened a door. It was the first time my culture shifted. It let me realize that I could shift my culture. What? I'm not sure how to explain.

I consciously shifted my sense of time in Malaysia, and the conscious shifting didn't stop when I left. I've been interested in different experiences of time since then, and I've worked hard to keep a slower, more relational sense of time, where time recedes to the background and presence becomes more important—which has rescued me from the tyranny of the clock. I've picked up things from other cultures—a medieval sense of space, for instance. How's that?

When I took a class in modern physics, the professor was interested in my assessment that Newtonian physics is basically a mathematical restatement of our common sense understanding of how the world works: everything has its place at a given time; time is straightforward; space is a three-dimensional version of what we study in high school geometry, and so on and so forth. Modern physics is a complete reversal: space itself is convoluted in ways that are hard to understand unless you know advanced math, there is no absolute time and space, there are funny things that happen when you try to measure both where something is and how fast it's moving, everything (including you and me) is both a particle and a wave, you can have a cat that's both dead and alive until you look at it... A few years later, I read about medieval culture and made a very slight change to my evaluation that Newtonian physics is a mathematical development of our common sense while modern physics is closer to the result of a contest to see who could find the strangest way of describing our world.

In medieval thought, you don't have anything like Newton's one absolute time and space that encompasses everything. There's an icon of two saints from different centuries talking together, and this troubles the medieval mind not at all. Each place is not one more cell of an immense Newtonian grid, but its

own little world with its own internal logic. (Could the medievals do logic? They invented the university, and Aristotle, who defined logic, was to many medievals the philosopher.) This, more than any logical weakness, appears to be why the medievals could look at four places all claiming to have the head of John the Baptist, and be grateful that God had been so generous. This understanding of space may be part of why C.S. Lewis, a medievalist, would write a children's story that begins to get interesting when a girl walks into a wardrobe and finds that inside is a passage to another world. When I understood this view of space, I revised my estimation that Newton's physics is a mathematical version of our common sense and modern physics is strange. Newton is not a mathematical version of common sense because my culture's common sense is a non-mathematical simplification of Newtonian physics. We have the cart before the horse: Newtonian physics shaped what I felt was common sense, and this common sense is something not shared by a great many intelligent people.

I remember one point that I was walking with some friends through a park and felt momentarily disoriented when I saw an American flag. The reason I felt disoriented was that I was looking at a very picturesque pastoral view and talking with my friends, and had become steeped enough in the medieval view of space that I thought of it as its own country. I value that error—even if it was an error—because it showed that the medieval view of space had seeped deep enough into my bones that I could not only talk about it, but see through medieval eyes. Do I think that my culture's view of time and space is false? I believe they're a rather small kind of truth—true so far as they go, but not nearly as significant as they seem. The medieval view of space means that when I enter the house of God, I am entering a

special place, a sacred space, a place to cast aside all earthly cares. (This way of thinking, by the way, makes a difference in being able to enter another person's world.)

Some people could probably say nasty things about this, and I have gotten myself in the trouble. But I have made it a discipline to become acquainted with other cultures, past and present, and draw on them. In this discipline, I've learned that there are things I can say 'no' to, things that don't have to be. Living under the tyranny of the clock, and a lot of the stress we experience, doesn't have to be. My time in Malaysia was the key that opened that door.

It would take a very long time to explain, or even remember, the treasures I've encountered. Let me mention one. Another practical life skill has to do with technology. Computer hobbyist as I am, I once began a book entitled, *The Luddite Guide to Technology*. The title was meant less to convey irony than to suggest something: technology costs other things besides its price tag. A cell phone, for instance, means that you are available to people who want to reach you no matter where you are. It also means that you lose your privacy. This is, in fact, the same thing, and it is part of why I don't own one. Technology has ramifications well beyond what you pray in a store, and I believe there's a lot to be said for seeing a technology and asking, "What effects will this have?" before asking, "Can I afford it?" The Amish position is a lot more sophisticated than it seems. It's not, "Technology, bad!" The Amish believe that technologies will impact their community, and they evaluate a technology based on whether it will help or hinder their community. The reason they have buggies but not cars is not that buggies are older than cars, but that buggies give mobility within a community and cars make it all too easy to detach oneself from a

community. This is a major difference. I disagree with some specifics of how they take that project, but I respect them profoundly for making that inquiry.

What does this have to do with de-stressing? I read a webpage a while back where the author talked about getting a perspective about 1950's wages versus 1990's wages. In both decades, an hour's work at minimum wage will buy you a burger and fries at a restaurant. Then how has a double income become insufficient for a family? He started listing i.e. what was in a kitchen in the 1950's versus the many things found in a 1990's kitchen, and his conclusion was, "We're not keeping up with the Joneses any more. We're keeping up with the Trumps." The spiritual discipline of simplicity provides an alternative to burning the candle at both ends.

When Y2k was approaching, I was profoundly pessimistic. It was my considered judgment that January 1, 2000 would be doomsday. So I was trying hard to prepare. And one of the things that I realized was that if society shut down, there wouldn't just be the physical challenge of food, drink, and so on. Any physical challenges would be dwarfed by the psychological challenge. So I began doing research.

I asked around on newsgroups; I checked out books on people in wartime and disaster conditions. In the end I received very little in the way of interesting responses; about the most I got by way of response was one person on a survivalist newsgroup saying, "You're right; be sure to get some board games." (If I were to be stuck in my house long term, board games would have been profoundly inadequate.) The best I was able to find was material about Christians who had been held hostage. Those who weathered the storm best were those who had a strong devotional life. Spiritual discipline made the difference.

What I have found in my travels, in my reading, in my exploring, amounts at its most basic to spiritual discipline. Sometimes this is quite mundane spiritual discipline. There was a man who told a doctor, "I don't want you to tell me to stop burning the candle at both ends. I want you to give me more candle." Part of spiritual discipline is learning what is possible rather than chasing an impossible fantasy—to stop searching for something to give you more candle, and instead learn to put out one of the flames and let the other flame burn for its full length of time.

One of the things I have learned is to guard the inner person. Guard thoughts, beliefs, emotions, desires. C.S. Lewis said that today we only ask one ethical question, or maybe two, out of three major questions the ancients asked. If we use the image of ships at sea, the main question we ask is, "How can the ships avoid bumping into each other?" The other two questions, which were recognised in the ancient world, are "How can the ships be shipshape inside?", and "Why are they out at sea in the first place?" It's awfully hard to keep from bumping into other ships if you don't do whatever it takes to be shipshape inside—even if you can't do it perfectly (I certainly can't), it's better to aim for the sky and miss than aim for manure and hit. Being unstressed has something to do with how I am inside, what care I take of myself, and how I live in the Spirit whose communion makes a world of difference. And this care of this inner person, means sitting and thinking and praying, but it also saying 'no' to things that push me too far from calm and quiet: I can't do this completely, but if I have a choice between working overtime and not having the latest appliances and working overtime, I'll have a bit of an emptier house. This is also true on a smaller scale: sometimes when I am most desperately locked into "I need to

get this done!", is precisely the point when I most need to take a break. Besides the larger-scale lifestyle choice, there is a vast number of little choices that add up to a lot. Choices like "How long will I work on this task today?", or "Will I start something productive or procrastinate just a little?" add up to a lot.

There's a saying that procrastination is the thief of time. Putting off work drains your time and mine, doing something that is neither productive work nor refreshing leisure—and steals time from both your work and leisure. Sometimes I'm feeling burned out when I stop work at 5:00, and it's awfully hard to do anything besides sit in the chair and stare into nothingness. That can be when I most need to play with a pet project, or take a walk, or talk with another person—and I have a choice there whether to act proactively or simply sit, drained. What I need is, on the small scale, a proactive sense of balance that means both choosing to avoid now what is too much for now, and to overcome myself and pour myself into something when my natural bent is to just procrastinate, just a little. He who is faithful in little is also faithful in much. He who is unfaithful in little is also unfaithful in much. This means that if I am going to do a good job on a project, I am not given a choice about whether I will do well on it. I really only have a million little choices about whether I'll get to work or fiddle with something non-productive, just for a little while.

Another aspect of spiritual discipline that has made a difference is to learn, even if I learn slowly and badly, to stop thinking in practical terms like an atheist. What do I mean by that? (I've been a Christian all my life.) Let me explain. One of my friends, who is an administrator, has a paper above his desk that says, "Good morning. This is God. I will handle all of your problems today. Please relax, and enjoy the day." There's a big

difference between believing that and believing on paper that there is a God, but you have to solve all of your problems on your own, by yourself. One is a situation where you are working with a loving God, and he's ultimately in charge. The other is one where you're an orphan, nobody's in control, and if you don't get things just right, you're at the mercy of chance—and if you do happen to get things right, you're still at the mercy of merciless chance. There's a world of difference between these two. Believing that you are working with God, he is in charge, and will deal with things in his sovereign manner, means so much less stress.

Now I am learning about another kind of time, liturgical time.

This aspect of spiritual discipline surprised me, because I became Orthodox without this being a reason why: I was more humoring the Church than believing its practice was anything good. And I was surprised when it was. In liturgy, time flows, like a stream in a peaceful forest: here it moves quickly, there it flows slowly, there it turns in eddies. That's how liturgical time flows in Orthodox worship. But liturgical time isn't confined to Church; there are the cycles of the day, week, and year, and all of these interlock, making exquisite patterns. There is a whole spectrum of interlocking colours. Alexander Schmemmann wrote that secular culture has "literally no time": the tyranny of the clock is a vast emptiness compared to what time should—and can—be. Orthodoxy has this discipline—an hour to begin, a lifetime to master—and it manages to preserve wisdom that has endured for ages and at the same time be about living a life of faith, now.

There is the paradox—or at least what seems to be a paradox from outside—of a living anachronism, of something that is in a very real sense ancient, a Patristic culture that is alive today, and at the same time something that is not trying to restore a golden age, because it's trying to live now.

And to describe Orthodoxy as a culture, in purely secular terms, is to miss something fundamental. The culture is there precisely because it is part of something larger. If you say Orthodoxy is a culture, you have another detail of earth. If you recognize that Orthodoxy brings Heaven down to earth, and draws people to share in the divine life, then you are no longer looking at earth alone. This has profound ramifications for spiritual discipline—for what it means and what it does. It means that spiritual disciplines are not an earthly tool to give you an edge in living an earthly life. They take the life we live and begin to draw it into a Heavenly life that begins here on earth.

Someone has said, "Even if you win the rat race, you're still a rat." Spiritual discipline isn't the whole picture, but it does much more than mitigate the worst effects of the rat race. As you begin to walk the path, the Orthodox way, you begin to live the joy you were made for. God touches you so you become more like Christ, and live more deeply, richly, and fully the divine life.

Have I left anything out? Yes, volumes. I haven't talked about prayers, but praying has done a world of good to me. (And God has also given me many of the things I've asked for. But that's another story.) In prayer, God takes the many requests we make of him and weaves them into something immeasurably greater: communion with him, the Lord and Creator of all that exists. I haven't talked about the simplicity and "Non-Conform Freely" of [Living More with Less](#), a book that says quite a lot that's relevant here. I haven't even mentioned sacraments. Of the things I've met, read, thought about, imagined, and created, the treasures all seem to boil down to spiritual discipline, which is quite a lot. Is there anything that spiritual discipline boils down to? Funny you should ask. I've found some very practical advice in a book:

So don't worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, but your Heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth much more than them? And which of you can add another hour to his life by worrying? You might as well try to add another foot to your height! And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, and how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, but I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was dressed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, won't he much more clothe you, you who have so little faith? Don't worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" For the pagans run after all these things, and your Heavenly Father knows well enough that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will also be given to you. (Matt. 6:25-33, RSV, altered.)

## For Further Reading...

### [The Powered Access Bible](#)

I made the Powered Access Bible to make it easy to find things in the Bible and read them in context. The [Sermon on the Mount](#) is an excellent place to start learning about the foundations of spiritual discipline.

The Philokalia ([Volume 1](#), [Volume 2](#), [Volume 3](#), and [Volume 4](#)).

The Philokalia is a massive compilation by spiritual masters from the fourth to fifteenth centuries. It is all about the life of discipline, and is second only to the Bible in spiritual writings that have influenced the Orthodox Church.

[In Celebration of Discipline](#), by Richard Foster

I was given this book on my baptism at Petaling Jaya Gospel Hall. It's a good introduction to spiritual discipline, especially if you find it foreign.

### [A Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers](#)

This is the prayer book that I use in my prayers. It is part of the liturgical rhythm I am using, and it has prayers of great beauty.

[Living More with Less](#), by Doris Longacre

This is a very simple book that outlines five principles. Where it talks about abstaining from things, this is always in the context of a fuller life. It does a good job of underscoring the joy of spiritual discipline.

[Maximus Confessor: Selected Writing](#), by Saint Maximus Confessor

Saint Maximus Confessor wrote at the end of the Patristic age and was a key figure in helping crystallise the Christian understanding of who Christ was. His writings are slow reading, enigmatic, and full of insight. I'd recommend starting with his "chapters on love".

[The Orthodox Way](#), by Bishop Kallistos Ware

[The Orthodox Church](#), also by Bishop Kallistos Ware, has become the standard introduction to the Orthodox Church.

[The Orthodox Way](#) is much shorter and says less, but resonates more. Or at least that's what I've found. More than anything else I've read, this book answers the question, "What does a life of discipline look like from the inside?"

# Now

Now.

Eternity is now.

Eternity is now,

And Paradise is wherever the saints are.

Forever we are dispersed,

Our minds' concentration diffused,

Wishing it were a later time,

When something we are waiting for arrives,

A false hope.

Hope abides, with faith and love,

A hope things eternal to wit,

Earthly hopes do not deliver:

"Earthly things cannot give Heavenly comfort,

And in the end earthly things cannot give earthly comfort,

Either:

Heavenly comfort is the only comfort to be had."

Hoping for change on earth will disappoint:

This is the key to the riddle:

"Two great tragedies in life:

Not to get your heart's desire,

And to get it."

The desire for comfort in earthly hopes,

Is a vortex.

Sucking the energy out of life.  
But there is another way.  
To a thief crucified in torture,  
To any man in circumstances dire,  
Hear the word of the Lord:  
"This hour you will be with me in Paradise."  
And listen to its heart:  
Paradise is not when we get some earthly wish;  
Paradise is now,  
A scattered mind,  
Brought home as a dove in peace,  
To an earth lifted up to Heaven.  
He who wants peace and paradise,  
And worries about how to arrange the things of earth,  
Is rightly compared,  
To a man who wants to swim and clap his hands.  
Multitasking is a way to grasp at more,  
And let more slip through your fingers,  
So you end up grasping less,  
And dissipation with it.  
"What is the sound of one hand clapping?"  
What is the peace achieved by worry?  
What is the contentment achieved by acquiring something?  
If your desire is frustrated,  
Perhaps God wishes to free you to greater goods:  
Treasures on earth give only illusory security,  
But treasures in Heaven feed us today.  
And if you cannot see how God could provide,  
Perhaps God is waiting,  
To give you something bigger,  
To see with the eyes of faith.

Be in your mind,  
"A garden locked,"  
"A fountain sealed,"  
Not dispersed in every direction,  
For when we abandon this NOW that God gives us,  
And wish a handhold on controlling the future,  
Our hearts spill out in every which way,  
Losing living water by grasping for an earthly water supply,  
"Take no thought for tomorrow,"  
And let Living Water enclose Himself,  
In the cistern of your heart.  
The time for eternal life is now:  
The time for obedience is now,  
If you procrastinate,  
Choosing not to obey now,  
Saying, "I can do it later,"  
When that "later" becomes "now",  
It will be harder to do now,  
Because you have already rejected doing it now.  
"Take no thought for tomorrow,"  
You will more have eternity now,  
If your heart is not dispersed,  
Dispersed into "What if this?"  
Dispersed into "I want that,"  
Than if you attend today to what God has given today,  
("Each day has enough troubles of its own.")  
You will be better rested from one night's sleep,  
Than trying your hardest to sleep for a week at once,  
You will be better nourished by eating one nourishing meal now,  
Than trying to get a head start by eating ten nourishing meals at  
one sitting.

And leave this now for other imagined moments.

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

A now where we will remain in the summons,  
To gather ourselves into our heart,  
To dismiss thoughts that disperse us,  
Present to God,  
Present to neighbor,  
Present to surroundings,  
And Paradise present to us.  
When the time comes,  
When we will sink or swim,  
We will swim,

Because swimming is easier than you think,  
When you are only trying to swim,  
And not also clap your hands:  
"My yoke is easy and my burden is light:  
Come to me, all who are weary,  
And I will give you rest."

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

# Oops... Could the Western Rite Please Try Again?

Fr. Cherubim has left a considerable wake; the tip of the iceberg is in his contribution to a wave of committed Evangelicals deciding that being Orthodox is an indispensable aid to pursuing their cottage industry of reconstructing the ancient Church. The sycophant excitedly commented, "Yes; there was an article on this phenomenon in The Onion Dome. It was a bit like that article in The Onion, um, what was it... there was a woman, a strong woman, who overcame years of childhood abuse to become a successful porn star..."

[Followers of Fr. Cherubim \(Thorn\) Demand His Immediate Canonization and Full Recognition as Equal to the Heirophants](#)

## The Western Rite: "Chaotic Neutral" Orthodoxy

When I played Dungeons & Dragons in high school, one of the cardinal rules surrounded alignments: "Lawful Good", "Neutral Good", "Chaotic Good", "Lawful Neutral", "True Neutral", "Chaotic Neutral", "Lawful Evil", "Neutral Evil", and "Chaotic Evil". Each of these alignments was quite different from each other, but there was a common undergirding: no matter what alignment you play, you pick a course of action and you stick with it. You may be a hero or a villain; you may believe in organized

cooperation or the power of the individual, but whatever your choice may be, you are shirking due diligence as a role playing gamer unless you pick a course of action and stick with it.

Except for one exception. "Chaotic Neutral" isn't exactly a matter of picking a course of action and sticking it with it.

"Chaotic Neutral" role play can be described as "You can do anything you want, as long as you don't do it twice," and it is the closest alignment to acting like a hero one day and a villain the

Since my involvement with Dungeons & Dragons, I wrote a Christian role playing game, [The Minstrel's Song](#), before writing [Exotic Golden Ages and Harmony with Nature: Anatomy of a Passion](#) and moving away from role playing games.

next. It has a bad reputation among gamers, perhaps because it disproportionately draws gamers who want to dodge proper handling of one cardinal aspect of game play, and quite possibly may dodge due diligence in other areas as well. And the Western Rite seems in large measure to be the "Chaotic Neutral" of Orthodoxy.

**Q: Why do some Protestants keep trying to reconstruct the ancient Church?**

**A: The "Great Apostasy"**

If you are trying to understand Protestant Christianity, one of the key features you should understand is the "Great Apostasy", even if the term is unfamiliar to many Protestants today. Today the Internet is in working order, and regardless of what may happen in the future, it would be a strange thing to seek out venture capitalists now to help fund the great endeavor of reconstructing the Internet. It doesn't make sense to "reconstruct the Internet" unless the Internet is dead, which it isn't. And it also doesn't make sense to try to "reconstruct the authentic ancient Church" unless the ancient Church died and left no surviving continuation into our day.

The Reformers asserted that there were serious problems in the Catholic Church they knew, and on that score many loyal Romans agreed with them. (For that matter, there are problems in Orthodoxy today—real problems.) What the Reformers asserted was something stronger: some time between the days of the Apostles and their days, the genuine Church had vanished altogether, on some accounts very soon after the Apostles

passed away, and this belief impelled them to a great project of scholarly research and antiquarian reconstruction to reconstruct the (genuine) ancient Church. And so we have the Evangelical cottage industry of trying to reconstruct the ancient Church, which only makes sense if the Church had vanished and, in Orthodox terms, there was no living Tradition whose milk we should turn to nurse from. It is not an accident that the Reformers abandoned Church vestments in favor of scholar's robes; understanding the Bible was no longer through reading the words of holy saints, but through secular antiquarian research. (This attitude still holds in the secular discipline of Bible scholarship today.)

**Q: And why does the Western Rite keep trying to reconstruct Western Orthodoxy?**

**A: Their own version of the "Great Apostasy."**

The Western Rite's project does make some sense here: the Western Church did in fact go through a *Great Apostasy*, and while I have never heard someone from the Western Rite find a *Great Apostasy* and say that the Orthodox Church has died out in Antiochian, Greek, Russian, Serbian, Georgian, etc. living Tradition, none the less it is not a provocative thing to say that the West was once canonically Orthodox and has ceased to be that.

But in my conversations with Western Orthodox and what I have read, the plumbline of Orthodoxy is always a Protestant-style reconstruction of Western Orthodoxy from the time the West was Orthodox. Hence one asserts, for instance, that the vestments used follow the pattern of the time when East and West wore the same liturgical vestments, before the East changed. And this is not an isolated example; things keep coming up where the offered reason for a decision is that this is closest to what historical lessons tell us things were like in the ancient

Church. It is a Protestant tune that is foreign to non-Western Rite Orthodox, and it keeps coming up.

## Converts from the same tradition

One thing that concerns me is that Western Rite Orthodox are by and large not former Roman Catholics, but former Anglicans: one who understood Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism would be much more wary of former Anglicans practicing the Western Rite than former Romans. But let us waive that aside.

One point of spiritual danger for converts to the Orthodox Church is to overly associate with other converts from the same place, an arrangement that seems to invite subtle regressions to how the former confession places things. I have heard friends commenting how an Orthodox group of former Catholics was getting a bit unhealthy, and I have seen it in a mailing list of former Evangelicals. The Western Rite is largely a group of former Anglicans, and subtle (and

The Western Rite discussion I have seen on Facebook often has an edge of British nationalism.

There were "historical" articles posted, and I remember some surprise at someone asserting King Arthur as literal, historical fact. I've (as a historian type) read quite a lot of scholarly commentary on King Arthur, as well as thousands of pages of medieval Arthurian legends, and though there is

maybe not-so-subtle) bits and pieces of Anglicanism seem to keep cropping up.

The Western Rite was unknown until St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco started to create it on his own authority; it is not a continuous, living tradition preserving Orthodoxy, and here nature abhors a vacuum. Converts practicing Western Orthodoxy, not in a position to nurse from the bosom of a living rite of Eastern Orthodoxy, willingly or unwillingly regress to the milk of [an Anglicanism whose Archbishop of Canterbury is a Druid](#). (Some have said that the Anglican way is not via media as proclaimed, but "cut, copy, and paste." But let us leave that aside.)

some evidence that there might have been a warrior named Arthur, [the basic idea of King Arthur comes from a pseudo-historical work, the Brut, which was great reading and captivated European readers, but is not a work of history in any way, shape, or form](#). (I don't remember reference to King Oswald, a saint and martyr which English kings associated with until slightly after William the Bastard's invasion in 1066.)

## ***Must I adopt a foreign culture?***

Christ did not invent baptism, nor did John the Baptist. Baptism was practiced in Judaism for the reception of non-Jewish pagans into Judaism: it was bringing in someone who was unambiguously portrayed as an outsider. What Christ did that was distinctive was to say that baptism is for everyone, Jew as much as Greek pagan. We all start outside.

The introduction to Bishop NIKOLAI's [Prayers by the Lake](#) speaks of "the Christ-fighting Slavic soul": Russians and Serbs need to swim upstream. And I remember a discussion with one Serb on Facebook who was a devout Orthodox and corrected my assumption that he had grown up in Orthodoxy: he grew up an atheist and learned that the giants of Serbian history were all Orthodox, and then discovered something much bigger than nationalism when he discovered Holy Orthodoxy.

One of the differences between Catholicism and Orthodoxy is that in Catholicism, philosophy and culture can be swapped in and out; Thomism is a usual standby but Patriarch JOHN PAUL was a phenomenologist. In Orthodoxy, however, philosophy and culture are not something you change like a garment, and the Orthodox Church in its way keeps alive philosophies and cultures long after the West apostasized. Today's Western culture boasts a millenium of apostasy and is scarcely closer to tenth

century England than it is to present-day India. If you're going to aim for what Western culture was when it was still Orthodox, you have at least as far to go as if you join an Orthodox Church and start to absorb its culture along the way.

And not to put too fine a point on it, but former Catholics and Protestants can only enter the Church as reconciled heretics; we may wish it were some other way, but former Anglicans (among others) are reconciled heretics who particularly need to submit to the Church as one shaped outside of her ways.

## Is there any alternative?

Let's leave aside generalities for just one moment and talk in the specific. My priest is a protopresbyter or archpriest within ROCOR, and a former Anglican deacon. He is glad that he was not immediately ordained when he entered the Orthodox Church, but spent some time as a layman growing Orthodox roots. And not to put too fine a point on it, but I have never heard him argue, in Western Rite style, "This book says that this is how something was done in the ancient Church, so we should implement a program of change to restore this part of ancient Christianity."

Not that he has any particular desire to throw out the old; he's rather conservative. But one particular decision he has made is interesting. As well as being a priest he is a physician, a doctor who treats patients at the extremes of pain and suffering, and he has brought together an icon shrine devoted to one of the "holy unmercenary physicians", saints who healed without charge. And he has placed, very near together, an icon of the ancient Roman St. Panteleimon next to a hand-painted icon of the twentieth century Blessed St. Luke. Another icon shows all of the holy unmercenaries across all the centuries, and as it so happens, the specific saint the corner is named after is St. Panteleimon. From the same fount as this icon corner comes a priest who will accept wisdom from a saint of any century, and again, I have never heard him argue, "This is what my book

research says about how things were way back several centuries ago, or nineteenth century Russia or whatever, so we should change what we are doing to reconstruct the past."

Looking at all the reconstruction of Western Orthodoxy that looms so large in the Western Rite, and seeing such an incredibly Anglican demeanor among Anglican converts who do not seem to really see themselves as reconciled heretics, wild olive branches grafted onto the Vine, leads me to want to say, "**Oops... Could the Western Rite please try again?**"

# Open

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

...ness, the presence, the same,  
Forever welcome me with open hearts,  
And the oil of their gladness,  
Loosens my fist,  
Little by little.  
God, why is my fist tightened on openness,  
When thou openest in me?

# **An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism**

## **What might be called "the Orthodox question"**

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

In my experience, most Catholic priests have been hospitable: warm to the point of being warmer to me than my own priests. It almost seems as if the recipe for handling Orthodox is to

express a great deal of warmth and warmly express hope for Catholics and Orthodox to be united. And that, in a nutshell, is how Catholics seem to conceive what might be called "the Orthodox question."

And I'm afraid I have something painful to say. Catholics think Orthodox are basically the same, and that they understand us. And I'm asking you to take a tough pill to swallow: Catholics do not understand Orthodox. You think you do, but you don't. I'd like to talk about an elephant in the room. This elephant, however painfully obvious to Orthodox, seems something Catholics are strikingly oblivious to.

## **A conciliatory gesture (or so I was told)**

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

## **What Catholics never acknowledge**

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

Let me clarify that slightly. I've heard Catholics acknowledge that Catholics have committed atrocities against Orthodox in the past, and Catholics may express regrets over wrongs from ages past and chide Orthodox for a lack of love in not being reunified. But when I say, "what Rome most needs to repent of," I am not taking the historian's view. I'm not talking about sack of the Constantinople, although people more Orthodox than me may insist on things like that. I am not talking about what Rome has done in the past to repent of, but what is continuing now. I am talking about the present tense, and in the present tense.

When Catholics come to me and honor Orthodoxy with deep warmth and respect and express a desire for reunion, what I have never once heard mention of is the recantation of Western heresy.

This may be another tough pill to swallow. Catholics may know

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

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

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

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

See the two texts below. One is chapter 5 in St. Dionysius (or, if you prefer, pseudo-Dionysius), *The Mystical Theology*.

That gem is on the left. To the right is a partial rewriting of the ideas in the style of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*.

**St. Dionysius the  
Areopagite, "The Mystical  
Theology"**

Again, as we climb higher we say this. It is not soul or mind, nor does it possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is it speech per se, understanding per se. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit.

**Rewritten in the scholastic style  
of Thomas Aquinas**

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

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

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

in the sense that we understand the term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or to any other being. It falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth—it is none of these. It is beyond every assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its preeminently simple and absolute nature, it is also beyond every denial.

father, son, king, wisdom, etc.

Objection Three: It appears that either affirmations or

negations must accurately describe God, for between an affirmation and its negation, exactly one of them must be true.

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

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

## Lost in translation?

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

Thomas Aquinas drew on Greek Fathers and in particular St. John the Damascene. He gathered some of the richest theology of the East and turned it into something that is not theology to Orthodox: nothing of the Greek theology was lost in the scholastic translation but the theology! And there is more amiss in that Thomas Aquinas also drew on "the Philosopher," Aristotle, and all the materialistic seeds in Aristotelianism. (The Greeks never lost Aristotle, but they also never made such a big deal

about him, and to be called an Aristotelian could be a strike against you.) There is a spooky hint of the "methodological agnosticism" of today's academic theology—the insistence that maybe you have religious beliefs, but you need to push them aside, at least for the moment, to write serious theology. The seed of secular academic "theology" is already present in how Thomas Aquinas transformed the Fathers.

This is a basic issue with far-reaching implications.

Am I seriously suggesting that Rome de-canonize Thomas Aquinas? Not exactly. I am trying to point out what level of repentance and recantation would be called for in order that full communion would be appropriate. I am not seriously asking that Rome de-canonize Thomas Aquinas. I am suggesting, though, that Rome begin to recognize that nastier and deeper cuts than this would be needed for full communion between Rome and Orthodoxy. And I know that it is not pleasant to think of rejoining the Orthodox Church as (shudder) a reconciled heretic. I know it's not pleasant. I am, by the grace of God, a reconciled heretic myself, and I recanted Western heresy myself. It's a humbling position, and if it's too big a step for you to take, it is something to at least recognize that it's a big step to take, and one that Rome has not yet taken.

## The Saint and the Activist

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

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

The 2005 [Deus Caritas Est](#) names the Song of Songs three times, and that is without precedent in the Catholic social encyclicals from the 1891 [Rerum Novarum](#) on. Look for

references to the Song of Songs in their footnotes—I don't think you'll find any, or at least I didn't. This is a symptom of a real problem, a lack of the kind of theology that would think of things like the Song of Songs—which is highly significant. The Song of Songs is a favorite in mystical theology, the prayerful theology that flows from faith, and mystical theology is not easily found in the social encyclicals. I am aware of the friction when secular academics assume that Catholic social teaching is one more political ideology to be changed at will. I give some benefit of the doubt to Catholics who insist that there are important differences, even if I'm skeptical over whether the differences are quite so big as they are made out to be. But without insisting that Catholic social teaching is just another activist ideology, I will say that it is anything but a pure "saint" model, and it mixes in the secular "activist" model to a degree that is utterly unlawful to Orthodox.

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

Catholics today celebrate Orthodoxy and almost everything they know about us save that we are not in full communion. Catholic priests encourage icons, or reading the Greek fathers, or the Jesus prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." But what Catholics may not always be mindful of is that they celebrate Orthodoxy and put it alongside things

that are utterly anathema to Orthodox: like heartily endorsing the Orthodox Divine Liturgy and placing it alongside the Roman mass, Protestant services, Unitarian meetings, Hindu worship, and the spiritualist séance as all amply embraced by Rome's enfolding bosom.

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

One more thing that is very important to many Orthodox, and that I have never once heard acknowledged or even mentioned by the Catholics reaching so hard for ecumenical embrace is that many Orthodox are uneasy at best with ecumenism. It has been my own experience that the more devout and more mature Orthodox are, the more certainly they regard ecumenism as a spiritual poison. Some of the more conservative speak of "ecumenism awareness" as Americans involved in the war on drugs speak of "drug awareness."

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

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

Really, I'm flattered...

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

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

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

Really, I'm flattered...

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

full communion would be appropriate.

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

## **Conclusion: are we at the eve of an explosion?**

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

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

Your ecumenical advances and efforts to draw us closer to Rome's enfolding bosom come at a rough and delicate time: What if, while there was serious trouble but not yet schisms spreading like wildfire, the East had reached out to their estranged Western brethren and said:

Good news! You really don't need scholasticism... And you don't exactly need transsubstantiation either... And you don't need anywhere such a top-down Church hierarchy...

And you really don't need to be in communion with the Patriarch of Rome... And...

There is a profound schism brewing in the Orthodox Church. It may not be within your power to stop it. but it may be within

...may, not be within your power to stop it, but it may be within  
your power to avoid giving it an early start, and it may be within  
your power to avoid making the wreckage even worse.

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

Cordially yours,

[Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward](#)

The Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt; Lent, 2009.

# An Open Letter From a Customer

**I don't WANT to abuse  
your employees and be  
rewarded for gaming the  
system.**

[cjshayward.com/customer](http://cjshayward.com/customer)

Dear Customer Service;

**I don't WANT to abuse your employees and be rewarded  
for gaming the system.**

As a customer and as a member of the public, I like being treated with courtesy and respect, and it is nice if customer service employees can be gracious to me whether I am right or wrong. And if "**The customer is always right!**" is about being gracious and representing the company well whether the customer is right or wrong, then I'm all for **that version** of, "The customer is always right!"

However, if you say "The customer is always right!" as a **policy that invites customers to be deliberately abusive**, and treat your employees as punching bags because they know you

will treat them better than customers who act like mature adults, I will take my business to places like Starbuck's (for one example) where employees give the excellent customer service that only employees supported by their management can give.

I do, sometimes, come in with a complaint that I want help with. But even then, I'm not looking for "free hits" on a punching bag. I'm not even looking for a shoulder to cry on, although it might be nice if customer service can offer a sympathetic ear when a customer has had a rough day. What I really am looking for is help fixing a problem, and **the bigger the problem is, the more an empowered employee is my best ally**. An unsupported employee who has been put out as a punching bag, and is trying to hide resentment from being put out as a punching bag by management, is not nearly so big a help to me as an empowered employee. I've heard that bad internal customer service never gives good external customer service, and **when I need help, I want an empowered employee acting with management support, not someone management pushes forward as a doormat**.

Like a lot of other people, and like a lot of other customers, **I don't like to watch someone be abused**, and then treated better than those of us who try to respect your employees as humans. The message is very clear, whether or not it is one you would want associated with your organization. The message? You are willing to let us see others who are obviously acting abusive to your employees to get ahead of us when they are "just" being abusive to game the system, while people who treat your burning-out employees with respect are effectively second-class customers. Why? Because we are not gaming the system by abusing your employees.

I've heard of stores where the management treats employees

with enough respect to call the police if a customer will not stop treating employees abusively. This happens perhaps once or twice a year; most of the time the employees are trying to make any reasonable effort to please customers. But when it does happen, **the spontaneous response from the other customers is to clap and cheer.** Most customers do not enjoy seeing someone be abused, even if the abuser isn't getting rewarded for gaming the system.

I spent a bit of time in England, and one thing that really struck me there was that customer service settings seemed to quite often have a poster that said something like, **"I am here to help customers. Please let me do my job. If you treat me in an abusive manner, my supervisors will put their foot down and call the police if they need to."** I was, for a very, very short while put off the first time I saw one of those posters, and then very, very impressed. And I realized that **those posters went hand-in-hand with excellent customer service:** not just the routine details, but deftly smoothing some very ruffled feathers when a customer was wrong and upset at not getting what he wanted.

And perhaps it stands to reason. I know the English place an emphasis on politeness, but customer service people who are treated as punching bags will probably be working hard to hide resentment. I may be missing something, but these customer service people didn't seem to have much resentment to hide. (If any.)

I miss that customer service, and for that matter I miss the posters. Now I often get the inferior customer service that comes from employees who know that management doesn't support them (and knowingly expects them to take abuse), not the top-notch customer support of employees who are supported

by management, are not expected to take frequent abuse, and act empowered and free to help me as the customer. It's quite a difference.

It's a shame when "The Customer Is Always Right" gets in the way of treating employees well enough that they can deliver good customer service.

**As a customer and as a member of the general public, and as a man and a human being, I would appreciate if you treat your employees as human beings who you will no more allow to be abused on your premises than a customer.**

Sincerely,

Christos Jonathan Hayward

[cjshayward.com](http://cjshayward.com)

# An Open Letter to OTHER Link Prospectors

Dear **Other** Link Prospectors;

I run a major website at [cjshayward.com](http://cjshayward.com). It is a collection of my creative works and has increasingly been focused on Orthodox theology. Suggested starting points include [Doxology](#) and [The Angelic Letters](#). Most of what I've written for reading (as opposed to e.g. open source software or artwork) [is available collected in this seven volume set](#).

I've gotten the occasional fan (e)mail, but I have never had a fan or visitor be generically impressed with everything on my website. I've only had one visitor claim to have read everything for that matter. People who just like my work tend to give some specific compliment or thanks for some of the specific content on my site. Usually people who write fan mail are more than happy to explain what, specifically, makes them happy my site is available to them.

For that matter, I've gotten flames, and the flames in general are quite obviously written in response for some specific posting or element on my site. No one really seems to call me nasty things without some specific statement about how work on my

site. Call it justified the claim

SITE TULLY JUSTIFIES THE CLAIM.

If you try to obtain a one-way backlink from my site without bothering to find out what my site is about and what some of my works are, you are failing to show me a courtesy readily shown by most haters. Please do not be offended if I regard your contact as spam and it is reported as spam.

## A “Hall of Shame” example

I've gotten various link prospecting emails that in generic terms could be sent to the owners of almost any website. The most recent example of a particularly objectionable link prospecting emails is,

**Subject:** Thank you  
Dear C.J.S. Hayward,

Although, it is generally not in my nature to “cold-contact” people I don't know, nonetheless, I wanted to offer you my gratitude for the writings you have shared on your website. They have gotten me through some very hard days. As way of saying “thank-you”, and not being at this time to make any purchases of your products, following are three website links related to one of your current posts, that I thought you may find useful. They are:

<http://arachnoid.com/>

(Psychology - Located on the sidebar of homepage)

<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/>

(Geared towards parents of gifted children, but may be useful as a general resource)

[URL deleted]

(Fr. [name deleted], of the Anglican Catholic Church - His

perspective on similar psychological and theological topics)

I apologize in advance if these links are not useful to you.  
As I said, they are a humble offering in appreciation for  
what you have freely shared.

Thank you again,  
Bryan W.

I believed what it said for a short while. I started to write a  
thank-you note, and then when I thought things through, I was  
horrified.

The first point, if a subtle one, is that like many sites on the  
website, my [contact page](#) contains a direct and explicit request  
of people contacting me: that they put "To the author" in their  
email subject so it gets fished out of my spam folder if need be.  
This is not meant as a hoop to jump through, but I ask it and the  
feedback form and email link on my site have a "To the author"  
baked right in. This provided a crystal-clear red flag that  
however much he may have wished for resharing, it didn't  
translate into respecting simple instructions. (That much, by the  
way, offers a useful filter, and if you are working on triaging  
your own incoming link prospect requests, you might include some  
simple and very clearly stated request on your contact page.)

The second point is that the first paragraph does not  
reference anything specific. Now my website does have several  
works intended to offer strength and comfort to people in hard  
times; [The Best Things in Life are Free](#) comes readily to mind.  
However, while some of my work has been received respectfully,  
this is the first report I've heard that they've helped someone  
quite that much. They don't deserve sole credit. I think they're  
good and worth reading, but I think that anyone who really  
benefitted from them would be benefitting from several other

supports too. But I may be being too picky here; it is common practice to exaggerate some compliments so I don't want to be too legalistic.

The first psychology link left me mystified; I do not consider psychology to be a particularly active interest, and I follow my advisor in regarding psychology to be a sort of leftover that stayed around during and after a process of secularization in the West. Or maybe that's a strong way of putting it, but one post about [Theory of Alien Minds: A UX Copernican Shift](#) does not make me a credentialed psychologist nor does it make psychology a primary interest.

The second link left me mystified as regards approaching giftedness; you don't really tell gifted parents to go to Hoagie's Gifted almost like how you don't really tell web users to go to Google to find things out. Apart from my retaining the spammer's mention of Hoagie's Gifted in this posting, the only real reason I would see myself telling someone about that site would be if I got an "out of the blue" email from a parent whose child was identified as gifted and the parents want a roadmap.

**The third link is the cultural equivalent of saying, "You're from Japan? Say something in Chinese!"** It made me profoundly uncomfortable, and there is a profound difference between Eastern Orthodoxy and Anglican "Catholics", and I was much more uncomfortable with that contact than I usually am either with mainstream Romans or mainstream Anglicans. I wanted to send the spammer a link to my reply to those Greek Catholic T-shirts that say, "Orthodox Christian in Communion with Rome," [a T-shirt that says, "Roman Catholic in Communion with the Archdruid of Canterbury"](#). (I restrained myself.)

And by the way, that wasn't really three links the sender equally wanted me to see. It was two links of window dressing

and one link of payload. This was part of multiple aspects of guile in this post. It was made to give the impression of having received a great benefit, without mentioning anything in particular, and it presented the three links as a thank-you when they were, in fact, there to do the job of link acquisition. Upon reflection, I believe the email was sent in the optimistic hopes that I was born yesterday.

And the last thing I'll mention is that it is admittedly current practice to avoid the word "link" in link prospecting emails and more generically speak of sharing and passing on even though what you want most is a link. That at least might be appropriate, but the goal of this email is to obtain a white-hat one-way backlink, and there was a lot of guile and feigned respect. **Sorry, no.**

I am, as a site owner, willing to give links, including white-hat one-way backlinks. However, if you want something that big from me, your due diligence is to communicate honestly, research my site enough that you have some idea of its marketing proposition and some examples of its content, and if your site is a religious site, read the sharply written [An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism](#), and needless to repeat, respect the clear instructions on [my contact page](#). Guile is one of several ways you can get reported for spam.

Owners of other high-quality sites might appreciate similar considerations.

Thanks,  
[C.J.S. Hayward](#)

# An Open Letter to Spam Patrons

**Dear Valued Patron;**

**How would you like to associate your organization with false advertising, illegal marketing scams, snake oil diets, and offensive unsolicited porn? You can—it's easier than you think.**

**You can reach thousands of people for every penny you invest.**

**The only real cost is to your reputation.**

**What? That doesn't sound attractive to you? Too bad. You're doing all that—and more—every single time you send unsolicited bulk e-mail. It's also known as spam, and for good reason. Why?**

**In a classic Monty Python sketch, a customer in a restaurant asks what's on the menu. The waitress tells him, "Well, there's egg and bacon; egg, sausage, and bacon; egg and spam; egg, bacon, and spam; egg, bacon, sausage, spam; spam, bacon, sausage, and spam; spam, egg, spam, spam, bacon, and spam; spam, sausage, spam, spam, spam, bacon, spam, tomato, and spam; spam, spam, spam, egg, and spam" (and so on). Then a chorus of Vikings begins chanting, "Spam, spam, spam, spam; lovely spam, wonderful spam."**

**The waitress just doesn't get it, even when the customer repeats that he doesn't like spam.**

**You may be the victim of false advertising. Many spammers advertise "opt-in e-mail lists" with millions of targeted recipients**

—but please think for a moment. Would you choose to be on a mailing list that let advertisers fill your mailbox dirt-cheap? Are there millions of people who would choose to have a mailbox with advertisement, advertisement, personal letter, advertisement, family newsletter, and your advertisement? If someone has asked you to read this page, there's a good chance you've patronized spam—and been advertised along with snake oil diets and illegal marketing scams. Don't you think you're in bad company?

You don't have to be. If you want more information, you can read [Stopping Spam: Stamping Out Unwanted E-mail and News Postings](#). It's one of O'Reilly & Associates' best-selling titles. But, most importantly, you can stop paying people to make you look bad. Think about it.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Hayward

[Jonathan's Corner: A Free Library of Online Books](#)

# Ordinary

O Lord my God,  
Who hath placed me here and now,  
Not in the ages of Christological councils,  
Nor in Russia in the 19th century,  
But here and now,  
Sovereign Master and Lord,  
Help me be at peace,  
With where thou in thy sovranty hast placed me,  
Help me to desire for my ascesis,  
What thou in thy sovereign love hast ordained for me.  
If I seek harmony with nature,  
Let it not be with Protestant heart,  
Seeking to reconstruct some romantic golden age,  
But let it be the harmony with nature,  
Whose radix is virtue,  
And a virtue that is found,  
In the things that thou hast given,  
For there is more harmony with nature,  
In contented use of everyday technology,  
Loving people and using things,  
Self-forgetting in humility,  
Than a heart filled with wonder,  
In forest alen enthralled.

Self-impressed at return to harmony with nature.  
O Lord our God,  
Who hast ordained that I might be saved in hesychastic stillness  
and silence,  
Let me beware of technologies whose raison d'être is to deliver  
noise,  
And provide an alternative to asceticism:  
Let me not look my thirst to slake,  
In broken cisterns that cannot hold water,  
In this new technological world forever extended,  
For if technology may be used in asceticism,  
We may not ask it to slake our thirst,  
For asking technology to deliver from boredom,  
Is like asking wine to deliver us from the thirst drunkenness  
creates,  
Or narcotics to deliver us from the addict's low.  
Boredom is a passion,  
And escape from the ordinary feeds it;  
Its cure is repentance,  
And serving God here and now,  
Our thirst slowly reoriented,  
From the mirages of broken cisterns,  
To living water,  
Which we seek in vain when we seek to escape,  
And find given in what we sought to escape from.  
We seek to escape a despised here and now,  
And so long as we escape,  
We close our eyes to the beauty of Heaven,  
Unfolding in the here and now:  
Paradise is wherever God's saints are;

The bad news is that we cannot escape,  
And the good news is that there is no need:  
The bad news is that mirages can never slake our thirst,  
The good news is that what we have disdained in chasing after  
mirages,  
Holds a fountain of living water.

O Lord our God,  
Help us to respect the ordinary which thou hast ordained,  
Help us to be grateful for the here and now,  
Whether that is a here and now of first world luxuries,  
Or a here and now of suffering increased,  
A here and now for spiritual athletes' to strive,

Let us answer,  
Glory to God in all things,  
In easy times and in hard,  
Whether luxuries are placed within our grasp,  
Or we grow ever closer,  
To being offered the crowns of confessors and martyrs,

Glory to God in all things,  
Let us confess,  
Let us pray,  
Let us glorify,  
Thou who art Lord and God and King,  
Thou who reignest,  
In all places and all times,

The God sovereign over the Christological councils,  
The God sovereign over nineteenth century Russia,  
The God sovereign over every age past,  
The God sovereign over every age present,  
The God sovereign over every age future,  
Who hast placed us where we are,

In thy sovereign wisdom,  
For our ascesis,  
For our growth,  
For our struggle,  
For our contemplation,  
For our glory.

And if we consider ourselves wiser than thee,  
As we do if we think we are in the wrong age,  
And we would better have been placed in another era,  
Let us repent,  
And be grateful,  
For where thou hast placed us,  
And the terms of the ascesis,  
Which thou hast ordained for our theosis,  
The ordinary terms,  
Of ordinary things,  
And ordinary work,  
And ordinary activity,  
And ordinary needs,  
And ordinary responsibilities,  
For monastic and faithful living in the world,  
Alike find their salvation,  
In what are their ordinary circumstances,  
Anchored in the ordinary,  
For when their energy is not spilled out in self-seeking,  
Then they are freed to soar to Heaven,  
Working in and through a course ordained,  
For their salvation.  
To thee belongeth glory,  
To thee belongeth praise,  
To thee is due right ascetical use,

Of every circumstance,  
To the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost,  
Who hast ordained what is ordinary,  
In every place and every time,  
And to whom is due,  
Right use of the present thou hast given us in the present,  
Gratitude expressed in ascesis,  
For the terms on which thou hast offered us theosis,  
To the Father and to the Son and the Holy Ghost:  
Glory to God for all things!  
Amen!

# An Orthodox Bookshelf

## The Greatest Treasures

These are some of the greatest treasures around to read, and there's a lifetime worth of reading in them. I may be critical in some of my reviews, but I only list books I think are worth reading, and the pieces I criticize are probably worthy of a more charitable spirit.

### [The Orthodox\\* Study Bible](#) (Kindle)

In this Orthodox bookshelf, a decisive pride of place goes to [The Orthodox\\* Study Bible](#). I have felt more comfort in reading it than any other Bible, and it gives a real sense of reading the Bible, not privately, but in community with the saints across the ages. The footnotes are decisively better than the Bible de Jérusalem / [New Jerusalem Bible](#), and those responsible for [The Orthodox\\* Study Bible](#) decisively understand that the proper use of footnotes in a text is not to speculate about how a text came together across the

ages, but to illumine the Bible as the ultimate work of practical, spiritual, and mystical theology, with footnotes oriented towards practical, spiritual, and mystical theology.

Then why have I put an asterisk in [The Orthodox\\* Study Bible](#)?

[The Orthodox\\* Study Bible](#) shows signs of a group of converts who have described as trying to do too much, too fast. Their selection of saints for commentary is limited to the first millenium (have no nineteenth century saints already stood the test of time?), and the introduction harps on the ancient Church.

If harping on the antiquity of the Church doesn't seem strange, think about how we are all the continuation of the royal, ancient bloodline of His Majesty King ADAM and Her Majesty Queen EVE. Poetry and meaning are alike profound when, to quote a Protestant author, C.S. Lewis has Aslan proclaim "Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve." Such a thing may be poetic to note, and quaint, but it would be a strange thing to harp on and say that you respect other people primarily as carriers of an ancient bloodline. Most of the respect we have, or should have, for other people is not for the antiquity of our bloodline, but because they are fully human, however we may understand being human, because they are made in the image of God and can be transformed into the likeness of Christ. It may be a useful thing to remember that a beggar or a person we can't stand is ultimately family to us, but very little of the language of respect for the human person, whether Orthodox, other religious, or secular, states that we are the fullness of the ancient bloodline of our first parents. And, notwithstanding that eagerness to re-create the ancient Church was

foundational to the Reformation and can still be found in Protestant influences, the basis of respect for Orthodoxy is not that it is Ancient Orthodoxy, but that it is Holy Orthodoxy.

Though [The Orthodox\\* Study Bible](#) introduces its material by talking about the authentic continuity of the Orthodox Church (without so much as a brief passing mention of our antiquity as the authentic continuity of the bloodline of Lord Adam and Lady Eve), I have never heard such harping on the ancient Church among cradle Orthodox. Admittedly the Orthodox Church is the same living organism as the ancient Church, but in the altar at my parish, most of the books are ancient in character (service books, Gospel books, a Greek New Testament), not one of them is labelled as ancient: no service book touts "the ancient Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom." 'Ancient' is not the point.

And there are other things like that are written to "smooth things over" at the expense of truth in [The Orthodox\\* Study Bible](#). **For one instance**, the note on Creation on page 2 says like a politico, "Regarding scientific questions about the scientific accuracy of the Genesis account of creation, and about various viewpoints concerning evolution, the Orthodox

For more information, see [Note to Orthodox Evolutionists: Stop Trying to Shanghai Recruit the Fathers to Your Camp and Creation and Holy Orthodoxy: Fundamentalism Is Not Enough](#).

Church has not dogmatized any particular view." This is misleading disinformation; origins questions may well be among the many areas "not dogmatized", but there is a near-universal consensus among the Church Fathers, including the

Church Fathers of the first millenium that [The Orthodox\\* Study Bible](#) returns to, that the earth was created in six days about six thousand years ago. This may be inconvenient to point out, and it might be easier to help people get along if we say that several views are legitimate, but this is twisting facts for the sake of convenience. (And for the recdord, I believe in a billions of years old earth and legitimate disagreement over how God created the world), although [the world was created 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD.](#))

With all that stated, [The Orthodox\\* Study Bible](#) has a number of helpful and edifying notes in an overall tenor that provides guidance in reading the Bible, and nothing better has come to fill its place.

Perhaps another work will come along that is not trying to do "too much, too fast," but [The Orthodox\\* Study Bible](#) has left behind a pretty big pair of boots to fill, and there is much profit in it whether you know the Bible well or are just beginning to dive into it.

[Sir Lancelot Brenton's translation of the Septuagint Old Testament \(Read online\)](#) and [The King James Version of the New Testament](#)

One tacit assumption about the Bible is that we have to have it in one volume. In fact, we do not, and when I read the Bible in Greek, one volume is [a copy of the Septuagint](#) (with [Sir Lancelot Brenton's translation](#) on the side), and the other is [a Greek New Testament](#) (admittedly, a Western critical edition rather than the Byzantine text). This works quite well.

The language of both is a little unfamiliar today, but there is something unsurpassed in [the King James Version](#). Modern translations of the Bible are the work of specialized

language scholars, and their technical skill in the original language is not matched by being able to write well in English: in fact the only time I've heard of someone selected to help in translation based on being able to write well in English is the very tangential involvement of J.R.R. Tolkien in The New English Bible(?). [The King James Version](#) is the work of generalists, Renaissance men whose technical knowledge of original languages was matched by aptitude as English wordsmiths. And that is something that modern bureaucratic translations don't even try.

The best alternative I am aware of to [The Orthodox\\* Study Bible](#) is a combination of [Sir Lancelot Brenton's translation of the Septuagint](#), which was clearly written to match the excellence of [The King James Version](#), and [the King James Version of the New Testament](#).

And if the language seems a little unfamiliar at first, I would recall one encounter in [The Way of the Pilgrim](#), where a man had been cured of alcoholism by a priest who gave him a Gospel book and told him to read one Gospel each day (which he made a part of his practice). The Gospel was in Slavonic, which is further from that day's Russian than the Elizabethan English of [The King James Version](#) is from our English. The priest, giving him the Gospel book, said, "Do not worry if you do not understand [all of] what you are reading. The demons will understand."

**The Philokalia** ([Volume 1](#), [Volume 2](#), [Volume 3](#), [Volume 4](#)),  
([Kindle](#))

[The Philokalia](#) is a library of practical theology, and there is nothing else like it. It is a collection about the science of spiritual struggle, and though entries can vary substantially from each other, they are very edifying and can orient us to

what is truly important in life.

[The Philokalia](#) is best viewed, not as a book, but as a library of classics, and the intent is that people would read specific works as selected by a clergy member. I can attest that simply reading it cover to cover is a second-best solution.

Many Orthodox give [The Philokalia](#) first place outside of the Bible.

### [The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#)

[The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#) is a work addressed to monastics, and is read each Lent in monasteries. However this is far from being a treasure only useful to monastics. It is a jewel of the Orthodox Church as a whole, and all kinds of people have read [The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#) to great spiritual profit.

**The Prologue of Ochrid** ([Volume 1](#), [Volume 2](#) ([Daily selections online](#); [Old Calendar](#)))

The Orthodox Church has a great tradition of biography as theology: one grasps holiness by reading the lives of the saints. A rich sampling of these lives is found in the daily readings of the [Prologue](#), which tells of all the saints commemorated on a particular day.

### [The Jordanville Prayer Book](#)

Praying the prayers of the Church is a great help along the way, and [The Jordanville Prayer Book](#) (or any other good prayer book) is like the script to a play: it is not primarily meant to be read silently while sitting in a chair, but spoken aloud, brought to life, preferably from a standing position.

Prayers, with fasting, are an area to work out with one's priest or spiritual father. They come alive when they are practiced as part of the life of the Church.

[Akathists](#) (links to many good Akathists; note that the website, Orthodox Wiki, should be taken with a little grain of salt).

St. Romanos the Melodist is said to have miraculously received the prayer of the [Akathist to the Mother of God](#).

Since then there is a tradition of Akathist prayers; the term "akathist" means "not seated," i.e. standing to deliver the prayer. The first Akathist, and many of the ones that follow, are beautiful and powerful prayers.

[The Ante-Nicene Fathers and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers](#) collections ([Read online](#))

[The Ante-Nicene and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers](#) provide the standard reference translations to a great many Church Fathers. This collection receives its own asterisk because while the texts are Orthodox they were translated by Anglicans grinding a massive axe against Rome. Hence a

condemnation of contraception, abortion, and infanticide by

St. John Chrysostom is turned into a condemnation of abortion and infanticide alone; Augustine may be allowed to condemn Natural Family Planning, but there is an axe that is ground in the texts and is even more explicit in the accompanying notes and introductions.

Still, this does not stop a great deal of glory from the Fathers; read, for instance, [St. John Chrysostom's Treatise to Prove that No One Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself](#). The collection, for all its deficiencies, is still a great treasure.

[St. John of Damascus, An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox](#)

For more information on contraception in particular, see [Orthodoxy, contraception, and spin doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article](#).

[Faith \(Kindle\)](#), [Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works](#), etc.

I have picked these two examples of works that it is work to read. I read them, not because I have grown enough that they seem easy and natural to read, but because they stretch me and challenge me to enter into a larger space. Fr. John Behr said, "The only thing worse than not reading the Fathers and reading them systematically;" in a similar fashion, the Fathers are of the most value to us, not when we find an endorsement of what we have always believed, but when we are challenged and invited to grow. I am challenged by these works, and I pick out these two as representative examples of innumerable works that challenge me to grow bigger and unpleasantly challenge me to enter a larger world.

## Lesser Classics

This is a collection of lesser greats, limited in number by the limitations of what I am familiar with. Note that this does not include a lot of popular authors, such as [Fr. Seraphim \(Rose\)](#), or Met. John (Zizioulas); in the latter case, I answered the question, "Is John Zizioulas an existentialist in disguise?" by asking, "Where's the disguise?" However, there is some good work produced recently, and I've even read a little of it.

### [The Orthodox Way](#)

The standard print introduction to Orthodoxy is His Eminence Metropolitan Kallistos's [The Orthodox Church](#), but what captivated my attention was not that more systematic work but the less systematic and more mystical [The Orthodox Way](#). It is an excellent introduction to Holy Orthodoxy.

### [The Way of the Pilgrim \(Kindle\)](#)

[The Way of the Pilgrim](#) is a glimpse of one pilgrim for whom the [Philokalia](#) unlocked the treasures of the Gospel. The author, whose name is lost, would today be considered a vagrant; that was the form taken by his pilgrimage. Along the way [the Jesus Prayer](#) unfolds in his heart. The book is a lesser classic, but it is a classic.

## External Influences

One queer postmodern theologian speaking in class spoke of how the Fathers used "the best philosophical resources of their day," the implication being that we should use the postmodern resources fashionable today. To that I might reply: the best philosophical resources available to the Fathers were neo-Platonism, and the best philosophical resources available today are neo-Platonism. That may sound harsh, but the Church that said "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" used philosophical resources without limiting themselves to them as captives. Neo-Platonism was at once the air the Fathers breathed and the opponent they struggled against; in today's terms, slightly clumsy to apply to them, they strove for a critical reception of neo-Platonism, or developed (or rather preserved) a counterculture.

These books are not exhaustive; but they serve to point to an area that is worth reading. But perhaps this section of this Orthodox bookshelf is less important than one might think.

Note here that there is one category I have deliberately excluded: Gnostic and other heretical writings. Gnostic writing is spiritual pornography and I regret I have ever set eyes on it. I thought it would provide perspective to help me understand Orthodoxy. It did not, and I would rather have read any Orthodox resource than that form of spiritual poison.

### **Plotinus: The Enneads (Kindle)**

A central work of neo-Platonism, and possibly the best single resource in philosophy from outside the Church into what the Fathers drew from when they drew from pagan philosophy, in the image of one Church Father, "like a bee that goes straight to the sweetest nectar and ignores all else."

### **Plato: The Republic (Kindle)**

A seminal work that was the first domino that would build to neo-Platonism. There are parts of the work that seem strange today; Derrida called it "the world's oldest, longest, and least funny political joke". I would amend that to "the world's oldest, longest, least funny, and least intentional political joke." The treatment of sexuality reads like something plagiarized from Monty Python today, but viewed in relation to historical context (in books I shouldn't have read), it does not seem nearly so provocative a stance against currents of its own day as in currents of our own day. It sets forth one of the oldest radical political ideologies, but for all that it is a seed of many important things, many good things, and I lightly adapted its most famous passage in [Plato: The Allegory of the...Flickering Screen?](#)

**Almost last, and certainly  
least,**

I would at least like to mention my own offerings, not because there is any conclusion that they are classics, but because I cherish them and they are what I have to offer. They are in:

[The theology section at Jonathan's Corner.](#)

**I invite you to visit my collection of theology Kindle eBooks!**

## The “Big Room”

Programmer slang uses “the Big Room” for outside, the “room” one is in when one is not hunched over a computer indoors. And there is something profound to looking beyond books and learning from life.

Monasticism has a maxim, “Your cell will teach you everything you need to know.” And the precept holds whether or not one is a monk; staying in one’s place and learning things is powerful. Most monks have been illiterate and not owned books; the maxim is not simply “Your bookshelf will teach you everything you need to know,” but “Your cell will teach you everything you need to know.” The here and now that God has put you in, that you are tempted to escape by real or virtual means, will teach you everything you need to know.

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

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

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

**A Calvinist Looks at  
Orthodoxy**

**Jack D. Kinneer**

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

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

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

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

### **The Appeal of Orthodoxy**

Since the days of the apostles, there have been Christian communities in such ancient cities as Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, and Corinth in Greece. In such places, the

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

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

The apparently apostolic roots of Orthodoxy provide much of its appeal for some evangelical Protestants. Furthermore, it is not burdened with such later Roman Catholic developments as the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences, the immaculate conception of Mary, and her assumption into heaven. Orthodoxy is ancient; it is unified in a way that

PROTESTANTISM IS NOT; IT LACKS MOST OF THE medieval doctrines and practices that gave rise to the Reformation. This gives it for many a fascinating appeal.

Part of that appeal is the rich liturgical heritage of Orthodoxy, with its elaborate liturgies, its glorious garbing of the clergy, and its gestures, symbols, and icons. If it is true that the distinctive mark of Reformed worship is simplicity, then even more so is glory the distinctive mark of Orthodox worship. Another appealing aspect of Orthodox worship is its otherness. It is mysterious, sensual, and, as the Orthodox see it, heavenly. Orthodox worship at its best makes you feel like you have been transported into one of the worship scenes in the book of Revelation. Of course, if the priest chants off-key or the choir sings poorly, it is not quite so wonderful.

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

### **The Shortcomings of Orthodoxy**

So then, is this Orthodox Presbyterian about to drop the "Presbyterian" and become simply Orthodox? No! In my estimation, the shortcomings of Orthodoxy outweigh its many fascinations. A comparison of the Reformed faith with the Orthodox faith would be a massive undertaking, made all the more difficult because Orthodoxy has no doctrinal statement comparable to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Orthodoxy is the consensus of faith arising from the ancient Fathers and the ecumenical councils. This includes

the forty-nine volumes of the Ante- and Post-Nicene Fathers, plus the writings of the hermits and monastics known collectively as the Desert Fathers! It would take an entire issue of *New Horizons* just to outline the topics to be covered in a comparison of Orthodoxy and Reformed Christianity. So the following comments are selective rather than systematic.

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

Orthodoxy also has a real problem with nominal members.

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

Second, the Orthodox have a very inadequate understanding of sovereign grace. It is not fair to say that they are Pelagians. (Pelagius was a Western Christian who

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

Third, the Orthodox are passionately committed to the use of icons (flat images of Christ, Mary, or a saint) in worship. Indeed, the annual Feast of Orthodoxy celebrates the restoration of icons to the churches at the end of the Iconoclast controversy (in a.d. 843). For the Orthodox, the making and venerating of icons is the mark of Orthodoxy—showing that one really believes that God the Son, who is consubstantial with the Father, became also truly human.

Since I did not venerate icons, I was repeatedly asked whether or not I really believed in the Incarnation. The Orthodox are deeply offended at the suggestion that their veneration of icons is a violation of the second commandment. But after listening patiently to their justifications, I am convinced that whatever their intentions may be, their practice is not biblical. However, our dialogue

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

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

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

### **A Concluding Assessment**

But these criticisms do not mean that we have nothing to learn from Orthodoxy. Just as the Orthodox have not thought a lot about matters that have consumed us (such as

thought a lot about matters that have consumed us (such as justification, the nature of Scripture, sovereign grace, and Christ's work on the cross), so we have not thought a lot about what have been their consuming passions: the Incarnation, the meaning of worship, the soul's perfection in the communicable attributes of God (which they call the energies of God), and the disciplines by which we grow in grace. Let us have the maturity to keep the faith as we know it, and to learn from others where we need to learn.

Orthodoxy in many ways fascinates me, but it does not claim my heart nor stir my soul as does the Reformed faith.

My firsthand exposure to Orthodoxy has left me all the more convinced that on the essential matters of human sin, divine forgiveness, and Christ's atoning sacrifice, the Reformed faith is the biblical faith. I would love to see my Orthodox friends embrace a more biblical understanding of these matters. And I am grieved when Reformed friends sacrifice this greater good for the considerable but lesser goods of Orthodox liturgy and piety.

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**I wrote the following reply:**

Dear Dr. Kinneer;

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

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

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

**Fourth**, the Orthodox consensus of faith is not a much longer and less manageable collection of texts than the [Ante-Nicene Fathers and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers](#), combined with the even more massive *Patrologia Graecae*, and other patristic sources. [I have said elsewhere](#) that Western and particularly

Protestant and Evangelical culture are at their core written cultures, and Orthodoxy is at its core an oral culture that makes use of writing—I could suggest that it was precisely the Reformation that is at the root of what we now know as literate culture. This means that Orthodoxy does not have, as its closest equivalent to the Westminster Confession, a backbreaking load of books that even patristics scholars can't read cover to cover; it means that the closest Orthodox equivalent to Westminster Confession is not anything printed but something alive in the life and culture of the community. (At very least this is true if you exclude the Nicene Creed, which is often considered "what Orthodox are supposed to believe.")

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

minds, but this was a terrible doomsday prophecy.

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

"The righteous shall walk by faith."

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

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

Paul does not say, "The righteous will walk by sight," even as he invokes the words, "The righteous shall walk by faith." Here's something to ponder: The righteous shall walk by faith even in their understanding of the words, "The righteous shall walk by faith."

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

When I showed this to one Reformation scholar to check my treatment of the Reformation, he said that I didn't explain what "The righteous shall walk by faith," but my entire point was to show what the Old Testament quotation could mean besides a shibboleth that one is sanctified in entirety in response to faith without one iota being earned by good works. The Reformation teaching, as I understand it, reflects a subtle adaptation of the Pauline usage—and here I might underscore that Paul and Luther had different opponents—and a profound adaptation of the Old Testament usage. And it may be possible to properly understand the Biblical text without interpreting it along Reformation lines.

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

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

**Seventh**, I am slightly surprised that you describe original sin as simply being in the Bible and something Orthodox do not teach. Rom 5:12 as translated in the Vulgate ("...in quo omnes peccaverunt") has a Greek ambiguity translated out, so that a

Greek text that could quite justifiably be rendered that death came into the world "because all sinned" (NIV) is unambiguously rendered as saying about Adam, "in whom all have sinned," which in turn fed into Augustine's shaping of the Western doctrine of original sin. It's a little surprising to me that you present this reading of an ambiguity as simply being what the Bible says, so that the Orthodox are deficiently presenting the Bible by not sharing the reading.

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

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

**Ninth**, you write, "Finally, many of the Orthodox tend to have a lower view of the Bible than the ancient Fathers had." When I was about to be received into the Orthodox Church, I told my father that I had been devoted in my reading of the Bible and I would switch to being devoted in my reading of the Fathers. My spiritual father, who is a graduate of [St. Vladimir's Seminary](#), emphatically asked me to back up a bit, saying that the Bible was the core text and the Fathers were a commentary. He's said that he would consider himself very fortunate if his parishioners

would spend half an hour a day reading the Bible. On an Orthodox mailing list, one cradle Orthodox believer among mostly converts quoted as emphatic an Orthodox clergyman saying, "If you don't read your Bible each day, you're not a Christian." Which I would take as exaggeration, perhaps, but exaggeration as a means of emphasizing something important.

**Tenth**, regarding higher-critical views at [St. Vladimir's Seminary](#): I agree that it is a problem, but I would remind you of how [St. Vladimir's Seminary](#) and [St. Tikhon's Seminary](#) compare.

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

**Eleventh**, after I was at [Calvin](#), I remembered one friend, tongue-in-cheek, talking about "the person who led me to Calvin."

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

I left this out at first because it's not as "nice" as some of

the others, but I would like to invite you to perhaps leave the "faith" (as you call it) that aims for John Calvin, and embrace the faith that Calvin was trying to re-create in response to abuses in the Western Church. It's still alive, and we still have an open door for you.

# A Postmodern- Influenced Conclusion

When I studied early modern era Orthodox Patriarch Cyril Lucaris, I compared the Eucharistic teaching in his profession of faith to the Eucharistic teaching in Calvin's [Institutes](#)...  
...and concluded that Calvin was more Orthodox. Calvin, among other things, concerned himself with the question of what John Chrysostom taught.

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

When I read Francis Schaeffer's [How Should We Then Live?](#), my immediate reaction was that I wished the book had been "expanded to six times its present length." I have some reservations about the fruitfulness of presuppositional

apologetics now. What I do not have reservations about is saying that there is a valid insight in Schaeffer's approach, and more specifically there is distortion introduced by letting Orthodoxy say whatever it wants... as an answer to Calvinist questions.

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

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

**"The Orthodox  
Martial Art Is  
Living the Sermon  
on the Mount:"  
*Orthodoxy, "Our  
Social Program is  
the Trinity," and  
"Our Juvenile  
Correctional  
System Is Parents  
Who Stay Married  
and Love Each  
Other and Their  
Children"***

**A look at India in relation**

## to my own roots and formation

My live story up until now would be immeasurably impoverished if the various ways in which India had entered my life would simply be subtracted. I appreciate Indian food, even if I eat it in a non-Indian (Paleo) fashion. And that is not trivial, but there are deeper ways I've been enriched by that great nation. One of these relates to pacifism, where one of India's giants, one certain Gandhi, is perhaps the best-known person in history as I know it for the strength of pacifism. Gandhi might have said with perfect sincerity, "Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills," but there is a certain motherlode as old as the hills that Gandhi may have mined that motherlode better than anyone else in history.

My own earliest roots, the brand of Christianity I received as mother's milk, were in the Anabaptist tradition, and more specifically the Mennonite Church. I have never been a member of the Amish tradition, but I would contrast Amish as they are known today from Anabaptists in the time of the Reformation. Today Amish are seen as quiet, peaceful, and [daft in being picky about which technologies they accept in their community](#).

(Amish are conservative, perhaps seen as a bit daft, and as Weird AI offensively jabs them, says, "[Tonight we're going to party like it's 1699](#), not seeing what on earth could be good about [partying like it's 1699](#).)

But Amish and other Anabaptists were originally the anarchist wing of the Reformation, the Radical Reformers who were radical even in the eyes of fellow Protestants, the

were radical even in the eyes of fellow Protestants, the Reformation's Left Coast. That they would have been parodied in the future as "quaint"ly conservative and "please don't point and stare" would have perhaps astonished Zwingli and his radical wing of the Reformation, and all their opponents, alike.

Before and during college, I went on a bit of a journey and a quest to bolster and advocate for pacifism. I studied the [Sermon in the Mount](#); I read Gandhi write things that I thought only a Christian would write. Gandhi did not only say that his three heroes were Jesus, Daniel, and Socrates; he said that Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for the sin of the world, a perfect act. And it was only years later that I learned why Gandhi did not become a Christian, something not given a single stinging word in a single quote I ever saw attributed to Mr. Gandhi.

I was filled with shame when I learned that Gandhi wanted to become a Christian, attended a Christian evangelist's meeting, and was turned away from being accepted into the Christian faith, because of the color of his skin. And he gave advice to Christians on how to present Christianity to Hindus, including displaying the hard parts very clearly, but he was not willing, after that, to consider becoming a Christian.

I would not have felt shame if I heard that Gandhi simply didn't ever consider becoming a Christian, or that he found the Hindu mystical tradition deep enough that he would content himself with Hindu roots, or that he would not have considered adopting the religion of the colonial occupiers of India, or other reasons like Hinduism as perhaps the most cosmopolitan of all world religions, or if we may permit an anachronism, Hinduism as the deep tradition that would years later establish India as a software superpower. These are all bearable. But not becoming Christian because a Christian evangelist turned him away—that is

not bearable, but shameful.

In my own journey and life practices, the very oldest of the major works on my website, [Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength](#), was from my own search for pacifism. I don't deny that the nonviolent power that Gandhi described in terms of "satyagraha" or hold onto Truth (from the Sanskrit), nor that satyagraha became incarnate with Indian flesh. "I am a man, so nothing that is human is alien to me," as an ancient Roman said. The Church Fathers who quickly saw a path that meets its fruition in Christianity in philosophy or Plato is able to read of the practice of satyagraha and nonviolence, and the Indian cardinal virtue of ahimsa that recognizes you are tied to the other person and cannot harm the other without harming yourself, can be coherently interpreted without recognizing what Gandhi took, without compromise, from Christianity and the [Sermon on the Mount](#). If Plato or Platonism can be purified, and someone [Taoism can be purified](#), then perhaps something can be purified from Gandhi and the one nation on earth that established itself as sovereign and independent without shedding a drop of enemy blood.

I would like to briefly stop at [C.S. Lewis](#) and what is apparently an attack on satyagraha. The architect of "mere Christianity" as it is established in the West makes the only external addition to what is called "mere Christianity" that is in fact not part of Christianity as it was known then. He describes and condemns a guilt manipulation that one holds oneself hostage to make pity a weapon. And he is the only Protestant writer I have read who, in papers like "Why I am not a Pacifist," says not only that Christians may wage war but in fact that conscientious exemption is not acceptable in any sense, and pacifists as much as anyone else should be compelled to try their best to kill men

in military service. And on that point I really give Lewis an F. Ruling out even alternative service for people who believe it is always wrong to kill is FAIL, at least for someone pushing a comprehensive plan of "mere Christianity."

## A second look at my roots

I mentioned Anabaptism or Mennonites earlier as my earliest roots, and I have revisited them, not as a matter of regression but pushing a divide further. And there are some points of contact. The Anabaptist movement has three self-identified points of distinction:

1. A "believer's baptism", meaning baptism only on adult profession of faith,
2. A refusal to take oaths under any circumstance.
3. Pacifism.

On the first point there is a disagreement between Orthodoxy and the Anabaptist tradition; what Anabaptists sought to dismantle in saying "Infant baptism is of the Devil," is one of many continuities with Orthodoxy that some in the West has

The self-identification may or may not be what is most important to others. Probably the strongest critique that Orthodox might make of the Radical Reformation, shocking to both sides of the comparison, might be that an early Anabaptist might say, "We are starting with a clean slate. God is NOT incarnate in bread and wine, is NOT incarnate in any fixed form of worship, is NOT incarnate in any icon

opted out of.

On the second point, there is strong agreement. Now in pastoral terms there is an issue of people's comfort with a teaching, and it is not pastorally helpful to take a teaching someone is not ready

to recognize, and ram it down that person's throat rather than allowing that person to grow to accept the teaching. But as far as oaths go, there was one Athonite monk who refused to take a required oath before testifying in a court of law, and endured without complaint the four months of prison that he was punished with before refusing to take an oath. [St. John Chrysostom](#), called "the moral theologian among the Fathers par excellence," throughout every work that I have read, keeps on returning to certain moral topics regardless of perception. He keeps on hitting on the necessity of sharing with the poor, and of the theatre "in which the common nature of women is affronted" (think Internet porn, as it existed in the fourth century; to be an actress included being a member of a much older profession), and he more than once drops the hammer on the practice of taking oaths at all.

But as regards the question of pacifism, I regard my own [Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength](#) as an interesting early

or art, NOT incarnate in any priesthood where priests are anything more or less than laity, NOT incarnate in the saints, NOT—" and [a Muslim might answer](#), "You're off to a good start, but you left off the most important one: [God is NOT incarnate in Christ!](#)"

However, for now I would like to focus on the three self-chosen identifiers that I was taught growing up were the Anabaptist distinctives.

I should wish to clarify that I am, as an Orthodox Christian, in

step, particularly as there weren't too many other pieces playing in the same space that I was able to find. I asked a number of other people for feedback, and I regret my own sophomoric side of dealings with mature Christians who believe in a just war and who in every sense embodied what I advocate for here. (Wheaton College president Dr. J. Richard Chase asked for a copy for his personal files; part of this was undoubtedly kindness, but the kind gesture was against a backdrop where he probably had not seen too many works like it at all, even if he searched for them.) I've come back to review it, and there are things I wouldn't say now in this the very oldest and earliest of my works. But my coming back to it after all these years is not so much a matter of recognizing I was young and idealistic and thinking I am practical and realistic now, but looking again and saying that **I did not go nearly far enough.**

(Coming back years later deepened in the Orthodox spiritual tradition, or at least slightly less immature, my further knowledge has unlocked things in my earlier position that I could not understand in my early career as a

communion with saints including alike the [Martyrs and Passion-bearers Boris and Gleb](#), who were rulers in authority who chose to be murdered rather than take the sword, and warrior-saints like the [Greatmartyr, Victory-bearer and Wonderworker George](#). Both are treasures of the Orthodox Church, and while a soldier who has gone on active duty cannot become clergy, he can become a saint.

I might also comment that in years back, when I was exploring and searching, Christians who believed in a just war, without exception, met my forceful arguing only

convinced pacifist.)

But let us not demand perfection from everyone, and give one concession, at least, for lawful gun ownership.

with gentleness and kindness. If you are one of those people, this piece is dedicated to you.

## **A cue from the military that might *matter* to gun owners**

One Orthodox faithful explained gun ownership and challenged people who regarded gun ownership as simply nothing but a passion of anger. And he explained how, as a loving and careful father, he hopes to never fire his gun "live", but as a loving and responsible husband and father, he knows what he would do if someone broke into his house with intent to do harm. He would bring such killing to confession, but he had his priorities straight.

(Note that this is reasoning about what would happen in an imagined scenario, not what was happening, a distinction which is important in Orthodox mystical theology.)

I have heard gun control advocates talk about how tragic it was when someone heavily armed opened fire on children; I haven't yet heard a rebuttal after a card-carrying NRA member answered, "Yes, it was tragic not only that that started, but that there was no one lawfully possessing firearms available to stop the crime. Did you hear about one of those many incidents that never appears on television, where for instance a man armed to kill a bear entered a church sanctuary with intent to do ill, and an off-duty security guard who was carrying a firearm legally and with explicit permission of her church shot and stopped a

crime?"

And this may be just my observation, but the primary approach to persuasion taken by gun control advocates is to show hard-hitting images of traumatized people after an active shooter met no armed speed bump at all, to persuasion taken by the gun lobby is to mount a logical argument appealing to research and statistics. Now as a mathematician I understand Mark Twain's point that there are three types of lies ("Lies, \_\_\_\_\_ lies, and statistics!"), and I don't put my weight onto statistics I haven't seen investigated, but the question between gun control and gun lobby isn't a matter of deciding which side has cooked their books. Perhaps the gun lobby has cooked their books: but it is a little sad when only one side of a discussion argues from research, evidence, and statistics.

I may be hypocritical or a freeloading parasite when I say this, but I do not personally own a gun; I never have and probably never will. [I have some skill with firearms](#), but that is beside the point. But I feel safer now that my state has legalized carrying concealed firearms, with a few asterisks about how to opt out on your property. I would rather be in a situation where there are two guns in a room, owned by a criminal and meant for a crime, and one by a law-abiding citizen intending to stop crime in the most drastic circumstances, than only the gun carried by a criminal. I feel safer knowing that gun-using criminals do not know where there is a lawfully carried firearm, and criminals simply do not know if I am carrying a .45 with hollow-nosed rounds.

But if you're keepinkeeping a firearm by your bed for self-defense, may I ask if you are also, for instance, investing in good [night vision](#)? Have you taken the time to install a respectable home security system? This may be slightly less "sexy" than

having a powerful gun at hand, but have you established the powerful and immediate deterrent of flooding your home with light (a thief's worst enemy) if someone approaches?

And have you considered that it may be easier, after training, to hit someone while shooting out a solid stream of pepper spray—especially in poor lighting, where at least without night vision you can't really aim—than the few rounds in a gun's magazine? And that the effects on your house are much easier to clean up from a vile liquid than a few bullet holes after a powerful gun has shot through an intruder's body and hit the wall behind. Killing someone, however justified it may be, is a traumatic experience; even for trained law enforcement professionals, for instance, killing in the line of duty is trauma and good police chiefs can mandate that an officer who has killed in the line of duty get a year's counseling. Training as a law enforcement professional or soldier does not change the fact that it is traumatic to kill another person. If I had a choice between stopping a dozen innocent men with pepper spray and stopping one guilty man with a shot through the heart, I know which one I would rather remember when I look in the mirror each day.

For a first cue from the military, snipers, who know well enough how to fire a rifle at a paper target, are given one round and only one round to keep with them, carry, hold, and move around, and then after a couple of days are given one shot to take a "hostage situation" (balloon full of oatmeal or whatever) shot. Most fail the first time. With a bit more training and preparation, it gets to one shot, one kill. But it takes some training to get there. I wouldn't myself trust that with one shot, cold and in a panic, to hit home.

But with all that preface stated, may I ask people who look for safety via firearms to at least take a cue from the military?

Sun Tzu's classic *The Art of War* c. 500 BC, adapted for the business world in sometimes flaky ways, is arguably the greatest classic in military strategy and usually considered to be less dated than the best of the best from 100 years ago.

If one were to condense the multi-faceted classic into a single sentence, it should probably be one gem taken from the text, "**All warfare amounts to deception.**" To put it starkly, war is not achieved by killing people, with psychological considerations in any sense being a side issue. War is about deceiving people; killing people has more of a supporting role than anything else. The terms "strategy" and "strategem" are forms of the same basic word; they amount to how to trick the opponent. You don't win well by killing each other's soldiers and seeing who has some left over at the end; military forces at any rate fall apart at a third (maybe less) casualties, and rank and file U.S. troops have guns and ammunition intended to seriously wound in the average case, but not kill. (Part of this is love for enemies; part of it is a tactical consideration that if you instantly kill an enemy soldier, you take one man out of action; if you seriously wound a soldier with a wound that may be treatable, you take three men out of action.)

One ancient account talks about how a military leader stripped a force of thousand down to a few hundred, and gave them torches and the shofars that one would use at the head of a host. Then they crept around the host, surrounded it, and blasted the horn. The entire enemy warhost, "like the sand at a seashore for multitude", fell into deep panic and was routed, falling to each other's swords ([original text](#)).

World War II might have been won under even more dire circumstances, but at least it was not the armies of second-born sons whose blood was poured out like water who won D-Day

without strategem. Also contributing to that scenario was an enormous effort to build up rubber balloon versions of tanks at the like, massing to look from the air like the Allies were intending to invade from the point where the English Channel was narrowest, but sent a double agent to keep Hitler believing the D-Day invasion was just a diversion and keeping his main forces to where the channel was nearest and therefore out of the way when the breach was made on Normandy beach.

What does this have to do with home security? **Everything.** You're not firing on all pistons if you stop with a gun, and I do not mean that you need more firepower, or really even more gadgets.

Jack MacLean's [Secrets of a Superthief](#) says, on the cover:

"They said I was the best, the one the police called the 'Superthief.' Before I went straight I picked every lock, turned off every alarm, found every hiding place. I know how burglars get inside—and gets them out. If you're smart, you'll pay attention to what I have to say..."

Possibly the most valuable observation in the text is that home security should be 60% psychological and 40% physical, and it is seriously confused to think that you can win a physical arms race with a thief who wants to get in and isn't afraid of you. If you change your doors for heavier doors and less glass then a determined intruder will just change an already big crowbar for an even bigger crowbar. Then what other options are there? [the book](#) has some options; drawn from it:

**Situation:** There is an intruder accidentally making sounds in your house, or at least you think it is an intruder.

You say, crossly, with irritation and as much frosty, icy

condescension as you can muster, "Yes, Sweetie, I know what the machine gun will do to the walls. I don't care. I'm going to give 60 more seconds for the SWAT team to get here, and then I'm taking care of it **MY** way."

**Situation:** A thief is casing your back door for possible entrance.

Have a clearly scribbled note on your back door, fresh-looking note that says, "Honey, will you please talk to Billy? He's let that stupid pet rattlesnake escape his cage again, and right now, I can't even find that idiotic scorpion! Can you explain to him that this is UNACCEPTABLE?"

(Women have sometimes taken to putting a pair of [size 17 men's boots](#) outside the door each evening.)

Does it work? Perhaps you may not sound entirely believable, but nerves roughened by intruding in unknown situations where you don't know how people are armed and you could legally be killed tell a different story. (The "Superthief" tells of not being able to count how many terrifying times he heard a barking dog answered by "Shaddap, Max!")

The most implausible note he described, more humorous than believable, was a notice when he wanted people to leave him alone, was a note saying that he had a severe case of crabs, and the crabs were strong enough to break people's fingers with their claws.

**However, it was enough to motivate other convicted felons in prison to simply leave him alone.**

There's a lot that can be accomplished by violence in certain very unhappy circumstances, and Gandhi respected those who use force nobly. Seriously, he did:

*The people of a village near Rettilah told me that they had*

The people of a village near Dehri told me that they had run away whilst the police were looting their houses and molesting their womenfolk. When they said that they had run away because I had told them to be nonviolent, I hung my head in shame. I assured them that such was not the meaning of my nonviolence. I expected them to intercept the mightiest power that might be in the act of harming those who were under their protection, and draw without retaliation all harm upon their own heads even to the point of death, but never to run away from the storm centre. It was manly enough to defend one's property, honour or religion at the point of the sword. It was manlier and nobler to defend them without seeking to injure the wrongdoer. But it was unmanly, unnatural and dishonourable to forsake the post of duty and, in order to save one's skin, to leave property, honour or religion to the mercy of the wrongdoer. I could see my way of delivering the message of ahimsa to those who knew how to die, not to those who were afraid of death.

- Gandhiji in Indian Villages by Mahadev Desai

But there is more...

...and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

## **"Our social program is the Trinity"**

Of all the brief sayings that most mystifies people, "Our social program is the Trinity" may be the most confusing. A social program includes a blueprint for some more or less vaguely Utopian social order, and how by ~~civil war~~ politics it is possible to influence, manipulate, coerce, intimidate, bamboozle a plan to concretely build things on earth. And given such a bulleted list of key features to a social program, it seems an extremely strained reading of the doctrine of the Trinity.

But may I ask: What about devout Christian family communities saying, "Our juvenile correctional system is parents who love each other, stay married to each other, and love and discipline their children?" That's wordier, but the key point lies in a similar vein. If you go to a staunch Evangelical community, you may not see terribly many prisons, courthouses, correctional officers, and so on and so forth, but the purpose of a staunch Evangelical community is not that it has abundant "department of corrections" responses to a 10-year-old arrested for pushing hard drugs or a 12-year-old arrested for rape; however much there may be support for repentance, an ounce of prevention is worth a much more than a ton of cure, and an ounce of bored children in a less-than-ideal Bible study is worth years of expensive state programs to care for children who have been

incarcerated.

And in that sense, prayerful life, or the entire struggle in spiritual discipline, is the Orthodox martial art. Certain threads more than others, but the disciplined Orthodox life offers more than a martial art as wholesome homes offers something better than a state Department of Corrections or a doctrine of the Trinity that effectively answers social planners: "There are more things in Heaven and earth, visible and spiritual, than are even dreamed of in your ideologies."

Orthodox have various statements of how monasticism and the laity are compared, if they should be; I am of the opinion that it is beneficial to monastics to regard laity as fully equal, and laity to regard monastics as immeasurably above them. But some things in monasticism are falsely criticized as "just because it's monasticism:" taking passages of the Bible at face value is not, or at least should not, be a particularly distinctive feature of monasticism. And some people have said that Lent is just how Orthodoxy should be year round, and it makes sense to say that the bulk of monasticism is just how all Orthodox Christians should be.

Monasticism is privilege.

Monasticism is privilege, easily on par with a full ride scholarship at a top-notch university. But doesn't it entail poverty, obedience, and chastity? Well, of course. Aren't they difficult? Yes. But the vow of poverty, of never providing for your future self, is a vow of accepting the Providence who knows and loves you (past, present, and future) more than you could possibly ask. It is one of three medications that carves out a niche for abundant health. Perhaps most laity should observe chastity through faithfulness, but it is the same virtue that powers one practice and the other.

We are to be as the birds of the air, highlighted in the  
[Sermon on the Mount](#):

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Do you think you can add one single hour to your life by taking thought? You might as well try by taking thought to work your way into being a foot taller! And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which

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

There is something very powerful here, a something that is missed in business as usual in the U.S. Business as usual means heaping up treasures on earth, saying "God helps those who help themselves" (a quotation from Benjamin Franklin not found anywhere in the Bible), to be your own Providence. The idea that we are to do God's job as our Providence is at times treated harshly by Christ ([Luke 12:15](#):

And [Jesus] said unto them, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?' And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said unto him, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee:

then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?'  
So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich  
toward God."

I wrote about the husband who owned a gun as a means of being responsible towards his family: but my inward wincing was less that firing a gun is not turning the other cheek, than that he responded out of a spiritual illusion. This side of the Fall, we cannot ever arrange things right, and we do not do well to oust God so that we can get back to steering the helm of our lives ourselves.

It may or may not be appropriate for Orthodox laity to arm themselves, but whatever other reasons there may be for arming yourself, shutting off risk is not one of them. It is non-negotiable that no matter what hedge we surround ourselves with, the sand we grasp will slip through our fingers, and this is actually good news: we have another option, living the [Sermon on the Mount](#), not harmed because we do not have control, and free because we know we do not need to have control, [open to a larger world than the constricted world we keep on making for ourselves.](#)

There was a Linux fortune that said, on eloquent terms that I cannot fully reproduce, that there were a bunch of starfish clinging to rocks on the bottom of a rapidly flowing river, holding the rocks tightly and terrified they would lose their grip. Then one of them suddenly let go, was battered against a few rocks, and then finding a place in the flow. And, perhaps in a dig at Christianity, the other starfish who didn't get it called the one starfish a Messiah and worshiped him while continuing to cling, and remaining terrified of losing their grip on the rock.  
(But we are called to do both worship the Man, and imitate

him.)

The [Sermon on the Mount](#) would almost speak more strongly about violence being unworthy of Christians if it didn't address violence. The direct mention shadows the overarching theme, where silence speaks more powerfully than words.

But there are in fact words:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:' But I say unto you, 'Ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.' But I say unto you, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;' Ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

St. Paul's empathic plea to Christians to not demean themselves and the Church by secular lawsuits against fellow Christians ([Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be](#)

cheated?) is cut from the same cloth.  
But there is more.

## How does the Orthodox Christian martial art really work?

Returning the theme of monasticism as privilege, one aspect of the depth of monasticism is that monks are not to defend themselves by force. When they are accused, they are not to defend themselves in words, as Christ Himself remained silent before Pilate (Note: ...and terrorized Pilate more than any threat could have done). And this is not exactly a mainstream approach in the West. It's a bit of an oblong concept: something that is a common assumption between the various permutations of pacifism and just war is that, once you've decided what are the appropriate means for self-defense, you can and should use the most effective appropriate means to end the danger with minimal harm to yourself and others. It just goes without saying that whatever limits may be, obviously defending yourself with speech is appropriate. But the monastic interpretation of "[Ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.](#)" is quite simply that we are not to defend ourselves. We are not to defend ourself by means of lethal force; we are not to defend ourselves by means of less lethal force; we are not to defend ourselves even by words; we are not to defend ourselves even in thoughts. Not a single angry thought is permitted to us, and there are two kinds of power that we

wield after renouncing power.

The first kind of power, the (relatively) obvious one, is highlighted in a story from [A 3rd Serving of Chicken Soup for the Soul](#):

In the days when an ice cream sundae cost much less, a 10-year old boy entered a hotel coffee shop and sat at a table. A waitress put a glass of water in front of him. "How much is an ice cream sundae?" "Fifty cents," replied the waitress. The little boy pulled his hand out of his pocket and studied a number of coins in it. "How much is a dish of plain ice cream?" he inquired. Some people were now waiting for a table and the waitress was a bit impatient. "Thirty-five cents," she said brusquely. The little boy again counted the coins. "I'll have the plain ice cream," he said.

The waitress brought the ice cream, put the bill on the table, and walked away. The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier and departed. When the waitress came back, she began wiping down the table and then swallowed hard at what she saw. There, placed neatly beside the empty dish, were two nickels and five pennies - her tip.

C.S. Lewis's article [Why I Am Not a Pacifist](#) which would be more accurately be titled, for what it says, "Why No Christian Should Be a Pacifist Nor Have Either Their Church Teachings or Their Conscience Respected As a Conscientious Objector," dismissed what appeared to be Gandhi's toolchest as a dog lying in a manger (as in "Aesop's Fables:" which not only does not eat but also prevents other animals from eating). And it is not clear to me that all of the tools Gandhi used are appropriate: I'm not sure there is ever reason to seek out suffering, and after the

Church's decision to both canonize St. Ignatius (who brought martyrdom down on himself), and forbid future Orthodox Christians from trying to provoke martyrdom, apart from strained readings of the [Sermon on the Mount](#), I can't remember seeing any subsequent interpretations of hunger strike as appropriate. In other words, the [Sermon on the Mount](#) may give us tools, including a [Do not resist evil](#) that is never separate from the more foundational Truth in [Do not worry](#), does not justify other tactics such as civil disobedience without **direct** provocation, or hunger strikes.

There's plenty of reason for fasting, of course, but fasting is not a tool for straightening out God and his Providence: fasting is a tool to let God straighten **you** out. And in fact the [Sermon on the Mount](#) tells us that fasting, like prayer, should be as secret as manageable. Then it can reach its full power. However, Lewis himself may have furnished the most touching portrayal of Gandhi's toolbox in Christian literature of all that I have read, in [The Voyage of the Dawn Treader](#):

"Hail, Aslan!" came his shrill voice. I have the honor—" But then he suddenly stopped.

The fact was that he still had no tail—whether that Lucy had forgotten it or that her cordial, though it could heal wounds, could not make things grow again. Reepicheep became aware of his loss as he made his bow; perhaps it altered something in his balance. He looked over his right shoulder. Failing to see his tail, he strained his neck further till he had to turn his shoulders and his whole body followeed. But by that time his hind-quarters had turned too and were out of sight. Then he strained his neck looking his shoulder again, with the same result. Only after he had

turned completely round three times did he realize the dreadful truth.

"I am confounded," said Reepicheep to Aslan. "I am completely out of countenance. I must crave your indulgence for appearing in this unseemly fashion."

"It becomes you very well, Small One," said Aslan.

"All the same," replied Reepicheep, "if anything could be done . . . Perhaps her Majesty?" and here he bowed to Lucy.

"But what do you want with a tail?" asked Aslan.

"Sir," said the Mouse, "I can eat and sleep and die for my King without one. But a tail is the honor and glory of a Mouse."

I have sometimes wondered, friend," said Aslan, "whether you do not think too much about your honor."

"Highest of all High Kings," said Reepicheep, "permit me to remind you that a very small size has been bestowed on us Mice, and if we did not guard our dignity, some (who weigh worth by inches) would allow themselves very unsuitable pleasantries at our expense. That is why I have been at some pains to make it known that no one who does not wish to feel this sword as near his heart as I can reach shall talk in my presence about Traps or Toasted Cheese or Candles: no, Sir —not the tallest fool in Narnia!" Here he glared very fiercely up at Wimbleweather, but the Giant, who was always at a stage behind everyone else, had not yet discovered what was being talked about down at his feet, and so missed the point.

"Why have your followers all drawn their swords, may I ask?" said Aslan.

"May it please your High Majesty," said the second Mouse, whose name was Peepiceek, "we are all waiting to cut

off our own tails if our Chief must go without his. We will not bear the shame of wearing an honor which is denied to the High Mouse."

"Ah!" roared Aslan. "You have conquered me. You have great hearts. Not for the sake of your dignity, Reepicheep, but for the sake of the love that is between you and your people, and still more for the kindness your people showed me long ago when you ate away the cords that bound me on the Stone Table (and it was then, though you have long forgotten it, that you began to be Talking Mice), you shall have your tail again."

On an immediate level, this is what nonviolent resistance may seem to have. But the "big picture" realization was one that I realized in discussion with one friend about "What will you do in situation X [which had not, and has not, happened]?" and I told a joke:

A young man who was a prospective captain of a ship was being quizzed about how he would handle difficulties.

The person quizzing him said, "What would you do if a storm came?"

"I'd drop an anchor."

"OK; suppose that the anchor gets stuck and won't come up, and later on another storm came up again. What would you do?"

"I'd drop another anchor."

"Ok, and if that gets stuck and won't come up, and later on you see another storm, what would you do?"

"Where on earth are you getting all these anchors from?"

"From the same place you're getting all these storms from!"

Fr. Thomas Hopko's [55 Maxims](#) says, "Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out," and connects with "What would you do in situation X?" and the point I tried to make in [Treasures in Heaven: The Inner Meaning of "Do Not Store Up Treasures on Earth"](#). We are not to store up treasures on earth only in things external to our bodies; we are not to store up internal treasures on earth, things that exist in our minds.

One of these kinds of false treasure exists in terms of our perceived need to map everything we do out in advance. One teacher talked about how some scholar claimed to map out what St. Irenaeos would have said in various circumstances that hadn't happened: "What would St. Irenaeos have said if Adam and Eve, with their immediate children, had not sinned, but their grandchild did?" And regardless of the content of such scholarship, it is imposing on St. Irenaeos something utterly foreign to his mindset. As I have seen the academic community today, it is natural both to ask, "What is ...?" and "What would ...?" when trying to understand something. In patristic writers, only one of the two basic kinds of questions is valid for understanding something: "What is ...?" And no real saint that I am aware of announces that we must have a plan that anticipates every possibility before we act. Part of the point in the [Sermon on the Mount](#) is that there is no need for planning. It is as if this dialogue plays out:

**God:** Will you trust me on this?

**Us:** I don't know. I'm trying to trust you, but I really don't understand what you are trying to do with me here.

**God:** I know you don't know. That's my point. [As your Spiritual Father](#), I am not asking you to do my

thinking for for me. I am asking you to trust me. Do  
you trust me?

**Us:** I'm trying to fit things together, really I am, and  
maybe can work together if I am able to work out a  
plan. Could you work with me on this?

**God:** I am very interested in working with you. Do you  
trust me?

It is not my point—and probably not my position—to try to  
tell fellow Orthodox what saints' footsteps they may follow.

There are warrior-saints, and then there is [St. Acacius](#),  
mentioned in St. John Climacus's [Ladder of Divine Ascent](#), who  
obediently served an abusive elder for nine years until he died,  
and when asked at his grave, "Brother Acacius, are you dead?"  
called out from beyond the grave, "No, Father, how is it possible  
for an obedient man to die?" And there are many others of  
various stripes, [a kaleidoscope to the glory of God](#).

It is not my point—and probably not my position—to tell other  
Orthodox Christians whether they should join the military, or  
under what (if any) conditions firearm ownership is appropriate,  
or other questions regarding violence. I have a hunch that a good  
set of bright lights that turn on instantly whenever someone  
approaches your house may, at least by itself, provide a more  
effective deterrent than a gun for when an intruder is already in  
your house. And it may be a mistake to assume that the real "I'm  
taking it seriously" way to address threats is something that  
starts with weapons. However, at least for the sake of argument,  
I do not wish to give a prescription for how others may relate to  
violence. **But it is my direct wish to challenge the main  
assumption that keeps popping up when Christians regard  
violence as the real practical power.**

One point regarding the [Sermon on the Mount](#) is that this side of Heaven, control that you plan out is simply impossible.

The task is not to God's thinking for him; it is to accept his Providence as intended to bless you entirely, and trust him with the complete trust that the [Sermon on the Mount](#) cries out. This may mean being [with the birds of the field and the lilies of the field](#), and being so with (in some cases) or without openness to using violence. And, though this is a lesser point, I'm a little wary of a second assumption that lurks under the covers: "Pacifism is idealistic and appropriate for an ideal world, while sometimes using force is what works in the non-ideal world that we have." But there is confusion for people stressed and worried to give that line to "[Each day has enough trouble of its own](#)." I've had times with more stress in my life, and times with less, and it may more be true that in an ideal world, we wouldn't need "[Each day has enough trouble of its own](#)", but in the rough circumstances in which we live, we need to take things one day at a time, and we need it much more than we would if we were in Paradise.

One ex-military person I spoke with talked about how top brass would keep on waking everyone up at very late night / early morning, sound the alarm, say the USSR was invading NOW, and everybody had to get up and go out to the tanks. And so soldiers would grudgingly walk out, dragging their rifles by the muzzle, and get into the tanks, and the live question in everyone's eyes was whether the officers would call off the exercise before they got the tanks out and into mud. The live concern here is whether the soldiers would have to clean the mud off the tanks for moving into the field the next morning. And he talked about idealistically believing that if only he and his colleagues trained hard enough, no one would attack anyone else.

I remember hearing a missionary's kid who grew up

somewhere on the African continent saying, "You can't defeat people who have nothing to lose!" and thinking that that sounded awfully idealistic, something I really wanted to believe but couldn't, but that was over a decade ago, and since then the U.S. has been involved in multiple wars against third world nations and perhaps won none of them. World War I proudly paraded a mechanized army down to California for a sort of extended field training exercise where the entire mechanized army failed to apprehend the one single Mexican bandit that they were searching for. In Vietnam, the U.S. strategy was, "Our cool gadgets will win this war for us," the Viet Cong's strategy was to maximize the war's unpopularity back home ("ballbuster": a non-lethal anti-personnel mine used by the Viet Cong, just powerful enough to destroy testicles), and the present strategy in the present conflict of shooting at ISIL from the air and arming jihadists to fight ISIL jihadists is really less of a military strategy, properly speaking, than an all-American marketing strategy.

Having control this side of Heaven is not possible, and believing that firearms can be a way to opt-out of the conditions [Sermon on the Mount](#) addresses in its prescriptions. In that sense gun ownership is dangerous, because even if you accept 100% of what NRA advocates say, you have effectively closed your eyes to some of the bedrock of what the [Sermon on the Mount](#) says. In another matter, that of finances, the Fathers are quite clear: "That robe, hanging in your closet, belongs to the poor;" "Feeding the hungry is greater work than raising the dead." If your firearm costs you the ability to live the [Sermon on the Mount](#), drop it off at the police department; it is better for you to enter eternal life as killed where a firearm would have let you stop a crime, than to have your whole body (and your gun

with it) cast into Hell.

I might briefly comment that I have brief experience with martial arts, and I have consistently noticed that they had become the driest portions of my spiritual life. Firearms and martial arts, if they are to be useful, depend on constant practice and preparation. As the banner for every school but one of Kuk Sool Won, "We need more practice!" At the grandmaster's school, the banner says, "You need more practice!" The common consensus is that with martial arts, you fight noticeably better within months, but real mastery takes years, and years, and years. And even then you don't have a money-back guarantee; any martial arts instructor worth anything will make it clear before you reach black belt level (arguably before you reach anything above white belt) that martial arts instructors will make it abundantly clear that martial arts are no silver bullet; you may be safer in a conflict but not safe against every threat; someone testing for black belt can, if arrogant enough, wind up with a hole in the head. There have been attempts to make something simply easier to learn and remember—Goshin Jitsu is meant to be simple and effective—but keeping up on a martial art just because it might be useful in a fight is a bit like spending a few hours a week practicing a spare profession so that if you happen to lose your job you have a spare profession ready and waiting for you. It's a lot of work, and it's no more of a guarantee at that.

And there is a spiritual toll for practicing violence over and over and over. You sink in a lot of time that might be better spent sharpening your skills in your own profession. Aiki Ninjutsu talks about becoming a compassionate protector of others, and talks about building great compassion to offset the incredible destructiveness of the techniques. With all due respect, I need

to give all the compassion to others that I can give, without preventably siphoning it off to offset other considerations. Perhaps you can numb or ignore what it feels like to practice violence on others and have others practice violence on itself; and martial arts have an occult ambiance; the concept of ki / qi / chi is a Buddhist practice, not really Christian, and there is a good case to be made that it's magical, even without taking a common sense look at the philosophies Eastern martial arts draw on, which are almost invariably laden with an occult dimension.

**...and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.**

## Thoughts Which Determine Our Lives

Much of what I wrote in [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives: Beyond The Secret and the Law of Attraction](#) relates here. After Providence, here is perhaps the core payload for what is the Orthodox martial art.

The English word "practice" has two senses. One is, as a musician says, "I'm practicing," meaning, "I am taking time to make dry runs at this skill and sharpen it as much as possible." Or one speaks of a doctor "practicing medicine," meaning "I am exercising and doing the proper live activity in my profession." I will use the terms musician-style-practice and doctor-style-practice to distinguish the two meanings

With both firearms and martial arts, you need to practice to keep an edge, practice in the sense of the musician-style-practice. Competence requires an ongoing time sink. But live doctor-style-practice, comes very, very rarely.

One communication textbook talked about what your odds were for being assaulted on your way home: 1 in 10, 1 in 100, 1 in 1000, or 1 in 10,000. The point was that the more TV you watch, the more you overestimate the chances of suffering a violent response. The heaviest TV viewers expected a 1 in 10 chance of assault. The actual figure was the 1 in 10,000 per night figure. Notwithstanding shows glamorizing a highly romanticized view of

law enforcement—when did a police show ever depict an officer filling out an hour of paperwork, or spending a day doing a daily grind of dull responsibilities—police officers draw their weapons (excluding training) perhaps once every few years.

In the musician-style-practice, you only practice very, very rarely, even including officers. No matter how much preparation it takes to keep a sharp edge, live doctor-style-practice is, and should be, very rare.

The discipline of nepsis or spiritual watchfulness over thoughts, has more than one relevance, but a nepsis that watches for and cuts off warring thoughts at the first is invaluable. Though this is a different meaning than when I last saw it, "They say that if you must resort to violence, you have already lost." Read my article [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#): then read Elder Thaddeus's original [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) and learn to appreciate your warring thoughts in deeper ways.

It may seem almost "sexist" that the blame, or at least attention and corrections, should be placed entirely on one side, yours; but this dark cloud hides an astonishing silver lining. If the correction is only put on one side, so is the power to change and make the situation better. Perhaps most (not all) conflicts include a feedback loop of escalating anger (and one that most or all truly good martial artists know how to shut down, by for instance meekly saying, "You're the tough guy"—and this was a third-degree black belt who meekly and submissively opted out of having to be the tough guy). There is a classic enlightenment exercise where a group of sailors stand in a ring, with instructions to touch the shoulder of the soldier exactly as yours was pressed. And someone touches one of the sailors lightly, with one light finger press. The

"equal to what happened to me" results in a heavy finger press, and before too long at all the light touch has become a meaty, and nasty, punch. It is very hard at times, but **love your enemies, bless those who curse you, pray for those who despitefully use you**: but you have the power, many times, to shut down the escalating unmerry merry-go-round that others will not step off of. Not that this is only for pacifists; I have seen soldiers beautifully live out of this power, and people who weren't specifically soldiers but believed in a just war (a western concept that never really took in Orthodoxy even though Orthodoxy never really places an expectation of becoming a pacifist). If Elder Thaddeus's sage advice could be summed up in a single maxim, it might be **Proverbs 15:1: "Anger slays even wise men; yet a submissive answer turns away wrath: but a grievous word stirs up anger."**

Gandhi said, "**An eye for an eye** only ends by making the whole world blind." each day and practicing our nonviolent thoughts (doctor-style-practice) a watchfulness in thoughts that is alert to snuff out smoulders when it is small rather than heroically deluging a burning house, is harder up front, but far easier down the road.

**It sounds small, but the results down the road are anything but small.**

## Holy and blinding arrogance

Elsewhere in *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu writes:

It is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.

And this is far from what the Orthodox Church has to offer. Do we need to know the demons? **No**. The [Philokalia](#) may say as much about demons as any Orthodox writing may have, but we are allowed arrogance such as Sun Tzu would have considered a fatal weakness. As regards the demons, we are to be really, properly, truly, and blindingly arrogant, like the Orthodox elder who was speaking with a novice about strange noises in a courtyard and told the novice, "It is only the demons. Pay it no mind." This is cut from the same cloth as the liturgical references to "the feeble audacity of the demons." **The mind takes the shape of whatever it contemplates**, hence St. Paul's words, [Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of](#)

good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. We should look at Light, not darkness; live the *Sermon on the Mount*, and then, and not before, will we understand that the Light knows Himself and the darkness; the darkness knows neither itself nor the Light. If the spiritual eye receives things that make an impression on it, it matters what items it receives impressions from. *The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light:* "single" in this context is cut from the same cloth as the *Beatitudes* that Orthodox chant in Liturgy, confessing in abbreviated form the entire *Sermon on the Mount*.

It has been said, "You can choose your options, but you cannot choose the consequences of your actions." You can choose whether to look at Light or darkness: in so doing you may choose, by gazing on the Light, to be filled with peace, or to gaze deeply into darkness (and have darkness gaze into you) by training your eyes on the whirlpool of circumstances all of us face. The option is not presented to try to do God's thinking for him, and analyze and work out how we will handle the future, and instead of darkness have all of the joys of peace that beholds the Light of God.

O that we could reach far enough into overreaching arrogance that we could, like saints old and new, look upon good and bad people and only see the beauty of the image of God in each!

## Conclusion

A lot has been covered here; the past few paragraphs narrate what, in a very specific sense, can be done as the Orthodox martial art. Broadly and in a deeper sense, holiness matters.

We live in turbulent times, as did Elder Thaddeus, who wrote, [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#), a gift given to me by a friend who gave a very modest recommendation: "It's not terribly deep, but I find it helpful.". After reading it and writing, [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives: Beyond The Secret and the Law of Attraction](#), I came up to him and told him he'd undersold it. It wasn't long before he agreed.

We live in turbulent times, and probably more turbulent and rougher as time goes on. But there is an alternative to being whipped out in the vortex of our times and surroundings. (Elder

Thaddeus had many sufferings and was repeatedly taken prisoner by Nazis.) We have a choice about whether we will be sucked into it. It might not seem like it, but we do. Psychologists advising addicts say that you have more power than you think. If we are attentive and refuse to consent to thoughts, perhaps praying to God to save us from this temptation, and if we are in anger, praying for God's every blessing. This is not a quick overall process: it may be something that is a minute to start, and a lifetime to master. But though it may take years and years and years to master, but improvement may start much faster

than months.

In [Treasures in Heaven: The Inner Meaning of "Do Not Store Up Treasures on Earth"](#), I try to unpack a small mystical slice of [Blessed are the poor in spirit](#). There is bodily poverty, and monastics are blessed when they let go of physical possessions. But we have many false treasures in terms of ideas in our heads, and the letting-go of these false interior treasures is in step with why my previous parish priest said, "When we are praying, we should not have very good thoughts; we should have no thoughts." And this has a poverty that is hard to come by. But once you have tasted it, earthly treasures taste suddenly flat. You've drunk something purer.

### **Beyond the Deep Magic of violence**

When aggression and violence are met only with meekness and love, what results can be truly powerful. Evil is not always stopped from harming and killing no matter where you fall: witness Satan's defeat in the martyrs, who are not in any sense killed because they are not good enough as Christians. Martyrdom is implemented by the Devil's work, but the victor in martyrdom is always and ever in the Lord and in the triumphant martyr entering Heaven in glory as a son of God. What happens in martyrdom, but quite a few other places as well, happens when the Deep Magic of violence runs its course, but when it has run its course, the Devil's work is transfigured into something immeasurably far beyond anything that the practical nature of violence can hope for. And its primary application is not reserved to the most extraordinary moments in a well-lived life, but the warp and woof of the daily living of those who practice it, be it on ever so small a scale!

Seeing as are surrounded by such a great cloud of  
witnesses,  
And such and heavenly treasures are set within our reach,  
Let us ever reach,  
Further Up and Further In!

# **Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article**

**The reason for writing:  
"Buried treasure?"**

Computer programmers often need to understand why programs behave as they do, and there are times when one is trying to explain a puzzle by understanding the source, and meets an arresting surprise. Programmer slang for this is "buried treasure," politely defined as,

A surprising piece of code found in some program. While usually not wrong, it tends to vary from [cruffy](#) to [bletcherous](#), and has lain undiscovered only because it was

functionally correct, however horrible it is. Used sarcastically, because what is found is anything \*but\* treasure. Buried treasure almost always needs to be dug up and removed. 'I just found that the scheduler sorts its queue using [the mind-bogglingly slow] [bubble sort](#)! Buried treasure!'"<sup>1</sup> ([source](#))

What I have found has me wondering if I've discovered theological "buried treasure," that may actually be wrong. Although my analysis is not exhaustive, I have tried to provide two documents that relate to the (possible) "buried treasure:" one treating the specific issue, contraception, in patristic and modern times, and one commentary on the document I have found that may qualify as "buried treasure."

## How to use this document

This document is broken into two parts besides this summary page.

The first part is taken from a paper written by an Orthodox grad student, with reference to Orthodoxy in patristic times and today. It sets a broad theological background, and provides the overall argument. One major conclusion is that one paper (Chrysostom Zaphiris, "Morality of Contraception: An Eastern Orthodox Opinion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, volume 11, number 4, fall 1974, 677-90) is important in a troubling shift in Orthodox theology.

The second part, motivated by the understanding that Zaphiris's paper is worth studying in toto, is a relatively brief commentary on Zaphiris's paper. If the initial paper provides good reason to believe that Zaphiris's paper may be worth studying, then it may be valuable to see the actual text of his paper. The commentary can be skipped, but it is intended to allow the reader to know just why the author believes Zaphiris is so much worth studying.

It is anticipated that some readers will want to read the first section without poring over the second, even though the argument in the first section may motivate one to read the second.

## Why the fuss?

The Orthodox Church appears to have begun allowing contraception, after previously condemning it, around the time of an article (Chrysostom Zaphiris, "Morality of Contraception: An Eastern Orthodox Opinion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, volume 11, number 4, fall 1974, 677-90) which may have given rise to the "new consensus." This article raises extremely serious concerns of questionable doctrine, questionable argument, and/or sophistry, and may be worth further studying.

A broader picture is portrayed in the earlier article about contraception as it appears in both patristic and modern views, which are profoundly different from each other.

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# **Patristic and Current Orthodoxy: on Contraception**

## **Introduction**

Patristic and contemporary Orthodoxy do not say exactly the same things about contraception. Any differences in what acts are permitted are less interesting than the contexts which are much more different than the differences that would show on a chart made to classify what acts are and are not formally permissible.

Much of what I attempt below looks at what is unquestionable today and asks, "How else could it be?" After two sections comparing the Patristic and modern circumstances, one will be able to appreciate that one would need to cross several lines to want contraception in Patristic Christianity while today some find it hard to understand why the Orthodox Church is being so picky about contraception, I look at how these considerations may influence positions regarding contraception.

## How are the Fathers valuable to us?

I assume that even when one criticizes Patristic sources, one is criticizing people who understand Christianity much better than we do, and I may provocatively say that the Fathers are most interesting, not when they eloquently give voice to our views, but precisely when they shock us. My interest in what seems shocking today is an interest in a cue to something big that we may be missing. This is for much the same reason scientists may say that the most exciting sound in science is not "Eureka," "I've found it," but "That's funny..." The reason for this enigmatic quote is that "Eureka" only announces the discovery of something one already knew to look for. "That's funny" is the hint that we may have tripped over something big that we didn't even know to look for, and may be so far outside of what we know we need that we try to explain it away. Such an intrusion—and it ordinarily feels like an intrusion—is difficult to welcome: hence the quotation attributed to Winston Churchill, "Man will occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of the time he will pick himself up and continue on."

Understanding Church Fathers on contraception can provide a moment of, "That's funny..."

## The Patristic era

My aim in this section is not so much to suggest what views should be held, than help the reader see how certain things do not follow from other things self-evidently. I would point out that in the Patristic world, not only were there condemnations of contraception as such, but more deeply, I would suggest that there was a mindset where the idea of freeing the goodness of sexual pleasure from any onerous fecundity would seem to represent a fundamental confusion of ideas.

We may be selling both the Fathers and ourselves short if we say that neo-Platonic distrust of the body made them misconstrue sex as evil except as a necessary evil excused as a means to something else, the generation of children. The sword of this kind of dismissal can cut two ways: one could make a reductive argument saying that the ambient neo-Gnosticism of our own day follows classical forms of Gnosticism in hostility to bodily goods that values sex precisely as an experience and despite unwanted capacity to generate children, and so due to our Gnostic influence we cannot value sex except as a way of getting pleasure that is unfortunately encumbered by the possibility of generating children whether they are wanted or not. This kind of dismissal is easy to make, difficult to refute, and not the most helpful way of advancing discussion.

In the Patristic era, some things that many today experience

as the only way to understand the goodness of creation do not follow quite so straightforwardly, in particular that goodness to sex has its center of gravity in the experience rather than the fecundity. To Patristic Christians, it was far from self-evident that sex as it exists after the Fall is good without ambivalence, and it is even further from self-evident that the goodness of sex (if its fallen form is considered unambiguously good) centers around the experience of pleasure in coitus. Some contemporaries did hold that sexual experience was good. The goodness of sex consisted in the experience itself. Any generative consequences of the experience were evil, to be distanced from the experience. Gnostics in Irenaeus's day (John Noonan, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatments by Catholic Theologians and Canonists*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, 57, 64. Unfortunately, not only is there no recent work of Orthodox scholarship that is comparable to Noonan, but there is little to no good Orthodox scholarship on the topic at all!), Manichees in the days of Augustine (Noonan 1986, 124.), and for that matter medieval Cathars (Noonan 1986, 181-3.) would hold to the goodness of sex precisely as an experience, combined with holding to the evil of procreation. (I will not analyze the similarities and differences to wanting pleasure unencumbered by children today.) Notwithstanding those heretics' positions, Christianity held a stance, fierce by today's standards, in which children were desirable for those who were married but "marriage" would almost strike many people today as celibacy with shockingly little interaction between the sexes (including husband and wife), interrupted by just enough sex to generate children (For a treatment of this phenomenon as it continued in the Middle Ages, see Philip Grace, *Aspects of Fatherhood in Thirteenth-Century Encyclopedias*, Western Michigan University

master's thesis, 2005, chapter 3, "Genealogy of Ideas," 35-6.).

Men and women, including husbands and wives, lived in largely separate worlds, and the framing of love antedated both the exaltations of courtly and companionate love without which many Westerners today have any frame by which to understand goodness in marriage (See Stephen Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences*, Ann Arbor: Servant 1980, Chapter 18, for a contrast between traditional and technological society.).

I would like to look at two quotations, the first from Augustine writing against the Manichees, and the second as an author today writes in reference to the first:

Is it not you who used to counsel us to observe as much as possible the time when a woman, after her purification, is most likely to conceive, and to abstain from cohabitation at that time, lest the soul should be entangled in flesh? This proves that you approve of having a wife, not for the procreation of children, but for the gratification of passion.

In marriage, as the marriage law declares, the man and woman come together for the procreation of children.

Therefore whoever makes the procreation of children a greater sin than copulation, forbids marriage, and makes the woman not a wife, but a mistress, who for some gifts presented to her is joined to the man to gratify his passion. Where there is a wife there must be marriage. But there is no marriage where motherhood is not in view; therefore neither is there a wife. In this way you forbid marriage. Nor can you defend yourselves successfully from this charge, long ago brought against you prophetically by the Holy Spirit

([source](#); the Blessed Augustine is referring to [I Tim 4:1-3](#)).

There is irony here. "Natural family planning" is today sometimes presented as a fundamental opposite to artificial contraception. (The term refers to a calculated abstinence precisely at the point where a wife is naturally capable of the greatest desire, pleasure, and response.) Augustine here described natural family planning, as such, and condemns it in harsh terms. (I will discuss "natural family planning" in the next section. I would prefer to call it contraceptive timing for a couple of reasons.)

Besides the immediate irony of Augustine criticizing the form of contraception to be heralded as "'Natural' Family Planning," (remember that "natural" family planning is a calculated abstinence when a wife is capable, naturally, of the greatest desire, pleasure, and response), Augustine's words are particularly significant because the method of contraception being discussed raised no question of contraception through recourse to the occult ("medicine man" pharmakeia potions) even in the Patristic world. There are various

issues surrounding contraception: in the Patristic world, contraceptive and abortifascient potions were difficult to distinguish and were made by pharmakoi in whom magic and drugs were not sharply distinguished (Noonan 1986, 25.). But it would be an irresponsible reading to conclude from this that Patristic

**Note:**

There is some irony in calling "'Natural' Family Planning" making a set of mathematical calculations and deliberately avoiding intercourse at the times when a woman is naturally endowed with the greatest capacity for desire, pleasure, and response.

condemnations of contraceptive potions were only condemning them for magic, for much the same reason as it would be irresponsible to conclude that recent papal documents condemning the contraceptive mindset are only condemning selfishness and not making any statement about contraception as such. Patristic condemnations of contraception could be quite forceful (Noonan 1986, 91.), although what I want to explore is not so much the condemnations as the environment which partly gave rise to them:

[L]et us sketch a marriage in every way most happy; illustrious birth, competent means, suitable ages, the very flower of the prime of life, deep affection, the very best that each can think of the other, that sweet rivalry of each wishing to surpass the other in loving; in addition, popularity, power, wide reputation, and everything else. But observe that even beneath this array of blessings the fire of an inevitable pain is smouldering... They are human all the time, things weak and perishing; they have to look upon the tombs of their progenitors; and so pain is inseparably bound up with their existence, if they have the least power of reflection. This continued expectancy of death, realized by no sure tokens, but hanging over them the terrible uncertainty of the future, disturbs their present joy, clouding it over with the fear of what is coming... Whenever the husband looks at the beloved face, that moment the fear of separation accompanies the look. If he listens to the sweet voice, the thought comes into his mind that some day he will not hear it. Whenever he is glad with gazing on her beauty, then he shudders most with the presentiment of mourning her loss. When he marks all those charms which to youth are so

precious and which the thoughtless seek for, the bright eyes beneath the lids, the arching eyebrows, the cheek with its sweet and dimpling smile, the natural red that blooms upon the lips, the gold-bound hair shining in many-twisted masses on the head, and all that transient grace, then, though he may be little given to reflection, he must have this thought also in his inmost soul that some day all this beauty will melt away and become as nothing, turned after all this show into noisome and unsightly bones, which wear no trace, no memorial, no remnant of that living bloom. Can he live delighted when he thinks of that? ([source](#))

Let no one think however that herein we depreciate marriage as an institution. We are well aware that it is not a stranger to God's blessing. But since the common instincts of mankind can plead sufficiently on its behalf, instincts which prompt by a spontaneous bias to take the high road of marriage for the procreation of children, whereas Virginité in a way thwarts this natural impulse, it is a superfluous task to compose formally an Exhortation to marriage. We put forward the pleasure of it instead, as a most doughty champion on its behalf... But our view of marriage is this; that, while the pursuit of heavenly things should be a man's first care, yet if he can use the advantages of marriage with sobriety and moderation, he need not despise this way of serving the state. An example might be found in the patriarch Isaac. He married Rebecca when he was past the flower of his age and his prime was well-nigh spent, so that his marriage was not the deed of passion, but because of God's blessing that should be upon his seed. He cohabited with her till the birth of her only children, and then, closing the channels of the senses, lived wholly for the Unseen...

(source)

This picture of a "moderate" view of marriage that does not "depreciate marriage as an institution" comes from St. Gregory of Nyssa's treatise *On Virginity*, and allowances must be made for the fact that St. Gregory of Nyssa is contrasting virginity, not with an easy opposite today, namely promiscuity or lust, but marriage, which he bitterly attacks in the context of this passage. The piece is not an attractive one today. However, that does not mean that what he says is not part of the picture. This bitter attack is part of a picture in which contraception could look very different from today, but that way of looking at contraception is not purely the cause of a rhetoric attacking marriage to praise virginity. I present this not to analyze St. Gregory's exact view on marriage, but to give a taste of an answer to "How else could it be?" in comparison to what is unquestionable today.

Some attitudes today (arguably the basic assumption that motivates offense at the idea that one is condemning the goodness of the created order in treating sex as rightly ordered towards procreation) could be paraphrased, "We affirm the body as good, and we affirm sex in all its goodness. It is a source of pleasure; it is a way to bond; it is powerful as few other things are. But it has a downside, and that is a certain biological survival: unless countermeasures are taken, along with its good features unwanted pregnancy can come. And properly affirming the goodness of sex means freeing it from the biological holdover that gives the good of sexual pleasure the side effect of potentially resulting in pregnancy even if it is pursued for another reason." To the Patristic Christian, this may well come across as saying something like, "Major surgery can be a

wonderful thing. It is occasion for the skillful art of doctors, in many instances it is surrounded by an outflow of love by the patient's community, and the difficulties associated with the process can build a thicker spine and provide a powerful process of spiritual discipline. But it would be really nice if we could undergo surgery without attendant risks of unwanted improvements to our health."

It seems so natural today to affirm the goodness of the body or sex, and see as the only possible translation of that affirmation "the goodness of the pleasure in sexual experience," that different views are not even thinkable; I would like to mention briefly some other answers to the question, "How else could it be?" The ancient world, in many places, looked beyond the few minutes of treasure and found the basis for the maxim, "Post coitum omne animal triste" (after sex, every animal [including humans] is sad), and feared that sex could, among other things, fundamentally deplete virile energy (Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, New York: Random House 1985, 137): its goodness might be seen as a costly goodness involving the whole person, rather than simply being the goodness of "one more pleasure, only a very intense one, that is especially good because it is especially intense" or self-evidently being at the core of even a good marriage (Noonan 1986, 47-8).

This is not to suggest that Christians merely copied the surrounding views. Contraception, abortion, and infanticide were quite prevalent in the Roman world (Noonan 1986, 10-29). Whatever else Patristic Christianity can be criticized for in its strong stance on contraception, abortion, and infanticide, it is not an uncritical acceptance of whatever their neighbors would happen to be doing. And if St. Gregory of Nyssa holds up an

example which he alleges is procreation that minimizes pleasure, it might be better not to simply say that neo-Platonism tainted many of the Fathers with a dualistic view in which the body was evil, or some other form of, "His environment made him do it."

## **Modernity and "natural" family planning**

In the discussion which follows, I will use the term "contraceptive timing" in lieu of the somewhat euphemistic "natural family planning" or "the rhythm method." In my own experience, I have noticed Catholics consistently needing to explain why "natural family planning" is an opposite to contraception; invariably newcomers have difficulties seeing why decreasing the odds of conception through mathematical timing is a fundamentally different matter from decreasing the odds of conception through biological and chemical expedients. I would draw an analogy to firing a rifle down a rifle range, or walking down a rifle range to retrieve a target: either action, appropriately timed, is licit; changing the timing of an otherwise licit action by firing a rifle while others are retrieving their targets and walk in front of that gun is a use of timing that greatly affects the moral significance of an otherwise licit act. I will hereafter use the phrase "contraceptive timing."

## Orthodox implications

As Orthodox, I have somewhat grave concerns about my own Church, which condemned contraception before 1970 but in recent decades appears to have developed a "new consensus" more liberal than the Catholic position: abortifascient methods are excluded, there must be some openness to children, and it must be agreed with by a couple's spiritual father. This "new consensus," or at least what is called a new consensus in an article that acknowledges it as surrounded by controversy that has "various groups accusing each other of Western influence," which is, in Orthodox circles, a good cue that there is something interesting going on.

The one article I found on the topic was "lobbyist" scholarship that seemed to avoid giving a fuller picture (Zaphiris 1974.). This one article I found in the ATLA religion database matching the keywords "Orthodox" and "contraception" was an article that took a "new consensus" view and, most immediately, did not provide what I was hoping a "new consensus" article would provide: an explanation that can say, "We understand that the Fathers had grave reservations about contraception, but here is why it can be permissible." The article in fact made no reference to relevant information that can (at least today) be easily obtained from conservative Catholic analyses. There was no discussion of relevant but ambiguous matter such as Onan's

sin (Noonan 1986, 34-6.) and New Testament condemnations of "medicine man" pharmakeia which would have included some contraception (Noonan 1986, 44-5.). There was not even the faintest passing mention of forceful denunciations of contraception by both Greek and Latin Fathers. John Chrysostom was mentioned, but only as support for distinguishing the good of sex from procreation: "The moral theologian par excellence of the Fathers, St. John Chrysostom, also does not stress the procreation of children as the goal of marriage." (Zaphiris 1974, 680) Possibly; St. Chrysostom Chrysostom may not have written anything like the incendiary material from St. Gregory above. But "the moral theologian par excellence of the Fathers" did write:

[St. John Chrysostom:] Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit? Where are the medicines of sterility? Where is there murder before birth? You do not even let a harlot remain only a harlot, but you make her a murderess as well. Do you see that from drunkenness comes fornication, from fornication adultery, from adultery murder? Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you condemn the gift of God, and fight with his laws? What is a curse, do you

The [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers](#) has at times a legendary bias against against Rome (let alone against the Eastern Church), and renders Chrysostom as talking about abortion and infanticide but not obviously contraception. This is deliberate mistranslation. To pick out one example, In *Patrologia Graecae* 60.626 (the

seek as though it were a blessing?... Do you teach the woman who is given to you for the procreation of offspring to perpetrate killing?... In this indifference of the married men there is greater evil filth; for then poisons are prepared, not against the womb of a prostitute, but against your injured wife. (Homilies on Romans XXIV, Rom 13:14, as translated in Noonan 1986, 98.)

St. Chrysostom is not so quick as we are today to distinguish contraception from murder. Possibly, as Zaphiris writes, "there is not a defined statement on the morality of contraception within Orthodoxy." But this is a treacherous use of words.

Let me give an analogy to explain why. People consume both food and drink, by eating and drinking. But it is somewhat strange to point out that a person has never drunk a roast beef sandwich, particularly in an attempt to lead a third party to believe, incorrectly, that a person has never consumed that food item. The Church has "defined" statements relating to Trinitarian and Christological, and other doctrines ([source](#)), and formulated morally significant canon law. But she has never "defined" a statement in morals; that would be like drinking a roast beef sandwich. And so for Zaphiris to point out that the Orthodox Church has never "defined" a statement about contraception—a point that would be obvious to someone knowing what sorts of

quotation spans PG 60.626-7), "enqa polla ta atokia," rendered "ubi multae sunt herbae in sterilitatem?" in the PG's Latin and "Where are the medicines of sterility?" by Noonan, appears in the NPNF as "where are there many efforts at abortion?" This is a deliberate under-translation.

things the Church does not "define;" "defining" a position against murder would, for some definitions of "define," be like drinking a sandwich—and lead the reader to believe that the Church has never issued a highly authoritative statement about contraception. The Orthodox Church has issued such statements more than once.

Saying that the Orthodox Church has never "defined" a position on a moral question is as silly and as pointless as saying that a man has never drunk a roast beef sandwich: it is technically true, but sheds no light on whether a person has consumed such a sandwich—or taken a stand on the moral question at hand. Zaphiris's "observation" is beginning to smell a lot like spin doctoring.

I have grave reservations about an article that gives the impression of covering relevant Patristic material to the question of contraception without hinting at the fact that it was condemned. Needless to say, the article did not go beyond the immediate condemnation to try to have a sympathetic understanding of why someone would find it sensible to make such condemnations. If I were trying to marshal Orthodox theological resources in the support of some use of contraception, I doubt if I could do better than Zaphiris. However, if the question is what Orthodox should believe in reading the Bible through the Fathers, submitting to the tradition in seeking what is licit, then this version of a "new consensus" theological treatment gives me even graver doubts about the faithfulness of the "new consensus" to Orthodox tradition. The Zaphiris article, if anything, seems to be an Orthodox document with influence, and red flags, that are comparable to *Humanae Vitae*.

There have been times before where the Orthodox Church

has accepted something alien and come to purify herself in succeeding centuries. In that sense there would be a precedent for a change that would be later undone, and that provides one ready Orthodox classification. The Orthodox Wiki provides no history of the change in Orthodoxy, and a formal statement by the Orthodox Church in America (source), without specifically praising any form of contraception, attests to the newer position and allows some use of reproductive technologies, but does not explain the change. I would be interested in seeing why the Orthodox Church in particular has brought itself into sudden agreement with cultural forces beyond what the Catholic Church has.

The Orthodox Church both affirms that Christ taught marriage to be indissoluble—excluding both divorce and remarriage after divorce—and allows by way of *oikonomia* (a concession or leniency in observing a rule) a second and third remarriage after divorce, not counting marriages before full reception into the Orthodox Church. However, there is a difference between observing a rule with *oikonomia* and saying that the rule does not apply. If a rule is observed with *oikonomia*, the rule is recognized even as it is not followed literally, much like choosing "the next best thing to being there," in lieu of personal presence, when one is invited to an occasion but cannot easily attend. By contrast, saying that the rule does not apply is a deeper rejection, like refusing a friend's invitation in a way that denies any duty or moral claim for that friend. There is a fundamental difference between sending a gift to a friend's wedding with regrets that one cannot attend, and treating the invitation itself with contempt. The rites for a second and third marriage are genuine observations of the fact that one is observing a rule with leniency: the rite for a second

marriage is penitential, the rite for a third marriage even more so, and a firm line is drawn that rules out a fourth marriage: oikonomia has limits ([source](#)). If a second and third marriage is allowed, the concession recognizes the rule and, one might argue, the reality the rule recognizes. If one looks at jokes as an anthropologist would, as revealing profound assumptions about a culture, snipes about "A wife is only temporary; an ex-wife is forever" and "When two divorced people sleep together, four people are in the bed" are often told by people who would scoff at the idea of marriage as a sacred, permanent union... but the jokes themselves testify that there is something about a marriage that divorce cannot simply erase: a spouse can become an ex-spouse, but the marriage is too permanent to simply be dropped as something revocable that has no intrinsically permanent effects. And in that sense, an ex-spouse is closer to a spouse than to a friend that has never had romance. Which is to say that marriage bears witness both to an absolute and oikonomia in how that absolute is observed.

Even with noted exceptions, the Gospels give the indissolubility of marriage a forceful dominical saying backed by quotation from the heart of the Old Testament Scriptures. If something that forcefully put may legitimately be observed with oikonomia, then it would seem strange to me to say that what I have observed as Patristic attitudes, where thinking of contraception as desirable would appear seriously disturbed, dictate not only a suspicion towards contraception but a criterion that admits no oikonomia in its observation. Presumably some degree oikonomia is allowable, and perhaps one could not rule out the oikonomia could take the form of a new consensus's criterion allowing non-abortifascient contraception, in consultation with one's spiritual father, on condition of allowing children at some

point during a marriage. However, even if that is the legitimate oikonomia, it is legitimate as the lenient observation of grave moral principles. And, in that sense, unless one is prepared to say that the Patristic consensus is wrong in viewing contraception with great suspicion, the oikonomia, like the rites for a second and third marriage, should be appropriate for an oikonomia in observing a moral concern that remains a necessary moral concern even as it is observed with leniency.

## Conclusion

I am left with a puzzle: why is it that Orthodox have adopted the current "new consensus"? My guess is that Zaphiris's quite provocative article was taken as simply giving a straight account of Orthodoxy and Patristic teaching as it relates to contraception. The OCA document more or less applies both his analysis and prescriptions. But, while I hesitate to say that no one could explain both why the Fathers would regard contraception as abhorrent and we should permit it in some cases, I will say that I have not yet encountered such an explanation. And I would present, if not anything like a last word, at least important information which should probably be considered in judging the rule and what is appropriate *oikonomia*. If Orthodoxy regards Patristic culture and philosophy as how Christ has become incarnate in the Orthodox Church, then neither condemnations of contraception, nor the reasons why those condemnations would be made in the first place, concern only antiquarians.

Would it be possible for there to be another "new consensus?"

## **"Morality of Contraception: An Orthodox Opinion:" A commentary**

The article published by Chrysostom Zaphiris, "Morality of Contraception: An Eastern Orthodox Opinion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, volume 11, number 4, fall 1974, 677-90, seems extremely significant. **It seems a lobbyist article, and in both content and timing the 1970's "new consensus" as articulated by the Orthodox Church in America is consistent with taking Zaphiris in good faith as simply stating the Orthodox position on contraception.** (This was the one article I found in an ATLA search for keywords "Orthodox" and "contraception" anywhere, on 13 May, 2007. A search for "Orthodoxy" and "contraception" on 14 May, 2007 turned up one additional result which seemed to be connected to queer theory.)

I perceive in this faulty—or, more properly, deceptively incomplete data, questionable argument, and seductive sophistry which I wish to comment on.

I believe that Zaphiris's text is worth at least an informal commentary to draw arguments and certain features to the reader's attention. In this commentary, all footnotes will be Zaphiris's own; where I draw on other sources I will allude to the discussion above or add parenthetical references. I follow

his footnote numbering, note page breaks by inserting the new page number, and reproduce some typographical features.

THE MORALITY OF  
CONTRACEPTION: AN EASTERN  
ORTHODOX OPINION\*

by  
CHRYSOSTOM ZAPHIRIS  
PRECIS

This discussion of the morality of contraception includes four basic points: the purpose of marriage as viewed scripturally and patristically, the official teachings of Orthodoxy concerning contraception, the moral issue from an Orthodox perspective, and "the Orthodox notion of synergism and its implications for the moral question of contraception."

It is possible through inference to determine that the Scriptures and the early Christian writers considered that, within marriage, sexual activity and procreation were not the same entity and that sexuality was to be practiced within marriage. These assertions are illustrated.

The official teaching of the Orthodox Church on contraception

**Footnote from  
Zaphiris's text**

Chrysostom Zaphiris (Orthodox) is a graduate of the Patriarchal Theological School of Halki, Turkey, and holds a doctorate with highest honors from the University of Strasbourg, where he studied with the Roman Catholic faculty. His 1970 thesis dealt with the "Text of the Gospel according to St. Matthew in Accordance with the Citations in Clement of Alexandria compared with Citations in the Greek Fathers and Theologians of the Second to Fifth Centuries." Dr.

includes five points: a denunciation of intentional refusal to procreate within marriage, a condemnation of both abortion and infanticide, an absence of any commitment against contraception, and a reliance upon the medical profession to supply further information on the issue. The author offers a theological opinion on the question of contraception allowing for contraception under certain circumstances.

Synergism is the final issue discussed. Synergism is defined as cooperation, co-creation, and co-legislation between humans and God. When people use their talents and faculties morally and creatively, they are acting in combination with God and expressing God's will. The Orthodox view of contraception is perceived within the dimensions of synergistic activity and serves as a contrast to the Roman Catholic view.

The essay concludes with some comments about contraception as a moral issue as perceived within the Eastern Orthodox Church. Allowing

Zaphiris taught canon law and New Testament courses at Holy Cross School of Theology (at Hellenic College), Brookline, MA, 1970-72. From 1972 to 1974, he was Vice Rector at the Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Studies, Tantur, Jerusalem.

\* This paper was originally presented during the discussion held for doctors of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the surrounding area hosted by theologians of the Ecumenical Institute at Tantur on the question of the morality of contraception. At this point, I would like also to thank Br. James Hanson,

for individual freedom and responsibility, and in light of synergism, Orthodoxy avoids

C.S.C., for his help editing my English text.

definitive pronouncements on such moral issues as contraception.

## I. INTRODUCTION.

Contraception is one of the most important aspects of human behavior and family life, and thus it is a part of life which cannot be ignored by theology itself. There can be no question of treating this moral question, but only of outlining the aspects which must be considered according to the Orthodox tradition.

I don't know an exact rule for "what must be considered for the Orthodox tradition," but besides of Biblical witness, the Patriarch of New Rome and one of three "heirarchs and ecumenical teachers" of the Orthodox Church, St. John Chrysostom, homilectically treating something as an abomination and calling it "worse than murder" would tend to be something I would include under "aspects which must be considered according to the Orthodox tradition."

One reaction which I would like to address in many readers, even though it is not properly commentary is, "Contraception is comparable to homicide? It's called "worse than murder"? Is this translated correctly? Is this gross exaggeration? Is it cultural weirdness, or some odd influence of Platonic thought that the Church has recovered from? Why on earth would anybody say that?" This is a natural reaction, partly because the Fathers are articulating a position that is inconceivable today. So the temptation is to assume that this has some cause, perhaps historical, despite moral claims that cannot be taken seriously

today.

I would like to provide a loose analogy, intended less to convince than convey how someone really could find a continuity between contraception and murder. Suppose that destroying a painting is always objectionable. Now consider the process of painting: a painting germinates in an artist's mind, is physically created and explored, and finally becomes something one hangs on a wall.

Now let me ask a question: if one tries to interrupt the process of artistic creation, perhaps by disrupting the creator's state of mind and scattering the paints, does that qualify as "destroying a painting"?

The answer to that question depends on what qualifies as "destroying a painting." If one disrupts the artist who is thinking about painting a painting, or scatters the paints and half-painted canvas, then in neither case has one destroyed a finished painting. You cannot point to a completed painting that was there before the interruption began, and say, "See? That is the painting that was destroyed." However, someone who is not being legalistic has good reason to pause before saying "This simply does not qualify as destroying a painting" A completed painting was not destroyed, but the process of artistic creation that produces a completed painting was destroyed. And in that sense, someone who interrupted Van Gogh and stopped him from painting "Starry Night" is doing the same sort of thing as someone today who would burn up the completed painting. The two acts are cut from the same cloth.

Now my intent is not to provide a precise and detailed allegory about what detail of the creation process represents conception, birth, etc. That is not the intent of the general illustration. My point is that talk about "destroying paintings"

need not be construed only as destroying a completed painting in its final form. There is also the possibility of destroying a painting in the sense of willfully disrupting the process of an artist in the process of making a painting. And, perhaps, there is room for St. John Chrysostom's horrified, "Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation."

Now is this rhetorical exaggeration? Quite possibly; Noonan studies various penitentials, all from before the Great Schism, and although there is not always a penance assigned for contraception by potion, two assign a lighter penance than for homicide, one assigns the same penance, and one actually assigns a penance of four years for homicide and seven for contraception. Contraception could bear a heavier penance than murder.

It is somewhat beside the point to work out if we really have to take St. John Chrysostom literally in saying that contraception is worse than homicide. I don't think that is necessary. But it is not beside the point that the Fathers seem to treat a great deal of continuity between contraception, abortion, and infanticide, and seem not to draw terribly sharp oppositions between them. Whether or not one assigns heavy-handed penalties from contraception, I can't think of a way to read the Fathers responsibly and categorically deny that contraception is cut from the same cloth as abortion and infanticide. The point is not exactly an exact calculus to measure the relative gravity of the sins. The point is that they are all connected in patristic writing.

First, we need to study the purpose of marriage as we find it in the Scriptures and in the writings of the Greek Fathers. Second, we will reflect on the official teaching authority of the

Orthodox Church on this question of contraception. Third, we will offer a moral opinion as to the legitimacy of the practice of contraception from an Orthodox viewpoint. And finally, we will discuss the Orthodox notion of synergism and its implications for the moral question of contraception.

## II. THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE.

Although the purpose of marriage is never treated systematically in the Scriptures or in the Fathers according to our contemporary viewpoint and questions, it is possible to infer the thoughts of these classical authors on the purpose of marriage. In general, what we find is that there is the presupposition that human sexual activity within marriage and the procreation of children are not seen as completely the same reality. And furthermore, both Scripture and the Fathers consistently counsel the faithful to live in such a way that human sexuality can be expressed within marriage.

The claim in the last sentence is true; more has been argued from St. John Chrysostom. But Orthodoxy does view celibacy and marriage as more compatible than some assume today. At least by the letter of the law, Orthodox are expected to be continent on fasting days and on days where the Eucharist is received, meaning a minimum of almost half days of the year, including one period approaching two months. I don't know what degree of *oikonomia* is common in pastoral application, but an Orthodox might want to drop another shoe besides saying "both Scripture and the Fathers consistently counsel the faithful to live in such a way that sexuality can be expressed in marriage."

The Scriptures present us with a Christian doctrine of marriage most clearly in *Genesis* and in the writings of St.

Paul. In *Genesis 2:18*, God said that it was not good for man to be alone, but that he should have a helpmate which he then gave to Adam in the person of his wife, Eve. Is this help meant by God to be only social and religious?

Apparently the possibility that marriage could, as in the patristic world, be not only an affective matter of what people but a union of pragmatic help encompassing even the economic is not considered.

For a detailed answer to "How else could that be?" in terms of a relationship including quite significant pragmatic help, see Stephen Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences*, Ann Arbor: Servant 1980. To someone who has read and digested that book, there seem to be an awful lot of assumptions going into what marriage is allowed to be for the husband and wife.

Or is it also intended by God to be a physical help provided to a man in terms of sexual complementarity?

Does "physical help" simply boil down to the C-word, as Zaphiris seems to imply? Are there no other possibilities? And why is "physical help" just something a wife gives a husband and not something a husband gives a wife? The euphemism sounds like the wife should be kind enough to join a pity party: "It causes him so much pleasure, and it causes me so little pain." I would like to propose a much more excellent alternative: **making love**.

Perhaps it is also possible that "physical help" should also include assistance with errands, or provision, or getting work done as part of a working household? Besides Stephen Clark, Man

and *Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor: Servant 1980), Proverbs 31:10-31 describes the ideal helpmate who perhaps has children but is not praised as for beauty or as a basic sex toy: she is praised, among other things, as a powerful and effective helpmeet. In the praises, physical beauty is mentioned only in order to deprecate its significance.

In reading Clark, it seems a natural thing to offer a wife the praises of the end of Proverbs. Zaphiris's presuppositions make that kind of thing look strange. But the defect is with Zaphiris.

However we answer these questions, one thing is certain: the question of procreation as such is not raised by the author. Yet, procreation itself is encouraged by the author of *Genesis 1:28*, when God orders human beings to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Just as the author of the Pentateuch never makes an explicit connection between the creation of Eve and the practice of human procreation, so likewise St. Paul in the New Testament never makes this connection.

In the case of St. Paul, it is a question of sexual relations of continence within marriage or of marriage as opposed to virginity, but never exactly the question of procreation in any of these cases. Paul considers marriage and virginity as charisms within the life of the Church. He exhorts believers to the practice of virginity if they have this charism; if not, he encourages them to marry. This raises a subsequent question: "Does St. Paul encourage marriage first of all to promote the procreation of children or rather make up for human weakness which is experienced in sexual passion?" While I acknowledge that procreation of children is one of

the reasons for marriage which Christian theology has consistently taught, it has never been the only reason for Christian marriage.

If we follow St. Paul closely, it is apparent that he encourages a man to marry, not simply to procreate children, but for other reasons, the most prominent of which would be to avoid fornication (cf. I Cor. 7:2). It is because human persons have the right

I would like to make a comment that sounds, at first, like nitpicking about word choice:

Rights-based moral calculus is prevalent in the modern world, sometimes so that people don't see how to do moral reasoning without seeing things in terms of rights. But the modern concept of a "right" is alien to Orthodoxy.

See Kenneth Himes (ed.) et al., *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations* (Washington: Georgetown University Press 2005), chapter 2 (41-71) for an historical discussion including how the concept of rights became incorporated into Catholic moral reasoning from the outside. The change was vigorously resisted as recently as Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), today the subject of embarrassed explanations, but what Catholics apologetically explain is often closer to Orthodoxy than the modern Catholic explanation of what Catholicism really teaches. Even in modern Catholicism, officially approved "rights" language is a relatively recent development, and there are attempts to use the concept differently from the secular West.

Armenian Orthodox author Vigen Guorian's *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1987, page number not available) briefly complains

about the modern idea of placing human dignity on no deeper basis than rights; I would refer the reader to my homily "Do we have rights?" ( [http://jonathanscorner.com/no\\_rights/](http://jonathanscorner.com/no_rights/) ) for moral-ascetical reasoning that rejects the innovation.

The reason why I am "nitpicking" here is that there is a subtle difference, but a profound one, between saying that sex is good within marriage (or at least permissible), and saying that husband and wife have a right to sexual pleasure, and this entitlement is deep enough that if the sexual generation of children would be undesirable, the entitlement remains, along with a necessity of modifying sex so that the entitled sexual pleasure is delivered even if the sexual generation of children is stopped cold.

Zaphiris never develops the consequences of rights-based moral reasoning at length or makes it the explicit basis for arguing for an entitlement to sexual pleasure even if that means frustrating sexual generation. However, after asserting a married right to sex, he not only fails to discourage this reasoning, but reaches a conclusion identical with the one this reasoning would reach.

to be married and to perform sexual activity within that specific context that Jesus Christ and St. Paul have condemned explicitly the practice of fornication (cf. Mt 5:32, 19:9; Acts 15:20; I Cor. 5:1, 6, 13, 18). Thus, in our study of the Christian tradition on marriage and the possibility of contraceptive practices within marriage, we must keep clearly in view this particular function of marriage as an antidote to fornication.

We find a similar sensitivity in the writings of Paul to the human need for sexual gratification in marriage when he

counsels Christian couples on the practice of continence within marriage. "The wife cannot claim her body as her own; it is her husband's. Equally, the husband cannot claim his body as his own; it is his wife's. Do not deny yourselves to one another, except when you agree upon a temporary abstinence in order to devote yourselves to prayer; afterwards, you may come together again; otherwise, for lack of self-control, you may be tempted by Satan" (I Cor. 7:4-5). In this passage, there is no question of procreation, but only of the social union between husband and wife within Christian marriage. While, on the positive side, Paul affirms that Christian marriage is a sign of the union between Jesus Christ and the Church and that the married couple participates in the unity and holiness of this union, more negatively he also sees in marriage an antidote or outlet for the normal human sexual passions. In this context, St. Paul always counsels marriage as preferable to any possibility of falling into fornication.

In saying this, St. Paul is obviously not opposed to procreation as the end of marriage. The bearing of children was naturally expected to result from the practice of sexual intercourse within marriage as he counseled it. Abstinence from regular sexual intercourse was encouraged only to deepen the life of prayer for a given period of time. This limiting of abstinence to a specific period of time shows well Paul's sensitivity to the demands of human sexual passions and his elasticity of judgment in giving moral counsel. Thus, from the exegesis of Genesis of St. Paul, the whole contemporary question of the explicit connection between sexual intercourse within marriage and the procreation of children was simply not raised in the same form in which it is

today.

I would like to take a moment to look at the story of Onan before posing a suggestion about exegesis.

I suggest that in the Bible, especially in portraying something meant to horrify the reader, there are often multiple elements to the horror. The story of Sodom portrays same-sex intercourse, gang rape, and extreme inhospitality. There is a profoundly naive assumption behind the question, "Of same-sex intercourse, gang rape, and extreme inhospitality, which one are we really supposed to think is the problem?" In this case, it seems all three contributed to something presented as superlatively horrifying, and it is the combined effect that precedes Sodom's judgment in fire and sulfur and subsequently becoming the Old Testament prophet's "poster city" for every single vice from idolatry and adultery to pride and cruelty to the poor. The story of Sodom is written to have multiple elements of horror.

There is one story where contraception is mentioned in the Bible, and it is one of few where Onan joins the company of Uzzah, Ananias, Sapphira, Herod (the one in Acts), and perhaps others in being the only people named in the Bible as being struck dead by God for their sins. This is not an august company. Certainly Onan's story is not the story of a couple saying, "Let's just focus on the children we have," but a story that forceful in condemning Onan's sin, whatever the sin properly consisted in, has prima facie good claim to be included a Biblical text that factors into a Biblical view of contraception. The story is relevant, even if it is ambiguous for the concerns of this question.

Likewise, in something that is not translated clearly in most

English translations, the New Testament (Gal 5:20, Rev 9:21) pharmakoi refers to "medicine men" who made, among other things, contraceptive and abortifascient potions, in a world that seemed not to really separate drugs from magic. English translations ordinarily follow the KJV in translating this only with reference to the occult sin, so that it does not come across clearly that the Bible is condemning the people you would go to for contraceptives. This is ambiguous evidence for this discussion: it is not clear whether it is only condemning the occult practices, condemning what the occult practices were used for, or condemning both at the same time, but the question is significant.

Granted, not every Biblical text touching marriage is evidence against contraception. There are other relevant passages like Gal 5:21-33 which discuss the love in marriage with no reference to fecundity, but if one wants to understand the Bible as it relates to contraception, it is surprising not to mention passages that directly impinge on it, ambiguously but raising the question of whether contraception is a grave sin.

Turning from the writings of Paul to those of the Greek Fathers, we will see that there is a continuity of Orthodox tradition in

this understanding of the purpose of marriage. First, let us consider the statement of Clement of Alexandria who raises this problem as a theologian and as a pastor of the faithful.

When he comments on I Cor. 7:2, he uses neither the allegorical nor the spiritual method of exegesis, but rather the literal interpretation of this Pauline text. Through this methodology, Clement, in spite of his usual idealism,

#### **Zaphiris's**

#### **footnote:**

1. Cf. Stromata, III, 82, 4.

recommends marriage over fornication and counsels sexual intercourse within marriage over the possibility of serving the temptor through fornication.[1]

679 We find a similar line of thought in his successor, Origen.

Although Origen accepts procreation as the end of marriage, he also sees in marriage the legitimate concession to human weakness in its sexual passions.[2]

Likewise Methodius of Olympus continues this interpretation of St. Paul in a very clear statement on the subject: "... The apostle did not grant these things unconditionally to all, but first laid down the reason on account of which he has led to this. For, having set forth that 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman' (I Cor. VII, 1) he added immediately 'nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife' (I Cor. VII, 2)—that is 'on account of the fornication which would arise from your being unable to restrain your passions.' ..." Afterwards the author notes that Paul speaks "by permission" and "not of command," so that Methodius comments: "For he receives command respecting chastity and not touching of a woman, but permission respecting those who are unable to chasten their appetites."

Methodius applies similar logic to the possibility of the second marriage, in that he permits the second marriage, not specifically for the procreation of children, but

"on account of the strength of animal passion, he [Paul]

**Zaphiris's  
footnote**

2. See H. Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage selon Origène* (Paris-Bruges, 1963), pp. 80-133.

**Zaphiris's  
footnote**

3. Cf. *The Banquet of the Virgins*, III, 12.

allows one who is in such condition may, 'by permission' contract a second marriage; not as though he expressed the opinion that a second marriage was in itself good, but judging it better than burning . . ." According to Methodius, the apostle speaks here, first saying that he wished all were healthy and continent, as he also was, but afterwards allowing a second marriage to those who are burdened with the weaknesses of the passions, goaded on by the uncontrolled desires of the organs of generations for promiscuous intercourse, considering such a second marriage far preferable to burning and indecency.[3]

The moral theologian par excellence of the Fathers, St. John Chrysostom, also does not stress the procreation of children as the goal of marriage. On the contrary, he adheres to the Pauline texts and to the apologists for virginity and concludes that marriage does not have any other goal than that of hindering fornication.

4. See A. Moulard, Saint Jean Chrysostome, le défenseur du mariage et l'apôtre de la virginité (Paris, 1923), pp. 72ff.

"The moral theologian par excellence of the Fathers" wrote the passage cited in the paper above:

"Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit? Where are the medicines of sterility? Where is there murder before birth? You do not even let a harlot remain only a harlot, but you make her a murderess as well. Do you see that from drunkenness comes fornication, from fornication adultery, from adultery murder? Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call

it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you condemn the gift of God, and fight with his laws? What is a curse, do you seek as though it were a blessing?... Do you teach the woman who is given to you for the procreation of offspring to perpetrate killing?... In this indifference of the married men there is greater evil filth; for then poisons are prepared, not against the womb of a prostitute, but against your injured wife."

There is arguably a degree of ambiguity in the Church Fathers. However, the ambiguity is of a far lesser degree. The Fathers argued most vehemently against opponents who believed the procreation of any children was morally wrong; contraception was seen as a duty in all intercourse, and not a personal choice for one's convenience. See Augustine as cited on page 6 above. Acknowledging that the Fathers addressed a different situation, this does not mean that, since the Fathers did not address the situation of a couple not wishing to be burdened by more children for now, the patristic arguments are inapplicable. An injunction against suicide may say something about self-mutilation even if, in the initial discussion, there was no question of mutilations that were nonlethal in character.

There is some element of something in the Fathers that can be used to support almost anything: hence Sarah Coakley's *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell 2002) teams up St. Gregory of Nyssa with Judith Butler, who is a lesbian deconstructionist and "bad writing" award winner, in pursuing the "gender fluidity" that is greatly sought after by queer theory and feminism (157-61). For that matter, I think there is a stronger case for Arianism, from the Bible, than Zapyiris makes from the Church Fathers on

contraception, and it involves less "crossing fingers." For the record, I believe the conclusions of both arguments I have brought up are heresy, but there is a reason I brought them up. We are in trouble if we only expect the truth to be able to pull arguments from the Scripture and the Fathers, or believe that an argument that draws on the Scripture and the Fathers is therefore trustworthy. My point is not so much whether Zaphiris is right or wrong as the fact that there's something that can be pulled from the Fathers in support of everything, either right or wrong. His argument needs to be weighed on its merits. (Or demerits.)

There is some more complexity to the discussion; I have left many things out of the shorter article, but the much even of what I have left out would make the point more strongly. Hence Noonan discusses a view that sex during pregnancy is not licit because it will not be fruitful, discusses the Stoic protest of "even animals don't do this," mentions a third-century dissenter from this view (Lactantius) who allowed sex during pregnancy only as an ambivalent concession, and then the well-read researcher writes, "This... is the only opinion I have encountered in any Christian theologian before 1500 explicitly upholding the lawfulness of intercourse in pregnancy" (Noonan 1986, 78.). Properly taken in context, this would support a much stronger position than I have argued, and one less attractive today.

Is the issue complex? There's a lot here to understand. Granted. But in this case, "complex" does not mean "nothing but shades of grey," and I am at a loss for a good, honest reason to claim to provide an overview Patristic theology as relevant to contraception, while at the same time failing to mention how it condemned contraception.

### III. THE OFFICIAL TEACHING OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH ON CONTRACEPTION

While there is not a defined statement on the morality of contraception within Orthodoxy,

To modify what I wrote above: I am not sure exactly what Zaphiris means by "defined." The Church is not considered to have "defined" any position on morals in the sense of infallibly pronounced doctrines. In Orthodoxy, the Seven Ecumenical Councils may create canons that are morally binding, but irreversible doctrinal declarations are mostly connected to Christology. Under that definition of "defined", the Orthodox Church would not have "defined" a ruling against contraception, regardless of its moral status. Neither would she have "defined" a ruling against rape, murder, or any other heinous offenses, even as she unambiguously condemns them.

This is one of several passages that raises questions of slippery rhetoric, perhaps of sophistry. Assuming that the above understanding of "defined" applies (a question which I am unsure of even if it seems that an affirmative answer would be consistent with the rest of the document), his claim is technically true. But it is presented so as to be interpreted as stating that the Orthodox Church has no real position on the matter, unlike other moral questions where the Orthodox Church would presumably have defined a position. This understandable inference is false. The Patristic witness, and arguably the Biblical witness, in fact do treat contraception as suspicious at best. If so, this is a case of Zaphiris saying something technically true in order to create an impression that is the opposite of the truth. That is very well-done sophistry.

Zaphiris continues with a small, but telling, remark:

there is a body of moral tradition which has a bearing on this question.

This short claim is also true. More specifically, there is a body of moral tradition which has a bearing on this question and tends to view contraception negatively.

First, the Church vigorously denounces any obvious case of pure egotism as the motivating force in Christian sexuality within marriage. Any married couple within the Orthodox Church who want absolutely no children sins grievously against both the Christian dispensation and against the primordial purpose of human life which includes the procreation or, as the Greek Fathers prefer, the "immortality" of the human species.

It seems that Zaphiris may be, for reasons of rhetoric and persuasion, providing a limit to how much he claims, so as to be more readily accepted. Zaphiris provides no footnotes or reference to sources more specific than the "Greek Fathers" to buttress this claim, and does not provide an explanation for certain questions. One such question is why, if marriage is not morally required and celibates are never obligated to provide that specific support for the "immortality" of the human species, such obligation is binding on all married couples. Are all celibates exempt from "the primordial purpose of human life," and if so, why is it permissible to fail to meet such a foundational purpose of human life? I do not see why Zaphiris's logic justifies his making the more palatable claim that some openness towards children is mandatory.

This raises the question of whether he has a consistent position arising from his reading, or whether he is simply

inventing a position and claiming he got it from the Greek Fathers.

According to the Greek Fathers, to refuse to transmit life to others is a grievous sin of pride in which the couple prefers to keep human life for themselves instead of sharing it with possible offspring.

Secondly, the Orthodox Church, following the teachings of the Fathers,[5] is totally opposed to any form of the abortion of unborn children. Human life belongs exclusively to God and neither the mother nor the father of the fetus has the right to destroy that life.

[6] When the Fathers of the Church debated against the non-Christian philosophers[7] of the first centuries, they considered abortion as murder because the life of the fetus is animate being.[8]

(Note, for the closing claim, that the reason Zaphiris provides is articulated in a fashion which does not apply to contraception, at least not directly: destroying a painting is wrong precisely because an existing and completed painting is a work of art. What the rhetoric says, avoids saying, and leaves the reader to

**Zaphiris's  
footnotes:**

5. See, e.g., Didache, II, i-3, V, 2, VI, 1-2; Pseudo-Barnabas, Epist., XIX, 4-6, Saint Justin, 1 Apolog., XXVII, 1-XXIX,1; Athenagoras, Supplic., XXXV; Epist. Ad Diogn., 5,6; Tertullian, Apolog, IX, 6-8; Ad Nationes, I, 15; Minucius Felix, Octavius, XXX, 2; Lactance, Divinarum Institutionum, VI, 20.

6. In this regard, we should stress the fact that the Greek Fathers forbid every induced abortion of a

infer, seems to be exquisitely crafted sophistry.)

Thirdly, the Orthodox Church has universally condemned infanticide as immoral, following the same line of theological reasoning.

**Zaphiris's  
footnote:**

6. In this regard, we should stress the fact that the Greek Fathers forbid every induced abortion of a human fetus because abortion involves tampering with a human soul. In fact, the soul is not the product of the sexual act of the parents, but is rather the manifestation of the love of God or the result of a special direct or indirect action of God (cf. Clement of Alexandria,

human fetus because abortion involves tampering with a human soul. In fact, the soul is not the product of the sexual act of the parents, but is rather the manifestation of the love of God or the result of a special direct or indirect action of God (cf. Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, VI. 135, et Eclogae propheticae, 50, 1-3). A study of the means of the transmission of the soul is beyond the scope of the present paper so that we do not try to explain it here. What is important is to emphasize that the parents cannot destroy any human life—even embryonic

Stromata, VI. 135,  
et Eclogae  
propheticae, 50, 1-3).  
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destroy any human  
life—even embryonic  
—because the  
embryo carries the  
soul which is  
transmitted by God.

Fourthly, it is important to stress that the Orthodox Church has not promulgated any solemn statements through its highest synods on the whole contemporary question of contraception. In general, I think it is accurate to say that, as long as a married couple is living in fidelity to one another and not allowing an immoral

egotism to dominate their sexual relations, the particularities of their sexual life are left to the freedom of

—because the  
embryo carries the  
soul which is  
transmitted by God.  
7. We must stress  
the fact that a few  
non-Christian  
philosophers took  
issue with the pro-  
abortion majority  
and condemned  
abortion. Cf. Seneca,  
De Consolatione ad  
Helviani, XVI, 3; R.  
Musunius, p. 77;  
Desimus Junius  
Juvenalis, Satire, VI,  
595f.; Philon of  
Alexandria,  
Hypothetia, VII, 7  
(apud Eusebius,  
Praeparatio  
Evangelica, VIII, 7,  
7).

8. Among other  
Greek Fathers, see  
Clement of  
Alexandria, Eclogae  
propheticae, 50, 1-3.

the spouses to decide.

Finally, it is important to note that the Orthodox Church looks to the medical profession itself to come to some unanimity in its biological research on the effects of contraception for human health. At the moment, the world of science does not furnish the world of theology such a unanimous body of opinion as would allow the Church prudently to formulate unchangeable moral teaching on this point. 682

There is probably a higher class academic way of making this point, but there is a classic anecdote, rightly or wrongly attributed:

Winston Churchill to unknown woman: "Would you sleep with me for a million pounds?"

Unknown woman: "Would I!"

Winston Churchill: "Would you sleep with me for five pounds?"

Unknown woman: "Exactly what kind of woman do you think I am?"

Winston Churchill: "We've already established that. We're just negotiating over the price."

This claim is not a claim that the theological status of contraception is to be determined by the medical profession. The paragraph quoted above means that the theological status of contraception has already been established, with the "price" left to the medical profession to work out.

#### IV. A THEOLOGICAL OPINION ON THE QUESTION OF CONTRACEPTION

From the material we have surveyed above, it should be obvious that there can be no question of entering into marriage without the intention of procreating children as part of the marriage and still remain faithful to the Orthodox moral tradition.

[10]

Pay very, very close attention to footnote 10, immediately above. When a Church Father says that marriage is for the procreation of legitimate children, Zaphiris mentions this only in a footnote and immediately apologizes for it, explaining it away it as "probably due to the influence of Greek philosophy." Are we really talking about the same "Greek philosophy" as Zaphiris describes above as only rarely having people speak out against abortion?

However, it seems to me that a different question is raised when we consider the case of a couple who already have three or four children and cannot realistically face the possibility of begetting more children and providing

**Zaphiris's  
footnote:**

10. Clement of Alexandria, e.g., probably due to the influence of Greek philosophy, defines marriage as "gamos oun esti synodos andros kai gynaikos e prote kata nomon epignesion teknon sporai," i.e. marriage is primarily the union of a man and a woman according to the law in order to procreate legitimate children (cf. Stromata, II, 137, 1).

**Zaphiris's  
footnote:**

11. When the patristic theologians comment on the Pauline doctrine of I Cor. 7:4-5, they

adequately for their upbringing and education. Either they can act fairly irresponsibly and beget more children or they can abstain from sexual intercourse with the constant threat that Satan may tempt the couple to some form of adultery.

I see plenty of precedent for this kind of heart-rending plea in Margaret Sanger's wake. Ordinarily when I see such a line of argument, it is to some degree connected with one of the causes Margaret Sanger worked to advance. I am more nebulous on whether the Fathers would have seen such "compassion" as

how compassion is most truly understood; they were compassionate, but the framework that gave their compassion concrete shape is different from this model.

I might comment that it is almost invariably first-world people enjoying a first-world income who find that they cannot afford any more children. Are they really that much less able than people in the third-world to feed children, or is it simply that they cannot afford more children and keep up their present standard of living? If this choice is interpreted to mean that more children are out of the question, then what that means is, with apologies to St. John Chrysostom, a decision that luxuries and inherited wealth make a better legacy for one's children than brothers and sisters.

consistently stress the temporary character of the sexual abstinence which was permitted by St. Paul to the marriage partners. This temporary period would be all that a husband and wife should agree to in order to avoid the temptation to evil (cf. Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, III, 79, 1).

If the first practice of continued sexual intercourse is pursued, there is the likelihood of an unwanted pregnancy in which case the child ceases to be a sign of their shared love, but risks being a burden which causes only anxiety and even hostility. It is not common that people in this situation of despondency opt for the clearly immoral act of abortion. If this radical action is avoided, and the parents go through with the birth of an unwanted child, there is still the danger that they will subsequently seek a divorce.

Apart from economic or possible emotional problems which accompany economic pressures in family life, there is the equally concrete problem that the health of one of the parents or the health of the possible child might be jeopardized should conception occur.

To limit as far as possible the moral, religious, social, economic, cultural, and psychological problems which arise with the arrival of an unwanted child—both for the parents and for the larger community—I believe that the use of contraceptives would be, if not the best solution, at least the only solution we have at our disposal today. I cannot distinguish between natural and artificial means because the morality of both is the same. If someone uses either a natural or an artificial means of birth control, the intention is the same, i.e., to prevent an unwanted pregnancy. The use of contraceptives can facilitate a sexual life which enjoys a minimum of anxiety.

With these reflections on the current situation of family life and based on the above understanding of St. Paul and the Fathers, I ask myself what is better: to practice abstinence from the act of sexual intercourse, an act made holy by the blessing of God, or to practice a controlled

sexual life within marriage and avoid the temptation of Satan? As we know, sexual intimacy within marriage is a very important aspect of the relationship between husband and wife. With the use of contraceptives this sexual intimacy can be practiced without fear of unwanted pregnancy or without the danger of adultery which may result from the practice of abstinence.

Here contraceptives appear to "save the day" in terms of marital intimacy, and the question of whether they have drawbacks is not brought to the reader's attention. Zaphiris is interested, apparently, in answering the question, "What can be made attractive about contraception?" There are other ways of looking at it.

There was one time I met Fr. Richard John Neuhaus; it was a pleasure, and very different from the stereotypes I keep hearing about neoconservatives here at my more liberal Catholic school, Fordham.

At that evening, over beer and (for the others) cigars I asked about the idea that I had been mulling over. The insight is that concepts ideas and positions having practical conclusions that may not be stated in any form. I asked Fr. Neuhaus for his response to the suggestion that the practice of ordaining women is a fundamental step that may ripple out and have other consequences. I said, "It would be an interesting matter to make a chart, for mainline Protestant denominations, of the date they accepted the ordination of women and the date when they accepted same-sex unions. My suspicion is that it would not be too many years."

He responded by suggesting that I push the observation further back: it would be interesting to make a chart for

American denominations of the date when they allowed contraception, and the more nebulous date when they started to allow divorce.

Fr. Neuhaus's response raises an interesting question for this discussion. There might be greater value than Zaphiris provides in answering the question, "What are the practical effects, both positive and negative, for sexual intimacy that happen when a couple uses contraception?" There is room to argue that intimacy premised on shutting down that aspect of sharing may have some rather unpleasant effects surfacing in odd places. Fr. Neuhaus seemed to think before suggesting a connection between contraception and divorce. But this is not the question Zaphiris is answering; the question he seems to be answering is, "How can we present contraception as potentially a savior to some couples' marital intimacy?" This is fundamentally the wrong question to ask.

The use of contraceptives can contribute to the possibility of a couple's having a permanent physical and spiritual union. The practice of contraception can contribute to the harmony between the man and wife which is the sine qua non of their union.

Furthermore, the practice of contraception can facilitate a balance between demographic expansion on our planet and cultivation of its natural resources. This is absolutely essential if we

### **Zaphiris's**

#### **foonote:**

12. This spiritual union and the physical union are not opposed to one another, but are complementary. As an Orthodox theologian, I cannot treat physical union and spiritual union as dialectically opposed realities, which would result from an

are to prevent future misery and human degradation for future generations. Furthermore, the church itself, which always desires to promote the economic, social, educational, psychological, and religious well-being of its members and of all persons, should permit the practice of contraception among its faithful if it is to be true to its own task.

There was one webpage I saw long ago, comparing the 1950's and 1990's and asking whether it was still possible to make ends meet. The author, after comparing one or two of other rules of thumb, compared what was in a 1950's kitchen with what was in a 1990's kitchen, and concluded, "We're not keeping up with the Joneses any more.... We're keeping up with the Trumps."

St. John Chrysostom was cited in an academic presentation I heard, as presenting an interesting argument for almsgiving: in response to the objection of "I have many children and cannot afford too much almsgiving," said that having more children was a reason to give more alms, because almsgiving has salvific power, and more children have more need for the spiritual benefit of parental almsgiving.

Besides finding the argument interesting, there is something that I would like to underscore, and it is not simply because this would be a family size with contraception forbidden. This is in

opposition between matter and spirit. Rather than getting trapped in this typically Western problem, I follow the theological stress of Orthodoxy; this opposition between matter and spirit is resolved through the Logos, and matter and spirit are affirmed to be in extraordinary accord and synergy.

the context of what would today be considered a third world economy—what we know as first world economy did not exist until the West discovered unprecedentedly productive ways of framing an economy. An hour's work would not buy a burger and fries; a day's work might buy a reasonable amount of bread, and meat was a rarity. Those whom St. Chrysostom was advising to give more alms since they had more children, were living in what would be considered squalor today. Or in the West the year of Zaphiris' publication, or perhaps before that.

Why is it that today, in such a historically productive economy, we have suddenly been faced with the difficulty of providing for a large family? Why does the first world present us with the (new?) issue of providing for as many children as a couple generates? My suspicion is that it is because we have an expected baseline that would appear to others as "keeping up with the Trumps." The question in Zaphiris is apparently not so much whether children can be fed, whether with a first world diet or with straight bread, as whether they can be given a college education, because, in a variation of Socrates' maxim, a life without letters after one's name is not worth living.

I would raise rather sharply the conception of what is good for human beings: as Luke 12:15 says, a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. The Orthodox ascetical tradition has any number of resources for a well-lived life. There are more resources than most of us will ever succeed in using. The Orthodox ascetical tradition is not only for people who consider themselves rich. Is contraception really justified just because the average middle-class family cannot afford to bring up more than a few children in the lifestyle of keeping up with the Trumps?

This personal theological-moral opinion which I have outlined and which suggests that we take active human measures regarding family life and the future of society does not at all imply that I reject the full importance of the action of divine providence as important—it is probably the most important factor in the human future. On the contrary, I want to suggest the cooperation of human reason with divine providence; for the Greek Fathers, human reason itself is a participation in the divine revelation. The discoveries and inventions of humankind are themselves permitted by God who governs the human spirit through the Logos without suppressing human freedom.

Furthermore, we must not forget that the physiology of the woman is itself a kind of preventative to the occurrence of pregnancy. During her menstrual cycle, as is well known, she is fertile only part of the time. On the side of the male physiology, it is only by chance, and certainly not the result of every ejaculation of semen, that one of the millions of sperm swims to the ovum with final success so that conception occurs. I believe that the physical make-up of the reproductive system of both female and male shows that God did not intend that every act of human sexual intercourse should result in a pregnancy. Consequently, I believe that the contraceptive pill does not produce an abnormal state in woman, but rather prolongs the non-fecund period which comes from God.

Having arrived at this moral opinion which would allow the use of contraceptives by Orthodox couples, it is important to conclude by underscoring several basic points. First, as an Orthodox theologian, I feel that I must respect the freedom of a married couple to ultimately make the decision

themselves after I have done my best to school them in the sacredness of marriage, the importance of their union within the saving Mystery of Jesus Christ, and their role in peopling the communion of saints.

684 Secondly, it is important, from an Orthodox point of view, to recognize in the practice of sexual continence a primarily spiritual reality. That is, sexual continence should be practiced only when a couple feels that this is being asked of them by God as a moment within their mutual growth in holiness and spirituality. Any imposition of continence as a physical discipline entered into for baser motives such as fear is not the kind of continence which is counseled to us by the Gospel.

This makes an amusing, if perhaps ironic, contrast to *Humanae Vitae*. Here Zaphiris more or less says that "continence" for the sake of having sexual pleasure unencumbered by children is not really continence. Which I would agree with. Zaphiris says that the pill (abortifascient, incidentally, on some accounts today) is merely regulating a natural cycle, while crying "foul!" at the Catholic claim that contraceptive timing is a spiritually commendable "continence." The Catholic position is the mirror image of this, rejecting the idea that the pill (even if it were not abortifascient) is merely regulating a natural cycle, and classifying the pill among what Catholic canon law calls "poisons of sterility." Both *Humanae Vitae* and Zaphiris make a shoddy argument for one of these two methods of contraception and cry "Foul!" about shoddy argument on the other side.

Despite the fact that Zaphiris presents himself as hostile to *Humanae Vitae* and rising above its faults, the two documents seem to be almost mirror images, more similar than different.

Thirdly, I want to make it quite clear that I am not proposing a complete and unqualified endorsement of the practice of contraception. Rather I am trying to find that same kind of middle ground which the ancient church followed in condemning both the extremes of sexual puritanism among the Encratites,[13] who found in sex something contrary to the holiness of God, and the opposite extreme of pagan debauchery which sought to find all human meaning in the practices of sexual excess. Within this Christian context, I exhort doctors to be faithful to the individual holiness of every Christian man and woman and to shun any irresponsible practice of automatically counseling the use of contraceptives in every situation for the sake of mere convenience and dehumanizing utilitarianism. Also, I want to make it quite clear that I in no way support the "new morality" with its ethic of sexual activity outside the bounds of matrimony, which is sometimes facilitated by doctors who furnish contraceptives quite

### Zaphiris's

#### footnotes:

13. As we know, the Encratites (e.g. Tatian, Cassien, and Carpocrates) condemned marriage because they considered every act of sexual intercourse as sinful. It was sinful because it did not come from God (cf. Epiphanius of Salamine, *Adv. Haer.*, I, III, 46). For them, sexuality was also condemned because of its supposed relationship to original sin. The fleshly union allowed by marriage only further propagated this original sin in the offspring. Thus, because sexuality was not divine, Jesus Christ came to suppress it (cf.

freely to the young and  
uninstructed.

#### V. THE QUESTION OF CONTRACEPTION IN RELATION TO HUMANS' ROLE AS CO- LEGISLATORS WITH GOD IN THE WORLD

The roots of the Orthodox teaching on marriage are to be found in St. Paul's statement about the love between Christ and the church, and St. John Chrysostom's view that marriage should be likened to a small church which, like the great church of God, is "one, holy, universal and apostolic." The relationship between husband and wife parallels the earthly church and the eternal church, or the relationship between the visible and the invisible church. These are not two different churches; on the contrary, there is one church with two dimensions: earthly or terrestrial, and eternal or celestial. The two are inextricably linked. Similarly, marriage constitutes for the Orthodox faith both a terrestrial and a celestial reality, for marriage is both a work of human love and a sacramental

Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, III, 91, 1; 92, 1). In their doctrine, through the suppression of the fleshly union, Jesus Christ opposed the Gospel of the New Testament to the Law of the Old Testament which had allowed sexual intercourse in marriage. The followers of the encratic movement said that they did not accept sexuality, marriage, or procreation because they did not feel that they should introduce other human beings into the world and in their stead as their immediate successors in the human race since they would only

means of salvation. Moreover, insofar as every divinely created being, including man and woman, is created according to the Logos, marriage reflects the Divine Logos.

For Paul, marriage is a striking manifestation (exteriorization) of the union between Jesus Christ and his church (Eph. 5:21-33). The Old Testament prophets saw marriage as a dimension of God's covenant with the people. A husband's

relationship with his wife is the same as the creature's relationship with the Creator; faithfulness in one is faithfulness in the other and, as with the faithfulness (cf. Hos. 1:1-3, 5; Jer. 3:1ff.; Ezek. 16:1ff., 23:1ff.; Isa. 50:1ff., 54:1ff.), so too Paul, in the New Testament, pronounced marriage a holy means (mysterion or sacrament) of Christ's grace. The marriage of man and woman participates in the marriage of Christ and the church.

Eastern Orthodox theologians view the relationship between God and human beings as a creative collaboration. It is our freedom that makes us co-creators with God in the world, and co-legislators with God in the moral order. As creatures, we are obliged to obey the law set down by the Creator, but insofar as our obedience is an expression of our freedom, we are not passive objects of God's law, but rather creative agents of it. Our reason is joined to God through the Logos (the Divine Reason). When we choose to exercise our reason in the moral life, we cooperate with God's creative work on earth. This cooperation or collaboration the

endure suffering and provide food for death (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 45, 1).

14. Cf. Joseph Fletcher, *Moral Responsibility, Situation Ethics at Wori*, (London, 1967), especially pp. 34ff.

Greek Fathers spoke of as synergism (*synergeia*). The person and work of Jesus Christ is the fullest embodiment of this synergistic union of God and humanity.

It is in the light of the synergistic union between God and humanity that the Eastern church understands and resolves the problems of contraceptives, especially the use of the pill.

I could interrupt more to ask many more questions like, "Is this what the Eastern Church should teach to be faithful to her tradition, or what Zaphiris wants the framing metaphor for the Eastern teaching to be as a change to its prior tradition?"

The question we should ask now is: Does our freedom to devise and employ contraceptives, including the pill, violate "natural law" as Roman Catholic teaching states? We are compelled to answer that the encyclical of Pope Paul VI (*Humanae vitae*) is lacking because it does not acknowledge the role of man and woman as God's co-creators and co-legislators on earth. The Eastern Orthodox view of contraception, unlike that of the Latin church, is that our capacity to control procreation is an expression of our powers of freedom and reason to collaborate with God in the moral order. A human being is viewed not only as a subject which receives passively the "natural law," but also as a person who plays an active role in its formulation. Thus the natural law, according to Eastern Orthodox thinkers, is not a code imposed by God on human beings, but rather a rule of life set forth by divine inspiration and by our responses to it in freedom and reason. This view does not permit the Eastern Orthodox Church to conclude that the pill, and

artificial contraceptives generally, are in violation of natural law.

There are a couple of things that are significant here.

First the argument being made about being co-legislators is a point of cardinal importance and one that should ideally be supported by at least one footnote. There is an absolute lack of footnotes or even mention of names of authors or titles of text in this section's quite significant assertions about the Eastern Church. (This raises to me some questions about the refereeing here. My teachers usually complain and lower my grade when I make sweeping claims without adding footnotes.)

Second, to employ a Western image, Christian freedom is comparable to a sonnet: total freedom within boundaries. Hence, in a slightly paraphrased version of one of the sayings of the Desert Fathers, "A brother asked an old monk, 'What is a good thing to do, that I may do it and live?' The old monk said, 'God alone knows what is good. Yet I have heard that someone questioned a great monk, and asked, "What good work shall I do?" And he answered, "There is no single good work. The Bible says that Abraham was hospitable, and God was with him. And Elijah loved quiet, and God was with him. And David was humble, and God was with him. Therefore, find the desire God has placed in your heart, and do that, and guard your heart.'" ( [http://jonathanscorner.com/christmas\\_tales/christmas\\_tales10.htm](http://jonathanscorner.com/christmas_tales/christmas_tales10.htm) , as seen on 14 May, 2007) There is great freedom in Orthodoxy, but freedom within bounds. Things such as "Do not murder," "Do not commit adultery," and "Do not steal," are boundaries absolutely consistent with the Desert Fathers saying above. There is great freedom within boundaries, and in fact the boundaries increase our freedom.

What Zaphiris presents is a great, stirring, poetic hymn to our cooperation with the Creator as co-creators, presented as a reason not to require a certain bound. (It is my experience that sophistry is often presented more poetically than honest arguments.) Perhaps this would be a valid move if there were no serious issues surrounding contraception, but as it is, it follows the logical fallacy of "begging the question": in technical usage, "begging the question" is not about raising a question, but improperly taking something for granted: more specifically, presenting an argument that assumes the very point that it is supposed to prove. It is begging the question to answer the question, "Why is contraception permissible?" by eloquently proclaiming, "Contraception is a magnificent exercise of Orthodox freedom, because Orthodox freedom is magnificent and contraception is permissible within the bounds of that freedom." The whole point at issue is whether contraception is permissible; to argue this way as a way of answering that question is sophistry.

**(I might suggest that it is an "interesting" exercise of our status as co-creators with God to try hard to shut down the creative powers God built into sex. Perhaps the suggestion is not indefensible, but it is in need of being defended, and Zaphiris never acknowledges that this interpretation of our status as co-creators needs to be defended, or buttress his specific interpretation.)**

686 The conception of natural law in *Humanae vitae* contains a deterministic understanding of human marital and sexual life. According to this understanding, any and every human (or artificial) intervention into the biological processes of human being constitutes a violation of God's

law for humanity. Hence, contraception as an artificial interruption or prevention of the natural event of procreation is inherently a violation of God's law. *Humanae vitae*, moreover, goes on to state that each act of coitus is, according to the law of nature, an "actus per se aptus ad generation."

While the Eastern Orthodox Church fully acknowledges the role of procreation in the marital sexual act, it does not share the deterministic understanding of this act as expressed by *Humanae vitae*, which ignores love as a dimension of great value in sexual intercourse between husband and wife. Indeed, this love is viewed by the Eastern church as the marriage partners' own response to the love of God for human beings, a human love as the marriage partners' own response to the love of God for human beings, a human love which is also a paradigm of Christ's love for the church. Finally, one must say that the deterministic Roman Catholic conception of marital sexuality, rooted as it is in scholastic medieval teaching, cannot very well deal with crucial contemporary problems such as over-population, food shortage, poverty, and insufficient medical resources.

The Roman Catholic position on human sexuality and procreation is based on the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas, and these in turn are decisively influenced by Aristotle's philosophy. Aristotle's view was that every object in the physical universe possesses an intelligible structure, a form which is composed of an intrinsic end and the means or "drive" to realize that end. When a thing is behaving, or being used, according to its end—as a frying pan used to fry fish—then that thing is acting properly or "naturally"; however, when a thing is not acting, or being

used, according to its intrinsic end—as when a frying pan is used to prop open a faulty window—then that object is acting, or being used, improperly or "unnaturally."

There is a much bigger problem than a singularly unflattering illustration of the distinction between natural and unnatural use.

Unless one counts Zaphiris's example above of a theologian saying that marriage is intended for procreation, with footnoted clarification that this is "probably due to the influence of Greek philosophy," the surrounding passage (about Thomas Aquinas's discussion of whether contraception is unnatural) is the first time that Zaphiris mentions a theologian presenting an argument against contraception. And it is a Latin after the Great Schism interpreted in terms of Scholastic influence.

The following inference is not stated in so many words, but the trusting reader who is trying to be sympathetic will naturally draw an understandably wrong conclusion: "Arguments that contraception enter the picture when Aquinas as a Latin Scholastic imported Aristotelian philosophy." Again, this is not stated explicitly, but much of sophistry, including this, is the impression that is created without technically saying anything false. (This is how sophistry works.)

This will lead the trusting reader to expect another further conclusion: since (so it appears) arguments against contraception, and especially the idea of contraception being unnatural, enter the picture with Latin Scholasticism, any Orthodox who brings such argument against contraception is under Western influence. People who have fallen under Western influence should perhaps be answered gently and charitably, but the Western influence is not something one should listen to and accept. Again, this is not stated in so many words, but it is

precise the rhetoric appears to be aimed at.

Incidentally, whatever Aquinas may have gotten from Aristotle, the Greek Fathers had ideas of unnatural vice without the help of Latin Scholasticism. There is a firmly embedded concept of unnatural vices, including witchcraft as well as "unnatural vice." Jude 7 charges the men of Sodom with unnatural lust (sarkos heteras). The salient question is not whether the Greek Fathers have an understanding of some sins as unnatural, but whether contraception is a sin and, if so, whether it is among the sins classified as unnatural. But it is not automatically due to Western influence for an Orthodox to make claims about unnatural sin.

St. Thomas attempted to synthesize Aristotle's logic of means-ends with the biblical story of the divine creator of the universe. For Aquinas, God is the author of the intelligible structure present in each finite or earthly object. When a finite being behaves according to its intrinsic end, it acts "naturally" as Aristotle thought, but according to Aquinas it also acts in accord with the divine will for that creaturely being. So it is with human sexuality and procreation. Aquinas believed that the intrinsic end of all sexuality (human and non-human) is procreation.

Procreation may not necessarily result from each act of coitus, but this does not mean that the sexual (human) partners have disobeyed God for, if their aim in sexual union was procreation, they have behaved in accord with the divine will governing this creaturely reality. But if that intrinsic aim of sexuality-procreation is subverted, either by substituting pleasure for procreation as the aim, or by introducing artificial devices or means to inhibit or prevent procreation,

then sexuality is practiced "unnaturally" or sinfully, and God is disobeyed.

The wedding of Aristotle's means-ends logic to the biblical Creator meant for Aquinas that sexuality, as every other earthly vitality, is governed by laws setting forth God's intention for each creaturely being, which are knowable to every creature for 686 the proper conduct of its life on earth. When the law governing sexuality and procreation is disobeyed, then, according to Aquinas' theology, the Creation itself is undermined and God's own creative will is defied.

\* \* \*

If a fuller anthropological understanding of human beings is advanced, such that people are viewed as free, rationally and spiritually, as well as biologically, a different judgment on contraception must then be made, one certainly different from that of the Roman Catholic Church.

Zaphiris is driving his persuasive effect further. He is driving home further the impression that if a misguided fellow Orthodox tells you that contraception is sin, he is presumably one of those poor saps, an Orthodox who has fallen under Western influence, and if this misguided fellow Orthodox perhaps specifies that this is because contraception frustrates the purpose of sex, this is someone under the spell of the Roman Church, who is to be dealt with as one ordinarily deals with the pseudomorphosis of Western influence yet again corrupting Orthodoxy.

It is the belief of Eastern Orthodox theology that only such an anthropology is consistent with the dignity the Bible bestows on humans as imago Dei.

Note that earlier some of what Zaphiris said earlier was presented as a "theological opinion," not necessarily binding on the consciences of other Orthodox Christians even if he was trying to make a case for it. But here we seem to have shifted to something that is binding on all Orthodox Christians: "It is the belief of Eastern Orthodox theology that only such an anthropology," apparently meaning the anthropology implied in the last section which makes at least one sweeping claim without footnotes or even the name of an author or text, that is binding on the consciences of Orthodox Christians. Earlier, perhaps the view of St. John Chrysostom might have been acceptable, at least as a theological opinion. Here it begins to look like a blunt declaration implying that Chrysostom's position is heretical. Is the implication, "If anybody disagrees with this, let him be anathema?"

This dignity is revealed afresh by Jesus Christ who, as both divine and human in freedom, reason, spirit, and flesh, incarnates the complex anthropology of all human beings.

Speaking from this anthropological conception of humanity, we should distinguish three principle aspects in the use of contraceptives—the psychological, the medical, and the moral. From the psychological point of view, contraceptives are permissible only when their use is the result of a common decision reached by both partners. The imposition of contraceptives by one partner in the sexual act must be regarded as immoral inasmuch as it abridges the freedom and possibly violates the conscience of the other partner. Any use of contraceptives which does not respect the psychological condition of both partners and of the sexual act itself must be judged immoral. What should guide

sexual act itself must be judged immoral. What should guide sexual partners in the use or non-use of contraceptives is their freedom and reason, their spiritual dignity as creatures of God.

From the medical point of view, we have mentioned above the conditions under which contraceptives are permissible. It is important to emphasize here that moral questions are not part of the technical judgments made by medical doctors about the use or non-use of contraceptives.[15] As we have said, the use of the pill is not a permanent sterilization but a temporary state of sterility induced for reasons that may be social or economic or psychological or demographic or physiological.

**Zaphiris's footnote:**  
15. [Footnote not recorded in my copy.]

Contrary to Roman Catholic teaching, the pill does not violate natural law. Its function is not to bring about a permanent state of sterilization but rather a temporary suspension of fertility. And this decision to suspend fertility, when made by both marital partners with reason and freedom and spirit, is a decision made perfectly consistent with God's will for human beings on earth.

\* \* \*

688 There is an authentic moral question in the use and non-use of contraceptives. It is no less true that marriage as a sacramental mystery contains a powerful moral dimension.

When marital partners engage in contraception, the Orthodox Church believes that they must do so with the full understanding that the goal God assigns to marriage is both the creation of new life and the expression of deeply felt love.

Note: Love is something you deeply feel. I do not find this notion in the Bible nearly so much as in the literature of courtly love. This conception of love is (one infers from Zaphiris) not only permissible but mandatory.

Moreover, the Orthodox Church believes that the relationship of man and woman in marriage is essentially a relationship of persons. This means that sexual life must be guided by the meaning of relationship and personhood.

Though it is obvious that procreation is a physical phenomenon, the Eastern church understands the decision of the married couple to have a child to be a moral, even more, a spiritual decision. The Pope's encyclical, *Humanae vitae*, in our judgment, committed a significant error. The authors of the encyclical sought to distinguish our procreative power from all other powers that make us human but, in fact, they isolate our procreateness and set it apart from the human personality. Such an isolation does little justice to the complexity. If conjugality has as its goal per se aptitude for procreation, then this is a virtual denial that sexual is permissible during a woman's infertile periods. We have said, and now repeat, that conjugality can and should continue, whether or not procreation is a practical possibility. In contrast to *Humanae vitae*, Orthodox thinkers do not believe that human beings are subjects bound by "natural law" in the deterministic Roman Catholic sense, but rather persons living and acting freely in the natural world.

It now appears, at least to the uninitiate or those liable to misconstrue things, that existentialist personalism is the teaching of the Orthodox Church. And apparently not just a theological opinion: one is bound to subscribe to it

theological opinion: one is bound to subscribe to it.

\* \* \*

Eastern Orthodoxy recognizes that men and women can only truly be God's co-creators on earth through the responsible use of freedom and reason. The question of responsibility becomes crucial in such cases as permanent sterilization, artificial insemination, [16] and euthanasia. The Eastern Orthodox Church cannot and will not legislate vis-à-vis the enormously important and complicated questions raised by these cases.

I'm at this point imagining the Battle Hymn of the Republic playing in the background: "Glory, glory, Hallelujah! His truth goes marching on!" This is very stirring rhetoric, but sits ill with some of my sources and seems to be something he doesn't document well.

These questions are regarded by the Orthodox Church as theologoumena, that is, theologically discussable issues. The Eastern church seeks always to respect one's freedom of decision, but it also seeks through its own ethical inquiry to guide people in making responsible decisions.

There is a lot of great rhetoric for this perspective in

**Zaphiris's  
footnote:**

16. For one Orthodox discussion of the question of insemination, see the excellent book of Prof. Chrysostomos Constantinidis, *Technete Gonipoesis kai Theologia in Orthodoxia*, XXXIII (1958), 66-79, 174-90, 329-335, 451-468; XXXIV (1959), 36-52, 212-230.

Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*. I am suspicious of this rhetorical version of growing to autonomous adult responsibility in its Catholic forms, and I don't see why it needs to be incorporated into Orthodoxy.

The Eastern church's refusal to provide specific answers to some concrete moral questions is based on a fundamental theological principle—the belief that no one can specify where human freedom ends and divine will begins.

Notwithstanding that Zaphiris has done precisely that, not by forbidding contraception altogether, but by specifying multiple lines which contraception may not pass. And, apparently, specified a line where Orthodox condemnation of contraception may not pass. But this is impressive rhetoric none the less.

Synergism means the collaboration of human beings with God in the continuing creation of the world. We must struggle to understand the right and wrong uses of our freedom, guided by the divine spirit. Our freedom is a mystery of God's own will and freedom. Therefore, no theologian—Eastern Orthodox 689 or otherwise—can specify what finally constitutes the divine-human collaboration. Practically speaking, we can know when any given act, having taken place we can never be certain of the responsible and creative use of our freedom. We cannot determine a priori the movement of the human spirit any more than we can determine a priori the movement of the divine spirit. It is certain that, unless we recognize continually the Lordship of God in the world—the Creator judging all the actions of the creatures, we cannot speak

truly of a divine-human synergism.

The church is an instrument of the work of the Holy Spirit on earth, and must seek to relate the scriptural revelation of God to the moral situation in life which we constantly confront. When the church accepts this responsibility, it enables the participation of human beings in the on-going history of salvation. In this fashion, the church witnesses simultaneously to the sacred will of God and to the urgency of human moral life. Thereby the church avoids both antinomianism on the one side and the moral reductionism of "situation ethics" on the other side.

Many ethical approaches are presented as meant to steer a middle course between problematic extremes, including ones we might like and ones we might not like. See an attempted middle road between forcing queer positions onto the Biblical text and forcing conservative positions onto the Biblical text in Patricia Beattie Jung, "The Promise of Postmodern Hermeneutics for the Biblical Renewal of Moral Theology," in Patricia Beattie Jung (ed.), *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press 2001. I haven't seen this phenomenon before in Orthodoxy, but it is common in the liberal Catholic dissent I've read. The dissenter adopts a rhetorical pose of being eager to seek a measured middle course that doesn't do something extreme, and does not give unfair advantage to any position. But this is done in the course of agitating for change on a point where the Catholic teaching is unambiguous. Jung, for instance hopes for a versions Catholic ethics more congenial to lesbian wishes, but she always takes the rhetoric of moderate and reasonable efforts that will respect Scripture and Catholic Tradition. (Again, I am comparing Zaphiris

to Catholic dissent because I have not seen what he is doing here in Orthodoxy before, but have seen it repeatedly in liberal Catholic dissent.)

We must conclude here by saying that God's fantastic love for human beings—*maniakos eros*[17]—has divinised all creation. With this divinisation, God achieves the purpose of bringing all beings to God's own self. We play a role in this great work of salvation through the creativeness and freedom which God has bestowed on us. These dynamic capacities of our being cannot finally be identified and understood outside the scope of the Christian doctrines of humanity (anthropology), of Christ (Christology), and of salvation (soteriology). The ultimate purpose of our synergistic relation to God is our own regeneration, as the New Testament states (cf. Rom. 8:28; Phil. 2:13; I Cor. 3:9).

Moreover, synergism has an ecclesiological dimension, and secondarily a moral dimension. Our role as co-legislators on earth with God can only fully be exercised in relationship to the church, which is the instrument of the communication of the Holy Spirit to humans in their creativeness. This means for Eastern Orthodoxy that the legislative and creative actions

**Zaphiris's  
footnote:**

17. This is an expression used by Nicholas Cabasilas, an Eastern Orthodox theologian of the Byzantine era. The notion of God's *maniakos eros* is discussed by Paul Evdokimov, *L'amour fou de Dieu* (Paris, 1973).

**Zaphiris's  
footnotes:**

18 I Cor 2:7.

19 Rom 12:2.

of men and women are a liturgy of the church itself. When we live in relation to the church's body, we live within "God's wisdom: a mysterious and hidden wisdom framed from the very beginning to bring us to our full glory." [18] The ecclesio-anthropo-soteriological value of this human liturgy is contained in the relation which exists between God's revelation and our activity. The harmonious cooperation between God and humans makes it possible for our legislative and creative acts to be "what is good, acceptable, and perfect." [19]

We have offered these remarks in the hope that they can contribute to a common basis for an ecumenical discussion on the contemporary human problem of contraception.

Orthodox who are concerned with ecumenism may wish to take note of this statement of authorial intent.

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### **Study and discussion questions**

1. What view concerning marriage and sexuality do we find in the Scriptures? In the early Christian writers?
2. Discuss the author's interpretation of the biblical and patristic views of marriage, sexuality, and procreation.
3. What implication concerning contraception can be derived from biblical and patristic concepts of marriage, sexuality, and procreation?
4. What are the official teachings of the Orthodox Church on contraception?
5. How do these teachings compare with Protestant and

### Roman Catholic teachings?

6. Under what circumstances does the author believe contraception to be theologically permissible? Discuss.
7. What is synergism?
8. How is contraception linked with synergism?
9. How is the resulting view of contraception within Orthodoxy a contrast to the Roman Catholic view?
10. Why does the Eastern Orthodox Church avoid concrete and decisive answers to problems such as contraception?

I have never seen Bible study/book discussions questions posed like this in a refereed journal before. I suspect that these will lead people to say things that will help cement the belief that the truth is more or less what has been presented in this account. This seems in keeping with other red flags that this is doing more than just providing a scholarly account of what Orthodox believe. Perhaps this is part of why this paper's label as a "theological opinion"—about as close as Orthodoxy gets to the idea of "agreeing to disagree" on spiritual matters—has been accepted as a statement of what the Orthodox Church believes, period.

I believe this document has problems, and if as I expect it is a major influence in the "new consensus" allowing some contraception in the Orthodox Church, this constitutes major reason to re-evaluate the "new consensus."

There could conceivably be good reasons to change the ancient tradition of the Orthodox Church from time immemorial to almost the present day. Maybe. But this is not it. (And if these are the best reasons Zaphiris found to change the immemorial tradition of the Church, perhaps it would be better not to do so.)

# Our Crown of Thorns

I remember meeting a couple; the memory is not entirely pleasant. Almost the first thing they told me after being introduced was that their son was "an accident," and this was followed by telling me how hard it was to live their lives as they wanted when he was in the picture.

I do not doubt that they had no intent of conceiving a child, nor do I doubt that having their little boy hindered living their lives as they saw fit. But when I heard this, I wanted to almost scream to them that they should look at things differently. It was almost as if I was speaking with someone bright who had gotten a full ride scholarship to an excellent university, and was vociferously complaining about how much work the scholarship would require, and how cleanly it would cut them off from what they took for granted in their home town.

I did not think, at the time, about the boy as an icon of the Holy Trinity, not made by hands, or what it means to think of such an icon as "an accident." I was thinking mainly about a missed opportunity for growth. What I wanted to say was, "This boy was given to you for your deification! Why must you look on the means of your deification as a curse?"

Marriage and monasticism are opposites in many ways. But

there are profound ways in which they provide the same thing, and not only by including a community. Marriage and monasticism both provide—in quite different ways—an opportunity to take up your cross and follow Christ, to grow into the I Corinthians 13 love that says, "When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me"—words that are belong in this hymn to love because love does not place its own desires at the center, but lives for something more. Those who are mature in love put the childish ways of living for themselves behind them, and love Christ through those others who are put in their lives. In marriage this is not just Hollywood-style exhilaration; on this point I recall words I heard from an older woman, that you don't know understand being in love when you're "a kid;" being in love is what you have when you've been married for decades. Hollywood promises a love that is about having your desires fulfilled; I did not ask that woman about what more there is to being in love, but it struck me as both beautiful and powerful that the one thing said by to me by an older woman, grieving the loss of her husband, was that there is much more to being in love than what you understand when you are young enough that marriage seems like a way to satisfy your desires.

Marriage is not just an environment for children to grow up; it is also an environment for parents to grow up, and it does this as a crown of thorns.

The monastic crown of thorns includes an obedience to one's elder that is meant to be difficult. There would be some fundamental confusion in making that obedience optional, to give monastics more control and make things less difficult. The problem is not that it would fail to make a more pleasant, and less demanding, option than absolute obedience to a monastic elder. The problem is that when it was making things more

pleasant and less demanding, it would break the spine of a lifegiving struggle—which is almost exactly what contraception promises.

Rearing children is not required of monastics, and monastic obedience is not required married faithful. But the spiritual struggle, the crown of thorns by which we take up our cross and follow Christ, by which we die to ourselves that we live in Christ, is not something we can improve our lives by escaping. The very thing we can escape by contraception, is what all of us—married, monastic, or anything else—need. The person who needs monastic obedience to be a crown of thorns is not the elder, but the monastic under obedience. Obedience is no more a mere aid to one's monastic elder than our medicines are something to help our doctors. There is some error in thinking that some people will be freed to live better lives, if they can have marriage, but have it on their own terms, "a la carte."

What contraception helps people flee is a spiritual condition, a sharpening, a struggle, a proving grounds and a training arena, that all of us need. There is life in death. We find a rose atop the thorns, and the space which looks like a constricting prison from the outside, has the heavens' vast expanse once we view it from the inside. It is rather like the stable on Christmas' day: it looks on the outside like a terrible little place, but on the inside it holds a Treasure that is greater than all the world. But we need first to give up the illusion of living our own lives, and "practice dying" each day, dying to our ideas, our self-image, our self-will, having our way and our sense that the world will be better if we have our way—or even that we will be better if we have our way. Only when we have given up the illusion of living our own lives... will we be touched by the mystery and find ourselves living God's own life.

**Our Thoughts  
Determine Our  
Lives: Beyond *The  
Secret* and the  
Law of Attraction**

(To the family who gave me my copy of **Our Thoughts  
Determine Our Lives**—You know who you are: you are appreciated  
and you are loved!)

## Perfecting the core of *The Secret*

The Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica's [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) begins,

1.1 Our life depends on the kind of thoughts we nurture. If our thoughts are peaceful, calm, meek, and kind, then that is what our life is like. If our attention is turned to the circumstances in which we live, we are drawn into a whirlpool of thoughts and can have neither peace nor tranquility.

In Christ the Eternal Tao, there is a work similar to the Tao Te Ching, but it is introduced not as a translation of the ancient Chinese classic, but as a New Testament building on and perfecting the original Tao Te Ching. The Christian understanding of the New Testament is that it fulfills and completes the Old Testament. Where the Old Testament mostly forbids toxic actions and says "Do not murder" and "Do not commit adultery," the New Testament forbids toxic thoughts and says "Do not hate" and "Do not lust," offering a greater healing and freedom from evil and pain, even better than freedom from evil actions. And I would like to suggest that *The Secret*, a book loved by many, can be seen as an Old Testament that reaches its fulfillment and completion in Elder Thaddeus's

## [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives.](#)

The Secret offers a very attractive promise. On the book's account, the Secret is a Secret that can unlock youthful health at any age, spectacular and more spectacular wealth, professional success, romance, and more. But there is more one could want, much more. The Secret may offer a program to satisfy one's conscious desires, but not so much is there a program to transcend one's desires. Our unrefined desires, our common covetousness, may be for things which will not really satisfy us, especially not as much as some things we may not think to even covet in our present state. And having read and not accepted The Secret and its Law of Attraction which says (along with other New Age sources) that if you think of something your thoughts will become reality, I was blindsided by Elder Thaddeus in [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#), which had, if not a Law of Attraction in full, nonetheless something a lot like the Law of Attraction which said that our thoughts have a great deal more influence than we suspect. It said that if we have nastiness or conflict, it is rarely, or perhaps never, something that happens without our warring with others in our thoughts. Perhaps, as Elder Thaddeus does not specifically suggest, other people have contributed something, and perhaps some people start out with a chip on their shoulders. But they rarely, if ever, start warring against us, and continue their warfare, if we simply do not war against them in our thoughts. Others rarely remain hostile to us if we are gentle, respectful, and never strike back, not even in the most private recesses of our thoughts. And that is a Law of Attraction The Secret barely, if ever, even begins to hint at. It may be implicit, but The Secret never says that **if you sow hostile thoughts, you will reap conflict.**

[Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) says more than this. It

also talks about thoughts that are in fact neither healthy nor truly our own. The demonic is real and operative, and part of spiritual health is declining an ongoing flood of thoughts that are not to our best interest. And some of the things touted as benefits in [The Secret](#) may be less helpful than they seem, even if they are true. It talks about how "...The end of the story about my own weight is that I now maintain my perfect weight of 116 pounds and I can eat whatever I want." The [Philokalia](#), by contrast, see the sin of gluttony as affecting much more than how one looks in a swimsuit: what overeating does to one's waistline is incidental to what it does to one's spirit, acting as a gateway drug to more serious sins.

## Maxims for life

The famous [55 maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko](#) include ([Ancient Faith podcast](#)):

39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.
45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.

I would draw something out of "Be defined and bound by God, not people," in particular. When someone opposes us and we accept the warring thoughts that come so easily to all of our hands, we are being defined and bound by the people we are resisting, and not, or at least not only, by God. The satyagraha or nonviolent resistance highlighted by Gandhi draws on the [Sermon on the Mount](#) and has its power close to the heart of the [Sermon on the Mount](#) that simply says, "[Do not resist an evil person.](#)" If someone evil to you is hostile and you do not dish out hostility even in the secrets of your heart, that is powerful. If you are only "defined and bound by God, not people," and [turn the other](#)

[cheek](#), the roots of hostility begin to melt away. I personally do not know how my life would have been different if I had always shown the perfection of this teaching, but there have been some very rough situations that could have been very different if I had answered each and every hostility with unruffled meekness.

We tend to think that changes in our exterior life will make us happy, and this is part of why *The Secret* is such a runaway bestseller. It promises means to abundant success in various worldly concerns, and never asks the (at times terrifying) question of "What if I get the BMW SUV my heart is dying for now, and it does not deliver lasting satisfaction?" Someone who is a little bit sensitive to memories and experiences may note that sometimes getting some hot luxury item does not give us satisfaction, at least not for terribly long. But [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) offers a Law of Attraction that recognizes that the transformation that we need, and the transformation that will yield lasting satisfaction, is much more a transformation of our interior lives than anything external. And in regard to the interior life, God wants to give us much better than a cost-of-living raise. He wants to give abundant interior riches, and part of why external circumstances sometimes do not change is that he knows we need something more. Something beyond what *The Secret* even pretends to offer.

## One man's crown of thorns

It would be true, but deceptive by itself, to say that Elder Thaddeus was a clairvoyant elder who lived to see quite a following. The reason that is deceptive by itself is that that fruit gives an impression that his wishes were fulfilled, when in fact Elder Thaddeus had a much more painful life, with many more wishes not fulfilled, than most of us. The life of a saint is a difficult one with many more obstacles, not less, than your average Joe, and while I don't want to try to make Elder Thaddeus a saint speaking out of my own authority, his life was at least like that of a great many saints in seeing wish after wish simply denied. His own burden included serious health issues. It also included that his wishes in monasticism to simply be a lay monk, just praying in silence, never really happened. Instead he had, as a monk fulfilling the obedience of serving as an abbot, to take on himself the cross of addressing the great many cares and concerns of supporting the monks entrusted to him. Maybe some of us, in our worse moments, can covet offices and titles. The reality is different, and contains a great many things people coveting honor never imagine in connection with their coveting prestige and some office. If you ask how he was a clairvoyant elder, seeing into people's hearts and thoughts, the answer is surprisingly simple. Elder Thaddeus had a heart that was pierced

again and again until things that the rest of us were oblivious to were enough to pierce his heart. Now it is not particularly hard to make some imaginings and covet a clairvoyant elder's abilities, but Elder Thaddeus was no fortune teller in the usual sense: when an author came to him and asked a prediction for how well his novels would sell, Elder Thaddeus said, "I am not a psychic!" (Now Elder Thaddeus may have had surprising insights when people came to him in faith seeking a balm for spiritual difficulties, but I insist that the pierced heart he knew was not in any sense what one imagines and fuels if one is coveting clairvoyance.) Holiness is taking up your cross and following in the footsteps of our crucified Lord, and the further you walk on that path, the less your life looks like fulfilling your wishes and desires.

## Needless difficulties

I am choosing an example here to try to make my point strongly, as strongly as I see how. If this seems strange, hokey, or putting an unreasonable share of blame on myself, I apologize; you are welcome to [skip to the next section](#).

This portion of this article is posted by the kind and gracious permission of the other party, to whom I am grateful.

I remember, to pick one of many examples, when a friend who helped me on my journey to Orthodoxy, decided on his own authority that there was something wrong with me and he was going to "fix" me (his term, with his quotes). I caught him in the act and firmly said, "No." He said I was sending mixed messages. I said, more forcefully, "No." He reiterated his claim and said that I was sending such mixed messages. I repeatedly said a forceful, "No," and he kept on telling me I was sending a mixed message, and then, "You can say what you want to say, but I will do what I want to do," meaning that he would continue trying to "fix" me after I said, "No." Then I sent a "cease and desist" letter (and he was not so bold as to continue his campaign once the Gmail Abuse Team was in on the conversation). Since then, I've briefly reached out, but we have only spoken briefly since.

Now I would like to ask what was going on here. A psychologist would speak of boundaries, say that he was possibly

doing something wrong at the beginning, and he was definitely wrong to persist after I had expressed a boundary. And I was absolutely right to send a cease-and-desist letter after he repeatedly tried to push past the boundary I was expressing. But I would point out something else. Did he start it? That's not my concern. Was he in the wrong? Still not my concern, except perhaps as my replies exacerbated the temptations he faced.

What really is my concern is that I met him with warring thoughts. And what is more, I spoke to him and answered him out of warring thoughts. Whether or not he had warring thoughts, or his warring thoughts came first, is not my concern. I wanted to have the upper hand as badly as he did, and I got what I really wanted, which was to have a scathing last word. And my warring thoughts (and words) did nothing to defuse the conflict, but only confirmed and agreed to being in conflict, and in fact an intense power struggle. (I had earlier given a cool reception to other attempts to help me out, perhaps part of why he decided that this time around, I wasn't allowed to say, "No." I may have been right to say "No," but I could possibly have done so with more respect.) Some people might say that I was right to send a cease and desist letter, but even if I was right, that only came after I had failed at making the encounter into one appropriate to friends, really failed to even try. And, though I am glad he stopped trying to "fix" me, it is hardly a victory for me that our conversation as friends has not really resumed.

I got my way, which is unusual for a situation like this, but I did not truly win. I couldn't, not with that attitude. Winning might have gently stopped the treatment plan, but it would have saved the friendship, and would have left me at peace instead of with an unhealed painful memory. I believe better was possible, or would have been possible if I had been more grown up.

(This kind of scenario is a good example of why Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye only ends by making the whole world blind.")

**I hesitated on whether to include this or cut it out: more than anything else I have had, this has the most potential to repulse a good reader as not being devout Orthodoxy, but simply dysfunctional. But harassment has figured prominently in my life, and there have been perhaps half a dozen times I've had harassment persist until I copied authorities on a forceful "No." Usually the harassment has been from someone I regarded as a friend, and sometimes trusted a great deal. (If it is a friend who doesn't get that "No means no," starting the first time.)**

This doesn't make the harassment my fault, but when I have faced harassment, usually I have done something preventable that already antagonized the other party. (I am trying to learn what I can from the experiences.)

## Surprising beauty

The converse is also true.

To quote [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) again:

4.5. If in each family there were just one person who served God zealously, what harmony there would be in the world! I often remember the story of Sister J. She used to come and talk to me often while I was still at the Tumane Monastery. Once she came, together with an organized group of pilgrims, and complained, saying, "I can't bear this any longer! People are so unkind to each other!" She went on to say that she was going to look for another job. I advised her against it, as there were few jobs and a high level of unemployment. I told her to stop the war she was fighting with her colleagues. "But I'm not fighting with anyone!" she said. I explained that, although she was not fighting physically, she was waging war with her colleagues in her thoughts by being dissatisfied with her position. She argued that it was beyond anyone's endurance. "Of course it is," I told her, "but you can't do it yourself. You need God's help. No one knows whether you are praying or not while you are at work. So, when they start offending you, do not return their offenses either with words or with negative thoughts. Try not to offend them even in your thoughts; pray to God that He may send them an angel of peace. Also ask that He

that He may send them an angel of peace. Also ask that He not forget you. You will not be able to do this immediately, but if you always pray like that, you will see how things will change over time and how the people will change as well. In fact, you are going to change, too." At that time I did not know whether she was going to heed my advice.

This happened in the Tumane Monastery in 1980. In 1981 I was sent to the Vitovnica Monastery. I was standing underneath the quince tree when I noticed a group of pilgrims that had arrived. She was in the group and she came up to me to receive a blessing. And this is what she said to me, "Oh, Father, I had no idea that people were so good!" I asked her whether she was referring to her colleagues at work and she said she was. "They have changed so much, Father, it's unbelievable! No one offends me anymore, and I can see the change in myself, as well." I asked her whether she was at peace with everyone, and she answered that there was one person with whom she could not make peace for a long time. Then, as she read the Gospels, she came to the part where the Lord  $\hat{A}$ ' commands us to love our enemies. Then she said to herself, "You are going to love this person whether you want to or not, because this is what the Lord commands us to do." And now, you see, they are best friends!

And I have experienced profound respect from people I have shown profound respect. At times I've been caught off guard until I remembered the hand I stretched out.

The Orthodox Tradition has a great deal to say about our thoughts, and contrary to modern psychology, demonic influence actually contributes a great deal of thoughts we think of as "ours." The Secret says that admitting a little thought attracts

others: if we think in kindness, it opens the door to more kind thoughts, and if we think in negativity, it opens the door to more negative thoughts. And it is right in this regard. Counselors have said in reference to addiction, "You have more power than you think," and while we can hardly win involved engagements with destructive thoughts, as fighting them may only give them more power, we can refuse entry when they first come to us as very small temptations. (If a candle is extinguished just after it starts to fall, there will be no house fire to fight.) This watchfulness is not easy; monks take years to learn it. But it is possible. Fr. Thomas's 55 maxims include, "13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings. Cut them off at the start." And this is advice well worth following. Put out the smouldering spark when it is a spark: don't wait to address the problem until your house is on fire.

## Avatars and being divine

The Secret surges as it builds to its claim that You are God. It speaks of avatars, here meaning living and successful leaders whose words are highlighted in the book. (Note that this is a slight modification of how Hinduism understands avatars, who are essentially great lights from the past, and include the world's great teachers as understood in the West.) The core idea of an avatar is God come down in human form, the idea being that God, who is at the core of each of us, is not simply represented by avatars, but becomes them.

So how does this relate to Christianity? Orthodoxy may be distinctive here, but Hinduism looks surprisingly familiar here to Orthodox. There was one point in a theology course where the professor, a Roman, talked about a Hindu friend saying that he appreciated the Christian teaching of the incarnation, but asked, why only once? Why not an overflowing stream of incarnations or avatars? And I challenged him (perhaps not very Orthodox or very wise in this matter) and said that there was, on a Christian understanding, not only one. The incarnation is perfected in the Church, and every saint, every faithful Orthodox Christian, is a place where the incarnation unfurls. Now I do not understand saints on the Hindu terms for an avatar; I do not believe that they are, like avatars or the Christ I worship, divine by nature, but something happens to created men that makes that matter

less than one might think. St. Maximus the Confessor described five great transcendings of differences, the last being a transcending of the distinction between created and uncreated matter. In other words, when the sanctifying God works such a great miracle that the fact that saints and faithful were created and were not divine from the outset is simply not the issue. God has transcended the chasm between created and uncreated: that all the saints were created is entirely beside the point.

Christians who find Hinduism's idea that God is at the core of each of us strange might wake up a bit. In the first chapter of the Bible, we read, "God created man in his image. In the image of God he created them. Male and female he created them." A person is by nature connected to God, something by which God's power operates, someone who breathes the breath of God. The image of God in us represents and embodies the Lord. This might be on slightly different terms from what Hinduism suggests, but the Hindu understanding is not strange and may be less different from Orthodoxy than it looks.

One chilling passage in Scripture reads ([Matthew 25:31-46](#)):

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick

welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Human nature is so much powered by the divine nature that we cannot rush past a beggar without rushing past God himself. Every kindness shown to even the least of those around us will be remembered at the crack of doom. And of course we all fall short, but giving half a loaf is better than giving no loaf.

And that brings me to one particular and not necessarily pleasant point. One question I've thought about is, "If you had the chance to do it over, would you fall in love with yourself all over again?" I've been pretty narcissistic, and I don't think I

can even imagine what my life would be like if I were more humble. I do know that the rest of the world has seemed a lot more interesting after I started to let go of trying to constantly stand awestruck at my "inner world." (As G.K. Chesterton said, "It takes humility to enjoy even pride.") If there is something about human nature that is deeply connected to the divine even among the worst of us, we would perhaps do better to think of our neighbor's genuine glory than our own. As C.S. Lewis said at the peak of, [The Weight of Glory](#) [PDF]:

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the most dull and uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet only, if at all, in a nightmare... There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal... Next to the Blessed Sacrament, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.

## There's no time like the present

We live in rough times, but Elder Thaddeus, who wrote [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#), was someone who had been repeatedly imprisoned by Nazis. He lived in rough circumstances, too, and there is some confusion implied in believing that his words flow naturally out of an unspoiled paradise and do not apply to our world with its rough realities. They do, and they are for here, and now.

I have had a lot of difficulty appreciating the here and now. This has not usually been because there is nothing to appreciate, but because I had, and still have, thoughts like the "before" of the young woman's "before and after" scenario quoted above. I am tempted to want a different setting, and perhaps for unrelated reasons such would be beneficial. But refusing to war against others in thoughts is for here and now, for the people I am actually connected with. [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) talks about a parish priest who kept persisting in asking his bishop to send him to another parish, and the bishop, to restate more boldly, said, "You're not unhappy because you have the wrong external settings. You're unhappy because you have the wrong thoughts and internal state." And the fact that the publication date of *The Secret*, ©2006, was when middle-class American families with Fords wanted BMW's, not when large

numbers middle-class American families are struggling to keep their houses, does not change the core issues. Elder Thaddeus's life was still under more difficult circumstances, and we may perhaps connect Elder Thaddeus's words (not quoted here) about spoiled children not knowing what they want and turning to dark alleys, with our going from unusually good times, historically speaking, to bearing a heavier cross. God is still with us whatever circumstances he puts us in, and his words are for us here and now, not hypothetical inhabitants of a perfect world.

In my own story, I have great hope arising from this text. I've had some real difficulties and I've warred against other people in my thoughts. Part of me wishes I had seen this text when I was twenty, but another part of me is wondering at new vistas that may be open to me if I repent of warring against my neighbor in my thoughts. I'm excited at possibilities in interviewing, job hunting, and employment beyond my current contract. I'm experiencing more zest for life than I have had in a long time.

## *Alice in Wonderland*

Programming expert Alan Perlis said, "The best book on programming for the layman is *Alice in Wonderland*, but that's because it's the best book on anything for the layman." And a word of caution is due here.

His Eminence KALLISTOS in [The Orthodox Church](#) wrote of Orthodoxy, "It is not something Oriental or exotic," and I chafed at those words, but they were very wisely chosen. My parish priest commented that people drawn in by the beauty of the liturgy sometimes didn't stick; it takes more than aesthetic pulls to stick with the liturgy, and as the priest who received me into confession said, "Orthodoxy is slog." I chafed at that too, but he was right. Nothing is permanently exotic, not Orthodoxy, nor anything else. And in that sense, I believe my treatment thus far is misleading; whatever of the Law of Attraction (or something better) may be present, it is much less exotic than my account of it; it is here and now, perhaps slogwork, and is no more exotic than the concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy is in the West. And there is nothing tantalizing or exotic about an adult in the West seeing a self-fulfilling prophecy in a youngster's words about homework of, "I don't understand this, and I'm never going to get it!"

I may have read or at least skimmed through [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) before, but this time I stumbled on it,

courtesy of some friends' generosity and modest praise of the book, as treasure in a field that was completely unexpected to me. However, however much I value it, Elder Thaddeus's basic claim is only one of many things God may say in drawing people closer to himself. This is only one of the thirty rungs of [The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#) (if even that). A great many wonderful classics do not make clear that our hostile thoughts can poison our interactions with others, and praying for others and stopping our warring thoughts can make a world of difference. This is only one flower from a field filled with many flowers.

This basic principle as I describe it sounds exotic, and that is a liability I don't see how to iron out. Its working out is mundane, or perhaps works in the mundane until we can accept the here and now. For me, it is loving the daily grind, in which regard I am fortunate. (I have a remarkably pleasant daily grind as far as external circumstances go.) It is loving God and my neighbor and working through my work and my dealings with others, as all of Orthodoxy is.

And that has made all the difference.

# The Patriarchy We Object To

Tell me what kind of patriarchy you object to. As Orthodox, we probably object to that kind of patriarchy as well.

There was one chaplain at a university who, whenever a student would come in and say, "I don't believe in God," would answer, "Tell me what kind of God you don't believe in. I probably don't believe in that kind of God either." And he really had something in common with them. He didn't believe in a God who was a vindictive judge, or a God who was responsible for all the evil in this world, or a God who was arbitrary and damned people for never hearing of him. And the chaplain wasn't just making a rhetorical exercise; he didn't believe in many kinds of "God" any more than the students who were kind enough to come and tell him they didn't believe in God. He really had something in common with them.

There was one book I was reading which was trying to recover women's wisdom from patriarchy. I was amazed when I was reading it, as it talked about the holistic, united character of women's knowing, and how women's knowledge is relational, how women know by participating. What amazed me was how much it had in common with Orthodox description of knowledge, because the Orthodox understanding of knowledge is based off an

essential unity and knows by relating, participating, drinking, rather than by analyzing and taking apart and knowing things by keeping track of a systematic map.

What Orthodoxy in the West would seek to recover from the West looks a lot like what feminism would like to recover from patriarchy. Part of what may confuse the issue is that feminism lumps together two very different forces as "patriarchy." One of these forces is classical tradition, and the other is something funny that's been going on for several hundred years in which certain men have defaced society by despising it and trying to make it manly.

The reason that women's holistic, connected knowledge is countercultural is something we'll miss if we only use the category of "patriarchy". The educational system, for instance, makes very little use of this knowledge, not because patriarchy has always devalued women's ways of knowing, but something very different. The reason that there's something countercultural to women's holistic, connected knowledge is that that is a basic human way of knowing, and men can be separated from it more easily than women, but it's a distortion of manhood to marginalize that way of knowing. And there has been a massive effort, macho in the worst way, that despised how society used to work, assumed that something is traditional it must be the women's despicable way of doing things, and taken one feature of masculine knowledge and used it to uproot the the places for other ways of knowing that are important to both men and women. There are two quite different forces lumped together in the category of "patriarchy." One is the tradition proper, and the other is "masculism" (or at least I call it that), and what feminism sees as patriarchy is what's left over of the tradition after masculism has defaced it by trying to make it

"masculine," on the assumption that if something was in the tradition, that was all you needed to know, in order to attack it as being unfit for men. "Masculism" is what happens when you cross immature masculinity with the effort to destroy whatever you need to make room for your version of Utopia. What is left of the tradition today, and what feminism knows as "patriarchy," is a bit like what's left of a house after it's been burned down.

With apologies to G.K. Chesterton, the Orthodox and feminists only ask to get their heads into the Heavens. It is the masculists who try to fit the Heavens into their heads, and it is their heads that split. This basic difference between knowing as exaltation and expansion, participating in something and allowing one's head to be raised in the Heavens, and domination and mastery that compresses the Heavens so they will fit in one's head, is the difference between what "knowing" means to both feminists and Orthodox, and what it means to masculists.

The difference between Orthodoxy and feminism is this. Orthodoxy has to a very large measure preserved the tradition. When it objects to masculism, it is objecting to an intrusion that affects something it is keeping. It is a guard trying to protect a treasure. Where Orthodoxy is a guard trying to protect a treasure, feminism is a treasure hunter trying to find something that world has lost. It is a scout rather than a guard. (And yes, I'm pulling images from my masculine mind.) Feminism is shaped by masculism, and I'd like to clarify what I mean by this. I don't mean in any sense that feminism wants to serve as a rubber stamp committee for masculism. The feminist struggle is largely a struggle to address the problems created by masculism. that's pretty foundational. But people that rebel against something tend to keep a lot of that something's assumptions, and feminism is a lot like masculism because in a culture as deeply affected by

masculism as much of the West, masculism is the air people breathe. (People can't stop breathing their air, whatever culture they're in.) For one example of this, masculism assumed that anything in the tradition was womanish and therefore unfit for men, and feminism inherited a basic approach from masculism when it assumed that anything in tradition was patriarchal and therefore unfit for women. It's a masculist rather than traditional way of approaching society. Orthodoxy has been affected by masculism to some degree, but it's trying to preserve the Orthodox faith, where feminism has been shaped by masculism to a much greater degree and is trying to rebel against the air its members breathe. Feminism is a progressive series of attempts to reform masculism for women; if you look at its first form, it said, "Women should be treated better. They should be treated like men." Later forms of feminism have seen that there are problems with that approach, but they have been reacting to a composite of masculism and earlier versions of feminism. Feminism has been a scout, rather than a guard. I say that feminism has been a scout rather than a guard, not to criticize, but to suggest that Orthodoxy has been given something that feminism reaches for, but does not have in full. It is a bit like the difference between maintaining a car and trying to go through a junkyard with the wrecks of many magnificent things and reconstruct a working vehicle. In a junkyard, one sees the imprint of many things; one sees the twisted remains of quite a few items that would be good to have. And one can probably assemble things, get some measure of functionality, perhaps hobble together a working bicycle. And if one does not have a working car, there is something very impressive about doing one's best to assemble something workable from the wreckage. It is perhaps not the best manners

to criticize someone who has combined parts to make a genuinely working bicycle and say, "But you were not given a working car!"

But in Orthodoxy, there is a very different use of time. Orthodox do not simply spend time filling the gas tank (there are many necessities in faith like filling a gas tank) and maintaining the car (which we periodically break), necessary as those may be. Having a car is primarily about living life as it is lived when you can drive. It is about being able to travel and visit people. It is about having more jobs open to you. If a car isn't working, dealing with the car means trying to do whatever you can to get it working. It means thinking about how to fix it. And feminism is trying to correct masculism. If a car is working, dealing with the car is about what it can let you do. It's like how when you're sick, your mind is on getting well and on your health. If you're healthy, you don't think about your health unless you choose to. You're free to enjoy your health by focusing on non-health-related pursuits.

What does Orthodoxy have to contribute to feminism? To begin with, it's not simply a project by men. Feminist tends to assume that whatever is in patriarchy is there because all-powerful men have imposed it on women, or to put things in unflattering terms women have contributed little of substance to patriarchal society. That may have truth as regards masculism, but Orthodoxy is the property of both men and women (and boys and girls), and it is a gross mischaracterization to only look at the people who hold positions of power.

Feminists have made bitter criticism of Prozac being used to mask the depression caused by many housewives' loneliness and isolation. Housewives who do not work outside the home have much more than housework to deal with; they have loneliness and isolation from adult company. And perhaps, feminists may icily

say, if a woman under those conditions is depressed, this does not necessarily mean Prozac is appropriate. Maybe, just maybe, the icy voice tells us, the solution is to change those conditions instead of misusing antidepressants to mask the quite natural depression those conditions create. Feminists are offended that women are confined to a place outside of society's real life and doing housework in solitary confinement. One of the most offensive things you can say, if there is no irony or humor in your voice, is, "A woman's place is in the house!" (and not add, "and in the Senate!")

But Orthodoxy looks at it differently, or at least Orthodox culture tends to work out differently. And, like many alien cultures, things have a very different meaning. The home has a different meaning. When people say "family" today, we think of a nuclear family. Then it was extended family, and thinking of an extended family without a nuclear family would have been as odd to people then as it would be odd today to take your favorite food and then be completely unable to eat anything else. Traditional society, real traditional society, did not ask women to work in isolation. Both men and women worked in adult company. And the home itself... In traditional society, the home was the primary place where economic activity occurred. In traditional society, the home was the primary place where charitable work occurred. In traditional society, the home took care of what we would now call insurance. In traditional society, the home was the primary place where education occurred. Masculism has stripped away layer after layer of what the home was. In Orthodox culture, in truly Orthodox culture that has treasures that have been dismantled in the West, a woman's place really is in the home, but it means something totally different from what a feminist cringes at in the words, "A woman's place is in the

house!"

America has largely failed to distinguish between what feminism says and women's interests, so people think that if you are for women, you must agree with feminism. Saying "I oppose feminism because I am for women's interests" seems not only false but a contradiction in terms, like saying "I'm expanding the text of this webpage so it will be more concise." It's not like more thoughtful Catholics today, who say, "I have thought, and I understand why many people distinguish or even oppose the teachings of the Catholic Church with God's truth. But my considered judgment is that God reveals his truth through the living magisterium of the Catholic Church." It's more like what the Reformers faced, where people could not see what on earth you meant if you said that God's truth and the Catholic Church's teaching were not automatically the same thing.

In this culture, someone who is trying to be pro-woman will ordinarily reach for feminism as the proper vehicle, just as someone who wants to understand the natural world will reach for science as the proper vehicle for that desire; "understanding the human body" is invariably read as "learning scientific theories about the body's work," and not "take a massage/dance/martial arts class", or "learn what religions and cultures have seen in the meaning of the human body." A great many societies pursued a deep understanding of the human body without expressing that desire the way Western science pursues it. They taught people to come to a better knowledge **of** their bodies—and I mean "of," not just "about"—the kind of relational, drinking knowledge that feminists and Orthodox value, and not just a list of abstract propositions from dissecting a cadaver (a practice which some cultures regard as "impious and disgusting"—C.S. Lewis). They taught people to develop, nurture,

and discipline their bodies so that there was a right relationship between body and spirit. They taught people to see the body as belonging a world of meaning, symbol, and spiritual depth—cultures where "How does it work?" takes a back seat to a deeper question: "Why? What does it mean?" Orthodoxy at its best still does teach these things. But Western culture has absorbed the scientific spirit that most people genuinely cannot see what "understanding the body" could mean besides "learning scientific theories about the body." And, in this context, it seems like a deceitful sleight of hand when someone says, "I want to help you understand the body" and then offers help in ways of moving one's body.

But I want to talk about some things that are missed within this set of assumptions. Feminism can speak for women's interests. It normally claims to. And women are ill-served by an arrangement when people assume that criticism of feminism is at the expense of women's interests. We need to open a door that American culture does not open. We need to open the possibility of being willing to challenge feminism in order to further women's interests. Not on all points, but if we never open that door, disturbing things can happen.

If you ask someone outside of feminism who "the enemy" is to feminists, the common misunderstanding is, "Nonfeminist men."

And that's certainly part of the problem and not part of the solution, but the real vitriol feeds into jokes like "How many men does it take to open a beer?—She should have it open when she brings it to him." The real vitriol is reserved for the contented housewife who wants to be married, have children, and make a home, and not have a professional career because of what she values in homemaking itself.

Feminism is against "patriarchy." That means that much that

is positive in the tradition is attacked along with masculism. That means that whatever the tradition provided for women is interpreted as harmful to women, even if it benefits women.

Wendy Shalit makes an interesting argument in [A Return to Modesty](#) that sexual modesty is not something men have imposed on women against their nature for men's benefit; it is first and foremost a womanly virtue that protects women. We now have a defaced version of traditional society, but to start by assuming that almost everything in the culture is a patriarchal imposition that benefits only men, sets the stage for throwing out a great many things that are important for women. It sets the stage, in fact, for completing the attack that masculism began. (The effect of throwing out things that strike you as patriarchal on a culture has much the same effect as killing off species in an ecosystem because you find them unpleasant. It is an interconnected, interdependent, and organic whole that all its members need. That's not quite the right way of saying it, but this image has a grain of truth.) Masculism scorned the traditional place for men, and was masculine only in that it rebelled against perceivedly feminine virtue. Feminism does not include a large number of women's voices in America and an even larger number worldwide—because feminism lumps them all together in "The Enemy." At times feminism can look anti-woman.

So everything will be OK if we resist feminism? No. First, if the tradition is right—let us say, in the controversial point that associates women with the home—that doesn't make much sense of today's options that don't really let women be women and don't let men be men. What is the closest equivalent to women reigning in one of society's most important institutions? Is it to be a housewife with a lunchtime discussion group, which seems to work wonders for depression caused by loneliness? Is it for

women to keep house and work part time? Is it to work full time, and find an appropriate division of labor with their husbands? I have trouble telling which of these is best, and it doesn't help matters to choose an option just because it bothers feminists. I think that women (and, for that matter, men) have an impoverished set of options today. Unfortunately, some of the most practical questions are also the ones that are hardest to answer.

Second and more importantly, reacting against feminism, or much of anything else, is intrinsically dangerous. If feminism has problems, we would be well advised to remember that heresies often start when people react against other heresies and say that the truth is so important they should resist that heresy as much as they can. Reactions against heresy are often heresy.

Let me explain how not to respond to feminism's picture of what men should be. You could say that feminism wants women to be more like men and men to be more like women, and that has a significant amount of truth. But if you dig in and say that men should be rugged and independent and say, "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul!", and women should be weak, passive creatures that are always in a swoon, there are several major problems.

The phrase "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul!" is something that nobody but God should say. Someone greater than us is the master of our fate, and someone greater than us is the master of our soul, and that is our glory. To be a man is to be under authority. Perhaps it irks feminists that the Bible tells wives to submit to their husbands as well as telling husbands to love their wives with the greatest and most costly love. (I've heard some first class citizens pointing out that the Bible requires something much heftier of husbands than mere

submission—loving and loving their wives on the model of Christ going so far as to give up his life for the Church.) But the tradition absolutely does not say "Women are to be second-class citizens because they are under men's authority and men are to be first-class citizens because they have the really good position of being free from authority." To be a man is to be under authority, to be a woman is to be under authority, and to be human is to be under authority. To masculism this looks demeaning because immature masculinity resists being under authority or being in community or any other thing that men embrace when they grow up. But Orthodoxy is a call to grow up, and it is a call to men to be contributing members of a community and to be under authority. To tell men, "Be independent!" is to tell them, "Refuse to grow up!"

What about women? Shouldn't they be passive and dependent? Let's look at one of the Bible's most complete treatments of what a woman should be like. I'll give my own slightly free translation from the Greek version of Proverbs (31:10-31):

Who can find a valorous wife?

She is more precious than precious stones.

Her husband wholeheartedly trusts her, and will have no lack of treasures.

Her whole life works good for her husband.

She gathers wool and linen and weaves with her hands.

She has become like a trading ship from afar, and she gathers her living.

She rises at night, and gives food to her house, and assigns work to her maids.

She examines and buys a farm, and plants a vineyard with

the fruit of her hands.

She girds her loins with strength and strengthens her arms  
for work.

She tastes how good it is to work, and her candle stays lit  
the whole night long.

She reaches her hands to collective work, and applies her  
hands to the spindle.

She opens her hands to the needy, and extends fruit to the  
poor.

Her husband does not worry about the men at home when he  
spends time abroad;

All her household has clothing.

She makes double weight clothing for her husband,  
And linen and scarlet for herself.

Her husband is respected when he engages in important  
business at the City Hall.

When he is seated in council with the elders of the land.

She makes fine linens and sells belts to the Canaanites.  
She opens her mouth with heedfulness and order, and is in  
control of her tongue.

She clothes herself in strength and honor, and rejoices in  
the future.

The ways of her household are secure, and she does not eat  
the bread of idleness.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, according to the deep  
law.

Her mercy for her children prepares them, and they grow  
rich, and her husband praises her.

Many daughters have obtained wealth, and many have worked  
vigorously, but you have surpassed them all.

Charm is false, and a woman's [physical] beauty is shallow:

For a wise woman is blessed, and let her praise the tear of  
the Lord.

Give her the fruit of her labors, and let her husband be  
praised at the City Hall.

I have several things to say about this text. To open with, I'll understand if you say this is an intimidating standard to be held up against, but if you say this affirms the ideal of women as passive and delicate, I'm going to have to ask what on earth you mean. Second, if you read the text closely, you can see hints of how important homes were to business and charity. Most business and charity were based in the home. Third, most translations use not quite the right word when they say, "Who can find a good wife?" The word used is not just "good". It's a word one could use of a powerful soldier. Fourth, at the risk of sounding snide, the words about not measuring womanhood by physical beauty beat body image feminism to the punch by about three thousand years. Fifth and finally, the text talks about this woman as a lot of things—as strong, as doing business, as farming, as manufacturing. But there's one thing it does not say. It does not interpret "woman" in terms of "victim."

There is something somewhat strange going on. If we ask what is the wealthiest nation on earth, it's the U.S.A. If we ask what nation wields the most political clout on earth, it's the U.S.A. And if we ask some slightly different questions, and ask what nation feminism has had the most success reforming the culture, the U.S. might not be at the very top, but it's at least near the top. The same is true if we ask what nation women hold the most political clout in: the U.S. is either at the top or near the top. If we ask what nations women hold the most civil rights, and have most successfully entered traditionally male

occupations, the U.S. is probably near the top. Now let us turn to still another kind of question: what are the women in the most powerful, and one of the most feminist-reformed, nations in the world, doing? If we're talking about uneducated and lower-class women, the answer is simply living life as women. But if we look at educated, middle-class women, the answer tends to be simple but quite different: they are Fighting in the fray for the lowest rung on the ladder of victimization.

To be fair to feminists, I must hastily add that it's a fray because it has a lot of participants besides feminists. The handicapped, gay, and racial minorities are also fighting, and it seems that everybody wants in. For that matter, a good many able-bodied, straight, white men also want in on the action; many middle-aged white applicants complain that affirmative action has biased the hiring process against them. To many of those who do not belong to an easily recognized victim's group, the cry is, "When can I be a victim so I can get some rights?" It seems that fighting for the lowest rung on the ladder of victimization has become the American national sport.

It seems like I'm mentioning a lot of paradoxes about feminism. Let me mention something else that concerns me. The term "consciousness raising" sounds like something everybody should support—after all, what could be wrong with enhancing someone's consciousness? But what does this term mean? To be somewhat blunt, "consciousness raising" means taking women who are often happy and well-adjusted members of society and making them hurt and miserable, not to mention alienated. Among feminists today, the more a woman identifies with the feminist movement, the more hurt and angry she is, the more she seems to be able to see past appearances and uncover a world that is unspeakable hostile to women. For that matter, historically the

more feminism has developed and the more success feminism has had reforming society, the more women, or at least feminists, are sure the world is grinding an invisible, or if you prefer, highly visible, axe against women. Are there alternatives to this? What about feminists who say that going back isn't an option? I'm not going to try to unravel whether there is an escape; I'm focusing on a different question, whether "consciousness raising" contributes to living in joy. If an animal's leg is caught in a steel trap, the only game in town may be to gnaw off its own leg. The question of, "Is it necessary?" is one question, but I'm focusing on the question of, "Is it basically good?" For the animal, chewing off its own leg is not good, even if it's the only game in town, and taking women who are happy and making them miserable is not good. You can argue that it is the only game in town, but if it's a necessary evil, it is still an evil, and naming this process "consciousness raising" is a bit like taking a piece of unconstitutional legislation that rescinds our civil liberties and naming it the "USA Patriot Act." It's a really cool name hiding something that's not so cool. The issue of whether there is anything better is one issue (I believe Orthodoxy is a better alternative), but there are two different issues going on here, and it is not clear that "consciousness raising" benefits women.

I've raised some unsettling points about feminism. And at this point I would like to suggest that Orthodoxy is what feminism is reaching for. What do I mean? There are a lot of points of contact between feminism's indictment of what is wrong with patriarchy and Orthodoxy's indictment of what is wrong in the West. (Both are also kook magnets, but we won't go into that.) I mentioned one thing that feminism and Orthodoxy have in common; there are a great many more, and some of them are deep. But there are also differences. Orthodoxy doesn't deliver

women who are hurt and angry; Orthodoxy has a place for women to be women, and for women to enjoy life. Feminism tries to be pro-woman, but ends up giving its most vitriolic treatment to women who disagree with it: we do not have the sisterhood of all women, as feminism should be, but a limited sisterhood that only includes feminists. Orthodoxy has its own vitriol, but there is also a great tradition of not judging; even in our worship people are doing different things and nobody cares about what the next person is doing. We don't believe salvation ends at our church doors, and in general we don't tell God who can and cannot be saved. Feminism is a deep question, and Orthodoxy is a deep answer.

That is at least a simplistic picture; it's complex, but I cannot help feeling I've done violence to my subject matter. It seems my treatment has combined the power and strength of a nimble housecat with the agility and grace of a mighty elephant. I would like to close with something related to what I said in the beginning, about knowing.

Christiane Northrup's *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom* talks about how women do not always feel the need to rush and get to the point, not because they are doing a bad job of getting that task out of the way (as necessary but unpleasant), but because to women things are interconnected, and the things a woman says before "the point" are things she sees as connected that add something to the point. This article has some of the qualities *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom* finds in women, and I see things as interconnected. Beyond analysis, there is synthesis. If this article discusses many things that are connected to the point, that is not because I am trying to write like a woman would. It's not something extra that I've decided to add; in fact it would be difficult for me to uproot this from

how I communicate. And it's not because I am trying to balance out my masculinity by being more feminine, or be androgynous, or because I'm trying to be woman-like out of a guilt factor. There are other reasons why, but I would suggest that it's an example of Orthodox manhood at work. Not the only example, and certainly not the best, but my point is that there is an important sense in which Orthodoxy is what feminism is reaching for. But to immediately get to the point would give an impression that is strange and deceptive, and almost completely fail to convey what is meant by the claim. That is why I've been spending my time exploring a web of interconnections that help show what that claim means.

Orthodoxy is about helping us to be fully human, and that includes divinely inspired support for both men and women. It is other things as well, but part of why I became Orthodox was that I realized there were problems with being a man in Western Christianity. Orthodoxy is the most gender balanced Christian confession in terms of numbers, and I came to ask the rather abrasive question, "Does Orthodoxy draw more men than Evangelicalism because Orthodoxy understands sanctification as deification and Evangelicalism understands sanctification as a close personal relationship with another man?" I never got much of an answer to that question (besides "Yes"). And even though I'm looking for more in Orthodoxy than help being a man, one of the reasons I became Orthodox was that it is the best environment for being a man that I found. And I'm coming to realize that men are only half the picture in Orthodoxy. Because everything is connected, if you hurt men, women get hurt, and if you hurt women, men get hurt... and if you think about what this means, it means that you cannot make an environment that is healthy for men but is destructive to women.

Nor can you make an environment that is healthy for women but destructive to men. Orthodoxy's being good for men is not something that is stolen from women. It is good for men because God instituted it as a gift to the whole human race, not only for men.

There are things that are deeply wrong with Western culture. Would you rather be working on an analysis of the problem, or learn to grow into its solution?

# A Personal Flag

When I was poking around the web, I found Steve Scheussler's home page. Among other things, it mentions that Steve has a personal constitution.

There was something that bothered me about the idea of a personal Constitution. I respect Steve and enjoy his acquaintanceship — I didn't feel a nagging doubt about him, only a disagreement with the idea of a personal constitution. The basic idea of *lex, rex* — "the law comes before the king" — is foundational to American government, runs so deep that justices who violate it invariably acknowledge its place by paying lip service to it, checks many of the abuses when a ruler is permitted to do anything he wants, and strikes me as fundamentally flawed. What you know is always more than you can write down, and living by a personal constitution makes a creation greater than its creator. The principle that can be written is not the ultimate principle.

I felt an objection, but I also felt something worth imitating. I followed my intuitions for a while, and came to a flag. I hold objection to the way flags are treated in American culture — the only physical object I have ever been asked to pledge allegiance to. I was required by law to pass a school test on the Constitution and on the flag, and the flag is the only item I have been told to never let touch the ground. Nobody objects when I

.....  
(quite frequently) put a Bible on the floor, nor does anybody object when I am roughhousing with friends (human — created in the image of God!) and push them into the ground — but the American flag is to be held in such high respect that it may not touch the ground, not even when it is being respectfully folded. The proper term, I believe, for an object of this veneration is: 'Idol'.

That is what American culture makes of a flag, but that is not what it must be. I choose to make it something else — a way to share who I am to other people. Like many symbols, it holds meaning, but does not explain itself. So here is an explanation of its symbolic side:

# Legend

## Basic design

Most flags are very simple, with perhaps one true picture at the center; my flag is intended to be at once both simple and complex. I will treat the simple aspects before going on to the little details.

The two obvious allusions are to the French and British flags. Why does the French flag appear reversed? I am left-handed. There's been a lot of silly stuff written about left-handedness, but there are some serious aspects as well. My brain has an unusual wiring pattern that appears in some left-handers — the pattern is only found in 2% of the world's population. If you meet me in person, you will find that I speak slowly, after a pause — but when I do speak, my words are as carefully chosen as those I write. I think differently, by nature.

I chose the French flag as the main model, because I have spent time in France, and because there are ways in which it is more home than America — French people often think and discuss ideas where Americans often watch television. I enjoy speaking French a great deal. But why is America not represented at all?

It is, only in a way that is not obvious.

The common mental model of American history is that there was England, and then English colonists came and settled in

was England, and then English colonists came and settled in America, and then they broke off and formed their own nation, and now the U.S. is the U.S. and England is England. How else could anyone think of it?

One of my professors argued that Martin Luther King was essentially a conservative: his "I have a dream" speech did not try to attack, change, or replace the fundamental principles of American government, but instead asked for a more consistent application of American principles. When he said that the bank of justice did not have insufficient funds, he was not asking white America to write a new check; he was trying to cash a check that had already been written. In a similar manner, the United States was in large part founded by English colonists who had been promised certain "rights of Englishmen", rights that were not forfeited by colonizing faraway soil, and rebelled when these English rights were violated. "No taxation without representation!" was an English cry. Another analogous situation would be the Reformation. The Reformation did not start when people decided that they wanted to break off from the Church and do something else; it started with criticisms from people who believed, rightly or wrongly, that the Roman Catholic Church was failing to live up to Catholic standards. Reams of anti-Catholic invective came later, but the initial idea was to help the Church be more properly Catholic. Something of the same is at work with America's independence. In contradistinction to the idea that the colonies split off from England and became different, I would suggest that a bifurcation occurred — and that the two sides are not very far apart. A friend who grew up in France commented on the similarity of spiritual atmosphere between France and the United States; both France and the United States are part of the West, and England and the United

States are closer still. Now the U.S. has economic and military distinction, and (for good or for bad) is drawing much of the world's technical talent — but there are strong similarities, and some of the intellectual movements that have been pointed to as America distinguishing itself from Europe are things I'd rather forget: pragmatism, behaviorism, etc. The English flag, in a non-obvious way, represents America, along with the basic colors of red, white, and blue.

## Red

This third of the flag might be titled, 'Eclectica' — not named for this website, but including various eclectic aspects of my interest or my person. Red was my favorite color when I was a boy. Specific things listed, loosely from top to bottom, are:

- The world. In this case, the world is not a symbol of the environment per se, so much as of cultures the world around. I am interested in cultures, and find them to be objects of fascination and beauty.
- A climber. I love to climb, and I am very happy that Wheaton College recently opened a climbing wall. I'm hoping to learn how to climb up a thick tree trunk without using branches.
- A hand, showing the bones inside. A skeleton is not necessarily a gruesome part of a corpse; it is also part of a living, breathing human body. In *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, Paul Brand talks about how a lobster has a hard skeleton on the outside — and how a man has a skeleton that's strong as steel, but covered with soft flesh. I don't know how well I live up to this standard (I know one person

who's said that I don't), but I want to live to the standard of rock hard, unyielding principles inside, but a soft touch that meets things on the outside.

- A paper target, viewed through a competition rifle's sight. I don't get to do riflery very often, but I enjoy it a great deal. Marksmanship is not about the machismo that Hollywood shows; it's about concentration and growing still.
- A Swiss Army Knife. I carry a thick Swiss Army Knife, and use it for all sorts of things. After watching MacGyver as a child, I came to value resourcefulness, tinkering, and jury-rigging; I still find the knife to be quite useful.
- A place called "the Web" at Honey Rock Camp. Honey Rock is a place that has been special to me from childhood; it is easier to know other people there, and there are beautifully eclectic physical facilities. One of these has a World War II cargo net strung up to make a place for children to romp around in: the Web. It is now, so far as I know, closed — the fabric is deteriorating, and it is a legal liability. The camp retains its beauty, and provided the home setting for [A Cord of Seven Strands](#).
- A clock with no hands. After spending a summer in Malaysia, I changed my time sense to move more slowly, to not need to have things happen quickly and try to let go of the number of minutes elapsed when I am with a friend. Something of this basic insight is captured in Madeleine l'Engle's description of kairos in *Walking on Water*, Neil Postman's description of moments (before the clock ruled) in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, and by an anthropologist in *The Dance of Life*. Why? It's not that I wanted to lose awareness of time, so much as to gain a more effective focus on things that are lost. There are other facets, but I do not wish to

expand here — the interested reader is encouraged to look at the mentioned titles.

- A roll of duct tape. Same basic meaning as the Swiss Army Knife; I used to also carry that, too.
- Swimming underwater. I haven't done much swimming in the past few years, but I was quite often in the water as a boy — and, more often than not, swimming under the surface. I cherish those memories.
- A television with clothing on top and books in front. It's hard to portray the absence of a television per se, but I can portray one that hasn't been used in a long time. I generally try to avoid watching television, and I do not have one in my apartment. Not only is an hour of television an hour not spent doing other things, but watching television subtly alters — impairs — our experience of the external world. How does it do that? Read Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*.
- A cave. A cave is a quiet place to rest and think; it is a symbol of withdrawing to meditating. My apartment is such a place.
- A graveyard. A graveyard is not necessarily a symbol of the macabre; it is a place symbolic of continuity between the living and the dead. This is why many old churches and cathedrals bury people under the sanctuary; it is a symbol of connection with those who walked before. I do not believe in the modern concept of progress, nor the postmodern rejection of progress and everything near it; I believe in a human and a Christian continuity with those who walked before.

**White**

The center of the flag, and the connection between the other two portions, is faith. The Cross is central and defines what else is there.

There are innumerable symbols that could be used, but I chose to restrict myself to four. Those four are:

- Grapes. Grapes are a symbol of wine, one of God's blessings to man. It is a blessing so special that Christ chose it to become his blood, and when we drink Christ's blood, we are drinking the divine life — something hidden and mystical, and close to my heart.
- A candle. There is something a candle symbolizes that is not in a light bulb. It is a softer light. There is a reason couples want a candle for a special dinner, and it is a reason not confined to romantic love. I cannot explain what it is, but it is something like faith.
- Me, sitting in my blue armchair, praying. There is an interplay of light between God and me.
- Friends hugging. **Touch** is also important to me, and with it, more broadly, **kything** — I identify strongly with Charles Wallace in Madeleine l'Engle's *A Wind in the Door*, a work whose resonance has pierced my heart like few other.

## Blue

The last third of the flag, blue, is devoted to reason. A particular emphasis on the mind is not catholic and universal like the claims of the Christian faith, but it is one part of the broad corpus of human and Christian work, and it is important to me.

I should note that the word 'reason' has shifted meaning in the last few centuries, and it is an older meaning that I wish to

invoke. Now the term 'imagination' is used very broadly for human brilliance; a person might say that a plan shows "real imagination" as a way of saying that it reflected insight and understanding. In the Middle Ages, however, the term did not have its present meaning. It meant the faculty that formed visual images, and little else — the term 'imagination' has expanded in meaning. The term 'reason', however, has shrunk in meaning. At present, it does not mean much else besides logical thinking — but in the Middle Ages, 'reason' referred much more broadly to human faculties, including many things we would now call 'imagination'. 'Reason' is an alternate translation to the Greek *logos* that John used to describe God the Son. 'Reason' does not mean 'rationalism' ("Among intellectuals, there are two types of people: those that worship the mind, and those that use it." — G.K. Chesterton), but a special effort to love God with all of my mind.

From bottom to top, here are the symbols represented:

- A book, open, with light flaring out, and things coming from that light. The book is a symbol of learning in general, and the Book.
- A hypercube (tesseract) — mathematics, which provided discipline for my mind, among other things.
- A storm of blue and orange flame, by a burning tree: [Firestorm 2034](#) as the image of literature, both read and written.
- A networked computer, coming in part through the hypercube. Math and computer science are tightly linked, and computer work is putting bread on the table.
- A magnifying glass, and a caduceus: "You must study the ways of all professions." (Miyamoto Musashi, *A Book of Five*

Rings. As well as the basic academic disciplines, I have tried to understand other areas that would stimulate and broaden my thinking: emergency medicine, forensics...

- Deep waters. The thought that can be stated is not the ultimate thought; the worded thoughts give way to things that cannot be explained, and the symbol into which others recede is formless, deep waters. Most of my thoughts are now in words, but my deepest thoughts are never in words to begin with.

# A Pet Owner's Rules

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

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

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

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

Lust is also drinking out of the toilet. Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe. It is a magic spell where suddenly nothing else is interesting and after lust destroys the

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

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

I'd like you to think about the last time you traveled from one place to another and you enjoyed the scenery. That's good, and it's something that greed destroys. Greed destroys the ability to enjoy things without needing to own them, and there are a lot of things in life (like scenery) that we can enjoy if we are able to enjoy things without always having to make them mine, mine, mine. Greed isn't about enjoying things; it's about grasping and letting the ability to enjoy things slip through your fingers. When people aren't greedy, they know contentment; they can enjoy their own things without wishing they were snazzier or newer or more antique or what have you. (And if you do get that hot possession you've been coveting, greed destroys the ability to simply enjoy it: it becomes as dull and despicable as all your possessions look when you look at them through greed's

darkened eyes. It takes contentment to enjoy even greed: greed is also drinking out of the toilet.

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

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

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

What is Rule Number One about? One window that lets us glimpse the beauty of Rule Number One is, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to a mountain, 'Be uprooted and thrown into the sea,' and it will be done for you." Is this exaggeration? Yes. More specifically, it's the kind of exaggeration the Bible uses to emphasize important points. Being human sometimes means that there are mountains that are

causing us real trouble. If someone remains in drunkenness and becomes an alcoholic, that alcoholism becomes a mountain that no human strength is strong enough to move. I've known several Christians who were recovering alcoholics. And had been sober for years. That is a mountain moved by faith. Without exception, they have become some of the most Christlike, loving people I have known. That is what can happen when we receive freely of the food and drink our Lord provides us. And it's not the only example. There has been an Orthodox resurrection in Albania. Not long ago, it was a church in ruins as part of a country that was ruins. Now the Albanian Orthodox Church is alive and strong, and a powerhouse of transformation for the whole nation. God is on the move in Albania. He's moved mountains.

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

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

# "Physics"

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

I would like to take a moment to pause in looking at the word "physics." It is true enough that historically Aristotelian physics was replaced by Newton, who in turn gave way to Einstein, and then quantum physics entered the scene, and now we have superstring theory. And in that caricatured summary, "physics" seems to mean what it means for superstring theory. But I want to pause on the word "physics." Orthodox know that non-Orthodox who ask, "What are your passions?" may get a bit more of an earful than they bargained for. "Passions" is not a word Orthodox use among themselves for nice hobbies and interests

they get excited about; it means a sinful habit that has carved out a niche for itself to become a spiritual disease. And "physics", as I use it, is not a competitor to superstring theory; etymologically it means, "of the nature of things," I would quote C.S. Lewis, [The Voyage of the Dawn Treader](#):

"I am a star at rest, my daughter," answered Ramandu.  
"When I set for the last time, decrepit and old beyond all that you can reckon, I was carried to this island. I am not so old now as I was then. Every morning a bird brings me a fire-berry from the valleys in the Sun, and each fire-berry takes away a little of my age. And when I have become as young as the child that was born yesterday, then I shall take my rising again (for we are at earth's eastern rim) and once more tread the great dance."

"In our world," said Eustace, "a star is a huge ball of flaming gas."

"Even in your world, my son, that is not what a star is but only what it is made of."

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

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

And this article is not intended to compete with physics as it is now understood, or to defend patristic Aristotelian physics against its challengers, or to demonstrate the compatibility of theology with the present state of scientific speculation: words

theology with the present state of scientific speculation, nor as that I choose carefully, because theology is about divine revealed doctrine while science is the present state of speculation in a very careful system of educated guesses, and scientific theories will not stop being discarded for newer alternatives until science is dead. It is therefore somewhat of a strange matter to demonstrate the compatibility of theology with science, as conforming timeless revealed doctrines to the present best educated guess that is meant to be discarded.

## Of the nature of things

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

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

says "The very notion of a God is incoherent," does so with the  
breath of God.

## Headship and harmony with nature

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

All creation bears some resemblance to God, and God himself is called the Rock. For every creature there is a logos or idea in God's heart, that is what that creature should strive to be. But there is a distinction among creation. Some are given the image of God: men and angels, and we exist in a fuller and deeper sense than creatures that do not bear such an image. God exists in a unique and deepest sense, and if we say that God exists, we cannot say that we exist in the same sense, and if we say that we exist, we cannot say that God exists in the same sense. Those who are given the image, who have a human or angelic mind, are more fully nature than those creatures who have do not exist in

the same way on the same level. And we who bear the royal image, even if liturgical asceticism removes barriers between us and the rest of Creation, are to take our cue from God our head.

## Getting past "the politics of envy"

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

### Head Body

Man            Woman

Paradise    The inhabited world

Heaven            Earth

Spiritual creation    Tangible creation

God            Creation

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

And this brings me to the point of inequality. Not only are the politics of envy toxic, but unequal treatment bears something

that the politics of envy would never imagine. The kindest and most courteous acts are most often not those that treat the other as an equal, but those that treat the other as not equal. The man who buys six dozen roses for his wife does not treat her as an equal: the thought would not occur to him to buy six dozen roses for one of his fellow workmen. The mother who holds and comforts a child after a scrape extends a courtesy that would not be extended quite so far for an adult capable of managing moods and life's scrapes. The greatest courtesies are extended precisely at the point when someone in a position of headship treats someone else, not as an equal, but as the head's body as in the chart above. The same is implied for authority, or some of the more painful social lessons having to do with profound giftedness. Perhaps people may say "Treat me as an equal" instead of "treat me well," but it has been my own experience that treating people as equals in an area where they request equality has given social explosions that I could have avoided if I were wise enough to realize that the point where I was asked, "Treat me as an equal," were precisely the situations which demanded the wisdom not to treat people as intellectual equals that could handle the full force of what I was thinking, but extend some of the most delicate courtesy and social graces. Exactly what is needed is hard to say, but precisely what is **not** needed is to say, "Great, I've found someone gifted in exactly the same way I am," and launch into the full force of your deepest thought. God does not create two blades of grass alike. He has never created two humans who are equal, but after each, he broke the mould.

## **Microcosm and mediator**

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

## Symbols

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

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

## Miracles

Miracles are very rare, if we use the term strictly and not for the genuine miracle of God providing for us every day. But the readings for the Theophany Vespers repeat miracles with nature, and they present, if you will, nature at its most essential. Most of the matter in the universe is not part of icons of Christ, his Mother, and his Saints, and yet even outside of men icons are a vanguard, a firstfruit of a creation that will be glorified.

Mankind is at its most essential in Christ himself, and the natural world is at its most essential as an arena for God's power to be displayed. And God's display of power is not strictly a rarity; it plays out when bread comes out of the earth, when *The Heavens declare the glory of God / And the firmament sheweth his handywork. / Day unto day uttereth speech / And night unto night sheweth knowledge.*

## Sweet Lord, You Play Me False

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

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

# A Picture of Evil

Once upon a time, there was a king. This king wished that his people know what evil was, so that his people could learn to recognize and flee from it. He issued a summons, that, in a year, all of his artists should come to him with one picture, to show what was evil. The best picture would be displayed to the people.

In a year, they all appeared at the king's palace. There were very few artists in the kingdom, but those who were there were very skillful, and worked as they had never worked before. Each brought a picture beneath a shroud.

The king turned to the first artist who had come. "Jesse, unveil your picture, and tell us its interpretation."

Jesse lifted the cloth. Against a background of blackened skulls was a dark green serpent, the color of venom and poison, with eyes that glowed red. "Your Majesty, it was the Serpent whose treacherous venom deceived man to eat of the forbidden fruit. The eye is the lamp of the body, and the Serpent's eye burns with the fires of Hell. You see that beyond the Serpent are skulls. Evil ensnares unto death and outer darkness."

The court murmured its approval. The picture was striking, and spoke its lesson well. The king, also, approved. "Well done, Jesse. If another picture is chosen, it will not be because you have done poorly. Now, Gallio, please show us your work."

Gallio unveiled his painting. In it was a man. his face red and

...and showed the painting. There was a man, his face red and veins bulging from hate. In his hand, he held a curved dagger. He was slowly advancing towards a woman, cowering in fear. "Your Majesty, man is created in the image of God, and human life is sacred. Thus the way we are to love God is often by loving our neighbor. There are few blasphemies more unholy than murder. You have asked me for a picture to show what evil is, that your subjects may flee from it. This is evil to flee from."

The court again murmured its approval, and the king began to shift slightly. It was not, as some supposed, because of the repellent nature of the pictures, but because he had secretly hoped that there would be only one good picture. Now, it was evident that the decision would not be so simple. "Gallio, you have also done well. And Simon, your picture?"

Simon unveiled his picture, and people later swore that they could smell a stench. There, in the picture, was the most hideous and misshapen beast they had ever seen. Its proportions were distorted, and its colors were ghastly. The left eye was green, and taller than it was wide. The right eye was even larger than the left, red, bloodshot, and flowing with blood; where there should have been a pupil, a claw grotesquely protruded. It was covered with claws, teeth, fur, scales, blood, slime, tentacles, and bits of rotted flesh; several members of the court excused themselves. "However it may be disguised, evil is that which is sick, distorted, and ugly."

There was a long silence. Finally, the king spoke again. "I see that there are three powerful pictures of evil, any one of which is easily a masterpiece and well fit to show to the people. Barak, I know that you have been given artistic genius, and that perhaps your picture will help me with this difficult decision. Unveil your picture."

Barak unveiled his picture. and an awestruck hush fell over

the court. There, unveiled, was the most beautiful picture they had ever seen.

The picture was in the great vault of a room in a celestial palace. It was carved of diamond, emerald, ruby, jasper, amethyst, sardonyx, and chrysolite. Through the walls of gem, the stars shone brightly. But all of this was nothing, compared to the creature in the room.

He carried with him power and majesty. He looked something like a man, but bore glory beyond intense. His face shone like the sun blazing in full force, his eyes flashed like lightning, and his hair like radiant flame. He wore a robe that looked as if it had been woven from solid light. In his left hand was a luminous book, written in letters of gold, and in his right hand was a sharp, double edged sword, sheathed in fire and lightning.

The king was stunned. It took him a long time to find words, and then he shouted with all of his might.

"You fool! I ask you for a picture of evil, and you bring me this! It is true that fools rush in where angels fear to tread, and that, like unthinking beasts, they do not hesitate to slander the glorious ones. What do you have to say for yourself and for this picture? I shall have an explanation now, or I shall have your head!"

Barak looked up, a tear trickling down his cheek. "Your Majesty, do you not understand? It is a picture of Satan."

# Pilgrim

O Holy Father, who hast made me a pilgrim,  
What pilgrimage is this that thou hast given me?  
Would that there were a volume inscribed,  
Refutatio Omnium Haerasium,  
Which is, being interpreted,  
The Refutation of All Heresies  
Whose pages were but inscribed,  
With but a single word:  
Michael.  
The war in Heaven is short,  
Already won,  
When the Dragon swept a third of the starry host,  
Thine own champion,  
Michael,  
But spoke his name,  
Which is, being interpreted,  
"Who is like God?"  
The damned doomed Dragon like lightning fell,  
From Heaven expelled,  
With all the rebellious host:  
Sore losers one and all,  
To use the common term,

Confounded by a single word:  
Michael.

But such a Refutatio Omnium Haeresium

Lieth not open to my pen:

A lesser work by far,

Righteous Father,

Hast thou given me to write.

To refute all heresies,

I would start on a point obscure,

And say that science and technology,

Have an occult resonance deep and loud,

For not with occult sin is one enchained,

A text to send,

But yet they beseem,

Of a single cloth to be cut,

And herein is a problem:

For of matters occult to treat,

The temptation is to believe,

"If only we are dainty enough,

We can pick up a turd by the clean end,

And avoid getting our hands dirty."

The point is sincere.

And yet we bear wounds,

Of the Damned Backswing,

And if all else were ignored,

I would speak carefully of the recurrent Damned Backswing.

The Sorceror's Bargain is one head of this Hydra:

The enchanter is told,

"Give me thy soul and I will give thee power,"

But if thou hast given thy soul,

Who hath the power?

This is one surfacing of the Damned Backswing,  
A Damned Backswing shared by street narcotic:  
    At first, a doorway to deepest joy,  
        Or so it first appears,  
    Until the first appearance disappears,  
        And the addictus,  
        The one consigned,  
Has escalating doses whose heights are lower,  
    Than the lows before taking a street drug.  
    Thus cutteth the Damned Backswing.  
    In ages past, Reason was enthroned,  
    Or such spake the spirit of the age,  
    Descartes and rationalism now made pariah,  
    In the postmodern flight from Reason,  
    But the Damned Backswing did not start,  
When Descartes became vilified without question:  
    "Reason" enthroned was "Reason" pared down,  
Like a toolchest replete with hammer, axe, awl, & c.  
    Pared down to a hammer alone,  
    And that hammer enthroned:  
    The Damned Backswing thus stole reason,  
Not from when continental philosophers ridiculed Descartes,  
    But in Descartes and the Enlightenment itself,  
    Darkness reigned:  
The Damned Backswing eviscerated Reason already.  
    In the '50s, in the '80s,  
    The economy was booming in many places,  
Middle class citizens enjoyed creature comforts,  
    Beyond imagining to medieval King and Queen.  
    But something queer has happened:  
    The Damned Backswing cuts,

And we are not ever changing from prosperity to prosperity;  
The Damned Backswing hews away at wealth.  
To the United States of America,  
The erstwhile champion of rights,  
The Bill of Rights is called,  
"Void where prohibited by law,"  
And surveillance grows and grows,  
Thus unfurls one cut of the Damned Backswing.  
What shall I say of porneia,  
Which is beyond a squid:  
Thrown out the front door,  
Its tentacles remain in your cabinets,  
And if you clean these out,  
They reach out from under your bed at night.  
Literally spoken, porneia is sexual vice,  
Yet its entwined, unbanishable tentacles,  
Are the condition of much more than lust; An open-ended thing is  
porneia.

In this porneia we have intertwined,  
Plastic foods and plastic culture,  
[Contraception and Splenda](#),  
Pleasure to grasp and fruitfulness to escape,  
Feminism renamed gender studies, queer concerns,  
Sexual freedom and a pornified world,  
Pride, narcissism, subjectivism, and the occult,  
Things that are not separate, but bleed one into the other,  
Our ersatz answer to the question,  
"What is the chief end of mankind?"  
For to glorify God and enjoy him forever,  
Is no longer apparent.  
The Christian way seems dull and discredited,

Or at any rate dull,  
So people turn to "alternative spirituality,"  
Or the iron yoke of Islamic surrender,  
When they recognize religious impulse as such.  
And just as people reaching for spirituality,  
Find "alternative spirituality" what comes to hand,  
People seeking the good of women,  
Find feminism of some stripe to come to hand,  
Not, perhaps, its extreme radical form,  
But something modest,  
Some via media to pick it up,  
By the clean end.  
What is not realized is that feminism is anti-woman.  
In rhetoric and presentation,  
It seems the promotion of women,  
Yet the enemy, the enemy true,  
Is not traditional men:  
They are only a decoy.  
The Enemy, capital "T", capital "E",  
Are nonfeminist women,  
Who enjoy happiness on a course—  
Not engineered by feminism,  
Who retain an organic spiritual diet,  
And not the plastic social engineering,  
Of feminists sitting down and designing,  
Their creation to make women happy—  
As they despise conditions that have made women happy.  
We are urged to listen to women's voices,  
And yet,  
And yet,  
And yet...

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

And to examine another tendril,  
Like in spirit and like in heart,  
Fantasy is no longer a bookstore's fringe,  
Christians read it,  
Laced with escape,  
From the terms of the here and now,  
Which God has given us.

It springs from the same root,  
As those for whom magic is not enjoyed,  
By a reader's willing suspension of disbelief,  
But literal and actually trying to make real.

There is a difference,  
A difference profound,  
But both are fruit of the same tree,  
And both instill the same passion,  
A spiritual condition that is wounded,  
In its ability to enjoy where God has placed us.

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

I see two responses,  
One false, and one true:  
The true response is to cite,  
"The righteous shall live by his faith,"  
And the false is to tell how much,

In Wittgenstein-style "forms of life,"

We have lost:

For the 1950's were far from traditional;

For in traditional societies,

Men and women alike worked in adult company,

Not the 1950's housewife confined alone,

But this answer is a decoy.

C.S. Lewis was right:

"Life has never been normal."

**And the righteous will live by faith:**

Each day has enough trouble of its own,

And the path of life is to live,

Working on the day's work and food,

Given to us this day by God.

For the refutation of all heresies is:

Michael - Who is like God?

Amen.

# A Pilgrimage from Narnia

Wardrobe of fur coats and fir trees:  
Sword and armor, castle and throne,  
Talking beast and Cair Paravel:  
From there began a journey,  
From thence began a trek,  
Further up and further in!  
The mystic kiss of the Holy Mysteries,  
A many-hued spectrum of saints,  
Where the holiness of the One God unfurls,  
Holy icons and holy relics:  
Tales of magic reach for such things and miss,  
Sincerely erecting an altar, "To an unknown god,"  
Enchantment but the shadow whilst these are realities:  
Whilst to us is bidden enjoy Reality Himself.  
Further up and further in!  
A journey of the heart, barely begun,  
Anointed with chrism, like as prophet, priest, king,  
A slow road of pain and loss,  
Giving up straw to receive gold:  
Further up and further in!  
Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner,

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

A camel may pass through the eye of a needle,  
Only by shedding every possession and kneeling humbly,  
Book-learning and technological power as well as possessions,  
Prestige and things that are yours— Even all that goes without  
saying:

To grow in this world one becomes more and more;  
To grow in the Way one becomes less and less:  
Further up and further in!

God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man,  
That men and the sons of men might become gods and the sons  
of God:

The chief end of mankind,  
Is to glorify God and become him forever.  
The mysticism in the ordinary,  
Not some faroff exotic place,  
But here and now,  
Living where God has placed us,  
Lifting where we are up into Heaven:  
Paradise is wherever holy men are found.

Escape is not possible:  
Yet escape is not needed,  
But our active engagement with the here and now,  
And in this here and now we move,  
Further up and further in!

We are summoned to war against dragons,  
Sins, passions, demons:

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

Spake a man who suffered sorely:  
For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time,  
Are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be  
revealed in us, and:  
Know ye not that we shall judge angels?  
For the way of humility and tribulation we are beckoned to walk,  
Is the path of greatest glory.

We do not live in the best of all possible worlds,  
But we have the best of all possible Gods,  
And live in a world ruled by the him,  
And the most painful of his commands,  
Are the very means to greatest glory,  
Exercise to the utmost is a preparation,  
To strengthen us for an Olympic gold medal,  
An instant of earthly apprenticeship,  
To a life of Heaven that already begins on earth:  
He saved others, himself he cannot save,  
Remains no longer a taunt filled with blasphemy:

But a definition of the Kingdom of God,  
Turned to gold,

And God sees his sons as more precious than gold:

Beauty is forged in the eye of the Beholder:

Further up and further in!

When I became a man, I put away childish things:

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

For if I have self-serving life in me,

What room is there for the divine life?

If I hold straw with a death grip,

How will God give me living gold?

Further up and further in!

Verily, verily, I say to thee,

When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself,

And walkedst whither thou wouldst:

But when thou shalt be old,

Thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee,

And carry thee whither thou wouldst not.

This is victory:

Further up and further in!

# Plato: The Allegory of the... Flickering Screen?

**Socrates:** And now, let me give an illustration to show how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened:—Behold! a human being in a darkened den, who has a slack jaw towards only source of light in the den; this is where he has gravitated since his childhood, and though his legs and neck are not chained or restrained any way, yet he scarcely turns round his head. In front of him are images from faroff, projected onto a flickering screen. And others whom he cannot see, from behind their walls, control the images like marionette players manipulating puppets. And there are many people in such dens, some isolated one way, some another.

**Glaucon:** I see.

**Socrates:** And do you see, I said, the flickering screen showing men, and all sorts of vessels, and statues and collectible animals made of wood and stone and various materials, and all sorts of commercial products which appear on the screen? Some of them are talking, and there is rarely silence.

**Glaucon:** You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

**Socrates:** Much like us. And they see only their own images, or the images of one another, as they appear on the screen opposite them?

**Glaucon:** True, he said; how could they see anything but the images if they never chose to look anywhere else?

**Socrates:** And they would know nothing about a product they buy, except for what brand it is?

**Glaucon:** Yes.

**Socrates:** And if they were able to converse with one another, wouldn't they think that they were discussing what mattered?

**Glaucon:** Very true.

**Socrates:** And suppose further that the screen had sounds which came from its side, wouldn't they imagine that they were simply hearing what people said?

**Glaucon:** No question.

**Socrates:** To them, the truth would be literally nothing but those shadowy things we call the images.

**Glaucon:** That is certain.

**Socrates:** And now look again, and see what naturally happens next: the prisoners are released and are shown the truth. At first, when any of them is liberated and required to suddenly stand up and turn his neck around, and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the images; and then imagine someone saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye

is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, -what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is asking him to things, not as they are captured on the screen, but in living color - will he not be perplexed? Won't he imagine that the version which he used to see on the screen are better and more real than the objects which are shown to him in real life?

**Glaucon:** Far better.

**Socrates:** And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take and take in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

**Glaucon:** True, he now will.

**Socrates:** And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and hindered in his self-seeking until he's forced to think about someone besides himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? He will find that he cannot simply live life as he sees fit, and he will not have even the illusion of finding comfort by living for himself.

**Glaucon:** Not all in a moment, he said.

**Socrates:** He will require time and practice to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the billboards best, next the product lines he has seen advertised, and then things which are not commodities; then he will talk with adults and children, and will he know greater joy in having services done to him, or will he prefer to do something for someone else?

**Glaucon:** Certainly.

**Socrates:** Last of he will be able to search for the One who is greatest, reflected in each person on earth, but he will seek him for himself, and not in another; and he will live to contemplate him.

**Glaucon:** Certainly.

**Socrates:** He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and is absolutely the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

**Glaucon:** Clearly, he said, his mind would be on God and his reasoning towards those things that come from him.

**Socrates:** And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

**Glaucon:** Certainly, he would.

**Socrates:** And if they were in the habit of conferring honours among themselves on those who were quickest to observe what was happening in the world of brands and what new features were marketed, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honours and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer, "Better to be the poor servant of a poor master" than to reign as king of this Hell, and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?

**Glaucon:** Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer

anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.

**Socrates:** Imagine once more, I said, such an one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness, and seem simply not to get it?

**Glaucon:** To be sure.

**Socrates:** And in conversations, and he had to compete in one-upsmanship of knowing the coolest brands with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went with his eyes and down he came without them; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would give him an extremely heavy cross to bear.

**Glaucon:** No question. Then is the saying, "In the land of the blind, the one eyed man is king," in fact false?

**Socrates:** In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is crucified. Dear Glaucon, you may now add this entire allegory to the discussion around a matter; the den arranged around a flickering screen is deeply connected to the world of living to serve your pleasures, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the spiritual transformation which alike may happen in the monk keeping vigil or the mother caring for children, the ascent of the soul into the

world of spiritual realities according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the Source of goodness appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

**Glaucon:** I agree, he said, as far as I am able to understand you.

# The Pleasure-Pain Syndrome

## Lorem Ipsum

In web design, as in graphic-related design since the 1500's, it is traditional to use a standard block of text called "lorem ipsum" when you're trying to see how the page will look graphically and you don't want to be distracted into reading the text itself. The standard block of "pseudo-text" reads:

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum.

The text above, somewhat shortened and corrupted, comes from a quotation of "de Finibus Bonorum et Malorum", section

1.10.32, by Cicero, written in 45 BC. The original text interests me not because it is at the root of the standard piece of dummy text, but for what it says (H. Rackham, 1914):

But I must explain to you how all this mistaken idea of denouncing pleasure and praising pain was born and I will give you a complete account of the system, and expound the actual teachings of the great explorer of the truth, the master-builder of human happiness. No one rejects, dislikes, or avoids pleasure itself, because it is pleasure, but because those who do not know how to pursue pleasure rationally encounter consequences that are extremely painful. Nor again is there anyone who loves or pursues or desires to obtain pain of itself, because it is pain, but because occasionally circumstances occur in which toil and pain can procure him some great pleasure. To take a trivial example, which of us ever undertakes laborious physical exercise, except to obtain some advantage from it? But who has any right to find fault with a man who chooses to enjoy a pleasure that has no annoying consequences, or one who avoids a pain that produces no resultant pleasure?

The copyright date is 45 BC, were such ancient works to be under copyright, but I'll take this to be a straightforward statement of the obvious in our day. Let me repeat the last sentence: **"But who has any right to find fault with a man who chooses to enjoy a pleasure that has no annoying consequences, or one who avoids a pain that produces no resultant pleasure?"** There is a real flaw in this way of looking at things.

## The pleasure-pain syndrome

Certain selections of the [Philokalia](#) suggest an understanding that imply this statement to be based on a philosophical error.

Physical pleasure and pain are tied together, and trying to experience pleasure with "no annoying consequences" is like trying to withdraw money from your bank account without making your bank balance any lower. It's a get-rich-quick scheme that boils down to poor math skills. It is a sign of confusion to try to separate the sugar rush from the sugar crash.

There are certain points where we are warned of the pleasure-pain syndrome: the warnings children are given about street narcotics is not that they fail to deliver pleasure, but after delivering pleasure they deliver all the pain that comes with it. It's kind of like Disney's Aladdin, where Aladdin goads Jafar into wishing, "I wish to be an all powerful genie!", and then tells him, "You wanted to be a genie, you got it! And everything that goes with it!" Shackles appear on Jafar's wrists, and he is sucked into a lamp's "itty bitty living space"—if anything, a sunny and optimistic image to compare with "everything that goes with" addiction to street drugs.

The passages in the [Philokalia](#) adapting and elaborating St. Maximos Confessor's teaching make highly emphatic claims about the pleasure-pain syndrome. They very emphatically state that

Christ, who was born of a virgin, was conceived without any trace of physical pleasure (sexual or otherwise), and born without pain: a sufficient Redeemer, in other words, needed to be conceived and born outside of the pleasure-pain syndrome. He took the redemptive effects of sufferings he would not earn; other writers have stated that sinless Christ couldn't have died of ripe old age, but in order to die would have to have a "borrowed" death imposed from outside as occurred in the Crucifixion. Mankind entered the pleasure-pain syndrome in a fall to pleasure and sensuality, and to be rescued from drowning, we need a Savior with one foot solidly planted on the dry land of the shore. This is the extent to which that work frames both our destruction and our salvation in terms of the pleasure-pain syndrome.

There are many ways one could frame things, and the pleasure-pain syndrome does not appear to be a central theme in the [Philokalia](#) overall, let alone an encompassing theme in Orthodox spirituality. But the insight is valid, and for that matter may not be distinctively Orthodox. One Orthodox friend explained to me why he had stopped watching movies: he noticed that an hour or two after a movie ended, he found himself in a depression. Jerry Mander may provide a theory as to why in his [Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#), a 1978 title that is still salient, and the book has no pretensions of speaking from a religious

Speaking in terms of the pleasure-pain syndrome is not a central feature of Orthodox theology, but dispassion is beyond being a central point; it is crucial and receives center stage not just in the [Philokalia](#) but in other classics like [The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#), which is read during Lent as a consistent feature of monastic

tradition. But he argues at length that when you gaze long into television, television gazes long into you: he makes some rather chilling suggestions about what effect television has on where people look for and experience pleasure (in a word, the argument is, "When you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail."). He suggests that when television provides a major source of pleasure, there are things that follow in its wake.

It would not seem too difficult to transpose his basic insights in terms of

having a cell phone that occupies your attention all the time. Treacherously addictive Internet porn may be a much worse kind of pleasure than most others one might discuss, but it is not the only one where a pleasure-pain syndrome is at play.

Even if the economy is dire, I am concerned we are in an age of pleasures of all kinds, and these are the pleasures of the pleasure-pain syndrome. The [Philokalia](#) discusses people who try to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, and perhaps times have not changed much... or perhaps we have put the problem on steroids. Think about the short, short list of pleasures that were around when the [Philokalia](#) was being written, warning of the pleasure-pain syndrome. Then compare that list to today. If it is a basic philosophical error to pursue pleasures and try to avoid invisibly attached pains, and if the observation is true when pleasure means simple foods, then we've really put things on steroids if pleasure is TV, movies, smartphones, internet, and so on. It's not just "friendship with benefits" (or other kinds of more casual sex) that brings pleasure entangled with pain, and there are

discipline.

There is a direct and vital relationship between dispassion and the pleasure-pain syndrome: dispassion is a state of spiritual freedom where one is no longer shackled and governed by the pleasure-pain syndrome or any passion allied to it.

things about those passages in the [Philokalia](#) that seem like they had been written yesterday; the portrayal of human nature remains insightful today (1st century of various texts, 53):

[M]an finds by experience that every pleasure is inevitably succeeded by pain, and so directs his whole effort towards pleasure and does all he can to avoid pain. He struggles with all his might to attain pleasure and he fights against pain with immense zeal. By doing this he hopes to keep the two apart from each other—which is impossible... [H]e is, it appears, ignorant that pleasure can never exist without pain. For pain is intertwined with pleasure, even though it seems to escape the notice of those who suffer it.

## The microcosm of praise

Becoming attached to praises is another example of the pleasure-pain syndrome at work. Mark Twain reportedly said, "I can live for two months on a good compliment," and he was emphasizing the point partly by exaggerating how long one can live on a compliment. If one does live off of compliments, there's a problem: one gets hungry again. Praise is very powerful at the beginning, but after time men require stronger and stronger doses. And this may be why the Orthodox leaders I have known give very, very few compliments. They decisively treat other people with love and respect, but they rarely make a minor social compliment to help others feel better. Some of them are not very comfortable when others give them compliments to help them feel better. Some run from it like fire and poison.

One of the basic rules of the Orthodox life is that while monastics are called to abandon all property, the rest of us may own property but are required to own it with detachment. Monasticism aims at being impervious to pleasure and pain alike, but the Bible also provides a foundation for owning things, being married and pursuing ventures, while attempting the difficult work of detachment ([I Corinthians 7:29-31, RSV](#)):

I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not

they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away.

As regards human compliments, the lesson would seem to be this: Listen, but do not inhale. Do not let compliments become the nourishment you feed off of. Better by far not to receive compliments at all than to become dependent on them as your spiritual food. And you might be particularly cautious about those compliments that are peppered throughout conversation to make you feel better; they are even more treacherous.

## Deep Magic

In [The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe](#), the Emperor's headsman, the White Witch, incredulously asks the Lion if he does not know the Deep Magic from the Dawn of Time: that a traitor must die and if the traitor does not die, Narnia will perish in fire and water. The Royal Lion in fact does know the Deep Magic. And he moves on.

But Aslan also knew something the White Witch didn't. He knew from within the Deeper Magic from before the Dawn of Time, that if an innocent victim were willingly slain in a traitor's stead, even death would begin working backwards: and so the White Witch slew Aslan to her defeat.

There is Deep Magic with pleasure and pain: what you sow, so shall you reap. If you sow pleasure to the flesh, you will reap pain to the flesh. The pleasure-pain syndrome is not the sort of thing you can escape by pleasure.

But there is Deeper Magic, and its supreme example is found in [Philippians 2:5-11, RSV](#):

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

St. John's Paschal homily pours out the Deeper Magic even more plainly:

By descending into Hell, He made Hell captive.  
He embittered it when it tasted of His flesh.

And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry:

Hell, said he, was embittered

When it encountered Thee in the lower regions.

It was embittered, for it was abolished.

It was embittered, for it was mocked.

It was embittered, for it was slain.

It was embittered, for it was overthrown.

It was embittered, for it was fettered in chains.

It took a body, and met God face to face.

It took earth, and encountered Heaven.

It took that which was seen, and fell upon the unseen.

O Death, where is thy sting?

O Hell, where is thy victory?

Christ is risen, and thou art overthrown!

Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!

Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice!

Christ is risen, and life reigns!

Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave.

For Christ, being risen from the dead,

Is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

To Him be glory and dominion  
Unto ages of ages.  
Amen.

And what is going on here is no unique exception. What is going on here is the supreme instance of a universal law, the same as in the glorified "Hall of Fame" in [Hebrews 11, RSV](#):

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old received divine approval. By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he

looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his burial. By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-

treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the first-born might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land; but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given friendly welcome to the spies.

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets — who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated — of whom the world was not worthy — wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen

something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The universal law, the Deeper Magic, plays out in Christ, in his saints, and ultimately the whole Church. Never mind that we do not do the feats of saints; we probably shouldn't try, and it is a trick of the demons to tempt inexperienced monks to take on impossible virtues. If we suffer for Christ, however small the way, it genuinely matters.

## A more excellent way

Is there any alternative to the pleasure-pain syndrome?  
St. Paul, in the great hymn to love, writes ([I Corinthians 13](#),  
[RSV](#)):

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.

**When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a**

**man, I gave up childish ways.**

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.  
Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I  
have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these  
three; but the greatest of these is love.

The part in bold seemed to me, at least at first glance, like it didn't belong. But there is something in the passage that hinges on giving up childish ways. Faith, hope, and love are virtues of Heaven, the virtues of Heavenly life lived on earth. Giving up childish ways, in effect, is giving up the quest for earthly comfort. As C.S. Lewis observed, Heaven cannot give earthly comfort no matter how hard we seek it. Earth cannot give Heavenly comfort: you are shopping at an empty store to ask earth for Heavenly comfort. But earth cannot give earthly comfort either: you are still shopping at an empty store to ask earth for even earthly comfort, and in fact stepping into the pleasure-pain syndrome. The only comfort to be had is Heavenly comfort. The words in bold could be paraphrased, "When I was a child, I sought earthly comfort, inescapably embracing the pleasure-pain syndrome. When I became a man, I put the search for earthly comfort behind me—and sought and received heavenly comfort instead." Those who sow to the flesh will reap pain from the flesh, but those who sow to the Spirit will reap joy from the Spirit. The words about "I put childish ways behind me" serve as a hinge between letting go of the pleasure-pain syndrome, and the virtues of the Life of Heaven begun here, now.

Let us return to the beginning of Cicero's quotation behind "lorem ipsum:" "But I must explain to you how all this mistaken idea of denouncing pleasure and praising pain was born..." Can we

say that Cicero was right all along? Only if we really stretch his words' meaning. Saints in pursuit of Heaven's comfort and Heaven's joy spurn mere material comfort and are purified through material pain. Arguably the text can be stretched to say that the saints reject pleasure in the pursuit of greater pleasure, and they accept pain likewise in the pursuit of greater pleasure. But something deeper than pleasure is going on, and Cicero's passage quoted above is stretched to the point of not meaning very much if it is interpreted this way. While the ancients were very open to the idea of finding "Christians before Christ" among the pagans, it is a real stretch to interpret Cicero's passage as describing a Son of Man who came not to be served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many. Perhaps this Son of Man finds the deepest, fullest, richest pleasure there is: but Cicero will not take us there, and his argument is shortsighted with no power to free us from the pleasure-pain syndrome.

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God and its heavenly comforts with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin and its pleasure-pain syndrome.

# **Pope Makes Historic Ecumenical Bid to Woo Eastern Rite Catholics**

Rome (AP). His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI has made a historic ecumenical bid to woo Eastern Rite Catholics and stop treating them as second class citizens. Eastern Rite Catholics are essentially Eastern Orthodox Christians who were received into full communion with the Catholic Church under an agreement intended to let them to preserve their Orthodox liturgy and faith. In the centuries since this historic agreement, Eastern Rite Catholics have found themselves not exactly treated as first-class citizens by the Roman Catholic Church.

In the nineteenth century, the Eastern Rite Catholic priest Alexis Toth entered the U.S. and found that Archbishop Ireland rejected him as a Catholic, not recognizing his Orthodox rite nor even recognizing him or his bishop as clergy, but demanding Roman behavior and Roman rites, nor accepting that Toth quoted chapter and verse demonstrating that he was allowed to continue his traditional practices as an Eastern Rite Catholic priest.

Alexis Toth, regarded today as a saint by the Orthodox Church, was a leader among those moving from being treated as second-class citizens by Rome to come home to the Orthodox Church.

Today, Eastern Rite Catholics enjoy somewhat better treatment, but it is a matter of some debate how much better today's treatment really is. In Rome, priests are basically required to be celibate; in Orthodoxy, prospective priests are usually expected to be married before they are ordained to the priesthood, and Rome respects this by allowing married Eastern Rite Catholics to be ordained priests. However, given the state of U.S. Catholic church politics, Rome is very reluctant to let married men be ordained priest on U.S. soil: Eastern Rite Catholic bishops from the U.S. may only ordain married men to the priesthood if they have special, case-by-case permission to ordain that particular man, and this is actually an improvement: not long ago, Eastern Rite Catholics had to be flown to another continent entirely if married men were to be ordained to the priesthood. This is how Rome allows Eastern Rite Catholics to preserve their Orthodox tradition and practices. (Rumor has it this is not the only rough point of how Rome treats its Eastern Rite Catholics today.)

But the Pope is very keen on restoring communion and seeing that all Eastern Orthodox become Eastern Rite Catholics, or rather restore communion with Rome, if that is really any different. Now that Anglicans have been offered full communion with Rome while keeping a great deal of their liturgy and faith, the Pope is now tackling the ambitious task of allowing Eastern Rite Catholics to keep their liturgy and faith as first-class members within the Roman communion. Some sources suggest the move may be intended to ease Eastern Orthodox apprehensions about being under papal authority implied in restoring communion

with Rome.

At present, details remain sketchy about how the Pope intends to improve Eastern Rite Catholics' standing. Perhaps only time will tell what it is like to be in full communion with Rome while preserving your tradition's liturgy and faith.

# Pride

## The Age of Rampant Pride

Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and his anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us."

He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD has them in derision.

[Psalm 2:1-4, RSV](#)

These words are timeless, and have a singular relevance to our own day, when it is not just the kings of the earth, the rulers, who counsel against the Lord and his Christ, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart, and cast their cords from us." Times were bad enough when the kings of the earth pursued this occupation: today this pride is the avocation of the rank-and-file, the spiritual vocation embraced by John Q. Public.

Pride has always been present as an adversary to our well-being, but sociologists say that each generation is more "narcissistic" than the last: each generation is more deeply enmeshed in pride. When I was growing up I was unced on all

emmeshed in pride. When I was growing up I was urged on all fronts to have a healthy self-esteem; I was to feel I was special. Both these things would alarm the Church Fathers; speaking of "a healthy self-esteem" is like speaking of an alcoholic having "a healthy insatiable thirst for for eighty proof hard liquor." The next generation after me is the generation that has to have its birthdays and other celebrations be a cut apart from the "ordinary": the old formula of inviting a child's friends and friend's parents, ensuring a plentiful supply of sugary food, and hanging out for a couple of hours just doesn't cut it. There has to be some special stamp imprinted on it, like a little girl having hours of costume and makeup to dress up as a fairy. To be adequate, a celebration need not merely be a cut above the old formula; it should ideally be a cut above the other "special" celebrations.

Pride has been called "the flaw of Narcissus," and it is astonishing how well pride is represented and portrayed in the story. Before the end of the story, Narcissus was haughty, even scorning those who adored him—it is the character of pride, not only to view oneself highly, but to scorn others. (And it is the nature of humility, not only to view oneself modestly, but to genuinely admire and respect others.) But the central feature of the story is how Narcissus meets his end: even though no other person assaulted him, he was doomed as soon as he saw his own reflection in the water and stared in rapt fascination at his own beauty, until he pined away to nothing. He died because not even his bodily needs could take his attention from his entranced admiration of his own beauty. ("Narcissus" etymologically comes from "narke", meaning sleep or drug-like drowsiness, and Narcissus might as well have been on drugs.) If you want a glimpse into the soul of Narcissism, read the myth of Narcissus.

Pick it up by the heart and it is called narcissism, pride, or self-esteem; pick it up by the head and it is called subjectivism. Subjectivism is insisting on believing what you want to believe, even when you know, or used to know, that it's wrong. The increasing standard of narcissism in people's lives is matched by an increasing standard of subjectivism at the university, an issue argued by the scholar who wrote [C. S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil: An Investigation of a Pervasive Theme](#). Here "problem of evil" does not refer to theodicy, but subjectivism. Subjectivism says, "I will believe what I want to believe," and far enough into it, subjectivism says, "I am right and God is wrong." At a low dose, subjectivism is called "wishful thinking;" at a high enough dose it is called blasphemy. And subjectivism comes from pride and builds up pride.

## Pride Unfurls and Unfolds

The poison of pride unfurls in many ways.

### Gay Pride

Where does "gay pride" fit into this? As a full-fledged member of pride unfurling, and as the wrong medicine. There is a lot of queer pain and suffering, and the idea that being queer is something to take pride in is to seek medication for this. It may be the wrong approach, but just as enough alcohol will seem to solve any problem for the short term, gay pride promises to medicate pain.

And the term is well chosen. It may not call itself subjectivism, but **transgendered surgery is an effort to set right what God got wrong**. Now gay pride may not on the surface claim to be pride; it may be on every conscious level an effort to come to terms with reality and celebrate who you really are. But pride cannot deliver that; only repentance and humility can make such a delivery. Only repentance and humility can make good on the promise. Narcissism in general is counterfeit coin: the classic [Narcissism: Denial of the True Self](#) could well enough have been written about gay pride. I have known one person who faced strong homosexual temptations who was at home with himself and truly happy; he came to terms with

who he was, and he did it as ex-gay.

But if you think, "I'm straight; I don't have to face that issue," you are wrong. There are many ways we drink the same poison; LGBTQ's are just honest enough to correctly name their salve as "pride."

## **Gnosticism**

Gnosticism is another theatre for this to play out in. Some years back, a few lone voices warned that the heresy of Gnosticism was coming back. Now you have to be pretty obtuse to deny a resurgence of Gnosticism; you can say if you want that contemporary attempts to resurrect the heresy are creating another beast altogether, but it is rather provocative to deny that recent years have seen a substantial interest in Gnosticism.

At one level of insight, one may enumerate various ideas and claims found in Gnosticism. At the next level, one may notice that Gnosticism is not a stable system of ideas; it is a process that moves from one point to another, and to study it as a historical phenomenon is to force it into something it isn't, just as a study of untreated cancer across history would be mistaken, grossly mistaken, to find historical vogues, trends, and patterns in how tumors have grown in different ages in history. But there is one more level of insight worth mentioning.

Gnosticism, at its core, is not powered by a framework of ideas (for that matter, neither is Orthodoxy, even if her ideas are more stable). It offers a good news of escape that hinges on a mood of despair, and Gnostic esoterica are a kind of spiritual pornography, almost, that slakes the thirst of someone thirsting for an escape from despair. And there is bad news and good news for people pursuing such projects. The bad news is that escape is not possible beyond a chimera that leaves one thirsting; the

not possible beyond a shimmer that leaves one thirsting, the good news is announced,

Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

John 4:13-14, RSV

The bad news is that escape is not possible. The good news is that escape is not needed, and [in the story of St. Photini, the woman at the well](#), she tried to enlist his help in fleeing from her shame and her pain, and he pulled her through her shame, helping her face what she was trying to flee, and left her running without shame through the whole city, "He told me all that I ever did."

The despair that builds a thirst for Gnosticism and escape appears in times of plenty; it can also occur in times of economic collapse and loss. But the final assessment applies to both: escape is not possible. But escape is not needed.

## Humility

And what does this have to do with pride? As much as the spiritual honesty of humility helps open one's eyes to the beauty of others and the world ("[in humility count others better than yourselves](#)"), pride bears blindness and leaves one seeing a despicable world from which one can only wish escape. Hubris is called blinding arrogance, and it alike blinds you from your weaknesses and blinds you to what is delightful and good in the world around you. Walk far enough along the path of Narcissus, and like him you will find yourself despising those who adore you.

And I would like to comment in particular on "**in humility count others better than yourselves.**" This is bitter medicine and an insult to our pride. I don't like it personally, and I'm not sure I've seen a person who can read those words and not squirm. I'm not near that spiritual maturity, but for all that I recognize and confess that this is not only Scripture, but that it specifically is a gateway to joy.

"How?", you may ask: "How on earth?" The answer is almost in the text. If you are proud like Narcissus, you will despise others.

And if you despise people, it is awfully hard to enjoy their company. But if, "in humiliiy," you "cosnsider other people better than yourself," you will learn respect for others who are made in the image of God, and you will enjoy the company of the worst of sinners. Conflicts may happen, but if we follow the supreme humility of one whose (almost) dying words were a prayer for his murderers, "**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.**" (Is there humility beyond seeing the good, and seeking the good, for the people who are trying to kill you?)

### **Wishful Thinking**

Let's look at a light, seemingly innocuous form of subjectivism: wishful thinking. I wrote of one specific kind of wishful thinking:

We have a lot of ways of wishing that God had placed us someplace else, someplace different. One of the most interesting books I've glanced through, but not read, was covered in pink rosy foliage, and said that it was dealing with the #1 cause of unhappiness in women's relationships. And that #1 cause was a surprise: romantic fantasies. The point

was that dreaming up a romantic fantasy and then trying to make it real is a recipe, not for fulfillment, but for heartbreaking disappointment in circumstances where you could be truly happy. (When you have your heart set on a fantasy of just how the perfect man will fulfill all your desires and transform your world, no real man can seem anything but a disappointing shadow next to your fantasy.)

And I've done worse, with wishing I was in the world of Arthurian legends, and I was somehow a knight with the Holy Grail. [i even wrote a novel out of that silliness](#). At least a happy romance and marriage is a natural enough wish; the Arthurian legends and the Holy Grail are not. And this list of two kinds of wishful thinking leaves a lot out. In [Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony with Nature: Anatomy of a Passion](#), the passage above continues,

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

And on a banal level, wishful thinking is a way to waste more time at work. for programmers, when you write something and it

doesn't work, it is not the right thing to try again and hope it will fix itself; the right thing to do is investigate what is wrong and fix it. And I was half-shocked when I paid attention to the time and energy I wasted wishfully trying something out again in the wishful hope it would magically fix itself.

## Money and Technology

Dostoevsky, in a quote in [The Brothers Karamazov](#) that I can't immediately trace, makes the point that money is something that people will think is good because it reduces their dependence on their neighbors. And while Alyosha indeed acknowledges that more money means less dependence, he sees this as a bad thing: perhaps it is God's design for people to be dependent on their neighbors and not on sums of money. And this skepticism towards how good money really is is straight from the Bible. To pick one of innumerable quotes, let me cite [the most politically incorrect sermon in history](#):

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Sandwiched between words about money are words about the health of one's spiritual eye, which is darkened if it is greedy or stingy. If, perhaps, it is proud, with such pride as would substitute dependence on money for dependence on one's neighbor.

### **The Acceleration of Addictiveness**

And whatever cautions the Bible makes about money apply fourfold to our technological labyrinth. The Bible has warnings about alcohol when the strongest drink you could get was at 4% alcohol: weaker than most beer. Today we live in a world when if you have access to alcohol you can probably buy hard liquor at 40% alcohol: a strong enough drink that it is drunk with special little shot glasses that are too small to drink anything one would drink to slake thirst. And it's not just alcoholic beverages that are on steroids. There's something about smartphones that is in the same key.

One of the rules at alcohol, whether at 4% or 40%, is that it needs to be used in a discipline of moderation, with restraint. The wrong use is precisely to lay the reins on the horse's neck and just go with the flow. And smartphones, like the matrix of technologies we live in, need to be used with a discipline of restraint and not lay the reins on the horse's neck.

Once in a while we get a clue that texting and driving is as dangerous as drinking and driving, but we have not as a society put much more restraint than that. One may occasionally read in a newspaper that texting is eating away at teen's sleep because the stream of new texts doesn't shut off at bedtime, but the idea that texting, for instance, should be used in a disciplined way does not dawn on us as a whole

way, does not dawn on us as a whole.

It is pride that seeks independence from one's neighbor, and it is pride that seeks independence from one's surroundings by means of technology. Back in the days of Walkmans, a friend's grandmother commented that running with a Walkman is a way of disdainfully detaching yourself from attentiveness to your surroundings: an old tape-eating Walkman was a way to carry your own reality with you. And carrying one's own reality with oneself is in the service of pride, and not a good thing.

I once thought of writing "The Luddite's Guide to Technology" and describing how to use technology appropriately.

In a word it would have been:

Use technologies in ways that arise from and support spiritual discipline, and do not use technologies in ways that arise from and support pride and other vices, including taking you to an alternate private world.

I stopped my attempt to write it because I was not writing anything particularly good, but I would love to see it written, if only as that summary above.

### **Plato: The Allegory of the... Flickering Screen?**

Someone said that the difference between good and bad literature is that bad literature is used to escape reality, while good literature is used to engage reality. I've said that television is a pack of cigarettes for the mind, but television can be used to check weather and traffic, which is not at all turning on the television and entering a state where your body burns fewer calories than when sleeping. But it's not just television. I had originally intended to revise Plato's famous "Allegory of the

Cave" into [Plato: The Allegory of the Television](#), but I ended with a title of [Plato: The Allegory of the... Flickering Screen?](#) In both cases Plato's lesson is applied twice to bad use of technology in which the user is twice imprisoned and far from [contemplation of God](#). And so much of the value proposition of special effects movies, smartphones, role playing games, video games, and the like is escape. Reality isn't good enough, not for the likes of us. We're tripping over the same root again, the root called "pride."

### **And that's not all.**

More could perhaps be said. What has been said about pride and despairing escapism, or pride and Gnosticism, or pride and technology, might as well be said about magic as an attempt to escape reality and enter another reality, however subtle the means. I haven't talked about spellbound fascination with one's own inner world. (The inner world is real, and it contains Heaven and Hell, but you're selling yourself short if you think it's just a place for "Me! Me! Me!" This is much for the same reason one priest says he doesn't like hearing people talking about "my life:" his answer is that there is only one life, meaning God's Life, and either you're in it or you're not.) I have not touched the dizzying abyss of postmodernism as spiritual ~~drunkenness~~ adventure, or a curious attitude towards sex that sees children as its liability and places its goodness in entirely the wrong place. On that last score, see the discussion in [The Most Politically Incorrect Sermon in History: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount](#).

But perhaps this is enough meditation on evil.

## Holy Humility

Is there anything good to be learned? Yes indeed, the humility that opens our eyes to the beauty of God and Creation. St. John of the Ladder asked where humility came from, and wrote only:

Someone discovered in his heart how beautiful humility is, and in his amazement he asked her to reveal her parent's name. Humility smiled, joyous and serene: "Why are you in such a rush to learn the name of my begetter? He has no name, nor will I reveal him to you until you have God as your possession. To Whom be glory forever."

But if pride has served as an opening point, let us close with humility. One picture of humility is illuminated in [Tales From a Magic Monastery](#):

### The Crystal Globe

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

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

"Yes," I said.

He poured me a cup of wine. "Here, take this." No sooner had I drunk it than I became aware of a crystal globe forming around me. It began to expand until finally it

surrounded him too. This monk, who a minute before had seemed so commonplace, now took on an astonishing beauty. I was struck dumb. After a bit the thought came to me, "Maybe I should tell him how beautiful he is—perhaps he doesn't even know."

But I really was dumb—that wine had burned out my tongue! But so great was my happiness at the sight of such beauty that I thought it was well worth the price of my tongue. When he made me a sign to leave, I turned away, confident that the memory of that beauty would be a joy forever.

But what was my surprise when I found that with each person I met it was the same—as soon as he would pass unwittingly into my crystal globe, I could see his beauty too. And I knew that it was real.

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

This is holy humility. This is what it means to see the image of God in others. This is what it means to "in humility count others better than yourself."

Let us make this our goal.

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

[See the video on YouTube!](#))

**"Invictus," *rough draft*:**

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.  
In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.  
Beyond this place of wrath and tears,  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years,  
Finds and shall find me unashamed.  
It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishment the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate.  
I am the captain of my soul.

---

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

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

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

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

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

Beyond this life of pleasure and pain,  
Lie the Gates of Heaven and Hell,  
Battered I still make my choice,  
Seeking neither to bolt nor bar,  
From inside, the gates of Hell.

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

Who cheer me on to join their choir,  
Thou blessest me beyond any fate,  
That I could ever know to ask.  
Thy Glory is to transfigure me,  
To Live, Thou Thyself:  
I AM the Master of my Fate!  
I AM the Captain of my Soul!

*Profoundly Gifted*  
*Magazine*  
**Interviews**  
**Maximos Planos**

**Profoundly Gifted:** You did some amazing things and some impressive actions when you were a child prodigy; have you been up to anything since then?

**Maximos:** Quite a lot, really; I've settled into work as a usability / user interface / user experience professional with a humble boss. And I've gotten married; my wife Mary and I have seven daughters, all of them with the middle name of Abigail, or "Father's Joy."

**Profoundly Gifted:** That's it? You haven't studied languages, for instance?

**Maximos:** *Much water will not be able to quench love, and rivers shall not drown it;* that is the important one, but yes; other languages are a bit like Scotch. One is just getting started; two is just about perfect; three is not nearly half enough.

**Profoundly Gifted:** So you're not just a husband and father: you're also a philologist—how many languages do you

know?

**Maximos:** You are paying attention to trivialities if you gloss over my fatherhood to ask a question about my love of languages that I really can't answer.

**Profoundly Gifted:** What can't you answer about how many languages your love of languages includes?

**Maximos:** You aren't a philologist when you speak two languages, or four, or twelve, or eight. You're a philologist when someone asks you how many languages you know, and you have no idea how to answer.

**Profoundly Gifted:** Then what is it? What should I make of it?

**Maximos:** If I may shanghai an opportunity to follow the words, "If there is an elephant in the room, introduce him..."?

**Profoundly Gifted:** Yes?

**Maximos:** Asperger's Syndrome.

**Profoundly Gifted:** It's kind of like profound giftedness, no?

**Maximos:** Let me quietly count to ten... Ok...

I read David Pollock's [Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds](#), and I said, "That's me!" Then I read Edward Hallowell's [Driven to Distraction](#) and it made sense. Then I read, on a medical practitioner's advice, Tony Attwood's [The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome](#), and my response was some more polite form of **"Dude... pass me a toke of whatever it is that you're smoking!"**

The root problem, which I will get to in a minute, is that when people who are happy to have an Asperger's diagnosis and happy to offer half the people they know an Asperger's diagnosis, there are superficial similarities between profound giftedness and Asperger's traits, things that a competent diagnostician should see far past.

Early in the title, Attwood says that when he diagnoses someone with Asperger's, he says, "Congratulations! You have Asperger's!" But then it goes downhill. Atwood argues that the obvious social impairments one would associate with Asperger's are guilty as charged; Asperger's people don't know (without counseling and / or training) how to hold an appropriate social conversation. However, the strengths one would

associate with Asperger's are all but eviscerated. Asperger's children may have a monologue that sounds like a competent adult discussing the matter, but this "knowledge" is a hollow shell, without much of anything of the deeper competency one would associate with an adult capable of such monologue. The common stereotype of Asperger's patients portrays a slightly odd combination of strengths and weaknesses; Attwood's book is less generous and really only ascribes real weaknesses.

The standard symptoms of Asperger's have a perhaps 50% overlap with standard symptoms of profound giftedness; while it is certainly possible to be a member of both demographics, **the profoundly gifted characteristics resemble Asperger's characters for quite unrelated reasons.** The similarity may be compared to the common cold, on the one hand, in which there is an immune response to a harmful invader, and environmental allergies on the other hand, in which there is a harmful response to something otherwise harmless. Or for those who prefer an example from Charles Baudelaire, there is an image of two females, one an infant too young to have teeth or hair, and the other a woman too old to have teeth or hair. (The coincidence of features is close to being due to diametrically opposed reasons.)

**Profoundly Gifted:** Is the question "Asperger's or profound giftedness?" the sort of question you'd rather un-ask than answer?

**Maximos:** It is indeed. Or at least I'm drawing a blank to see what a three-cornered discussion of normalcy,

Asperger's, and profound giftedness has to add to the older discussion of normalcy and profound giftedness. If we can overcome our chronological snobbishness says that only now could we say something worthwhile about XYZ and giftedness, Leta Hollingsworth decided as a counterbalance to a study of mental retardation a study of some who turned out to have an IQ of somewhere around 180 or higher. She wrote an insightful and descriptive, [Children Above 180 IQ Stanford-Binet](#), much more insightful than the treatment of profoundly gifted scoring "Termites."

Furthermore, and here I am less concerned with the relationship between profound giftedness and Asperger's than improperly read research, there is a consistent finding that IQ-normal, autism-normal children do markedly better at what are unfortunately lumped together as "**theory of other minds.**"

A much better interpretation of Attwood's data might come from splitting the **theory of other minds** into a separate **theory of like minds**, and also a **theory of alien minds**. A theory of like minds works with one's homeys or peeps; hence someone IQ-normal and autism-normal surrounded by IQ-normal and autism-normal classmates will coast on a theory of like minds. But, except in how it may be refined by practice, a theory of like minds that comes virtually free to everyone isn't in particular reserved to a majority of people (not) affected by XYZ condition. With some true exceptions like Tay-Sachs, everybody gets along with their peeps. Gifted and profoundly gifted click with their fellows; Asperger's people click with their fellows; to pick a few

many demographics, various geek subcultures, codependents, addicts, and various strains of queer should click just as well. Everybody gets a theory of like minds virtually free; the breadth of usefulness depends on how rarely or commonly one encounters like minds, and this heavily loads the dice for Attwood's approach.

The comparison Attwood makes in interaction with autism-normal people loads the dice in a way that is totally unfair. The comparison is autism-normals' theory of like minds to Asperger's theory of alien minds; he never, ever tests autism-normals on their ability to relate to alien minds, nor does he ever test Asperger's patients on their ability to relate to like minds. And while being unsure about how far this applies to IQ-normal Asperger's patients, Asperger's patients often make herculean and lifelong efforts to develop "theory of alien minds" aptitude, and the result is not just that they connect, perhaps clumsily, with people of the same age and socioeconomic status; they make very close connections across age, race, and gender, and for that matter animals who may start off by being afraid of them. The theory of alien minds is finely honed, even if it is not a valid substitute for a theory of like minds, and once it is honed, this theory of alien minds reaches much, much further than autism-normals resting on a theory of like minds.

**Profoundly Gifted:** So your parents' policy of non-interference and the Law of the Jungle was too romantic to teach you to be safe?

**Maximos:** More romantic than real life, perhaps, and putting me into a regular kindergarten, sink or swim, is neither

more nor less realistic as putting a rabbit in the midst of coyotes, sink or swim. There was a real solution, but it was more romantic, and I fear being misunderstood. I certainly found it by accident.

**Profoundly Gifted:** What is it?

**Maximos:** A woman has kept a goldfish for years longer than goldfish usually live, in a fishbowl, just by talking to it in Mommy-to-baby love. Years back, hospitals which were ever concerned with sanitation witnessed a dramatic drop in infant mortality when they took the "unsanitary" step of having old women cuddle them.

**Profoundly Gifted:** And how does this relate to bullying?

**Maximos:** Let me raise and address another question first. We raise and send constant signals which are often met with escalation. When we are angry with someone, or wish for a way out of our job, or anything else, we war against others in our thoughts. That warfare is powerful. Often it comes back amplified; we can feed a corrective to the loop by responding meekly and with meek thoughts to a blast of anger. Some martial artists have talked about how few people really want to fight; such people are much less common than people who want to be the unchallenged tough guy. It does happen that there are some people want to do wrong; however, much more common are people who are disarmed when all three claims in *Anger slays even wise men; yet a submissive answer turns away wrath; but a grievous word stirs up anger.* The submissive answer to domineering anger is difficult, but it is possible, and it is a route that a quest for life by the Law of the Jungle will never find.

And bullying isn't just for in the classroom. It's also in professional life. The top quality I search for in a boss is humility. There is something aggravating about high talent. It is common practice to have sent multiple C&D letters, or equivalent, when harassment has continued after being repeatedly told, "No." This is unfortunate, but it is a non-negotiable feature of the landscape.

And, like other things that are never the victim's fault, harassment is never the victim's fault; no matter how good or bad a person's social skills may be, it is never justified to continue harassment until the person being harassed says, "CEASE AND DESIST."

It is possible, in good faith, to do one's best work as the privilege of the inferior before the superior to be praised, in the purest thoughts of respect, and instead be met with anger and retaliation to a perceived challenge. But if this is a live danger if we meet our bosses with thoughts of peacefulness, what on earth is to be done when we throw down work with warfare in our thoughts?

**Profoundly Gifted:** But don't we all do best to avoid needlessly stepping on other people's feet, especially our bosses'?

**Maximos:** Yes and NO.

**Profoundly Gifted:** Yes and NO?

**Maximos:** Have you ever spent a winter in the Midwest, perhaps Illinois? And drove after a heavy snowfall, three to four inches of packing snow?

**Profoundly Gifted:** Yes; it was a bit harrowing, but I made a bit of extra effort and was overall pretty safe.

**Maximos:** What made you safe?

**Profoundly Gifted:** I drove slowly, left plenty of space, and made allowances for skidding. That was enough to have me relatively safe.

**Maximos:** Ever driven in that kind of snowstorm in Georgia and the US South? The same three or four inches?

**Profoundly Gifted:** Not really; it never snowed like that when I was there.

**Maximos:** Years back, Georgia responded to a snowstorm three or four inches deep, and decided, "We will not be caught off guard like this again." And then the next snowstorm the slowplows were rusted to the point of being unusable, and you would have been sharing the road with people who don't have even an Illinois familiarity with driving under heavy snow. Would you consider yourself safe all the same, because you need to drive in snow?

**Profoundly Gifted:** Aah.

**Maximos:** Get used to driving in a blizzard with other people not used to driving in any snow, if you want to be profoundly gifted. The approach that is usually safe sharing the road with drivers who can handle snow, more or less, does not even compare to trying to be safe handling a road with people who just don't know how to drive heavy snow.

And it feels awfully good to be told more than once, "You are the most brilliant person I've ever met," but suppose you are so bright that the average Oxford PhD has never met someone as talented as you? You may be trying to drive safely yourself at least, but you're sharing the road with people who are driving on a

complete snow-packed terra incognita to them.

**Profoundly Gifted:** This sounds like a lonely and sad life.

**Maximos:** That was not my point at all, but what life is sad and lonely when one is searching for humility?

But let me give another detail.

You know, probably ad nauseum, about Leta Hollingsworth's conception of "socially optimum intelligence". The top end of the range varies somewhat depending on who you ask, but it runs something like 120 to 150. At that point you have powers to speak of, but you're still running on the same chassis. And people who are properly above the range are rare, enough to really be exotic or a purple squirrel or something else few people have seen. The powers that come seem almost magical, but the price tag is hefty; the real advantage and the real privilege is at the heart of the gifted range, not the upper extreme.

I found James Webb's [Guiding the Gifted Child](#) to be a treasure chest and a gold mine. One part of it says that children with an IQ above 170 don't have peeps; the way that the book says this is that "children with an IQ above 170 tend to feel like they don't fit in anywhere..."

...But there is another shoe to drop. There is another level, exact IQ unknown, where people are able to make peeps out of anyone. They develop a theory of alien minds so far that the distinction between the theory of like minds and the theory of alien minds no longer matters so much...

...And that is how I have found employment as the local usability and user experience guru. One of the

first things people are taught for usability research is "You are not a user," meaning that however much theory-of-like-minds knowledge you have of how software is meant to be used, you need to grasp a theory-of-alien-minds understanding of how everybody but the software developers understands it...

...Maybe you think I should be doing something more exalted in academia, and maybe I should be, but a humble and gentle boss is a treasure worth gold, and turf wars are just a little less than with academic bullies. Right now I have my wife and our seven daughters, and a steady job, and **godliness with contentment is great gain.**

**Profoundly Gifted:** Well, that about says it.

**Maximus:** Or not.

**Profoundly Gifted:** Or not?

**Maximos:** Or not.

Sweet lord, I have played thee false.

You don't know how I was at a rich kids' school, and the one and only chapel message I heard on theology of play was students who had gone through internships in third world nations, and theology of joy and play was writ large: a girl asked how you talk about germ theory to a runny-nosed little girl who offered you a lick of her lollipop. And really, how can you to people who are poor enough to be happy?

You do not know the time when I was deathly ill and was healed You do not know when I met every earthly betrayal and dishonor, and none to my own credit knew Heavenly honor next to which the summit of earthly honor is but pale and shadow. You do not know the sound

of men weeping when *the sleeper awakes, and the dreams are gone: the apprenticeship is finished and the godhead begins.* You know I have felt sorrows above anything mentioned here, but they are not worth comparing with the glory to come, or even for the glory that exists here now in the vast, vast open freedom of forgiveness, *the utter nakedness of standing open before God,* and the priceless vale of humility that is so low that no man can fall from it.

We, like social Gospel and the liberal left, believe in life before death. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man,* the things which here now God worketh in hidden transcendent glory for those who love him.

# **Refutatio Omnium Haeresium**

*Michael? (Who Is Like God?)*

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

## A rude awakening

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

expression from American English", namely rabbit food, and subsequently use "rabbit food" as obviously a term meaning food made with rabbit meat.

In this one article were already two things that were fingernails on a chalkboard to my ears. Empirical sciences are today's prestige disciplines, like philosophy / theology / law in bygone eras, and the claim to be a science seems to inevitably be how to mediate prestige to oneself and one's own discipline.

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

This "physics envy" looks particularly strange next to the medieval Great Chain of Being as it moved from the highest to the lowest: "God, Angels, Man, Animals, Plants, Rocks, Nothing".

Theology is the study of God and Man; no discipline is given a more noble field. And however much other disciplines may have "physics envy", no other discipline looks lower than physics, the

science that studies Rocks and Nothing. There may be something pathetic about an anthropologist trying to step up on the pecking order by claiming to be "just as much scientists as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics." Yet on the lips of a theologian, it bears a faint hint of a CEO absurdly saying, "CEOs are janitors, and they are every bit as much janitors as the people responsible for cleaning wastebaskets."

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

- Rarely if ever used in any correct fashion.  
The one exception I can remember being Wolfhart Pannenberg's illustration of a point by talking about fields such as one finds in the study of electricity and magnetism: the non-scientist theologians in the room said they were having real trouble understanding the illustration conceptually, which would make it seem somewhat dubious as an illustration to help get a point across.
- Always reflect an effort to claim some of science's prestige. I remember the "you're being quaint" smiles I got when I suggested that a point that Pannenberg was trying to make by comparing something to a field as defined in physics, seemed in fact to be a point that could have been much better made by a comparison to the Force from Star Wars. Why the patronizing smiles? The job of the example from physics was to mediate prestige as well as to illustrate a concept that could have been better explained without involving a particularly slippery concept from physics.

## A first response

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

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

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

The author broke people down into more or less three groups of people. The first—she mentioned artists—was people that can't count to twenty without taking off their shoes. She didn't quite say **that**, but she emphasized artists

and other people where math and numbers simply aren't part of their consciousness. They don't buy into the mystique. And they can say, and sincerely mean, that numbers don't measure everything. They aren't seriously tempted to believe otherwise.

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

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

I was flattered, but I really think it stuck with me for more reasons than just the fact that she included me in one of the "good" groups. There is a sort of Karate Kid observation—"Karate is like a road. Know karate, safe. Don't know karate, safe. In the middle, squash, like a grape!"—that is relevant to theology and science. It has to do with, among other things, Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, the question of evolution, and the like (perhaps I should mention the second law of thermodynamics). My point in this is not that

there is an obligation to "know karate", that theologians need to earn degrees in the sciences before they are qualified to work as theologians, but that there is something perfectly respectable about "don't know karate."

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

Which is a crass error. The theological equivalent would be to say that Karl Barth's unflattering remarks about "religion" are anti-Christian, or that liberation theology's preferential option for the poor means that special concern for the poor is optional and to be dealt with according to personal preference. And saying that about liberation theology is a theological "squash like a grape," because it is better to not know liberation theology and know you don't know than believe that you understand liberation theology and "know" that the word "option" implies "optional." **It's not what you don't know that hurts you, but what you know that ain't so.**

For the record, what Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem means is that for a certain branch of mathematics, there are things that can be neither proven nor disproven—which made his theorem a shocker when there was a Tower of Babel effort to prove or disprove pretty much anything. It

proves that some things can never be proven within certain systems. And it has other implications. But it does not mean that things that are proven in mathematics are uncertain, or that mathematical knowledge is relative. It says you can't prove everything a mathematician would want to prove. But there are still lots and lots and lots of interesting things that can be proven, and Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem does not touch these proofs, nor does it mean that mathematical knowledge is merely relative in humanities fashion.

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

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

There would seem to be obvious non-mathematical reasons for why people would want to be informed about the first theorem and not want to mention the second. I consider it telling (about non-mathematical culture). I know it may be considered a mark of sophistication to mention Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem and share how it's informed your epistemology. But it hasn't informed my

epistemology and I really can't tell how my theology would be different if I hadn't heard of it. And my understanding is that other mathematicians tend not to have the highest view of people who are trying to take account of scientific discoveries that an educated person "should" know. There are other reasons for this, including goofy apologetics that make the famous theorem a proof for God. But I at least would rather talk with someone who simply hadn't heard of the theorem than a theologian who had tried to make a "responsible" effort to learn from the discovery.

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

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

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

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

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

I wince when I see theologians trying their dutiful best to work out an obligation to take evolution into account as a proven fact: squash, like a grape. It's not just that science doesn't trade in proof and evolution is being treated like a revelation, as if a Pope had consulted the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences and canonized The Origin of the Species as a book of the Bible. Or maybe that's putting it too strongly.

It would also be strong language to say that many theologians are adopting a carefully critical attitude to classic Church claims and part of their being critical means placing an embarrassingly blind faith in evolution. But that's truer than I'd want to admit.

What about the second law of thermodynamics?

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

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

Rumor science is worse than no science, and an ascientific theology is not a handicap. When I say that I would rather see theologians know either much more or much less science, I'm not hoping that theologians will therefore get scientific

degrees. The chief merit for a theologian to know science is that it can be a source of liberation that frees people from thinking "We live in a scientific age so it would be better for theology to be scientific." I'm not sure I would be able to question that assumption if I knew much less science. But what I believe that buys me is not a better theology than someone scientifically innocent but freedom from the perceived need to "take science into account" in my theology so I can do the same kind of theology as someone scientifically innocent.

I'm not as sure what to say about ecological theology; I wrote [Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth](#) at without scientific reference that I remember, and I believe there are other human ways of knowing Creation besides science. But an ecological theologian who draws on scientific studies is not trying to honor a duty to understand things an educated person should know, but pursuing something materially relevant. Science has some place; religion and science boundary issues are legitimate, and I don't know I can dissuade people who think it's progressive to try to make a scientific theology—although I really wish people with that interest would get letters after their name from a science discipline, or some other form of genuinely proper scientific credentials appropriate to a genuinely scientific theology.

There are probably other exceptions, and science is interesting. But there is no obligation to go from safely on one side of the road to a position in the middle because it is "closer" to a proper understanding of science. Perhaps liberation theologians want people to understand their cause, but it is better not to pretend to know liberation theology

than to approach it in a way that leaves you "knowing" that the preferential option is optional. It isn't what you know that hurts you, but what you know that ain't so—and rumor science, with its accepted list of important scientific knowledge that scholars need to take into account, is one way to learn from what ain't so.

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

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

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

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

## Pondering Einstein, or at least dropping his name

That work left out the crowning jewel of scientific theories to ponder in "rumor science": Einstein's "theory of relativity."

Some time later, in my science fiction short story / Socratic dialogue, [The Steel Orb](#), I wrote in fiction something that picked up what I had left out:

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

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

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

Oinos leaned forward, paused, and then tapped the table four different places. In front of Art appeared a gridlike object which Art recognized with a start as a scientific calculator like his son's. "Very well. Let me ask you a question. Relative to your frame of reference, an object of

one kilogram rest mass is moving away from you at a speed of one tenth the speed of light. What, from your present frame of reference, is its effective mass?"

Art hesitated, and began to sit up.

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

Art shrunk slightly towards his chair.

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

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

Oinos said, "If you are unable to answer that question before I started dropping hints, let alone after I gave hints, you should not pose as having contemplated what relativity means for us today. I'm not trying to humiliate you. But the first question I asked is the kind of question a teacher would put on a quiz to see if students were awake and not playing video games for most of the first lecture. I know it's fashionable in your world to drop Einstein's name as someone you have deeply pondered. It is also extraordinarily silly. I have noticed that scientists who have a good understanding of relativity often work without presenting themselves as

OT RELATIVITY OFTEN WORK WITHOUT PRESENTING THEMSELVES AS having these deep ponderings about what Einstein means for them today. Trying to deeply ponder Einstein without learning even the basics of relativistic physics is like trying to write the next Nobel prize-winning German novel without being bothered to learn even the most rudimentary German vocabulary and grammar."

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

"On a poetic level, I think it is an interesting development in your world's history for a breakthrough in science, Einstein's theory of relativity, to say that what is absolute is not time, but light. Space and time bend before light.

There is a poetic beauty to Einstein making an unprecedented absolute out of light. But let us leave poetic appreciation of Einstein's theory aside.

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

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

"Can you guess? Half its mass? The mass of a car? Or

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

"Is this a trick question? Fifty pounds?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

<b>Question</b>	<b>Orthodox Christianity</b>	<b>Academic Theology</b>	<b>Modern Science</b>
"Adam knew Eve..." The primary word in the Old and New		Knowledge is critical, meaning detached: the	You can't know how stars age ..

What is knowledge like?

Testaments for sexual union is in fact 'know', and this is a significant clue about the intimate nature of knowledge.

Knowledge is, at its core, the knowledge that drinks. It connects at a deepest level, and is cognate to how Orthodox say of the Holy Mysteries, "We have seen the true Light!": to receive the Eucharist is to know.

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

detached, the privileged position is of the outsider who stands clear of a situation and looks into a window. The devout believer enjoys no real advantage in grasping his religion compared to the methodical observer who remains detached—and the ordinary believer may be at a marked disadvantage.

or the limitations of the ideal gas law from direct personal experience. Science stems from a rationalism cognate to the Enlightenment, and even if one rebels against the Enlightenment, it's awfully hard to know quarks and leptons solely by the intimacy of personal experience.

<p>What aspect of yourself do you know with?</p>	<p>mind nous that there is a sort of "spiritual eye" which knows and which grasps spiritual realities as overflow to its central purpose of worshipping God. The center of gravity for knowing is this spiritual eye, and it is the center of a whole and integrated person. Logical and other "discursive" reasoning may have a place, but the seat of this kind of reasoning is a moon next to the light of the sun which is the spiritual eye, the nous.</p>	<p>Good scholarship comes from putting all other aspects of the person in their place and enthroning the part of us that reasons logically and almost putting the logic bit on steroids. Continental philosophy may rebel against this, but it rebels after starting from this point.</p>	<p>We have a slightly more rigorous use of primarily logical reasoning and a subject domain that allows this reasoning to shine.</p>
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<p>What . . .</p>	<p>Teachers should induce students</p>	<p>They should train students who will not be</p>	<p>They should train students to develop experiments</p>
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should  
teachers

into discipleship  
and should be

cultivate in  
their  
students?

exemplary  
disciples  
themselves.

who will not be  
content with  
their teachers'  
interpretations  
but push past to  
their own takes  
on the matter.

experiments  
and theories to  
carefully  
challenge the  
"present  
working  
picture" in  
their field.

Something of  
the attitude is  
captured in what  
followed the  
telling of an  
anecdote about a  
New Testament  
Greek class  
where the  
professor had

One may be not so  
much under  
Tradition as in  
Tradition:  
Tradition is like  
one's culture or  
language, if a  
culture and  
language breathed  
on by the Holy  
Spirit of God.  
Though the  
matrix of

difficulties  
telling how to  
read a short  
text, until a  
classics student  
looked and  
suggested that  
the difficulty  
would evaporate  
if the text were  
read with a  
different set of  
accents from

As Nobel prize-  
winning  
physicist  
Richard  
Feynman  
observed, "You  
get to be part

What is  
tradition,  
and how  
does your  
tradition

<p>tradition relate to knowing?</p>	<p>Tradition need not be viewed with legalistic fundamentalism, it is missing something important to fail to love and revere Tradition as something of a mother.</p>	<p>what scholars traditionally assigned it. The Greek professor's response ("Accents are not inspired!") was presented by the academic theologian retelling this story as full warrant to suggest that scholars should not view themselves as bound by tradition with its blind spots.</p>	<p>of the establishment by blowing up part of the establishment."</p>
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It reflects some  
degree of  
fundamental  
confusion to  
measure the value  
of what someone  
says by how

Publish  
something  
original, or  
perish. Better to  
say something  
original but not  
true than not

Continue to  
push the  
envelope. Are  
you an  
experimental  
physicist? If  
you cannot  
observe  
anything new by

How much emphasis do you place on creativity?

original IT IS. THAT which is true is not original, and that which is original is not true. Perhaps people may uncover new layers of meaning, but to measure someone by how many ideas he can claim as "mine" is a strange measure.

have any ideas to claim as "mine." If need be, rehabilitate Arius or Nestorius. (Or, if you are Orthodox, meet current fashions halfway and show that St. Augustine need not be a whipping boy.)

the layman's means of observation, pioneer new equipment or a clever experiment to push the envelope of what can be observed. Publish something original or perish.

There is a very real sense of empiricism, albeit a sense that has very little directly to do with empirical science. Knowledge is what you know through the "spiritual eye" and it is a knowledge that can only be

~~Theologians are just as empirical as physicists, whether or not they know basic statistics. We have such quasi-~~

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

Where  
does your  
discipline  
place its  
empiricism?

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

SCIENTIFIC  
empiricism as  
can be had for  
the human and  
divine domain we  
cover; there is a  
great deal of  
diversity, and  
some of us do  
not place much  
emphasis on the  
empiricism of  
science, but  
some of us have  
enough of  
scientific  
empiricism to do  
history work  
that stands its  
ground when  
judged by  
secular history's  
standards.

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

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

## Origins questions: can we dig deeper?

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

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

### **Genesis**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where the reader only sees one question, an ancient reader saw at least two other questions that are

invisible to the present reader. As well as the question of "How?" that evolution addresses, there is the question of "Why?" and "What function does it serve?"

These two questions are very important, and are not even considered when people are only trying to work out the antagonism between creationism and evolutionism.

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

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

There is an Dilbert strip which goes as follows:

**Pointy-haired boss:** I'm sending you to Elbonia to teach a class on Cobol on Thursday.

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

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

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

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

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

Dilbert's mortified, "You're answering the wrong question!"

has some slight relevance the issues of religion and science: in my homily, [Two Decisive Moments](#) I tried to ask people to look, and aim, higher:

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

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

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

Adam fell and dragged down the whole realm of nature. God had and has every authority to repudiate Adam, to destroy him, but in fact God did something different. He called Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, and in the fullness of time he didn't just call a prophet; he sent his Son to become a prophet and more.

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

"Behold the man!"

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

Behold the man! Behold the first-born of the dead.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I wince at the idea that for theologians "boundary issues" are mostly about demonstrating the compatibility of timeless revealed truths to the day's state of flux in scientific speculation. I wince that theologians so often assume that the biggest contribution they can give to the dialogue between

theology and science is the rubber stamp of perennially agreeing with science. I would decisively prefer that when theologians "approach religion and science boundary issues," we do so as boundaries are understood in pop psychology—and more specifically bad pop psychology—which is all about you cannot meaningfully say "Yes" until it is your practice to say "No" when you should say "No": what theology needs in its boundaries with science is not primarily a question of what else we should seek to embrace, but of where theology has ingested things toxic to its constitution.

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

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

But the historical-critical commentary itself is like an archivist who describes in excruciating detail the furniture and ornaments in the author's office and the statistics about the size and weight among books the scholar owned in reams of (largely uninterpreted) detail.

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

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

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

The Glory for whom all glory is named,  
The Treasure for whom treasures are named,  
The Light for whom all light is named,  
The Love for whom all love is named,  
The Eternal by whom all may glimpse eternity,  
The Being by whom all beings exist,

יהוה,

Ο ΩΝ.

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

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

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

Lowered by love,  
Raised to the highest,  
The Suffering Servant known,  
The King of Glory,  
O ΩN.

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

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

## Monty Python and Christian theology

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

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

**Arthur:** Sorry—

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

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

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

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

He had, in fact, played the clip because it was something that he worried about: did God, in fact, want to give grumbling complaints about moments when my friend cried out to him in prayer? Does prayer annoy our Lord as an unwelcome intrusion

from people who should have a little dignity and leave him alone  
or at least quit sniveling?

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

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

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

There are many more benign examples of academic theologav:

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

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

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

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

## A journey of repentance

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

I have doubt whether academic theology will open the door of repentance; it is a beginner's error to be the student who rushes in to single-handedly sort out what a number of devout Christian theologians see no way to fix. But as for theologians, the door of repentance is ever ready to open, and with it everything that the discipline of theology seeks in vain here using theories from the humanities, there trying to mediate prestige to itself science. Academic theologians who are, or who become, theologians in a more ancient sense find tremendous doors of beauty and joy open to them. The wondrous poetry of St. Ephrem the Syrian is ever open; the liturgy of the Church is open; the deifying rays of divine grace shine ever down upon those open to receiving them and upon those not yet open. The Western understanding is that

the door to the Middle Ages has long since been closed and the age of the Church Fathers was closed much earlier; but Orthodox will let you become a Church Father, here now.

Faithful people today submit as best they are able to the Fathers before them, as St. Maximus Confessor did ages ago. There may be problems with academic theology today, but the door to theology in the classic sense is never closed, as in the maxim that has rumbled through the ages, "A theologian is one who prays, and one who prays is a theologian." Perhaps academic theology is not the best place to be equipped to be a giant like the saintly theologians of ages past. But that does not mean that one cannot become a saintly theologian as in ages past. God can still work with us, here now.

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

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

with treasures beyond all beauty.

Let us ever seek the theology of living faith!

# Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement

On the screen appear numerous geometrical forms—prisms, cylinders, cubes — dancing, spinning, changing shape, in a very stunning computer animation. In the background sounds the pulsing beat of techno music. The forms waver, and then coalesce into letters: "Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement."

The music and image fade, to reveal a man, perfect in form and appearance, every hair in place, wearing a jet black suit and a dark, sparkling tie. He leans forward slightly, as the camera focuses in on him.

"Good morning, and I would like to extend a warm and personal welcome to each and every one of you from those of us at the Church of the Holy Television. Please sit back, relax, and turn off your brain."

Music begins to play, and the screen shows a woman holding a microphone. She is wearing a long dress of the whitest white, the color traditionally symbolic of goodness and purity, which somehow manages not to conceal her unnaturally large breasts.

The camera slowly focuses in as she begins to sing.

"You got problems? That's OK. You got problems? That's OK."

...you got problems? That's OK. you got problems? That's OK. Not enough luxury? That's OK. Only three cars? That's OK. Not enough power? That's OK. Can't get your way? That's OK. Not enough for you? That's OK. Can't do it on your own? That's OK. You got problems? That's OK. You got problems? That's OK. Just call out to Jesus, and he'll make them go away. Just call out to Jesus, and he'll make them go away."

As the music fades, the camera returns to the man.

"Have you ever thought about how much God loves us? Think about the apex of progress that we are at, and how much more he has blessed us than any one else.

"The Early Christians were in a dreadful situation. They were always under persecution. Because of this, they didn't have the physical assurance of security that is the basis for spiritual growth, nor the money to buy the great libraries of books that are necessary to cultivate wisdom. It is a miracle that Christianity survived at all.

"The persecution ended, but darkness persisted for a thousand years. The medievals were satisfied with blind faith, making it the context of thought and leisure. Their concept of identity was so weak that it was entangled with obedience. The time was quite rightly called the Dark Ages.

"But then, ah, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Man and his mind enthroned. Religion within the bounds of reason. Then science and technology, the heart of all true progress, grew.

"And now, we sit at the apex, blessed with more and better technology than anyone else. What more could you possibly ask for? What greater blessing could there possibly be? We have the technology, and know how to enjoy it. Isn't God gracious?"

There is a dramatic pause, and then the man closes his eyes. "Father, I thank you that we have not fallen into sin that we do

FATHER, I THANK YOU THAT WE HAVE NOT Fallen INTO SIN, THAT WE DO NOT worship idols, that we do not believe lies, and that we are not like the Pharisees. I thank you that we are good, moral people; that we are Americans. I thank you, and I praise you for your wondrous power. Amen."

He opens his eyes, and turns to the camera. It focuses in on his face, and his piercing gaze flashes out like lightning. With a thunderous voice, he boldly proclaims, "To God alone be the glory, for ever and ever!"

The image fades.

In the background can be heard the soft tones of Beethoven. A couple fades in; they are elegantly dressed, sitting at a black marble table, set with roast pheasant. The room is of Baroque fashion; marble pillars and mirrors with gilt frames adorn the walls. French windows overlook a formal garden.

The scene changes, and a sleek black sports car glides through forest, pasture, village, mountain. The music continues to play softly.

It passes into a field, and in the corner of the field a small hovel stands. The camera comes closer, and two half-naked children come into view, playing with some sticks and a broken Coca-Cola bottle. Their heads turn and follow the passing car.

A voice gently intones, "These few seconds may be the only opportunity some people ever have to know about you. What do you want them to see?"

The picture changes. Two men are walking through a field. As the camera comes closer, it is seen that they are deep in conversation.

One of them looks out at the camera with a probing gaze, and then turns to the other. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know, Jim." He draws a deep breath, and closes his eyes. "I just feel so... so empty. A life filled with nothing but

eyes. I just feel so... so empty. A life filled with nothing but shallowness. Like there's nothing inside, no purpose, no meaning. Just an everlasting nothing."

"Well, you know, John, for every real and serious problem, there is a solution which is trivial, cheap, and instantaneous." He unslings a small backpack, opening it to pull out two cans of beer, and hands one to his friend. "Shall we?"

The cans are opened.

Suddenly, the peaceful silence is destroyed by the blare of loud rock music. The camera turns upwards to the sky, against which may be seen parachutists; it spins, and there is suddenly a large swimming pool, and a vast table replete with great pitchers and kegs of beer. The parachutists land; they are all young women, all blonde, all laughing and smiling, all wearing string bikinis, and all anorexic.

For the remaining half of the commercial, the roving camera takes a lascivious tour of the bodies of the models. Finally, the image fades, and a deep voice intones, "Can you think of a better way to spend your weekends?"

The picture changes. A luxury sedan, passing through a ghetto, stops beside a black man, clad in rags. The driver, who is white, steps out in a pristine business suit, opens his wallet, and pulls out five crisp twenty dollar bills.

"I know that you can't be happy, stealing, lying, and getting drunk all of the time. Here is a little gift to let you know that Jesus loves you." He steps back into the car without waiting to hear the man's response, and speeds off.

Soon, he is at a house. He steps out of the car, bible in hand, and rings the doorbell.

The door opens, and a man says, "Nick, how are you? Come in, do come in. Have a seat. I was just thinking of you, and it is so nice of you to visit. May I interest you in a little Martini?"

nice of you to visit. May I interest you in a little martini?

Nick sits down and says, "No, Scott. I am a Christian, and we who are Christian do not do such things."

"Aah; I see." There is a sparkle in the friend's eye as he continues, "And tell me, what did Jesus do at his first miracle?"

The thick, black, leatherbound 1611 King James bible arcs through the air, coming to rest on the back of Scott's head.

There is a resounding thud.

"You must learn that the life and story of Jesus are serious matters, and not to be taken as the subject of jokes."

The screen turns white as the voice glosses, "This message has been brought to you by the Association of Concerned Christians, who would like to remind you that you, too, can be different from the world, and can present a positive witness to Christ."

In the studio again, the man is sitting in a chair.

"Now comes a very special time in our program. You, our viewers, matter most to us. It is your support that keeps us on the air. And I hope that you do remember to send us money; when you do, God will bless you. So keep your checks rolling, and we will be able to continue this ministry, and provide answers to your questions. I am delighted to be able to hear your phone calls. Caller number one, are you there?"

"Yes, I am, and I would like to say how great you are. I sent you fifty dollars, and someone gave me an anonymous check for five hundred! I only wish I had given you more."

"That is good to hear. God is so generous. And what is your question?"

"I was wondering what God's will is for America? And what I can do to help?"

"Thank you; that's a good question.

"America is at a time of great threat now; it is crumbling

America is at a time of great threat now, it is crumbling because good people are not elected to office.

"The problem would be solved if Christians would all listen to Rush Limbaugh, and then go out and vote. Remember, bad people are sent to Washington by good people who don't vote. With the right men in office, the government would stop wasting its time on things like the environment, and America would become a great and shining light, to show all the world what Christ can do.

"Caller number two?"

"I have been looking for a church to go to, and having trouble. I just moved, and used to go to a church which had nonstop stories and anecdotes; the congregation was glued to the edges of their seats. Here, most of the services are either boring or have something which lasts way too long. I have found a few churches whose services I generally enjoy—the people really sing the songs—but there are just too many things that aren't amusing. For starters, the sermons make me uncomfortable, and for another, they have a very boring time of silent meditation, and this weird mysticism about 'kiss of peace' and something to do with bread and wine. Do you have any advice for me?"

"Yes, I do. First of all, what really matters is that you have Jesus in your heart. Then you and God can conquer the world. Church is a peripheral; it doesn't really have anything to do with Jesus being in your heart. If you find a church that you like, go for it, but if there aren't any that you like, it's not your fault that they aren't doing their job.

"And the next caller?"

"Hello. I was wondering what the Song of Songs is about."

"The Song of Songs is an allegory of Christ's love for the Church. Various other interpretations have been suggested, but they are all far beyond the bounds of good taste, and read things into the text which would be entirely inappropriate in holy

things into the text which would be entirely inappropriate in Holy Scriptures. Next caller?"

"My people has a story. I know tales of years past, of soldiers come, of pillaging, of women ravaged, of villages razed to the ground and every living soul murdered by men who did not hesitate to wade through blood. Can you tell me what kind of religion could possibly decide that the Crusades were holy?"

The host, whose face had suddenly turned a deep shade of red, shifted slightly, and pulled at the side of his collar. After a few seconds, a somewhat less polished voice hastily states, "That would be a very good question to answer, and I really would like to, but I have lost track of time. It is now time for an important message from some of our sponsors."

The screen is suddenly filled by six dancing rabbits, singing about toilet paper.

A few minutes of commercials pass: a computer animated flash of color, speaking of the latest kind of candy; a family brought together and made happy by buying the right brand of vacuum cleaner; a specific kind of hamburger helping black and white, young and old to live together in harmony. Somewhere in there, the Energizer bunny appears; one of the people in the scene tells the rabbit that he should have appeared at some time other than the commercial breaks. Finally, the host, who has regained his composure, is on the screen again.

"Well, that's all for this week. I hope you can join us next week, as we begin a four part series on people whose lives have been changed by the Church of the Holy Television. May God bless you, and may all of your life be ever filled with endless amusement!"

# **Repentance, Heaven's Best- Kept Secret**

## **Rewards that are not mercenary**

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

are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation.

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

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

Let me explain by giving some examples.

## Discovering the treasure of humility

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

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

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

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

This CEO showed delight and some awe in each person I saw

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

Now let me ask a question: who benefitted most from his respect at work (and, I can scarcely doubt, his respect outside of work)? Is it the ambitious leader, the low-level permanent employee, the timid intern? Certainly all these people benefitted, and though it was not so flamboyantly expressed, there is a thread of deep respect running through the whole organization, and some things work smoother than any other place I've been. There are a lot of people who benefit from the CEO's humility. But I insist that the person who benefits most from the CEO's aptitude for respect is the CEO himself. Others may enjoy kind treatment and perhaps be inclined to more modestly follow his example. But he is in that respect at least functioning the way a person functions optimally, or to speak less abstractly, his state puts him in the presence of people he deeply respects and delights in again and again and again. To be proud is to be turned in on yourself, and he has something better: a spiritual orientation that lets him see the genuine beauty in others. (And, to be clear, the phenomenon also plays out more quietly among the rest of the organization.) Humility opens the eyes to the beauty of others. It also has other benefits; humility is less tempted to meet bad news with wishful thinking; the CEO is, I imagine, as sincerely wrong as often as the rest of us are sincerely wrong, but my suspicion is that he is less wrong, and less often wrong, than if he were to freely opt-in to being wrong by freely indulging in wishful thinking. This is another incidental advantage to humility, and perhaps there are others. But I insist that the person who benefits most from the CEO's humility is

the CEO himself. And the reward for him looking on others with delight and awe is that he is put in a condition where he meets others filled with delight and awe. If that sounds like a tautology, it is. The reward for his seeing others through the eyes of humility is that he sees others through the eyes of humility: the biggest reward for humility is, quite simply, humility: virtue is its own reward.

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

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

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

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

### **The Crystal Globe**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Plants and animals command respect, and not just in the sense articulated by green advocates. Empty space itself is itself interesting. How? It is empty space that is much of the study of quantum physics and superstring theory. A great many physicists have earned PhD's, and continue to research, based on the physical properties of empty space. And, more importantly, the whole of God is wholly present in any and every empty space. In that sense, empty space in Orthodox Christianity is more pregnant, more dignified, than what an atheist would consider to be everything that exists. So empty space is worth respecting. But more than that, inanimate things, rocks and such, exist on the level of empty space but fill the space: "Blessed be the Rock" lets an inanimate thing represent God. It exists; it is something rather than nothing, and for that reason it is worth

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

## Returning from drunkenness to sobriety

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

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

They are:

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

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

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

Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet.

Bondage to alcohol is suffering you wouldn't wish on your

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

The virtue is its own reward.

## **Returning from covetousness to contentment**

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

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

The virtue is the reward.

## **Returning from lust to chastity**

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

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

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

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

St. John Chrysostom calls contraception point-blank "worse than murder," and counsels parents to leave their children brothers and sisters, and not mere things, as an inheritance. The Blessed Augustine blasts what is today called "natural family planning," and should be called "contraceptive timing", saying that the heretics who practice what is today called "periodic continence" to frustrate the fertility of sex thereby forbid marriage, earning [the searing rebuke about forbidding marriage](#)

in [1 Tim 4:1-5](#), and says that where there is contraception, there is no wife, only a mistress. St. Maximus Confessor describes sex as being wrong when it is done for some other purpose than making a baby. In my researches, I have yet to hear of any Christian teacher or canonized saint from the first millenium stating or allowing that any form of contraception is permitted in any form. For that matter, I have yet to hear of any of the Reformation offering anything but condemnation to the sin of contraception.

Biologically speaking, the beginning, middle, and end of the purpose of sex is procreation. Sex is not intended merely for pleasure, but each pleasure, such as that of eating (for which we have made Splenda), exists to continue the species, whether through procreation or preserving individuals by nourishing their bodies with food. But I wish to state something more than just the condemnations of contraception, because the condemnations are the guardian of something basically human.

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

But, before looking at monasticism, let me say that part of

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

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

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

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

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

The reward for rejecting the temptation to escape from the here and now is the discovery of the here and now as something one does not need to escape from. At an advanced level, one

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

## Moving on from grudges to forgiveness

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

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

*...and being blindsided by  
reward*

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

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

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

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

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

*Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!*

# Romantic Impressions

Robert A. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* drew a distinction between 'classical' and 'romantic' modes of perception. Classical is concerned with inner workings, with gears and levers that lurk behind the surface; romantic is concerned with impressions and associations. (It does not, in this context, refer in particular to romantic love.) There appears to me to be some similarity to Jung's 'thinking' and 'feeling' preferences, and probably to Snow's two cultures of the sciences and humanities.

As I start fleshing out ideas, I am at my grandparents' house, probably for the last time before they move out; I have looked around at the impressions and memories. What I realized a little while ago, with some degree of surprise, that my conceptual paraphrase, equating classical with what is deep and concerned with what lies beyond the surface, and romantic with what is shallow and only concerned with the surface, was mistaken. Perhaps it is a fair representation of Pirsig's book, which defines 'classical' and explores its inner depths, but does not explore 'romantic' much at all — but it is not a fair understanding of 'classical' and 'romantic'. The romantic mode of perception is also deep and is also concerned with what lies beyond the

surface; this is true in a way that a classical perspective would not recognize. With this realization came an awareness of romantic impressions I've had — impressions which mean something.

The meanings that the impressions hold to me would not necessarily be evident to other readers; for this reason, and because I do not know of an existing genre that serves my purposes, I am writing about the romantic impressions in a non-romantic (some would say 'classical') manner. I will describe the romantic impression first — or, more precisely, the image evoked in my mind — and then talk about what it means to me.

Or that is one way to put it. A slightly more informative statement would be that there are meanings in my mind, and they are represented by visual symbols and romantic images. What I am doing is recording the image, and then recording the meaning behind it and which is manipulated through that symbol. It may be a form of writing that captures nonlinguistic thought better than a direct enfleshing in words — and perhaps something will shine through the poetic images directly that is not captured in the analysis.

# Missionary's Kid Room

## Impression

A missionary's kid jumps up on a top bunk, sitting Indian-style, and is eating noodles with chopsticks.

## Meaning

One of the entries in *You Know You're an MK When...* says, "You worry about fitting in, and wear a native wrap around the dorm."

One division experienced by most people is a division between public and private. It is mauled in various vulgarizations — C.S.

Lewis begins an essay by talking about a bad sermon from a parson eulogizing the family as the perfect place where you can put off all of society's artificial restrictions — and showed how in the parson's case this translated to setting aside every human decency and treating his children in ways he would not consider treating a stranger. It is mauled in various distortions, but it is a legitimate distinction, and some people experience it more intensely than others. There is a public world where one conforms to the agreed-upon compromises necessary for a world of different people to live with each other, and then there is (inside a boundary) a private sphere where agape is still needed, but where there is unique room to be yourself (a cliché — and a

cliché is a cliché because it's true). The basic distinction is human, but **metaculturals** experience it more intensely; it is to us not simply a fact of life, but a basic tension of existence.

Finding another person who can pass through the glass wall is difficult; I've been burned many times. But I have found some people who can pass through, and it is a rich reward. Dealing with someone through the glass wall requires both agape and acting according to standards designed by and for people who do not function as I do — while dealing with someone inside the glass wall "only" requires agape. It is still a high standard, but there is not an expectation which distorts a person who is different and has not yet acquired a great deal of maturity.

What does "through the glass wall" mean? In the movie *Time Bandits*, the bandits are walking through a vast desert wasteland — and bump into a glass wall. It's invisible, but they can't pass through it. They have been walking for hours in pursuit of a castle, which is nowhere in sight — and they start bickering. Tempers flare, and one of them picks up a skull and throws it at another. The other time bandit ducks.

The skull shatters the glass — and through the hole, the bandits suddenly see the castle they were looking for.

What I mean by "through the glass wall" is that, after being burned numerous times in approaching people — in ways that I didn't understand were unusual — I have erected a sort of glass wall that (badly) hides those aspects of me that are alien to most people, and then pull people through the glass wall to something inside that is very different. By 'pull' I don't mean either force or deceit; I rather mean that I draw the other person into my world.

# Friend Cheering

## Impression

One of my friends is jumping along, her arms raised, cheering.

## Meaning

There is a certain quality, loosely that of being '[unashamed](#)'. If the above impression is of having a private world, this is the quality of being unashamed of it, of being comfortable. It is self-awareness without self-consciousness. There is room — not absolute freedom, but definite space none the less — to publicly differ from what is usual. This impression of one of my friends captures this quality.

# **VMWare**

## **Impression**

"VMWare: Providing Linux with backwards compatibility with legacy computational infrastructure."

## **Meaning**

If you're a hacker, any explanation would be superfluous. If you're not a hacker, this one would take a while to explain. If you really want to know, ask a hacker (if you know any), or appropriate newsgroup or mailing list.

# **Tae Kwon Do Demonstration**

## **Impression**

At an Asian culture festival, a group of non-Asians (mostly white) in martial arts uniforms gives a Tae Kwon Do demonstration. The head instructor steps up to the microphone, and says both "If you're surprised at seeing us at an Asian culture festival, don't be," and that they have taken the Tae Kwon Do tradition and removed its competitiveness and militarism.

## **Meaning**

The analysis on this one is a bit more complicated than most. I am not bothered perforce by the presence of non-Asians at an exhibition of Asian culture. What did stick in my mind, quite a bit, was the presence of non-Asians at an Asian culture festival who exhibited attitudes contradictory to those of Eastern culture, or for that matter of Western culture for most of recorded history. I mean specifically the regard for a tradition as something arbitrary, to be changed according to whatever the Zeitgeist is blowing. Environmentalists are fond of the proverb, variously attributed to different aboriginal peoples of Africa and

the Americas, that says, "Be kind to the earth. It was not inherited from our ancestors; it is borrowed from our children."

Members of a great many societies across much of history embody an attitude that could be stated as "Be careful with this tradition. It was not inherited from our ancestors; it is borrowed from our children." Jewish children grow up acutely aware that it would take only one generation of Jews to finish Hitler's work, to sever all future generations from the heritage and identity that has survived for so long under the most difficult of circumstances. This attitude, quite conspicuous by its absence at an Asian culture festival, is present in the medieval mindset — the environment that made cathedrals possible, masterpieces that (in the words of Jeffrey Burke Satinover) "are as impossible for us on spiritual grounds as our photocopiers would have been to medievals on technological grounds." The romantic impression is distinctive as the inverse image of something very, very important.

# **Traveller Addressing Servant in Servant's Native Tongue**

## **Impression**

A traveler who is visiting a house turns to a servant, and addresses the servant in his native tongue.

## **Meaning**

The traveler is someone of grandeur, and he shows this grandeur in the un-thought-of courtesy of speaking to a servant in his native tongue. Speaking in another person's preferred tongue — even if it is only with the twenty words of politeness — is a kindness, if one not often thought of in 21st century America. Showing this courtesy to a servant — someone who is looked down on and ignored when not needed — is a mark of moral grandeur.

This has application, not just in literal languages, but in entering another person's world — "speaking the other person's language" in a figurative sense.

# Merlin Unlocking Gate

## Impression

In Lawhead's *Merlin*, Merlin stands stumped by a locked gate, then as it were shakes off a dust of sleep, remembers his powers, and magically removes the lock. He speaks of "that which men call magic", learned from the fhain.

## Meaning

The meaning of "that which men call magic" — which for me signifies an incredibly diverse (non-magical) collection of skills, such as writing HTML, jury-rigging things, and reading languages (some computer and some human) — is a birthright of gradually collected abilities that is described for my temperament in *Please Understand Me II*. The meaning of what the fhain taught Merlin in Lawhead's book, "that which men call magic", is an intriguing idea which I will not attempt to reproduce here.

# Exception granted

## Impression

An authority figure starts to tell someone that a given rule applies, then remembers who he's talking to, and readily grants an exception.

## Meaning

There are a couple of specific examples — grandfather clauses, pacifists under draft. A draft board might not simply say, "Oh, you're a pacifist. Never mind," but they are illustrations of a basic pattern.

When I read *Please Understand Me* (reviewed in my [canon](#)), I came across an explanation that both accounted for my actions (in a non-insulting way) and made sense of my feelings. The SJ (sensate judging) temperament, which comprises 38% of the population, including most of the people who create and enforce rules, tends to believe that "Having rules and seeing that they are followed is very beneficial to a community," while my temperament, NT (intuitive thinking), which comprises only 6% of the population, could state its perspective as "Rules exist for the betterment of community and may therefore be set aside when they do not contribute to that end." The difference in perspective could be stated as "Rules are almost always good"

versus "Rules are good if they are helpful, and not good if they are not helpful." There are a number of times I have been in situations not anticipated by rules, in which the rules did not serve their intended purpose, and I was reasoning from an NT background that "If I show these people that applying the rules is not beneficial in this context, they will naturally make an exception." The assumption betrays a lack of understanding of SJ perspective on rules, of course, but it was appropriate given my temperament and what I did and didn't know at the time.

This impression is of someone in authority who looks at a situation, sees that applying the rules is not beneficial in that context, and readily grants an exception. It may be born more out of hope than experience, but it is a little picture of paradise — a paradise that sometimes says to people who are different, "The rule in this case was not created in anticipation of your situation, and will not be applied." And who knows? Perhaps some people in authority might read this and exercise judgment so that rules do not harm those people for whom they were not created.

# **It Doesn't Work That Way**

## **Impression**

A child expectantly asks an adult, "You'll make everything better, right?"

The adult sadly answers, "It doesn't work that way."

## **Meaning**

There are a number of things that are, in the minds of people who do not understand them, magical. Among these may be mentioned adulthood, exceptional intelligence, computers, counseling, and medicine. People on the outside have certain expectations. Children expect adults to know what to do in every situation; people of normal intelligence expect a genius to have perfect grades and never make mistakes; people want computers to have humanlike intelligence; codependent people want to enlist the counselor's help in controlling everybody around them; patients want doctors to always have a pill that will make everything better. Those people who are inside the magic circle can only shake their heads and say, "It just doesn't work that way." Genius, for instance, is not an immunity to failure; a genius will actually experience more failure.

It doesn't mean that these domains don't have power — all of them do. Rather, it means that this power isn't what people

expect it to be. Christ came as the long-awaited Messiah — and when he came to preach spiritual deliverance from sin instead of military deliverance from Rome, disappointed many of the people who were waiting for him.

With giftedness, for example, there is a common assumption that it is an automatic badge to success: perfect grades in school, and being better at everything. Not so; many bright individuals have terrible school grades (Einstein was failed at math), and their intelligence functions differently, so that they experience difficulties like those of a foreigner in a very different land.

It may be that, in dealing with a great good, we need to be open to its being good in a way we cannot anticipate — even if our anticipation of its goodness is what draws us to it.

# **The Nest**

## **Impression**

In Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Michael Valentine Smith is raised in Martian culture and then brought to earth as a young man. He experiences terrific difficulty in adjustment, but adjusts to human culture first in author Jubal Harshaw's den, and then explores the world on his own before creating his own nest — a unique place that combines Martian and human culture. Inside it, there is little clothing, and no need for money — but this is superficial; more deeply, there is a shared consciousness, a world that is entered when a person steps over the threshold.

## **Meaning**

Michael's nest resonates with me in a very strong sense of home. I do not have any physical place with the external distinctiveness of Michael's nest — a thief who broke in would probably think I am a boring person — but that is not the essence of Mike's nest even in Heinlein's book. It was almost a literary symbol — and people who saw through the external strangeness found an internal wonder, itself even stranger, that was preserved when the people in the nest moved to a hotel hideout. My nest, which I have just begun to build, is found in

part in scattered places (here, there, everywhere: in the schoolyard during first-grade recess; with the cherubim and seraphim; among the farandolae) — most recently in the dance class I have started. I wrote [above](#) about there being a glass wall, and my having been burned again and again after inviting people to pass through it (perhaps I did not understand how difficult it is for other people) — and I have found a few friends who have passed through it without me being burned. With two of them in particular (Robin and Heather Munn, a delightful brother and sister), I am now not intentionally building so much as living inside a nest.

This nest is a symbol of Heaven, and I will never before death be able to have it in full — there are times when I long strongly for it, and am a bit closer, but this nest has the same [fundamental beauty](#) as the Romance described in *Less-Wild Lovers: Standing at the Crossroads of Desire* — or a related one.

# **Holy, Holy, Holy**

## **Impression**

In a room full of men, one man challenges another. The challenged man rises and begins to sing the hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy." Immediately other men rise, singing, until the room is filled with song.

## **Meaning**

The song is a symbol of the Christian faith. It is something shared, something great that is common to many people. It is worship — that is to say, it is a touch of Heaven here on earth. The harmony among people — a harmony that is assumed not to be there in the challenge — exists in contrast to the classification of private, arbitrary beliefs, a sort of thing you can do as long as you hide it and don't make it anything public to be taken seriously. The singing is public and intended to be taken seriously.

There are other dimensions to be carried as well, although I do not recall them now. It is not an allegory, with exactly one specific meaning; the symbol itself is more ambiguous — it carries multiple meanings, the primary one being the one referred to above.

# **Annular Chessboard**

## **Impression**

A tall person in a black cloak sits in a large hole at the center of an immense circular chessboard, slowly, unhurriedly moving pieces in and out in an intricate and complex pattern.

## **Meaning**

This image is a symbol of genius, but not of my own gifts. My gifts mean experience of both spectacular success and spectacular failure; this image of genius is of a mastermind who has several projects in motion, giving attention to each in due turn. It is something I do in part — but this image is an image of perfection.

# The Mask

## Impression

A man puts on a mask and through it shows himself in a way that would not have come without the mask.

## Meaning

Some of this is hinted at in what I wrote about [my Halloween costume](#). The terms I have used in my own thought (though I don't remember using them with anyone else) concern a "standard translation". In the ordinary course of events, a person reveals himself in certain standard ways — which is not a straight copy, but a translation in which something gets lost. Sometimes nonstandard translations can allow things to be seen — good things — that are not shown in the standard translation.

There are ways in which actions which are on the surface complete fantasy, allow the presentation of things that do not have occasion to be shown normally.

I think something of this is common — acting is concerned not only with using the actor to reveal an arbitrarily chosen different person, but with the development and revelation of the actor (to those who know him) — but my experience of it seems more intense than usual. I was surprised when some friends and I were playing a game I made, and one friend pulled a card from

the deck that said to tell what about her she most wished other people knew, and she said that most people understood the things about her that she wanted to be understood. I had assumed that my intuitions applied to everyone.

# Argentina

## Impression

This impression came to me as I was listening to some Argentinian tango music, and gave new reality to something a church friend, whose family is from Argentina, talked about how it was the most European of South American countries, but the Argentina she knew of is a lost world — the country and the people are still there, but inflation and other factors have made a drastic change.

(This is what I remember from a couple of sources; it is not the result of research, and is not intended to be taken as such. It is listed here as a romantic impression from a historical situation whose full details I do not understand.)

## Meaning

Europe has more the symbolic meaning of home to me than does America, and a piece of Europe in the beautiful land of South America bears some of the romance l'Engle conveys in *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*. Its loss — the lost world symbol, or lost home — be it Atlantis, Ynes Avalach, Arthurian England for me, *Gone With the Wind* for many Southerners, and still other symbols for people of other backgrounds — is tremendously powerful, and those places live on as a memory inside people's

hearts even when they are only a memory.

Another facet is that my sense of self (my personal feeling? my experience of a universal human emotion?) is in someone from a lost realm. There is not too much external evidence that would suggest this — [my high school](#) has its own culture, and I can't go back there, and my excursions into Malaysia and France cannot easily be repeated — but the country in which I have spent the bulk of my life is still the same country and has not changed with any particularly great violence — a society that embraces change will be more altered than one that tries to preserve traditions, but there is a strong continuity. Perhaps it is a part of adult nostalgia for a romanticized childhood — as [Calvin](#) put it, "People who are nostalgic about childhood were never children — but the symbol holds resonances for me, and is reflected in other works as well.

## **Sidhe Nobles in Cafe**

### **Impression**

Two people are sitting in a cafe full of people, talking. That is what can be easily seen. What is less easily seen is that they are færie nobles, an invisible minority and representatives of a lost world.

### **Meaning**

This is a part of the powerful romance captured in the online book excerpts for *Changeling: the Dreaming*. It bears a romance of a lost world, but it also captures something of those who, because of their intelligence, have minds more different than most people would dream to imagine before having encountered them. It also represents, as well as genius, Christians in naturalistic academia — and probably other things as well.

# Double Weapons

## Impression

In a Hollywood action-adventure style, there is a hero wielding two short swords, or two small automatic weapons (the visual symbol varies). It is in the midst of an intense battle, but under the surface of all the chaos there is stillness, control, and peace.

## Meaning

This one may surprise those who know me, and know that I am a pacifist and consider glorified violence in movies to be a significant problem. Why do I include it?

In *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, a second rate treatment of first rate issues, Pirsig talks about being in Quality (the idea of Quality being similar to the Chinese concept of the Tao, as the book notes). He explains that this relaxed, peaceful state is not only found in meditation; it can be found in racing or heavy combat. I have not experienced this in sparring, but I believe it exists, and there is a powerful impression of a person who is in a situation of sheer chaos and hostility, but the chaos outside the person does not bring chaos within.

## **Boy chasing girl**

### **Impression**

In a room, a college girl dashes through, being eagerly chased by a college boy, who is asking a barrage of teasing questions. There are some adults who are in the room, and they continue on — one of them calmly sipping his tea — without anyone raising an eyebrow.

### **Meaning**

One of my friends, Ashley, has voiced emphatically that she doesn't want to get married and is not domestic. It's not that she doesn't like men — she enjoys men a great deal, and can sit down at a table full of men and not feel self conscious at all. She just wants to be single.

At one point, she was spending a lot of time with one guy in particular, and the two of them started to sit together at Pooh's Corner (a group of people who meet to read children's books aloud).

I waited for a good moment, and then put an arm around her shoulder and said, "So, Ashley, when are you sending me a wedding invitation?"

The look on her face was classic.  
(I'm glad Ashley's such a good sport.)

I enjoy picking on those people who are close to me, especially girls and women. It's a form of affection. Picking on can be mean-spirited — but need not be. I've heard people telling children "Don't pick on people who don't fit in," but not (except by silence and possibly example) acknowledging that picking on someone in the right way, under the proper circumstances, can be part of a close bond.

Inside the glass wall, **touch** is important, as are teasing, tickling, horseplay, and the like. I don't think that these are the most unusual things inside the glass wall — only that they play a part of the picture; they are part of the Nest.

# The Bozone Layer

## Impression

In a classic Far Side cartoon, there is a layer of stacked clowns hovering above the earth's surface. The caption reads:

The Bozone Layer: Shielding the rest of the universe from the earth's harmful effects.

This cartoon is funny, but in the way hackers call 'ha ha only serious' — it describes a truth. Our world is fallen — which means not only 'sinful' as positively understood, but at times positively goofy. I am a part of this, too — I do not see my own absurdities, as I don't see my own blind spots, but from all the ridiculous things I have seen in others, I would be quite surprised if I was somehow exempt from this pervasive human law.

There is a peace that comes from the recognition of this absurdity, especially after trying and failing to make it go away. It is easy to hold an unstated belief that "If I only try hard enough, I can fix this — and if I can't make it all better, I'm failing as a person." The freedom and peace come from realizing that the absurdity is innate and out of our control, that it can perhaps be made better through our influence, but that if we try our best and it's still positively looney, we can live with

ourselves.

The Son of God incarnate did not cause the outrageous things of his countrymen to snap to where they should be; he attacked the absurdity tooth and nail, and his countrymen killed him. That at least should help us to accept that God doesn't expect us to make the world anything near a perfect place: we should try to better it, and be at peace when our imperfect efforts achieve more imperfect results.

# **In the Wasteland**

## **Impression**

There is a hero who is powerful and respected, and has a fall — he is disgraced, his name made a laughingstock, and he is exiled in a wasteland — and forgotten.

In the wasteland — slowly, imperceptibly, not noticed by anyone — he slowly regains his strength. Nobody expects when he returns.

## **Meaning**

Perhaps the oldest recorded example of this impression is Samson's story, but I was not originally thinking of that. I was thinking of what I hope part of my own experience to be. I am in a wasteland now; I am not where I thought I would be five years ago. And I cannot tell the future, to confidently predict any glorious return. But I am in a sort of Sabbath, regaining my strength, refocusing, having lost certain things, and learning how to use other strengths to best advantage. The romance appeals to me; while 'education' commonly describes a first ascent to effectiveness, and 'experience' the slow refinement of skills as one works in the field, I do not know any single word to tell of regained competency after a fall. This image describes it, and it describes what I am trying to do now.

# The Royal Letters

My dear son;

About your last letter, all that you say is true, but the way it is put together is missing something profound.

You say, "Are we not royalty?" Yes, indeed, and there is more to say. We will judge angels. To be human is to be made in a royal image. The oil we are anointed with is cut from the same cloth as the sacred oil anointing prophets, priests, and kings. In English we can say "Sir" and in koine Greek the same word means "Mister" and "Lord." The royal gifts of the Magi, gold an emblem of kingship, frankincense an emblem of divinity, and myrrh an emblem of suffering, are given to Christ and in him extend to the Church. We are indeed royalty, and we are more than royalty.

Now moving on to your second question, "Am I pushing this too far?" That question from you has a guilty-feeling fear to it, awaiting for me to give the real correction. And my answer to that is certain. You are not pushing it too far; you are not pushing it far enough by half. You wonder about being addressed as Your Majesty, and it is my duty to inform Your Royal Highness of something buried in [the Ladder](#), when it says: "Some stand weaponless and without armor before the kings of earth, while others hold insignia of office, shields, and swords. The former

are vastly superior to the latter since they are regularly the personal relations of the king and members of the royal household."

You stand weaponless and without armor, and wish for insignia, shield, and sword. You do not understand that you have more and pine for less. And I long for the day when you wish to be addressed, not as "Your Majesty," but as "you," with no insignia needed.

With love,  
Your father, Oswald

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My dear, dear son;

Regarding the question you raised in your last letter, I would remind you of the King of Kings.

Two of his disciples, who had been training for years, asked for as much royal honor as there was to have: to be seated at his right and left hand. And he tries to tell them that he doesn't get it. He, the King of Kings, will never wear royal purple on earth except when he is mocked and abused by brutal soldiers; he will never wear a crown except for a twisted crown of thorns. He asks them if they can bear the sufferings of his kingship, and they blindly assure them that they can. Then he holds an example up to them and says that whoever wishes to be great must be a servant and whoever wishes to be first must be the slave of all.

What people miss in their quest for honor is the greatest gem in the crown: humility. St. Dorotheos advises people to build up their spiritual houses with all different kinds of stone: a stone of prayer here, a stone of almsgiving there, a stone of courage still there. But humility is not one more stone; it is the slime which serves as mortar and cements everything together. And this royal dignity is the bedrock that people miss hoping for royal honors, for something to feed their narcissism. Real honor is not having your narcissism fed; it is humbly rejecting narcissism. Real, industrial strength royal honor is found in the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and God of Gods:

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you,

which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If you want to know where the glory at the end comes from, look nowhere but the humility at the beginning. If humility is good enough for Christ, let us not consider ourselves too good for it.

Your dearly affectionate father,  
Oswald

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My dear son Basil;

Now I wish to show you a more excellent way.

St. Athanasios wrote of the dignity of man in *On the Incarnation*: "You know how it is when some great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses; because of his dwelling in that single house, the whole city is honoured, and enemies and robbers cease to molest it. Even so it is with the King of all..." Pay attention to how St. Athanasios proclaims the dignity of the human race! The King of Kings is the King for whom every King in Heaven and earth is named. If there is a measure of truth to say that man is the king and priest of Creation, this is because we are created in God's image, and it is the fullness of Truth to know Christ God as King and Lord. It is no accident and no error that the prayers of the Church address God as King, for such he is, incomparably more than any man on earth. Men and kings are as the moon with its reflected light; Christ God is the original Sun, shining in its full glory. If it is a wonder to know men as kings, incomparably greater is it to know Christ God as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The [Revelation to St. John](#) tells of glorious creatures at the height of creature glory: "And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold... The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that lives for ever and ever..." My dear Basil, you are a king, and I hope that Your Majesty can throw his crown before the throne of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Writing with deepest fatherly affection,  
Your father,

Oswald

# Science and Knowledge: Regenerate Science, *Philosophia Naturalis*, and Human Ways of Knowing

"[Merlin] is the last vestige of an old order in which matter and spirit were, from our point of view, confused. For him, every operation on Nature is a kind of personal contact, like coaxing a child or stroking one's horse. After him came the modern man to whom Nature is something dead—a machine to be worked, and taken to bits if it won't work the way he pleases... In a sense Merlin represents what we've got to get back to in some different way..."

C.S. Lewis, [That Hideous Strength](#)

Is it, then, possible to imagine a new Natural Philosophy, continually conscious that the natural object produced by analysis and abstraction is not reality but only a view, and always correcting the abstraction? I hardly know what I am asking for. I hear rumours that Goethe's approach to nature deserves fuller consideration — that even Dr Steiner may have seen something that orthodox researchers have

missed. The regenerate science which I have in mind would not do even to minerals and vegetables what modern science threatens to do to man himself. When it explained it would not explain away. When it spoke of the parts it would remember the whole. While studying the It it would not lose what Martin Buber calls the Thou-situation. The analogy between the Tao of Man and the instincts of an animal species would mean for it new light cast on the unknown thing, Instinct, by the only known reality of conscience and not a reduction of conscience to the category of Instinct. Its followers would not be free with the words only and merely. In a word, it would conquer Nature without being at the same time conquered by her and buy knowledge at a lower cost than that of life.

Perhaps I am asking impossibilities...

C.S. Lewis, [The Abolition of Man](#)

Put this way, Lewis is advancing the possibility of a regenerate science as a speculation, as a call for something that doesn't yet exist. But in fact a regenerate science does exist, whether "natural philosophy" or not, and this regenerate science is as old as the hills.

Let me quote first lecture material for a friend who is teaching interns about farming:

## Learning with your whole body

I'm assuming that most of you have been to college. Even if you haven't, you've been learning for 12 years in an institution that has taught you that learning is done with the brain, that it comes from words written on screens or paper, and that the way you show what you've learned is to write intelligent words on screens or paper.

Here is the first thing I need you to understand: out here in the garden, you do not learn with your brain. You learn with your hands and with your eyes and with your whole body. Your brain is involved, sure. But don't let it take over.

Don't separate "learning" and "working." Every moment you're in this teaching garden, and even a lot of the time you're working in other parts of the farm, if you pay attention you can be learning constantly.

School teaches us to think of learning as information. It's such a mistake! Yes, there is information that will help you learn to garden, and I'll teach you some of it—but if you don't learn it with your body, it won't be much use to you.

You're going to need educated eyes—you're going to need the ability to look at a plant and know if it's thriving, to look at a little seedling and be able to see in your mind how big it'll be so you can give it enough space, to look at a patch of

weeds and have a sense of how much bigger it'll be next week if you don't kill it now. (The most advanced skill, which I'm still learning, is looking at a row of green beans and estimating—from how thick the blossoms & small beans on it are—how much it's going to produce over the next couple weeks.) You need educated hands—you need to be able to feel, when you're swinging a hoe, whether you're really biting into the roots of the weeds, and you need hands that know how to weed fast and effectively, and how to use a pitchfork, etc, etc. And you need instincts, too—when you've just transplanted a plant, you need to have the instinct to check on it till it's established, same as people have the instinct to check on a baby.

And you learn all that by experience. Writing it down won't help. Doing it while being aware of it is what helps. Be in the moment, don't be thinking of something else while you work. (Well, maybe when you're weeding strawberries!) Get your hands in the dirt and feel it, compare it with how it felt last week, watch and observe the plants as they grow—and watch the weeds as they die! Watch how much quicker they die on a sunny or a windy day, watch how they re-root themselves even from a lying-down position if it's too wet. At some point it all comes together and you start to develop a sort of instinctive understanding of the garden as a natural system. I've been doing this for five years now—I knew next to nothing about gardening before that—and I have a sense now of how all the pieces work together, not in theory but what's happening in real time in my own garden, and it's such a pleasure. It has been such a pleasure to go from someone who learned things only with her brain, to someone with hands and eyes that understand my garden.

I know some of what I'm saying you may already know, but I still think it's worth saying at the start here. I've just seen so often how hard it is to get rid of the idea that reality is in our heads or on paper and start focusing on the reality that's under our feet—to stop going on what you think is supposed to happen instead of looking at what really happens. I know it took me a lot longer than it should have. I still remember my breakthrough moment. I was using the push-cultivator—which I'll teach you how to use—and it was a new tool for us at that point so I didn't know its capabilities. The thing is that when the weeds get to a certain height, the push-cultivator doesn't kill them anymore—you have to use a hoe. But I would push the cultivator on down the row and it would kill a few weeds and knock down the rest and cover them with dirt so the row looked clean, and I never noticed that their roots were still in the soil, and in my head I would make a little check mark—well that row's done. The next week, we'd be looking through the garden to see what needed doing, and there would be a bunch of weeds in that row again, and I'd go, "Wow! They came back fast!" and cultivate again. I still remember the day the little lightbulb came on in my head and I realized I'd never killed those weeds at all. I felt so dumb. That was the day I learned to look at what I was doing. Not just at what I thought I was doing.

And that's a lot of what is involved in learning a skill—not just knowing "how" but involving your hands and eyes and brain all together in the process, so that you can feel how the motion is working and you can see whether it's working—and you remember to double-check the next day whether it worked!

Okay, I have one more story. This one taught me so much. We had a temporary volunteer in the garden for three days. He was this guy who, if you told him how to do something, would look annoyed as if you were patronizing him or something. Because, you know, everybody knows how to hoe, right? Well, I got embarrassed by him being offended and figured he was right, maybe it was rude to try and tell someone how to do such simple stuff. I was a beginner too, at the time. Erin told us to hoe a certain section, and we did it. And we did it backwards. We started at the back of the section and walked backwards to the front as we hoed, so that all the plants we hoed up ended up in a pile in the next bit we had to hoe, covering the weeds there. The result was that at the end of our work all you could see was a pile of dead plants, so it looked great, it looked done. And the next day when those dead plants had dried up and withered away, what you could see was a section that looked like someone had hit it a few times here and there with a hoe—at least half of the weeds were still alive and kicking. The next day Erin took me aside and showed me how to hoe for real: you move forward, and you hoe up every inch of the soil, whether you see a plant there or not. And I've never felt embarrassed to teach anyone to hoe since then. It's a skill.

It's a huge mistake to think of any part of farming as unskilled labor. A skilled worker can weed about five times as fast as a beginner—if not more. Farming is skilled, complicated, grounded work that involves your hands and your eyes and your brain and your whole body—and at some point you may find it starts to involve your heart. You're learning something this year that you can be proud of.

(Heather Munn)

My friend is part of an intentional community and comes from a more ivy-like background; she as a writer was perhaps able to put into words what would perhaps have been water to a fish and perhaps too much "just the way things are" to readily put into words. Except, perhaps, in discomfort at city types who do skilled labor with computers and are above the unskilled labor in a farm... but wouldn't eat except for "unskilled" labor at a farm.

## Regenerate Science

But I am interested in this passage as a lettered glimpse into a regenerate science that does not do to vegetables what modern science threatens to do to men. It is not exotic: but perhaps it shouldn't be exotic in the first place.

Acting on plants bears no animistic or occult overtones or confusions, but it is quite naturally a personal operation. It is, humbly and naturally, sensitive to an I-Thou that never dissolves away into mere I-It. The regenerate science Lewis calls for is not waiting to be concocted by some genius of a bookworm; it has been around all along and remains (humbly) accessible even to bookworms like my friend.

And this regenerate science is not just the biology that is experientially known to a farmer, although I would be very cautious about too quickly dismissing this instance. True, it is a biology of very specific life and plants

I know something of Plants, if not near at Heather's level; perhaps I know more of things on the level of Rocks, having tinkered and created devices out of them, and knowing the language of things.

But there is something entirely appropriate according to proper, mystical Natural Philosophy: one's knowledge of a field is proportionate to one's participation in it. Simply put, Heather has worked a lot with plants and understands a lot,

and not a biology of all life forms or even all farms everywhere: but it may be an attribute of the regenerate science that one knows what one has direct experience of and not everything, everywhere. That locality is arguably a strength.

But to shift focus slightly: Lewis talks about not doing to stones and plants what modern science threatens to do to man himself. This does not in its focus mean destruction of the same in laboratory conditions: though the twentieth century saw lethal experiments on prisoners and 21st century America does experiments on human embryos destroyed by the use that is made of them. However, Lewis's point is somewhat more subtle: "When it explained, it would not explain away." He goes on to raise the question whether science "must always be a [mythical monster, with lethal gaze] basilisk which kills what it sees and only sees by killing." And the regenerate farming science with the manifesto above does not have a basilisk's gaze. Even weeds are not reduced to nothingness, or explained away, or reduced to being a thing that one holds in the head. Live weeds may be literally killed and reduced to being dead weeds: but even as dead weeds they are not reduced to being merely the playing out of impersonal, discarnate ideas that really exist only in scientist's heads. And the practitioner may be very ready to kill weeds, but in a certain sense she seems to love them in knowing them with a love that science does not apply to mankind. Psychology is what we now have as our effort to take an empirical sciences approach to understanding mankind.

while I have worked a little with plants and understand a little, and both are appropriate to the unfolding or natural way of the regenerate science or Natural Philosophy.

## Psychology, a secularized surrogate for theology

My MPhil thesis advisor, Thomas Dixon, wrote [Theology, Anti-Theology, and Atheology: From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions](#). His basic approach was to look at one concrete instance as an example of a broader pattern: theology being replaced by anti-theology which in turn moves to "atheology" ("a naturalistic quasi-theology without God") which is alienated from theological roots but is more estranged from theology than actively fighting against it. He writes, "The details of empirical science are atheological in the sense that a recipe in a cookery book is atheological—both are, if you like, just 'untheological.'"

The specific instance he chose was the nineteenth century moving from the Christian understanding of passions and affections, which exist within an ascetical framework and are understood in moral and ascetical terms as features belonging a fundamentally moral landscape in "pneumatology" understood of a department of practical theology rather than secular phenomena studied by psychologists who are [just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics](#), to Darwin's paper-thin understanding of emotion as discussed in Darwin's *The Expression of Emotions in Man and the Animals*, where "emotion" is not in particular about something or part of any particular habit, moving to the atheology of today's psychological

understanding of emotions, where emotions may be about something and may be part of a healthy or unhealthy habit (as, for instance, alcoholism), but emotions are not seen as theological in character (and it is not terribly obvious to those within how one would go about associating emotions with theology). Much prior to the nineteenth century, it is not clear how people would react to or translate a statement like, "Feelings aren't right. Feelings aren't wrong. They're just feelings."

Dixon, as quoted, says, "The details of empirical science are atheological," and his primary study in the article cited engages the emotions as developed in the category of psychology in the nineteenth century. Even though his point is intended to be an instance of a broader phenomenon or regularity, Dixon, like a good scholar, guards a narrow, tightly focused thesis for his article instead of a sprawling encyclopedia-length book. Dixon in his supervision of me encouraged me to read a book, Mary Midgley's [Science as Salvation](#), favored by one of my thesis reviewers (although, it seems, not especially foreign to his own interests). Midgley in the chapter "The Remarkable Masculine Birth of Time" talked about what I would call a macho, domineering rebellion against an older understanding of nature (you know, "Mother Nature") to be merely cold matter as understood by the Newtonian physics that was heralded through vile, lurid rhetoric and imagery of sexual violence to the woman, Nature. Either Dixon's actual focus of "from Christian passions to secular emotions in 19th century psychology" or a focus he didn't take of "from a religious outlook on Mother Nature to cold matter in Newtonian era physics" would be better than an article with a combined thesis of "from a religious outlook on Mother Nature to cold matter in Newtonian era physics and from

Christian passions to secular emotions in 19th century psychology," and Dixon holds on to his narrow, focused thesis and explores it interestingly and well.

The friend who wrote the above manifesto had earlier talked about trying to understand people. She studied literature in college rather than psychology, and there is something significant in that. One bank president commented that he preferred making literature majors because they made the best bank tellers; in other words, literature majors made the best tellers because they were the best at getting inside people's heads. And better, apparently, than psychology students. Psychologists may claim to be [scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics](#), but literature in its better moments understands the human person without aping physics—and so much the better. The motive of understanding people is not the only motive one might have for studying literature, but it is an obvious motive, and one of the more important. Not to deify literature departments—they seem to get dumb academic fads thirty years later than everyone else, where the better portion would be simply to abstain—but one of the major currents is a science of understanding the human person, and a science that has some of the attributes of a regenerate science that Lewis seems to expect something very exotic, only to be found in some faroff never-never land. But students of literature who try to understand the human person and fulfill easily half of Lewis's description of a regenerate science have been right under our noses the whole time, and include C.S. Lewis himself.

## The queen of the sciences

Furthermore, theology was once known as the queen of sciences. This did not mean that theologians are scientists; in that sense the claim to be scientists, and especially [just-as-much-scientists-as](#) practitioners of some other discipline, is very much a "physics envy" phenomenon. Dorothy Sayers reiterates that theology is a science, meaning for instance that it is the kind of discipline that has a technical vocabulary and it matters if you use the terms correctly. But she makes no envious or wishful claim that theologians are "scientists," and her usage is somewhat archaic. She does not make the claim, or even seem to betray any particular wish, that theology should be flattered by classifying it with empirical sciences like physics. The older claim that theology is a science should be taken seriously, but with it an understanding that "science" in this usage may be a serious claim, but one tenuously related to whether its bachelor's and master's degrees are 'BS' and 'MS', or 'BA' and 'MA'. The same kind of older usage of "science" is enshrined in the words, "We have it down to a science," which means "We have mastered some precise technique or skill to approach \_\_\_\_\_," and not in particular that it is appropriate subject matter for a scientific journal.

In my mind one of the greatest of sciences is the science of spiritual struggle as articulated in the [Philokalia](#). When I first

read it it struck me as strange; then years later I found a book it seemed all I had wanted to read. The best way I can think to explain it is that I liked, and like, books like Oswald Chambers's [My Utmost for His Highest](#) precisely because they contain some of what is concentrated in the [Philokalia](#). Here is the pre-eminent science of sciences; if one looks at the medieval Great Chain of Being of **God, Angels, Men, Animals, Plants, Rocks, Nothing**, we have the science of God, Angels, and Men. No discipline has a higher ambit, though literature comes closer than some. Physics is the science of Rocks and Nothing; no other discipline has so humble of an ambit. Biology may be appropriately called a hard science and may have an ambit of Animals and Plants, perhaps touching on Men: but I have never read someone flatter himself by saying that people in his discipline are [scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-biology](#). The envy is always for physics, and I want to ask, "Don't you find that just a wee bit embarrassing? Don't you appreciate an ambit of Men which you rightly study? Do you really want your study of Men to be in the image of physicists's study of Rocks and Nothing? Is that really how you want to try to mediate prestige to your discipline? Even a biological study of Rotting Excrement, teeming with life, would be a nobler and more elevated ambit than the Rocks and Nothing which physics exquisitely delves into."

## *Real Empirical Science*

I rarely, perhaps only in this piece, use 'science' as including theology, at least outside of a grandfathered special case. The older statement that "theology is a science" says something that was, and is, true. However, today the meaning of the term "science" has shifted, and using the term as including theology is liable to cause confusion outside of a historically literate minority, and I am wary of suggesting that theology is a science when I do not have the luxury of explaining what that means besides the obvious implication that theology is a discipline with mathematical and statistical educated guesses about how the world functions that are tested in practical experiments. And I can and do genuinely believe that the ambit of the [Philokalia](#) is the crowning jewel of the queen of the sciences, next to which there is relatively little warrant to call physics "science," but it would just add confusion to call the [Philokalia](#) excellent science without further clarification.

Further muddying the waters are the kind of claim that inspired one alleged theology article in my most concentrated course in feminist theology to say, [Theologians are scientists, and they are every bit as much scientists as people in the so-called "hard sciences" like physics.](#) The boilerplate, quoted word for word though without attribution (but also, perhaps, without plagiarism as few critics would seriously maintain that the claim

is presented as anyone's original insight), that practitioners of one's own discipline [are-scientists,-and-they-are-every-bit-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics](#), enough so that in my theology education academic theologians sought to include science to mediate prestige and would do what I would later figure out was presenting a journalistically-written, op-ed style article from "science" pages about psychology and free will as representing genuine "science" (I tried quite in vain to say, "If for whatever reason you want to claim to understand science in your theology, get letters after your name in the sciences, and if you want to include scientific findings, quote something in a peer-reviewed journal and not something op-ed—perhaps not the greatest emotional intelligence on my part and probably more intimidating because I did not make any effort at all to incorporate ponderous grapplings with science, and I did have the letters BS and MS after my name), it is not enough to be a gentleman and a scholar: one must also claim to be a scientist, no matter how much one's real talents may lie in other directions.

Some scholars, including some historians, attempt to use the term "empirical science" to un-muddy the waters a little. There is a legitimate distinction between the enterprise of empirical science and science-as-worldview; science-as-worldview may be very interesting to study, but it is distinct from the immediate enterprise. Secondly, the term cuts out the various disciplines claiming that they are [scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-hard-sciences-like-physics](#). It may take a rule of thumb that if the members of a discipline are claiming to be full-fledged scientists, they are outside of what is studied in empirical science. And I might comment that, for all the letters after my name, I've never read or heard of a

textbook or publication in the hard sciences claiming that its practitioners are scientists at all, let alone that they are not one whit less scientific than physicists. One may encounter quaint books like *The Art of Mathematics* which place mathematics among the humanities, or one may encounter claims that physics properly includes metaphysics (without the counterbalancing nuance that learning competency in physics as taught today does not now include learning competency in metaphysics). But the shrill insistence that one is not one whit less a scientist than physics is really nowhere to be found. Disciplines that are as much science as physics don't seem to suffer physics envy. And the use of the term "empirical sciences" whittles a very open-ended term down to the point where it is narrow enough to actually be useful for study.

None the less, I have enough foolhardiness to not only state that the mystical theology of spiritual struggle and growth is not only enough of a science that physics's claim to be science pales in comparison, but that the mystical theology of spiritual struggle and growth is enough of an empirical science that physics's claim to be empirical science pales in comparison.

## ***Experiment: A term disconnected from its roots***

The term 'experiment' comes from the same root as 'experience'; at the birth of early modern science, at the point where there was real contention between Newtonian and Aristotelian physics, an 'experiment' could simply mean doing something straightforward and observing what happened. Aristotelian physics said that heavier items fell faster than light items; Newtonian physics said that things fall basically at the same speed regardless of weight (air friction turns out to account for something, but this is a bit of a side issue). At that point it was practical to test one's experience, dropping a grape and an orange (or a pebble and a fist-sized rock) at the same time and observing whether they both hit ground at the same rough time or whether the heavier item hit the ground much more quickly. I'm going through the muddy spectacles of popularization of history here, but insofar as people were trying to test Newtonian against Aristotelian physics, there was a live possibility of using ordinary means to conduct an experiment where Newtonian and Aristotelian physics would predict appreciably different outcomes. And there can, in fact, be a first-hand knowing, in continuity with a farmer's practical biology that is known with the whole person, that a pebble and a

larger rock will fall through air at the same speed as far as one can tell with the kinds of equipment easily available at the birth of early modern science.

Something has changed along the way. Experiments now regarded as classic and relatively old physics experiments—I can think of the [Millikan oil drop experiment](#) and the [Michaelson-Morley experiment](#), are not, in any sense, matters of interacting with the natural world and observing in a straightforward experiment. I have not seen even a very arrogant physics student look at one of those experiments for the first time and say, "I could have done that." What these experiments instead represent are like **devious** hacks in information technology, where someone thinks of a clever way to trick the computer to do something that shouldn't be possible at all (like programmatically shutting down a computer intended not to allow any programmatic shutdown, by continually overwriting the memory physically closest to a temperature sensor so it would read a false positive overheating and shut down). The classic experiments are no longer about observing whether a grape and an orange fall at the same speed as far as you can tell; they are all devious hacks that trick nature into revealing something about its inner workings that you could not tell. And unless you are very wealthy you cannot do experiments on the sort of equipment private people can own; people do experiments at Fermilab on incredibly delicate atom smashers which are just barely adequate to do what physicists are trying to do. When Albert Einstein's theory of relativity was accepted, apart from possibly the perihelion of Mercury (when Mercury passes the sun, it appears to accelerate and decelerate because its light is bent by the sun's gravity), there was a time period of decades between when relativity and its experiments and thought experiments

could be practically tried out. [The twins paradox](#) was in fact pragmatically tried out, decades after Einstein, when scientists brought an atomic clock, which is still as precise a clock as the human race has managed, on board an airplane, and observed that after flying around there was the predicted clock skew against an atomic clock which had stayed on the ground. But absolutely none of the timekeeping devices in Einstein's lifetime were nearly delicate enough to allow testing the prediction made in the [twins paradox](#). And today there is a somewhat similar position with superstring theory: there is no way that has been projected with today's technology and resources to do an experiment where the differences between what superstring theory predicts, and what older models in physics predict, are anywhere near big enough to measure. Some experiments have been imagined, but they would require, for instance, more energy than has ever been produced in the history of the human race.

I am probably going on even more shaky ground by suggesting that the term 'experiment' no longer applies to significant physics experiments, but I think I can say that the link between experiment in the sense of a physics experiment, and experience in the sense of, for instance, my friend's knowledge of farming biology, is historical, etymological, and not live. Saying that an 'experiment' is something you 'experience' is like saying in U.S. English that someone who never drinks alcohol consumes 'liquors' all the time, as 'liquor', historically at least, can mean a broth that food is steeped with. There may have been a time when people saw 'liquor' as more elastic and naturally including both chicken broth and today's Jack Daniel's; but now one is apt to get confusion if one speaks of a teatotaler consuming liquor. And in the same sense the historical link between 'experiment' and 'experience' has been all but severed; precisely none of my

friend's summons to experience practical farm biology is an 'experiment' in the sense of the physics experiments I have mentioned, and conversely, precisely none of the modern physics experiments covered in my education constitute a way to have the knowing that drinks. We're really talking apples and oranges.

For these reasons, mystical theology is empirical in ways that physics hardly touches. Now I should give one caveat, under teaching as a persuasive activity, that at my high school some of the first experiments were intended to dislodge what might be called "innate believed physics" after science education findings

had found that it takes a certain number of contrary experimental findings to kill a student's assumed physics. And I remember that I had an "innate believed physics" and I did not want to let it go. So the physics experiments that set the stage,

so to speak, were chosen to give mystical, whole-person knowledge rather than simply convey ideas. But that is at least a somewhat provocative position to take in education, and it was used only at the beginning, simply because even the introductory

physics class needed to go much further than experiential "experiments" would show. Such experiments can create trust in

the physics being taught; but they can only teach so much of what was really intended to be a class that went far. And the further the class really pushed into interesting physics, the less it built on direct student experience. Now, of course, there were

experiences of some stripe. One manipulated things used in the experiments, and read measuring instruments, and analyzed the results, and returned to class. All of this is an experience of

some sort, class lectures and tests as much of the labs. But it was not knowledge arising from contact; the experience of reading a measuring instrument was irrelevant to what was being learned, and a teacher who asked, "How's your experiment

going?" to a student reading out an LED display would probably not be happy with an answer of, "There are LED digits that are red, as opposed to green, or dark digits on a silver background, and the background is dark, and they flicker a bit when they change. It looks kind of 80's. Also, the top LED is a bit dim, and there's a dent in the left side. Also, the battery might be starting to go dead." A teacher in the classes wants the student to see past the experience to whatever point of physics was being addressed; the farmer's practical biology knows by seeing through the experience.

By contrast, the knowing of regenerate science, pre-eminently present in the [Philokalia](#), knows by participating, by drinking, by experience, and knows with the whole person. The farming manifesto of this knowing may speak of knowing with the whole body, and get around to knowing with the heart, while the [Philokalia](#) may deal with the heart front and center, although its most concentrated attention to the spirit always, always includes the body. But they are two parts of the same organism, and the knowing in one and the other is empirical in the deepest sense, whereas by comparison, physics is knowledge by hearsay. In physics, even if what you know from your own experiments is experienced or empirical in the proper sense—a point which I am slightly reluctant to grant except perhaps for the sake of argument—a very large portion of your bearings are from the authority of other scientists. The physical theories one works with may be the best provisional educated guess as tested by the scientific enterprise, but the picture I was told of science being distrustful of authority, and mentioning two high school students correcting a calculation by ?Newton? and being accepted in that, is dodgy at best. In both theology and physics there is a great deal that is accepted on authority, but the

amount of theology that one knows with one's whole person greatly exceeds the amount of physics one has by oneself corroborated through experiment, whereby the knowing of theology greatly eclipses that of physics, and furthermore the kind of knowing between the whole person and experiments one has performed is one where the knowing of theology eclipses that of physics. Theologians can say that the sin of an idle word is in anything one says that one has not learned with one's whole person: woe to the physicist who says (even by analogy) that believing what one has not corroborated by one's own personal experiments is simply forbidden.

## **Knowledge is intimate: Understanding feminism**

I have another friend, Heather's brother Robin, who in every other context but one has shown good character and in communication been entirely honest and straightforward. My earliest memories of feminism were of having a sense that it was necessary for Christians to agree with. Later, at one point after some drifting and still assuming feminism was largely true, I was squarely sitting on the fence regarding egalitarianism, he came back from an extended visit with a male relative, and began a rather vile argument that stated in heavily loaded language that we should believe that passages in Paul that feminists like should mean as much as possible what a feminist would mean by them, and passages which the same feminists found inconvenient were problems that should presumably be dealt with as problems. And

I replied, in essence, "Whoa. Wait a minute. That's loaded language... Why don't you repeat what you just said with the language loaded in the opposite direction?"

Later on I would go to write my first little dissertation in theology as [Dark Patterns / Anti-patterns and Cultural Context Study of Scriptural Texts: A Case Study in Craig Keener's Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul](#). My advisor, who was enough of an egalitarian to be a plenary speaker at a Christians for Biblical Equality

conference, advised me to compare Keener's text, chosen as an example of highly inappropriate persuasion, with a feminist / egalitarian treatment that did not pull dirty tricks. The suggestion was wise enough, but both of us searched through Tyndale House in Cambridge's quite literally world-class library on the subject of New Testament Christianity in the Graeco-Roman world, and neither of us could find anything in a passel of feminist texts that didn't pull dirty tricks (though I found one properly feminist treatment that was a little less forceful in shady communication). The closest thing I found to what my advisor suggested was a bit of an outlier of a commentary written by a postmodern, secular Jew who commented on the New Testament text but did not have even the pretension of receiving it as authority or Scripture.

My reason for mentioning that is this. All participants in the conversation, across the board, try to present their case in as powerful a fashion and as compelling a light as they can. This goes for conservatives, moderates, liberals, radicals, monotheists, polytheists, atheists, agnostics, and includes Yours Truly. And if egalitarians and feminists **consistently and repeatedly communicate in a treacherous fashion**, it may well turn out to be a message that goes flat if it is communicated on its merits in a straightforward fashion. I do not say that feminism cannot be communicated without manipulating the audience: but I do say that I have searched for years and not found examples of feminism communicating without manipulating the audience. And I am concerned, less for the immediate affront of an honest and straightforward friend suddenly communicating in a treacherous manner, than a red flag for "What kind of thing, really, is feminism if people only persuade others of it via vile, shady, manipulative communication?"

But that is at best the outer shell of the knowledge I have gained of feminism; it is an intimate knowledge, a knowledge of the heart, a knowledge of the whole person. It goes beyond logical speculations of what feminism must be if it communicates as it does. And this heart has everything to do, for instance, with feminist fairy tales, on which point I realized that I did not realize how wholesome and true traditional fairy tales were until I had grasped feminist fairy tales, from the time when a group of college students who read children's books aloud chose Patricia C. Wade's *Dealing with Dragons*, a feminist fairy tale that like other feminist fairy tales is based on the realization that girls cannot be cured of wanting fairy tales, and so provide something with the external ornaments of a fairy tale that wages all-out war on what is right with fairy tales (*Dealing with Dragons* says, in a well-chosen dust jacket quote, something like "Once upon a time, there was a bad princess," which is at the heart of what the book delivers). I was moved to strong nausea when I tried to accept that that was what the group was reading next. Again, knowledge of the whole person. I do not say knowledge is primarily a matter of what you feel, or that it always or even often causes one to feel XYZ intensely. But I do say that this is within how whole-person knowledge can express itself at something that warped.

C.S. Lewis opened *The Abolition of Man* with an exposé of something highly problematic placed in a children's textbook to educate children; this serves as a springboard which launches into a broad-scale argument about morality, society, and efforts to engineer the abolition of man. However, it is significant that the concrete springboard Lewis chose was the materials society chooses to educate and inculturate children: the hand that propagandizes the cradle is the hand that rules the world.

In that sense, I watched Frozen at a friend's house (the second time through I sat through the whole thing), and saw tradition unravelling in Disney just a little bit more. I noticed with some distance the standard, formulaic, codependent version of fairy-tale love: it can and does happen that there will be a roomful of people of which the vast majority are emotionally healthy and two are codependent, and the two codependent people's eyes meet from across the room and they fall head over heels in infatuation and are convinced they have both found TRUE LOVE and enter a relationship in which both are suffering mightily and struggling to breathe. And, perhaps showing my insularity, I don't remember too many examples of Hollywood films, certainly not children's films, where a man and a woman make friends and slowly realize that they want more than friendship. Now I do believe that years of love in a family represent something much deeper than instantaneous infatuation, that infatuation doesn't last even in a blissfully happy marriage, and I believe various other things, but in Disney's Frozen all these had the spiritual shape of winning a battle and losing the war. I was left wondering how close on the heels of Frozen will come the Disney version of Brokeback Mountain, and was sure that the first queer fairy tale will be something you have to be a complete heel not to make a little accommodation for—and ones coming after it the claws will come out, the same claws that ended the career of a distinguished open-and-free Mozilla employee after it came out that he had made a donation years back to some cause in favor of defending traditional marriage.

Frozen intruded with a literal level on what is archetypal in fairy tales; the glimpses of the princesses guiltily snarfing a bit of chocolate were A DIDACTIC LECTURE IN SENSITIVITY. And Disney used the external shapes of codependent fairy tale romance

while subverting them. And on a literal level, a sister's hold and embrace wrought with deep sorrow is in fact more of true love, classically and analytically speaking, than an infatuated smooch. And could even be felt more, even if that is beside the point. But this is winning a battle and losing the war.

I tried, before my project was shut down by the leadership at Cambridge's theology department, to write a thesis about the holy kiss as my second master's thesis. I remember with irritation one point where my advisor, claiming to help me, suggested I narrow my thesis down to the differences between Jewish and Christian understanding of kissing in the Song of Songs. And I was irritated; I wanted to do a doctrinal study of a non-sexual kiss, and not only was his proposed narrowing down of my thesis not a narrowing down of what I had proposed, but it did not overlap what I wanted to research. And then the University decided two thirds of the way through the schoolyear that my thesis topic, which I had declared explicitly at the beginning of the year, did not belong in my philosophy of religion seminar.

Before that thesis got shot down, I read some very interesting scholarship, found out that the holy kiss ("Greet one another with a holy kiss") was the only act that the Bible calls holy, and found statements like "Examples of the kiss as a means of making or breaking enchantments have been found in the folklore of almost every culture in the Western world." And what I found about the holy kiss and its cultural contexts only made things stand out in much sharper relief. This isn't the practice in most of the world now, but the holy kiss was in ancient times a kiss on the mouth, and it is doctrinally significant that the kiss of communion, with which we kiss Christ as well as fellow faithful, is planted on the "gates and doors," the lips, that

receive Christ himself in holy communion. Not specifically that that is what we should do today, but there is something powerfully archetypal in the holy kiss that exists in continuity with fairy tales' breaking enchantments with a kiss of true love. And Frozen, which is careful not to disturb certain assumptions on the listener's part (for instance, that their-eyes-meet-across-the-room infatuation is TRUE LOVE, or that an act of TRUE LOVE will be a sexual kiss), left me feeling cheated. As much as I cared about the holy kiss as specifically not being sexual, the fitting icon for breaking enchantments in a fairy tale is not a sexual kiss, even though a sexual kiss between the prince who the prince appeared to be, and the princess, would on a literal level been nowhere near the depth of an embrace of sisters' love. On a literal level. But not on the archetypal level of fairy tales. And Frozen uproots a couple more pillars of archetypal fairy tale truth by "correcting" it on a literal level.

Sometime later, I wrote:

## **Barbara's Tale: The Fairy Prince**

Adam looked at his daughter and said, "Barbara, what do you have to share? I can hear you thinking."

Barbara looked at her father and said, "You know what I'm thinking, Daddy. I'm thinking about the story you made for me, the story about the fairy prince."

"Why don't you tell it, Sweetie? You know it as well as I do."

The child paused a moment, and said, "You tell it, Daddy."  
Here is the tale of the fairy prince.

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Long ago and far away, the world was full of wonder. There were fairies in the flowers. People never knew a rift between the ordinary and the magical.

But that was not to last forever. The hearts of men are dark in many ways, and they soon raised their axe against the fairies and all that they stood for. The axe found a way to kill the dryad in a tree but leave the tree still standing—if indeed it was really a tree that was still standing. Thus begun the disenchantment of the entire universe.

Some time in, people realized their mistake. They tried to open their hearts to wonder, and bring the fairies back. They tried to raise the axe against disenchantment—but the axe they were wielding was cursed. You might as well use a sword to bring a dead man to life.

But this story is not about long ago and far away. It is about something that is recent and very near. Strange doings began when the son of the Fairy Queen looked on a world that was dying, where even song and dance and wine were mere spectres of what they had been. And so he disguised himself as a fool, and began to travel in the world of men.

The seeming fool came upon a group of men who were teasing a young woman: not the mirthful, merry teasing of friends, but a teasing of dark and bitter glee. He heard one say, "You are so ugly, you couldn't pay a man enough to kiss you!" She ran away, weeping.

The prince stood before her and said, "Stop." And she looked at him, startled.

He said, "Look at me."

She looked into his eyes, and began to wonder. Her tears

stopped.

He said, "Come here."

She stood, and then began walking.

He said, "Would you like a kiss?"

Tears filled her eyes again.

He gave her his kiss.

She ran away, tears falling like hail from her eyes.

Something had happened. Some people said they couldn't see a single feature in her face that had changed. Others said that she was radiant. Others still said that whatever she had was better than gorgeous.

The prince went along his way, and he came to a very serious philosopher, and talked with him, and talked, and talked. The man said, "Don't you see? You are cornered.

What you are saying is not possible. Do you have any response?"

The prince said, "I do, but it comes not in words, but in an embrace. But you wouldn't be interested in that, would you?"

For some reason, the man trusted him, and something changed for him too. He still read his books. But he would also dance with children. He would go into the forest, and he did not talk to the animals because he was listening to what the animals had to say.

The prince came upon a businessman, a man of the world with a nice car and a nice house, and after the fairy prince's kiss the man sold everything and gave it away to the poor. He ate very little, eating the poorest fare he could find, and spent much time in silence, speaking little. One of his old friends said, "You have forsaken your treasures!"

He looked at his friend and said, "Forsaken my treasures? My dearest friend, you do not know the beginning of

treasure."

"You used to have much more than the beginning of treasure."

"Perhaps, but now I have the greatest treasure of all."

Sometimes the prince moved deftly. He spoke with a woman in the park, a pain-seared woman who decided to celebrate her fiftieth wedding anniversary—or what would have been the fiftieth anniversary of a long and blissful marriage, if her husband were still alive. She was poor, and had only one bottle of champagne which she had been saving for many years. She had many friends; she was a gracious woman. She invited the fairy prince, and it was only much later that her friends began to wonder that that the one small bottle of champagne had poured so amply for each of them.

The prince did many things, but not everybody liked it. Some people almost saw the prince in the fool. Others saw nothing but a fool. One time he went into a busy shopping mall, and made a crude altar, so people could offer their wares before the Almighty Dollar. When he was asked why, he simply said, "So people can understand the true meaning of Christmas. Some people are still confused and think it's a religious holiday." That was not well received.

Not long after, the woman whom he met in the park slept the sleep of angels, and he spoke at her funeral. People cried more than they cried at any other funeral. And their sides hurt. All of this was because they were laughing so hard, and the funny thing was that almost nobody could remember much afterwards. A great many people took offense at this fool. There was only one person who could begin to explain it. A very respected man looked down at a child and said, "Do

you really think it is right to laugh so much after what happened to her?" And then, for just a moment, the child said, "He understood that. But if we really understood, laughter wouldn't be enough."

There were other things that he did that offended people, and those he offended sought to drive him away. And he returned to his home, the palace of the Fairy Queen.

But he had not really left. The fairy prince's kiss was no ordinary kiss. It was a magic kiss. When he kissed you, he gave his spirit, his magic, his fairy blood. And the world looks very different when there is fairy blood coursing through your veins. You share the fairy prince's kiss, and you can pass it on. And that pebble left behind an ever-expanding wave: we have magic, and wonder, and something deeper than either magic or wonder.

And that is how universe was re-enchanted.

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Adam looked down at his daughter and said, "There, Sweetie. Have I told the story the way you like it?" The child said, "Yes, Daddy, you have," climbed into her father's lap, and held up her mouth for a kiss.

This story represents a mixed success, and it creaks on a literal level. But it is at least an attempt to be faithful to the archetypal level. And its heavy hand shows what the reader is cheated of in the *ACT OF TRUE LOVE* that Frozen offers.

## Winding Down...

There are other things to be said, notably that while feminism claims to promote the good of women—and, more recently, gender studies claims to promote human flourishing—critiques of them are not thereby assaults on the dignity of woman. It may not be obvious how one could be for the good of women, and not for feminist reforms in the name of the good of women, but those thinkers I am in sympathy with are doing a better job of being for the good of women, and the whole human race. "Gender studies" may well pat itself on the back for being the discipline that promotes human flourishing, but it may be closer to the truth to say that the targets of gender studies attacks are usually attacked for something that is part and parcel of human flourishing. [And that is true even if feminism arose in response to some genuine deteriorations in Western culture.](#)

Feminism is more than anything else the one force that I personally have worked to critique (see partial list of works to the right), and my knowledge of it is intimate, a knowledge of the whole person. C.S. Lewis described regenerate science as something that while it explained would not explain

- [The Commentary](#)
- [The Fulfillment of Feminism](#)
- [Inclusive Language Greek Manuscript Discovered](#)

away, would attend to the It without losing track of what Buber would have called the Thou-situation, would not be free with the words 'merely' and 'only', and would not reduce minerals and vegetables as modern science threatens to reduce man. I do not believe that my work as regards feminism is what Lewis had in mind when he speculated about a regenerate science, for the simple and boring reason that it is not science, at least not in the sense of empirical science, and I can only see contorted

ways of including it under the heading of 'Natural Philosophy.' I can quite directly offer my friend's words about the regenerate science in farming as a candidate for regenerate science; my own work as regards feminism (not necessarily other topics) has the attributes Mr. Lewis would like to see added to Natural Philosophy, but it only strainedly can be forced under the umbrella of Natural Philosophy.

But I submit that my knowledge of feminism is interesting. It has, point for point, all of the things Lewis said he wanted to see in a regenerate science that science, as we now understand it, lacks. And that bears a significance that would not be obvious from saying that the [Philokalia](#) represents the science of sciences and has those attributes Lewis projected in asking for a regenerate science. It is not just the knowledge of those things I most admire that have the attributes of a regenerate science. It is also my knowledge of those things I work hardest to critique that is an intimate knowledge affecting the whole person. This is not something that is automatically true or

- [Knights and Ladies](#)
- [The Patriarchy We Object To](#)
- [A Strange Archaeological Find](#)
- [Unman's Tales: C.S. Lewis's Perelandra, Fairy Tales, and Feminism](#)

available. One article Lewis wrote, [Bulverism](#) from [God in the Dock](#), talks about the fallacy of starting by assuming that your opponent is wrong and then speculating about problems in your opponent's history that would account for the defect. (Mr. Lewis does not completely exclude investigating an opponents' background; he only claims that first you have to show that an opponent's position is wrong through addressing the position itself, and only then may you investigate reasons why your opponent has embraced a false position.) [Bulverism](#) is a way of explaining away, and I do not believe that I do it. I may assert that specific feminist claims are wrong, or do not in fact help us, in an attempt to treat them on their merits, and while my arguments are certainly not perfect, they represent a serious attempt to engage feminism on its merits. Perhaps feminists' personal histories are relevant to the discussion, but I do not recall ever arguing that some detail of feminism is wrong because of some defect that I speculate exists in a feminist's personal history. I may argue that some aspect of feminism creates a problematic future: but I critique from what is out on the table, in plain view, not from my speculations about what is wrong with feminists' personal lives. I believe that even in my most serious and concerted critiques there is a personal and intimate knowledge at play, a knowledge that has the attributes that Lewis requests of a regenerate science. This makes the case more strongly that something of regenerate science is present than if it were only demonstrated that my knowledge of things I admire and most seek to emulate has, for instance, what Buber would call a sensitivity to the Thou-situation.

## Should "science" dissolve into "knowledge"?

As an undergraduate I enrolled in a "philosophy of science" class that I was in love with from the time I learned about it until the time I read the front matter for a reader with material from classics in the philosophy of science.

What was so off-putting to me is that it said that to say that a study, for instance, was done "scientifically" is a compliment, and go on to state that essentially science and scientific ways of working were standards for excellence in all disciplines, even disciplines that did not have the pretension of being sciences. And while I was very enthusiastic to learn about science as one domain of excellence alongside other ways of excellence, I was dismayed to read a text that established science as the paradigm example of excellence in any discipline.

The conception, cultural placement, and status of science we have is problematic. Sciences are today's prestige disciplines; but they are a way of knowing what is lowest on the Chain: Animals, Plants, Rocks, and Nothing. The idea that empirical sciences should be the most exalted and enviable disciplines is a bit like having a culture

Some people may ask, "Aren't you familiar with the increasingly prevalent language of the human animal?" In fact I am, but I take it with a grain of salt.

where dieticians mostly know the relative merits of eating Doritos, Velveeta, and microwave pizza, and do not really have much to say about avoiding most processed food, let alone eating Paleo. "Science" connotes a class all by itself, one that is better than non-science discipline, which is part of why some disciplines with a superior area of study, Man, try to mediate prestige to themselves by inculcating that they are [scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics](#).

The concept of knowledge, as opposed to science, is perhaps in a better place. There is specific knowledge of Animals, Plants, Rocks, and Nothing. There is natural philosophy. Heather does, in fact, represent a regenerate science that, however modest it may seem, fits the bill of regenerate science very well. But this regenerate science is a department of knowledge, not something superior to the regenerate science by which she also tries to understand other people.

And it may be helpful, instead of thinking in terms of "science" and "non-science," to think in terms of

I do not deny that Man exists as Animal, but I would say that Man exists on the plane of Man, Animals, Plants, Rocks, and Nothing, and though it is not to the point here, can exist on the plane of Angels and God. Man exists indeed as an Animal that moves and thinks; and Man exists as a Plant that has the movements of life, and Man exists as a Rock that obeys the laws of physics (for example, in the kind of knowledge of what physical impact the human body can take, which feeds into car safety devices), and Man exists as a Nothing that is not merely Nothing. But none of these, even

"knowledge," of which one department is the humble knowledge of a humbler domain.

Thoughts?

if the Animal plane comes closest, is a study of Man as Man, and if by "human animal" you mean that Man is studied only as one more Animal, I say that you are not reaching high enough.

# Rules of Engagement

**1: Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.** Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. A vacation, besides taking you somewhere exotic, puts good before your eyes: but you can do that here and now, without even needing anything exotic. Fix your gaze on what is most worthy of your attention.

**2: Remember that nothing can injure the man who does not harm himself.** St. Job the Much-Suffering may have suffered terribly, but there was only one thing that could do him final harm: his own sin, and he would have been lost if he yielded to his wife's temptation, "Curse God and die." St. Job suffered terribly, and unlike us, the readers of his story, he is never told that he has served as God's champion. However, everything the Devil did added jewels to St. Job's royal and Heavenly crown.

**3: Know that Satan is on a leash.** *People of the Lie*, in many ways a perceptive book, argues that evil is terribly out of control, and that is understandable for a psychiatrist who faces

full force a kind of evil in a profession where the very belief in a Devil is rare enough to be exotic. But God help us if that were the case; none could be saved if we were tempted as much as the devils want. *The Philokalia* talks about how, if we know what burdens a beast of burden can bear, God knows and cares all the more what we can bear. Everything that happens is either a blessing from God, or a temptation that has allowed for our strengthening; the concept of a temptation, rightly understood, encompasses both things that make sin look attractive, and trials and tribulations, or something where both contribute to a single nasty whole. In medieval theology that I haven't been able to trace, Satan is called God's jester, because his foolishness with us is something that God takes up in glory, and a glory that can work in us.

**4: Expect not to understand.** One author I remember said that Christ's disciples were not so much sinful as thick-headed. I would be a bit careful about saying that, unless I say that I am thick-headed, too. God said through Isaiah, *For my counsels are not as your counsels, nor are my ways as your ways, saith the Lord. But as the heaven is distant from the earth, so is my way distant from your ways, and your thoughts from my mind.* One British preacher (this doesn't work as well as with U.S. pronunciation) said that the name "Isaiah" is basically like saying, "Eyes higher!" And we are called to have our eyes higher, including in Isaiah, which has been called the Fifth Gospel and may be the most Messianic book the Old Testament offers.

To pick one example of what might be called thick-headedness for people who do not understand that "the prophet sees through a glass, darkly, while the archivist sees through a microscope, sharply," we have in retrospect that Christ gave decisively clear predictions of his death and resurrection.

However, St. Mary Magdalene came to Christ's tomb for one and only one reason: to offer a last, singularly miserable service to a man dear to her, by embalming his body with aromatics. She was shocked at the empty tomb, and the only thing in her mind was disappointment that someone had seemingly stolen Christ's body and was depriving her even of that last painful service she came to offer Christ. What had actually happened was utterly beyond her reckoning, but the Truth came to her: the grave was empty, defeated, with Christ resurrected beyond all earthly triumph. Much the same is true on the road to Emmaus, when Christ was quickening his disciples all along the way, and when their eyes were finally ready to be open to him, he vanished. Between the Resurrection and Ascension Christ was weaning his faithful to new ways of relating to him, ever beyond their initial reach. And even before then, he was trying to wean people off expectations of a political savior and an earthly king. He came to offer something fundamentally deeper than his disciples (or we) could look for.

I remember one couple who unhappily introduced their three-year-old boy as "an accident", and complained about how hard it was to live their lives the way they wanted with him in the picture. I wanted to ask them, "Why must you look on the means of your deification as a curse?" Having children, whether we intend what God intends, is an opportunity for self-transcendence, where people who have transcended selfishness enough to love another are now given opportunity to transcend a selfishness of two. We may see a lot of other things that violate rights we think we have, and wonder where God is in all of this, but God is present all along; some have said that he is more visibly present in hard times than times of ease. Even if hard times shock us.

**5. Love and respect others.** "Blessed is the man who loves all men equally," said St. Maximus Confessor. We are missing something if we say that some have given themselves to good deeds and some have given themselves to evil: all of us can make an eternal choice between Heaven and Hell because we are made in the image of God, and the most disfigured of us cannot completely exterminate the original beauty. All of us are constituted by the presence of God in the image. There is no shallow obligation to think the best of everyone, let alone whitewash sins. However, even when all sin is taken into account, we are members of the royal race. What sins a person may be rightly judged for are God's concern, and God has not asked our help judging anyone. What divine image, and room for divine transformation, may exist in the vilest other are ours to respect and pray for.

Children who have been taught to respect adults may be more pleasant for adults to deal with, but the point of teaching children to respect adults really is not for the sake of adults, but for the sake of children to be able to benefit from adults.

Ecclesiastical title and robes also don't really exist for the wearer's sake. Calling a priest 'Father' and the connected respect helps laity towards a position where they can benefit from clergy and their role.

**6. Don't wait on living until you have it all together. You probably never will.** Abdicate from being in control of things. If there is a term for being in complete control of your life, it is probably "Hell" or "Gehenna". The Sermon on the Mount speaks at length about being as the birds of the air or the grass of the field, and we, of the royal race, are of inestimably more value than plants and animals, venerable as they may be. There is only one Life: you're in Him, or you're not, and being in self-contained

control over your life even if you can achieve it is not just dubiously achievable: it is dubiously desirable because you want to be independent of the one Life. The alternative is to dance the Great Dance, or as the [Sermon on the Mount](#) addresses our much more basic interests:

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Do you think you can add one single hour to your life by taking thought? You might as well try by taking thought to work your way into being a foot taller!

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Therefore take no thought, saying, "What shall we eat?" or, "What shall we drink?" or, "Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all

these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Christ speaks and assures us of our most basic material needs. There are other and more interesting needs, the need to grow in the divine Life and be freed from domination by our passions. But Christ here highlights things on a more basic level: not only does God wish to lead us in the Great Dance, but he also knows we need food and drink and offers practical care on his terms. The one petition out of the seven petitions in the Our Father, "Give us this day our daily bread", is exaggeratedly modest, or seems such: "Hallowed be thy name" is an earth-shaking desire, as is "Forgive us our trespasses." Asking for just enough providence for today is in fact more significant than asking, "Set providence for my whole life before me now." The smallness of the request is like the Virgin's womb: it is more spacious than the Heavens because it contained One that the Heavens of Heavens cannot contain.

**7. Guard your heart.** The Fathers talked about the importance of working, and monastics have worked to support their own needs, or even made baskets that were burned at the end of the year so that they would not be idle. In ancient times, the preferred handicraft for monastics was basketweaving; in modern times, apart from writing icons, one preferred handicraft for monastics is making incense. In both cases, it may be missing the point to say that it is menial work, and monastics humbled themselves to do menial work. Though I have tried my hand at neither craft, the simple repetitive motions involved appear to be deeply meditative, a project of choice to employ

the hands while the heart is at prayer. Now monastics can and have chosen the worst that was available to them in their humility, but the constant basketweaving of the Fathers may have been a best known option to occupy the hands while drawing the heart further into prayer.

In any case, and not just for monastics, one tenth of what we do is external action, and nine tenths of the work is guarding a heart at prayer. Today's respected forms of work like computer programming may present a bigger challenge to do prayerfully than tasks like janitorial work that are looked down on, but people in either line of work should make 9/10ths their effort to be at peace and at prayer, and 1/10th the external deliverable.

Furthermore, we should beware of all temptation, which starts as a spark and ends, if not stopped, as a raging fire. Love keeps no record of wrongs, and remembrance of wrong is a self-torment; we make what was painful when we went through it to be present to us all again. In this case it may be helpful to silently pray the Jesus Prayer and attend to that rather than leave things to their course and re-attend painful memories.

**8. Expect a road of pain and loss.** Fr. Thomas said, "Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath." Christ's own comment cuts deeper into why: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

There can and should be other things beyond temptation and loss; God is good, and it's meaningless or awfully close to meaningless to say that because God is good any evil that could possibly happen to us is harmless. However, if we "Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath" and "Do the most difficult and painful things first," and

recognize that **we have no rights**, the very letters will begin to shimmer and change. If we recognize that we do not have rights, instead of seeing rights of ours that are violated we may begin to see graces extended to us that we have no right to expect. If we have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to our last breath, we may recognize graces contrary to these expectations. The pain and the loss are real, and we may be shocked at times by what painful things God allows us. But the journey is purifying, and the God who prunes us does so that we may bear more fruit, and with it a fuller joy.

**9. Observe Orthodox mystagogy, at least on one lesser point.** There is such a thing as a book, or a teaching, that is above one's present pay grade. Maybe it will be in reach later; it is not in reach now. There are classic books that open with exhortations to literary secrecy; far from an author today hoping to reach as broad an audience as possible, they say "Read this but keep it in secret from the many who would not profit from it."

This is not the same point exactly, but there is a much lesser mystagogy than writing a book and asking that it be given a closed circulation. It is, as explained to me, if you know the truth, and you know that another person will reject the truth if you tell it, you hold your tongue instead of trying to argue the other person into accepting the truth. I'm not saying that we're all really emotion and arguments do not persuade; arguments can persuade. This piece is in part argument, and it is legitimately meant to persuade by reasoning about the truth. But if you are dealing with a gay rights advocate or someone who is thoroughly convinced that Islam is a religion of peace, or whatever company may join them in the future, you do not try to argue them into a truth you know they will reject. When Judgment Day comes, it

will better for the other person because they did not reject the truth. And it will also be better for you because you did not set them up for that sin. This is far from the full extent of Orthodox mystagogy; some people have advocated asking a priest or spiritual father to pick out books from them for a time, or said that they weren't ready to read a book first but came back after they had grown spiritually and then found immense profit in the book. There is another thread of mystagogy in that monastics do not parade their mystical experiences for all the world or even all the faithful to see. Mystagogy is foundational to Orthodoxy even if it is pitifully observed now, but it still applies now in that you don't try to use logical arguments to make people accept truths their hearts reject.

There is an alternative to compelling by arguing the truth: compelling by living the Truth. If we embrace a Truth who is ever so much more than right opinion, other people will pick up on it, the same as if we fully respect the image of God in another person, right or wrong. If we grow enough spiritually, people will sense something. Possibly this may create a teachable moment; possibly it won't, but it will reach people's hearts as a logical jackhammer cannot. St. Paul advises believing wives to win over unbelieving husbands without a word; but this is not an exception to an argumentative norm so much as an example that is almost supreme in character. The basic phenomenon reaches from one heart to another.

**10. Read nourishing books in keeping with the Orthodox Church's character as an oral tradition.** There is a wealth of good books at the hands of the Orthodox Church; the collection of the Fathers over the centuries is like an encyclopedia in its length, and the Bible is indispensable. None the less, the Orthodox Church is at heart an oral tradition, and for most

Orthodox Christians, being patristic is not achieved by quasi-academic reading of copious books, but by being in church where the priest mediates Tradition. There is oral tradition implied by the written tradition of the Philokalia, which is less properly a book than a library with different texts at different levels. It's not meant to be read cover to cover, although that may also be permitted; it's intended for a spiritual guide to pull selections for someone under guidance. And treat this text, too, as written property of oral tradition; use it (or not) as your priest or spiritual father guides you.

**11. Banish two thoughts, and retain two thoughts.**

Abandon the thoughts, "I am a saint," and "I will be damned." Instead, think both "I am a great sinner," and "God is merciful." Repentance needs no despair; the worst of earthly sins are like a smouldering ember thrown into the ocean of God's love.

**12. In conjunction with your spiritual father, know your limits and don't try to be perfect.** If someone is harassing you, and both not responding and repeated requests to stop harassment are being answered with harassment, it's time to involve social media or email authorities, or possibly the police, or just block someone on Facebook much earlier. It may be the case that some superspiritual saint could serenely shine through the worst of the harassment, but that is not the case for you and me. We aren't there, at least not yet, and your priest or spiritual father may have very practical words about how mountains are moved here on earth.

# Seven-Sided Gem

This lecture was given Oct. 26, 2001 during the Midwestern Mensa regional gathering, at the Arlington Heights Sheraton.

**Introductory remarks by Dr. Mike Doyle, CEO and Founder of [Eolas Technologies](#):** I first met Jonathan Hayward on the MegaList about a year and a half ago. I was impressed enough by his abilities to hire him at the first opportunity, and he now works as a software developer for Eolas Technologies. Jonathan, in one year, did an independent study of calculus, programmed a four-dimensional maze, and ranked 7th nationally in the 1989 [MathCounts](#) competition.

Then he turned 14 and turned his attention to deeper challenges. He has studied at [Wheaton College](#), the [Sorbonne](#), and the [University of Illinois](#). Like many profoundly gifted, Jonathan moves among a wide range of interests. He is now focused on writing. He has been published in [Ubiquity](#), Noesis, Inner Sanctum, Perfection, and now Vidya, with [Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement](#). Please welcome him as he speaks about his experiences as a profoundly gifted individual.

**Jonathan:** Thank you. It is a privilege to be here; I have been looking forward to this night, a time when we can connect and share—not only through our costumes. More on my costume later.

Before I begin my speech proper, I'd like to deal with a couple of preliminaries. I have a slight speech impediment; I'll try to speak clearly, but you may have to work a little harder to understand me. Second, I'd like to review the seven points of my speech, the seven facets of the seven-sided gem:

- Metaculture: a term which I coined and which I'll explain.
- Ages and cultures: by 'ages' I mean different temporal ages, not how old a person is.
- Beyond the Binet-Simon: alternative approaches to intelligence estimation.
- Inside the glass wall: a private symbol I'll explain.
- A musing life: Do I mean a life that is amusing or a life that has musing? I'll explain that.
- Thinking inside the box: lessons learned from living among IQ normals.
- Mystic, Artist, Christian.

Don't talk about the things you're interested in with someone you've just met. Never mind that, to you, abstract conversation is a staple of acquaintanceship and friendship. To the other person, it may be boring, unpleasant, or a sign of unwanted romantic interest.

Never mind that you have five points of great subtlety and complexity. Pick one, and when you have simplified past the point of distortion, be ready for the other person to say, "Excuse me. Could you say that in English?"

Don't assume that the person in authority believes, "The rules exist for the betterment of the community and are therefore negotiable when they do not contribute to that end." Even if the rules do not consider your case, even if they end up hurting you, expect "The rules are the rules and I am not here

...telling you, expect, "The rules are the rules and I am not here to make exceptions."

Never mind that you can shift your culture at will, or that it is something you must do to connect with others. Don't try explaining it to others, and whatever you do don't ask them to do so. If you do, they will experience culture shock and react accordingly. Never mind that to you, foreign cultures are familiar and familiar cultures foreign. Don't try to explain this either. It asks them to do something completely unfair.

Be very careful in sharing accomplishments, or even things you don't think of as accomplishments, just cherished moments. To the other person, they may well be intimidating to the point of alienation.

Grieve a thousand wounds, but don't fall prey to the worst wound of all. Don't come to believe, "I will never connect with them, and they will never understand me." If you do, you will find yourself in a sort of Hell—not in the world to come, but here on earth. You will be in a Hell of isolation, an alien in an alien land.

They can joke. That's why you're frustrated they don't understand your humor. They can think. That's why you're hurt and upset when they never fathom your deepest thoughts. To those separated by the greatest chasm, is given the greatest ability to bridge chasms.

Perhaps it is harder than doing calculus in middle school or creating a language. It is still something you can do. That intellect that leaves people dazed is the intellect you can use to communicate—connect—in ways that aren't open to them. That burning intensity that's gotten you into so much trouble can put fire in your friendships such as many of your friends would never have otherwise known. That unique inner world, that you've closed the doors to, after being burned time and time again, is a

place you may learn to draw people into. I cannot tell you how, but with a lot of hard work, a lot of patience, a lot of humility, a lot of forgiveness given and received, you may come to a point of synergy past the point where you wished you were not quite so gifted.

An anthropologist at this point might make the case that there is an unbridgeable chasm between the already very bright minds associated with Mensa, and the severely gifted. I'd rather say something different. I'd rather say the severely gifted experience is a crystallization of many things that make the Mensa experience distinctive, and there is a common bond of giftedness as well as the bond of being human. I'd rather say that what gap does exist is one that can be bridged. That is the premise this whole talk is based on.

A much better speaker than I am might be able to explain, in the abstract and in entirety, what the inner world and experience of the severely gifted is like. I can't do that, but I have my sights set on a much more modest goal: to share something of my own inner world and experience, and light a candle of illumination.

When I was a student at Wheaton College, there was a chapel where students lined up and shared some of the, ahem, interesting questions they'd been asked: "You grew up in Japan? Say something in Chinese!" "Say something in African!" "What did it feel like growing up in Finland?" (Uh, I don't know. Slight tingling sensation around the toes?) The chapel was given by missionary's kids/third culture kids, sometimes abbreviated MK/TCK. A third culture kid is a kid who grows up surrounded by one host culture—let us say, blue—to parents who belong to another culture—let us say, yellow. They are neither properly blue nor properly yellow, but create a third culture that draws on

both. This is not a simple average of the two cultures; there are common similarities, whether it's a U.S. kid growing up in Kenya, or a Japanese growing up in the U.S. It is a different mode of experience, a different way of being human. Third culture kids tend to have a tremendous ability to adapt to new cultures, but at times a cost: the price of never being completely at home in a culture, as a fish in water. When I heard that chapel, I said,  
"That's me!"

It is the characteristic of very creative minds to hit a very large nail not quite on the head. I am not literally a third culture kid; by the time I heard that chapel, I had not lived abroad. There was something deep that resonated, however. The best way I can describe it is that a third culture kid creates a third culture after being shaped by the outer forces of the host culture on one hand and his parents on the other, and a severely gifted individual is shaped by the outer forces of an IQ-normal world and an inner world from a different kind of mind: the higher you go on the IQ spectrum, there is less and less more of the same intelligence, and more and more of a different kind of intelligence altogether. I coined the term 'metaculture' to refer to the commonality of experience, a way of not ever being in a culture as a fish is in water. It brings pain, a sense of never fitting in, and at the same time a freedom from some of the blindnesses others can't escape.

In talking about cultures, I'm hesitant to say that they've left an imprint on me, because the metaphor is deficient. It evokes an image of an active, solid, definite culture that leaves a mark on hot wax which is simply there to receive an imprint. The truth is much more interesting: the cultures are themselves, yes, but I am actively drawing, discerning, seeing what in them is of interest to me and can be drawn into myself. Anyone who knows

cultures knows that conveying even one culture in five hours is impossible; I hope not to convey the cultures I visited, so much as give a sense of what sort of thing is interesting.

The summer after that chapel, I lived in Malaysia. My father spent the year teaching, and the rest of the family lived there. I got to spend the summer. I understand why my Mom said it was the best year of her life.

In American culture, there is always a clock tick-tick-ticking. It's not just there when you look down at your watch; it may be more present when you're not looking: when you're visiting your friend and distracted with twenty other things to do that day, or on the road where you move faster than any human athlete can run, and one second's needless delay is one second's torment. In Malaysia, the clock's constant ticking stops. This is not unique to Malaysia; those of you familiar with African cultures, or Latin American, will know something similar, but it is at any rate different from the U.S. It's not exactly true that the Malaysians perceive time slowly where we perceive it quickly, as that the U.S. is conscious of time where Malaysians are conscious of other things. I have continued to shape my sense of time after leaving Malaysia, and come to focus not on time but on people, creation, and some work. If I try to spend a half an hour on my third novel, what will dominate is the half hour, not the novel; I try to give focused presence to what I am doing now and not have a clock cut up my emotions. It is a tremendous boon in writing, or being with people. I try to keep enough of an American time sense to not be needlessly rude by being late to appointments, but on the inside I seek a different time, and I believe my friendships and my creations are the better for it. Dost thou love life? Then do not quantize time, for numbers are not the stuff life's made of.

Some time after that, I studied in Paris at the [Sorbonne](#). It was a wonderful time; part of my heart is still there. During my time as a student, I acquired a taste for alcohol. One thing I realized rather quickly is that five ounces of wine is not much. If I had a glass of wine with dinner and tossed it back after my first bites, I could have another... and another... and another... and become rather quickly inebriated. Or I could simply not have any more wine. Or—there is an alternative—I could sip my wine, savor it.

In doing that, I tasted wine as I had not tasted any beverage before. Because there was so little, I learned to be present and enjoy much more than absently having a hazy awareness that something I liked was passing through my mouth. My absent awareness of sodas was not a bad thing; one thing I learned upon returning is that American soft drinks are not intended to be consumed that way. If you sip a small glass of Mountain Dew, you will soon learn that Mountain Dew isn't meant to be so sipped. I learned to be present, not just to wine and non-alcoholic beverages like fruit drinks and Mocha, but also to food, and to a much broader circle. If I am in a public place, and music I like comes across the air, it is transient; it is fleeting. I cannot make it last any longer, but I can be present to it in the short time it does last. When a friend comes from out of town, in all likelihood her visit will be over before it has begun—but I can be present in that time as well. This presence has added something to my life complimentary to the time sense I acquired from Malaysia.

What's the last culture? One that will take a bit more explaining, as I have to swim upstream against more than one thread of American culture. What is it that I have to swim up against? "This is an idea whose time has come." "It's the wave of

the future." "We're entering the third millenium."

If I were to speak of "an idea whose time has come, and gone," or "the wave of the past," it would be less clear that I was speaking a compliment. If I were to say, in the most reverent of tones, "We're standing at the forty-second latitude and eighty-seventh longitude.", you'd have every right to accuse me of a non sequitur. I believe that "We're entering the third millenium." is also a non sequitur, even though it is spoken as a statement of great significance.

There are two ideas closely intertwined: the doctrine of progress, which says we are better, nobler, wiser people than those who came before—a temporal version of ethnocentrism, which says that ideas like machines grow rust and need to be replaced—and period awareness, which goes beyond the historicist observation that all of us, past and present, exist in a historical-cultural context and are affected by it; period awareness fixes an unbridgeable chasm between the people who walked before and us; they are in a hermetically sealed box. The net respect is to believe that the peoples of the past cannot talk with us: we can point out how they were less enlightened times, but they certainly cannot criticize us.

My second novel, [Firestorm 2034](#), is the story of a medieval in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. In the course of researching medieval culture, thinking about it, and trying to convey it, it left a mark on me in many ways similar to Malaysia and France. Mark Twain's [A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court](#) is a masterpiece of humor that is often mistaken for a reasonable treatment of medieval culture; my novel reverses it in more ways than one. Not only is it a medieval in America, but more deeply I reject the belief that the most significant difference between the medievals and us is that we have better technology. There is a

wealth of culture and wisdom that has been largely lost.

What is one such area? The present issue of [My Generation](#), the magazine of the [American Association of Retired Persons](#), has a cover story about "Jeff Bridges: Beautiful Dreamer." On the cover, he has black hair tinged with silver, although I would forgive you if you glanced and said it was brown. It's a few inches longer than mine. He's curled up, slouching, with his arms over his knees, wearing faded jeans, white socks, and tennis shoes. The man looks like a teenager. This is not an accident. I have never seen a [My Generation](#) cover with a woman who looks old enough to be admitted to the [AARP](#), and when I first saw that periodical, I mistook it for a *GenX* magazine.

Why? The core idea is that there is a short period of glory—I'll say from fifteen to twenty-five years, although some of you might place the beginning and end a little differently—and before that point, you're only a child, meaning curiously enough that you don't have access to adult pleasures; you can't drink, you can't drive—and after that point, you're a has-been. This message is ubiquitous, present not only in children's TV shows but equally in a magazine for retired people. And, in a certain manner, it makes perfect sense.

It makes perfect sense if there is nothing more to have in life than physical pleasure. Before fifteen, you can't acquire as much pleasure as someone with adult resources; after twenty-five, your capacity for youthful pleasure diminishes. And so, if one starts by assuming that the whole point of life is to have pleasure, that the point of science is to create a Utopia of spoiled children, then it follows quite simply that a child is nothing much and someone past the age of thirty is a has-been.

It follows quite simply for us, but the medievals saw it differently.

The medievals believed that the entire purpose of this life is as a preparation, an apprenticeship, a beginning, to an eternity gazing on God's glory. It means that, even in this life, there is infinitely more to seek than physical pleasure. There is more to desire. There is virtue, both earthly, natural virtues, and the merry, heavenly, deiform virtues. One can begin to be a heavenly person, enjoy Heaven's joys, and know God.

The words, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die," voice a pessimistic philosophy: enjoy pleasure because there's nothing more and we have a grim life. The medieval view sought much more than pleasure, and in following it, I want to grow more. I don't believe I'm leaving the time when I can enjoy the only good in life, pleasure. I believe I have different fruits in season coming. Some people dread their thirtieth birthday. I'm looking forward to it. I'm looking forward to turning thirty, forty, fifty, to when my hair turns tweed and then white. I'm looking forward to growing in wisdom: the interesting part of my life isn't ending, but just beginning.

What about intelligence testing? I like Madeleine l'Engle's [A Wind in the Door](#); it's a children's book with a little boy, Charles Wallace, whose IQ is "so high it's untestable by normal means." I like the story and Charles Wallace; I identify with him, and in reference to that passage began to wish the same were true of me, that my IQ were so high it was untestable by normal means. I even tried to convince myself, in moments of pride, that this was true.

It came as a great disappointment to learn not only was this literally true, that my IQ was literally so high as to be untestable by normal means, but that the threshold was so low. If the authors of the Binet-Simon test, paradigm example of the good IQ test, were to be told, "This test you've made, doesn't

really distinguish average from below average, but shows a remarkably fine discrimination at the upper strata of human intelligence," they would have regarded the test as a failure, pure and simple. The Binet-Simon test is a test for inferiority. Sources I've seen differ as to why; one gently states that it was meant to identify special needs people and give them that extra boost of special education they need to function in life. Another says, less charitably, that it's to identify certain people as inferior: exclude them; stop 'wasting' resources on them. In either case, it is less than clear to me that this is the model of test for organizations like Mensa.

Some other high-IQ societies use an adjusted model of test, where they take off the time limit, because they recognize that rushing people doesn't get best behavior, and put all the problems on anabolic steroids. This can probably boost the ceiling a little, but it has its own problems. It's a bit like taking an office where work isn't getting done, and making everybody work twenty more hours a week: if work isn't getting done, five more hours might help a little, but twenty won't fix the problem. Howard Gardner, multiple intelligence theorist, spends most of [Extraordinary Minds](#) arguing for a multiplicity of genius; in the beginning, he asks if there's anything common to all kinds of genius, and says, yes, he'd identify three things:

- There is some domain of performance.
- There is a community that appreciates the genius's performance in this domain.
- Failures.

According to Gardner, a genius fails more, and more spectacularly, than an average person.

This notwithstanding, if you're trying to get into [Mega Society East](#), what counts on the test is not what you get right; it's what you get wrong. It's not the absolutely brilliant answers you had to questions two, five, and seven; it's the fact that you missed something on questions one, four, and nine. Given the cognitive diversity at the upper end of the spectrum, there are limitations to even high-ceiling tests.

Is there any alternative? I would say yes, and I believe a hint of it comes from a story about a high school physics student. After the unit covering air pressure, the teacher wrote on an exam, "Explain how to use a barometer to determine the height of a tall building." The student wrote, "Tie a rope around the barometer, lower it from the top of the building until it hits the ground, make a mark on the rope, pull it up, and measure the length of the rope. (There are other ways of doing this.)"

This put the teacher in a bit of a bind. He called in one of his colleagues, and explained what had happened. The colleague said, "In a way that demonstrates your knowledge of physics, explain how to use a barometer to determine the height of a tall building." The student said, "Go to the top of the building with a barometer and a stopwatch. Drop the barometer, and measure the time before the barometer splatters on the ground beneath. Then use the formula  $y = \frac{1}{2} at^2$  to calculate the height of the building." The teachers conferred and gave him almost full credit.

The teacher asked what some of the other ways were: "Go outside on a sunny day, and measure the height of the barometer, the length of the barometer's shadow, and the length of the building's shadows, and use ratios to determine the height of the building." "This probably isn't the best way, but go into the basement, knock on the superintendent's door, and say,

'Mr. Superintendent! I have a fine barometer for you if you will only tell me the height of the building!'"

What this story screams out to me is not just that the student is bright enough that he could see the desired answer about calculating from the difference in air pressure. I'm positive of that. It's not just that he could give several alternate approaches. It's that he would. It's that he behaved like a gifted mind does when it's been completely insulted.

That gives a hint of an indirect approach: don't try IQ-normal-style cognitive strain questions, but look for a very different kind of thinking, and the effects of living in a world where most other people are two, three, four, five sigma below you. I wrote up the basic ideas, and e-mailed Paul Cooijmans, head of Giga and [Glia](#). He suggested I start my own high-IQ society. I thought that was a little more ambitious than I wanted to take on now, but I did create a test. I wrote it up, gave it to heads of some high-IQ societies to distribute, received very kind responses from Gina LoSasso of the [Mega Foundation](#) and Nik Lygeros of the Pi Society... and have gotten two tests filled out, which I haven't looked at because I want to read them together. The test may turn out to be nothing more than an interesting fizzle. Even then, I thought it might be interesting enough to share.

What about the glass wall? The symbol relates to me to three layers, or levels, of maturity in dealing with others. The first layer is not recognizing there is a difference. In childhood, even when I scored high in the MathCounts competition, I might have realized there was something called intelligence and I had more of it, but not that I thought all that differently: I treated others as if they were the same as me underneath. That is a

recipe for giving and receiving hurt.

When I finally let myself see that there were differences, I tried to fit in through blending in. In the short run, that's much better; there are far fewer incidents. Over time, it costs—the cost of a false self. There were some things in myself I wasn't showing anyone, not even myself.

After that, I began to erect a glass wall about myself, something that would keep things out of view before I was confident people were ready, but not permanently—and would let me draw others in. I don't think this is a final resting place—in fact, I'm almost positive it isn't—but it seems a definite step ahead of the other two steps.

What's inside the glass wall? Much of this speech hints at things inside the glass wall, but I'd like to give one concrete example.

In the book [Fearfully and Wonderfully Made](#), Phillip Yancey helps draw out stories and insights from Paul Brand, the doctor who discovered that leprosy ravages the body by destroying the sense of touch, and with it the ability to feel pain. In one of these stories, Dr. Brand tells how he left a speaking engagement sick, sat hunched in the corner of a train car, wishing the interminable train ride would be over, and finally staggered to his hotel room. He began to undress, and realized to his horror that there was no feeling in his left heel.

He pricked himself with a pin and felt nothing. He jabbed himself harder, watched a drop of blood form, and moaned for the pain that would not come. That night, he lay dressed on his bed. He knew that sulfone drugs would probably stop the spread of the disease quite quickly, but he still could not help imagine it spreading to his hands, his feet. As a doctor who worked with patients who'd lost their sense of touch, he cherished the feel

of earth in his fingers, the feel of a puppy's fur, the affection of a friend. His career as a surgeon would soon end. What's more, what would become of his movement? He, their leader, had assured others that leprosy was the least contagious of all communicable diseases, and careful hygiene could almost ensure that they would not get it. What would it mean if he, their leader, was a leper? That ugly word he'd banished from his vocabulary rose like a monster with new strength.

After a long and sleepless night, Dr. Brand got up, and took a pin to face the gristly task of mapping out the affected area. He took a breath, jabbed himself—and roared in pain. Nothing had ever felt so delicious to him as that one electric jolt of pain.

He realized what had happened. He was sick, with something mundane, and as a sick traveller had forgone his usual motion. His foot had fallen asleep. Dr. Brand was for a time too ashamed to recount that dismal experience, but I'm glad he did. The experience changed his life, and the story has impacted me.

As far as perception goes, I'm not sure if my sense of touch is more perceptive than most people's. Probably a little bit. I can say that it is integrated with other senses. There was one time I was at the supermarket, and the woman in front of me in the checkout line dropped a soda bottle a short distance. Being bored, I gently pinched the bottle, and then made a comment that seemed to me almost too obvious to be worth saying: if you pinch a soda bottle, you can tell if it's safe to open. A bottle that can be safely opened will give slightly to moderate pressure; a bottle that's shaken up is firm as a rock. Her reply, "Oh, is that the trick that you use?" caught me off guard. Feeling a shaken soda bottle like that is no more a trick to me than looking at the stove for dancing orange spots is a trick to see if I've started a grease fire.

As an American who's lived in France, I like to give my friends hugs and kisses. I'm careful how and when I ask, particularly about a kiss on the cheek, and I listen to people with my intuition before asking those questions... but that invitation (accepted or not) is usually tied to when I pull someone inside the glass wall.

What about a musing life? Neil Postman, in [Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business](#) talks about the dark side of television's effects on culture. Without going into a full analysis of Plato's Allegory of the Television, I will say that television blinds the inner eye by stimulating the surface and starving the depths. A home without a television is like a slice of chocolate cake without tartar sauce.

Without television, what happens? At times, you get bored, and then more bored, and then you come to a place on the other side of boredom with renewed creativity, sensitivity, and insight. I try to live there; like my time sense and the presence learned through wine, it gives focus to musings, such as this talk was woven from. It is a sort of fast for the mind, and makes room for a considerable degree of depth.

What is my interest in thinking inside the box? There's been a lot of homage paid to the many virtues of thinking outside the box. Perhaps many of you have stories to tell of a time when someone was extolling the many virtues of thinking outside the box, but that's not where I'm going. The praises of thinking outside the box are sung because thinking inside and outside the box complement each other, and most people are so often inside the box that it's hard for them to step out. With severely gifted individuals, the real challenge is not thinking outside the box, but thinking inside the box.

There are many times that it's better to think inside the box. Driving to work, for instance. More deeply, communicating and

negotiating requires one to understand and think like the other person, and for many people, this means thinking inside the box.

I'd also like to give one very concrete example of where it's important to think inside the box: manners.

Manners are an arbitrary collection of rules, and there is no unifying principle that everything else flows from. Respecting and valuing the person will not tell you why you should hold a fork like a pen instead of how a little boy wants to hold a knife.

Something that meaningless may be very difficult for you and me to learn, but it is important. Why? To many people, manners are the very foundation of civilized interaction, and it presents them with a needless and pointless obstacle if you say, "I respect you and I do not feel the need to observe manners in your presence."

It's been said, "Never offend people with style when you can offend them with substance;" if people are going to walk away from you offended, let them be offended by something of substance, not by crude manners.

And lastly: mystic, artist, Christian. Why do I group these together? Does being a mystic make one an artist and a Christian? No; nothing like that holds directly, but there is a common thread. It's illuminated by a conversation I had with one friend, where I said that pragmatism was a philosophical disease.

I learned shortly thereafter that pragmatism was quite important to her.

Why would I say something like that? In one conversation a few years earlier, at [Calvin College](#), one of my friends asked me why I wanted something, and didn't like my response. A little probing, and I knew why: while the words he used were, "Why do you want it?", what he meant by it, the only thing he could mean at that time, was, "What do you find it useful for?" The item, whatever it was (I don't remember), was not something I wanted

for its usefulness in letting me get something else; it was something I valued in itself. He couldn't see that.

So I asked him, "Do you value having that arm on your body?" "Uh, yes..." "Why?" "Because if I have an arm, I can grab an apple." "Why do you want that?" "Because if I grab an apple, I can eat an apple." "Why do you want that?" "Because if I eat an apple, I can live and not die!" "Why do you want that?" At that point, he gave the response I'd been waiting for: an impassioned explanation that living and not dying was not simply valued as a means to something else, but something he wanted for itself.

Pragmatism and utilitarianism have a very small circle of things that are valued outside of their usefulness to something else: the Oxford Companion to Philosophy lists only pleasure, which seems a dismally small selection to me. Franky Schaeffer's [Addicted to Mediocrity: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Christians and the Arts](#) talks about the insipid banality in the Christian art tradition: the tradition that once produced Dante and Bach has now produced [John's Christian Stores](#), and a large part of that is because Christians sold their birthright to embrace pragmatism. Where pragmatism draws a small circle of things that are embraced, Christianity, mysticism, and art draw a much larger circle: there's something there that isn't in Dewey and Mill's practical world.

Madeleine l'Engle, in [Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art](#), tells of a time in college when her professor asked on a test how Chaucer chose a particular literary device in a passage, and she wrote in a white heat of fury that Chaucer did not "choose a literary device;" that's not how an artist works at all! I had a loosely similar experience, if not involving anger; I was sharing something I was writing with a new acquaintance, and she complimented my use of personification at a specific point. I had

to reread the passage more than once to see what she meant; she made a straightforward statement, but I had not thought in those terms. A good artist may have excellent technique, but the technique is there because the art is good; the art is not good just because of the technique. Good art comes through something much more, and much more interesting, than technique: listening to the work, serving it, cooperating with it, helping an unformed idea have a shape that others can see.

What about mysticism? There is a problem here; you might say that insofar as mysticism can be explained, it is not mysticism. I will say that the characters I identify with most in literature have been characters who've had a foot in another world. Charles Wallace from Madeleine L'Engle's [A Wind in the Door](#) is not the boy genius, Dexter from Dexter's Laboratory, an abstract personification of intelligence; he is a very real and believable person. He is open to another world, not surprised to think he's seen dragons in the twins' vegetable garden, and he kythes; that is, he has a real and present communication, something beyond communication, with others. You can read about kything in the [100 ways of kything](#) on my webpage.

In Robert Heinlein's [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), Michael Valentine Smith is born as a baby boy on Mars, orphaned by all human travellers, raised on Mars by Martians in Martian culture, and brought to earth as a young man. Let's talk about culture shock for a moment. Smith causes and receives quite a lot of it, as the story narrates his progression from a Martian with the genes and ancestry of a man to a character who is both human and Martian. There are quite a few stumbling points along the way to this. At one point, early in the story, someone asks Michael what is intended to be a very routine question, but Michael doesn't get it. He has heard the words before, but he's

a bit like a top-notch English professor trying to decipher a math paper: even with a glossary to all the symbol, there's a whole way of thinking that goes with the strange words, and Michael doesn't understand it. Heinlein says that half a million years' wildly alien abstractions raced through his mind. I don't have half a million years' worth of much of anything, but I do have wildly alien abstractions. I first became a philosopher as a boy, too young to touch any of my thoughts in language; one of the questions I thought of was, "Am I human?", or, "Am I a being of the same class as those I observe around me?" I observed that my parents were linguistic creatures who moved naturally in language, that I was not linguistic in any comparable way, and concluded that I was not human. Another question I pondered was a short, simple question that could be rendered, "Can there be a perpetual motion machine, and if so, how can it be started?" The second part of the question was tied to the first; the best way I can explain it is that, given time-symmetric laws of physics, if there's a machine that will keep on going forever, then the other side of the coin is that it has been going on forever, and there's no way to start it. In middle school, I started French at about the age of ten, and in a few years was able to think more fluently in French than in English. My accent sounded more typical of a native Parisian French speaker than a Midwestern American English speaker. Why? There are a couple of reasons, differences in how the two languages were taught, but one of the basic ones is that English was here, French was there, and my way of thinking was way out there, and happened to be closer to French than English.

Blajeny, also from [A Wind in the Door](#), is a Teacher from another galaxy, and the lessons he brings are sometimes difficult: not as, "Face your worst fear ever," but as different

from what they'd expect. He tells the children they will be in his class, and Meg is elated that her brother Charles will never have to go to the red schoolhouse again; then he says something that leaves her wondering where his classroom is. Blajeny retreats inside himself, and when she's decided he won't answer, he says, "Here, there, everywhere. In the schoolyard in first-grade recess. With the cherubim and seraphim. Among the farandolae."

I am wearing [the costume you see me in](#) because of how I identify with Blajeny, because there's something of me that shines through him.

Last, what about being a Christian? There's one music professor who said that, rather than thinking that we sing a song one and then it's over, and we sing it later, and so on, we should rather think that as long as there have been created beings, there is an eternal song rising before God, a song rising as incense that will never go out, and that when we sing we step into that song. Christianity is the foundation this whole edifice of thought is built upon, and its crowning jewel. It is the soil in which other things grow, and the thoughts I have given are an example of how Christians may think.

So now in this brief time I have shared a little bit about myself; I have answered a few questions and raised many more.

Come visit my website, at [Jonathan's Corner](#); it's in your program. Of course I'd like to hear from an editor who'd like me to write something, or would like an existing manuscript, or someone who'd like to hear me speak, or someone who'd like a website built, but more than any of that I have given this talk for the same reason I've built my website: to connect. What have I left you wondering about?

# The Royal Letters

My dear son;

About your last letter, all that you say is true, but the way it is put together is missing something profound.

You say, "Are we not royalty?" Yes, indeed, and there is more to say. We will judge angels. To be human is to be made in a royal image. The oil we are anointed with is cut from the same cloth as the sacred oil anointing prophets, priests, and kings. In English we can say "Sir" and in koine Greek the same word means "Mister" and "Lord." The royal gifts of the Magi, gold an emblem of kingship, frankincense an emblem of divinity, and myrrh an emblem of suffering, are given to Christ and in him extend to the Church. We are indeed royalty, and we are more than royalty.

Now moving on to your second question, "Am I pushing this too far?" That question from you has a guilty-feeling fear to it, awaiting for me to give the real correction. And my answer to that is certain. You are not pushing it too far; you are not pushing it far enough by half. You wonder about being addressed as Your Majesty, and it is my duty to inform Your Royal Highness of something buried in [the Ladder](#), when it says: "Some stand weaponless and without armor before the kings of earth, while others hold insignia of office, shields, and swords. The former

are vastly superior to the latter since they are regularly the personal relations of the king and members of the royal household."

You stand weaponless and without armor, and wish for insignia, shield, and sword. You do not understand that you have more and pine for less. And I long for the day when you wish to be addressed, not as "Your Majesty," but as "you," with no insignia needed.

With love,  
Your father, Oswald

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My dear, dear son;

Regarding the question you raised in your last letter, I would remind you of the King of Kings.

Two of his disciples, who had been training for years, asked for as much royal honor as there was to have: to be seated at his right and left hand. And he tries to tell them that he doesn't get it. He, the King of Kings, will never wear royal purple on earth except when he is mocked and abused by brutal soldiers; he will never wear a crown except for a twisted crown of thorns. He asks them if they can bear the sufferings of his kingship, and they blindly assure them that they can. Then he holds an example up to them and says that whoever wishes to be great must be a servant and whoever wishes to be first must be the slave of all.

What people miss in their quest for honor is the greatest gem in the crown: humility. St. Dorotheos advises people to build up their spiritual houses with all different kinds of stone: a stone of prayer here, a stone of almsgiving there, a stone of courage still there. But humility is not one more stone; it is the slime which serves as mortar and cements everything together. And this royal dignity is the bedrock that people miss hoping for royal honors, for something to feed their narcissism. Real honor is not having your narcissism fed; it is humbly rejecting narcissism. Real, industrial strength royal honor is found in the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and God of Gods:

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you,

which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If you want to know where the glory at the end comes from, look nowhere but the humility at the beginning. If humility is good enough for Christ, let us not consider ourselves too good for it.

Your dearly affectionate father,  
Oswald

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My dear son Basil;

Now I wish to show you a more excellent way.

St. Athanasios wrote of the dignity of man in *On the Incarnation*: "You know how it is when some great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses; because of his dwelling in that single house, the whole city is honoured, and enemies and robbers cease to molest it. Even so it is with the King of all..." Pay attention to how St. Athanasios proclaims the dignity of the human race! The King of Kings is the King for whom every King in Heaven and earth is named. If there is a measure of truth to say that man is the king and priest of Creation, this is because we are created in God's image, and it is the fullness of Truth to know Christ God as King and Lord. It is no accident and no error that the prayers of the Church address God as King, for such he is, incomparably more than any man on earth. Men and kings are as the moon with its reflected light; Christ God is the original Sun, shining in its full glory. If it is a wonder to know men as kings, incomparably greater is it to know Christ God as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The [Revelation to St. John](#) tells of glorious creatures at the height of creature glory: "And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold... The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that lives for ever and ever..." My dear Basil, you are a king, and I hope that Your Majesty can throw his crown before the throne of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Writing with deepest fatherly affection,  
Your father,

Oswald

# Seven-Sided Gem

This lecture was given Oct. 26, 2001 during the Midwestern Mensa regional gathering, at the Arlington Heights Sheraton.

**Introductory remarks by Dr. Mike Doyle, CEO and Founder of [Eolas Technologies](#):** I first met Jonathan Hayward on the MegaList about a year and a half ago. I was impressed enough by his abilities to hire him at the first opportunity, and he now works as a software developer for Eolas Technologies. Jonathan, in one year, did an independent study of calculus, programmed a four-dimensional maze, and ranked 7th nationally in the 1989 [MathCounts](#) competition.

Then he turned 14 and turned his attention to deeper challenges. He has studied at [Wheaton College](#), the [Sorbonne](#), and the [University of Illinois](#). Like many profoundly gifted, Jonathan moves among a wide range of interests. He is now focused on writing. He has been published in [Ubiquity](#), Noesis, Inner Sanctum, Perfection, and now Vidya, with [Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement](#). Please welcome him as he speaks about his experiences as a profoundly gifted individual.

**Jonathan:** Thank you. It is a privilege to be here; I have been looking forward to this night, a time when we can connect and share—not only through our costumes. More on my costume later.

Before I begin my speech proper, I'd like to deal with a couple of preliminaries. I have a slight speech impediment; I'll try to speak clearly, but you may have to work a little harder to understand me. Second, I'd like to review the seven points of my speech, the seven facets of the seven-sided gem:

- Metaculture: a term which I coined and which I'll explain.
- Ages and cultures: by 'ages' I mean different temporal ages, not how old a person is.
- Beyond the Binet-Simon: alternative approaches to intelligence estimation.
- Inside the glass wall: a private symbol I'll explain.
- A musing life: Do I mean a life that is amusing or a life that has musing? I'll explain that.
- Thinking inside the box: lessons learned from living among IQ normals.
- Mystic, Artist, Christian.

Don't talk about the things you're interested in with someone you've just met. Never mind that, to you, abstract conversation is a staple of acquaintanceship and friendship. To the other person, it may be boring, unpleasant, or a sign of unwanted romantic interest.

Never mind that you have five points of great subtlety and complexity. Pick one, and when you have simplified past the point of distortion, be ready for the other person to say, "Excuse me. Could you say that in English?"

Don't assume that the person in authority believes, "The rules exist for the betterment of the community and are therefore negotiable when they do not contribute to that end." Even if the rules do not consider your case, even if they end up hurting you, expect "The rules are the rules and I am not here

...telling you, expect, "The rules are the rules and I am not here to make exceptions."

Never mind that you can shift your culture at will, or that it is something you must do to connect with others. Don't try explaining it to others, and whatever you do don't ask them to do so. If you do, they will experience culture shock and react accordingly. Never mind that to you, foreign cultures are familiar and familiar cultures foreign. Don't try to explain this either. It asks them to do something completely unfair.

Be very careful in sharing accomplishments, or even things you don't think of as accomplishments, just cherished moments. To the other person, they may well be intimidating to the point of alienation.

Grieve a thousand wounds, but don't fall prey to the worst wound of all. Don't come to believe, "I will never connect with them, and they will never understand me." If you do, you will find yourself in a sort of Hell—not in the world to come, but here on earth. You will be in a Hell of isolation, an alien in an alien land.

They can joke. That's why you're frustrated they don't understand your humor. They can think. That's why you're hurt and upset when they never fathom your deepest thoughts. To those separated by the greatest chasm, is given the greatest ability to bridge chasms.

Perhaps it is harder than doing calculus in middle school or creating a language. It is still something you can do. That intellect that leaves people dazed is the intellect you can use to communicate—connect—in ways that aren't open to them. That burning intensity that's gotten you into so much trouble can put fire in your friendships such as many of your friends would never have otherwise known. That unique inner world, that you've closed the doors to, after being burned time and time again, is a

place you may learn to draw people into. I cannot tell you how, but with a lot of hard work, a lot of patience, a lot of humility, a lot of forgiveness given and received, you may come to a point of synergy past the point where you wished you were not quite so gifted.

An anthropologist at this point might make the case that there is an unbridgeable chasm between the already very bright minds associated with Mensa, and the severely gifted. I'd rather say something different. I'd rather say the severely gifted experience is a crystallization of many things that make the Mensa experience distinctive, and there is a common bond of giftedness as well as the bond of being human. I'd rather say that what gap does exist is one that can be bridged. That is the premise this whole talk is based on.

A much better speaker than I am might be able to explain, in the abstract and in entirety, what the inner world and experience of the severely gifted is like. I can't do that, but I have my sights set on a much more modest goal: to share something of my own inner world and experience, and light a candle of illumination.

When I was a student at Wheaton College, there was a chapel where students lined up and shared some of the, ahem, interesting questions they'd been asked: "You grew up in Japan? Say something in Chinese!" "Say something in African!" "What did it feel like growing up in Finland?" (Uh, I don't know. Slight tingling sensation around the toes?) The chapel was given by missionary's kids/third culture kids, sometimes abbreviated MK/TCK. A third culture kid is a kid who grows up surrounded by one host culture—let us say, blue—to parents who belong to another culture—let us say, yellow. They are neither properly blue nor properly yellow, but create a third culture that draws on

both. This is not a simple average of the two cultures; there are common similarities, whether it's a U.S. kid growing up in Kenya, or a Japanese growing up in the U.S. It is a different mode of experience, a different way of being human. Third culture kids tend to have a tremendous ability to adapt to new cultures, but at times a cost: the price of never being completely at home in a culture, as a fish in water. When I heard that chapel, I said,  
"That's me!"

It is the characteristic of very creative minds to hit a very large nail not quite on the head. I am not literally a third culture kid; by the time I heard that chapel, I had not lived abroad. There was something deep that resonated, however. The best way I can describe it is that a third culture kid creates a third culture after being shaped by the outer forces of the host culture on one hand and his parents on the other, and a severely gifted individual is shaped by the outer forces of an IQ-normal world and an inner world from a different kind of mind: the higher you go on the IQ spectrum, there is less and less more of the same intelligence, and more and more of a different kind of intelligence altogether. I coined the term 'metaculture' to refer to the commonality of experience, a way of not ever being in a culture as a fish is in water. It brings pain, a sense of never fitting in, and at the same time a freedom from some of the blindnesses others can't escape.

In talking about cultures, I'm hesitant to say that they've left an imprint on me, because the metaphor is deficient. It evokes an image of an active, solid, definite culture that leaves a mark on hot wax which is simply there to receive an imprint. The truth is much more interesting: the cultures are themselves, yes, but I am actively drawing, discerning, seeing what in them is of interest to me and can be drawn into myself. Anyone who knows

cultures knows that conveying even one culture in five hours is impossible; I hope not to convey the cultures I visited, so much as give a sense of what sort of thing is interesting.

The summer after that chapel, I lived in Malaysia. My father spent the year teaching, and the rest of the family lived there. I got to spend the summer. I understand why my Mom said it was the best year of her life.

In American culture, there is always a clock tick-tick-ticking. It's not just there when you look down at your watch; it may be more present when you're not looking: when you're visiting your friend and distracted with twenty other things to do that day, or on the road where you move faster than any human athlete can run, and one second's needless delay is one second's torment. In Malaysia, the clock's constant ticking stops. This is not unique to Malaysia; those of you familiar with African cultures, or Latin American, will know something similar, but it is at any rate different from the U.S. It's not exactly true that the Malaysians perceive time slowly where we perceive it quickly, as that the U.S. is conscious of time where Malaysians are conscious of other things. I have continued to shape my sense of time after leaving Malaysia, and come to focus not on time but on people, creation, and some work. If I try to spend a half an hour on my third novel, what will dominate is the half hour, not the novel; I try to give focused presence to what I am doing now and not have a clock cut up my emotions. It is a tremendous boon in writing, or being with people. I try to keep enough of an American time sense to not be needlessly rude by being late to appointments, but on the inside I seek a different time, and I believe my friendships and my creations are the better for it. Dost thou love life? Then do not quantize time, for numbers are not the stuff life's made of.

Some time after that, I studied in Paris at the [Sorbonne](#). It was a wonderful time; part of my heart is still there. During my time as a student, I acquired a taste for alcohol. One thing I realized rather quickly is that five ounces of wine is not much. If I had a glass of wine with dinner and tossed it back after my first bites, I could have another... and another... and another... and become rather quickly inebriated. Or I could simply not have any more wine. Or—there is an alternative—I could sip my wine, savor it.

In doing that, I tasted wine as I had not tasted any beverage before. Because there was so little, I learned to be present and enjoy much more than absently having a hazy awareness that something I liked was passing through my mouth. My absent awareness of sodas was not a bad thing; one thing I learned upon returning is that American soft drinks are not intended to be consumed that way. If you sip a small glass of Mountain Don't, you will soon learn that Mountain Don't isn't meant to be so sipped. I learned to be present, not just to wine and non-alcoholic beverages like fruit drinks and Mocha, but also to food, and to a much broader circle. If I am in a public place, and music I like comes across the air, it is transient; it is fleeting. I cannot make it last any longer, but I can be present to it in the short time it does last. When a friend comes from out of town, in all likelihood her visit will be over before it has begun—but I can be present in that time as well. This presence has added something to my life complimentary to the time sense I acquired from Malaysia.

What's the last culture? One that will take a bit more explaining, as I have to swim upstream against more than one thread of American culture. What is it that I have to swim up against? "This is an idea whose time has come." "It's the wave of

the future." "We're entering the third millenium."

If I were to speak of "an idea whose time has come, and gone," or "the wave of the past," it would be less clear that I was speaking a compliment. If I were to say, in the most reverent of tones, "We're standing at the forty-second latitude and eighty-seventh longitude.", you'd have every right to accuse me of a non sequitur. I believe that "We're entering the third millenium." is also a non sequitur, even though it is spoken as a statement of great significance.

There are two ideas closely intertwined: the doctrine of progress, which says we are better, nobler, wiser people than those who came before—a temporal version of ethnocentrism, which says that ideas like machines grow rust and need to be replaced—and period awareness, which goes beyond the historicist observation that all of us, past and present, exist in a historical-cultural context and are affected by it; period awareness fixes an unbridgeable chasm between the people who walked before and us; they are in a hermetically sealed box. The net respect is to believe that the peoples of the past cannot talk with us: we can point out how they were less enlightened times, but they certainly cannot criticize us.

My second novel, [Firestorm 2034](#), is the story of a medieval in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. In the course of researching medieval culture, thinking about it, and trying to convey it, it left a mark on me in many ways similar to Malaysia and France. Mark Twain's [A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court](#) is a masterpiece of humor that is often mistaken for a reasonable treatment of medieval culture; my novel reverses it in more ways than one. Not only is it a medieval in America, but more deeply I reject the belief that the most significant difference between the medievals and us is that we have better technology. There is a

wealth of culture and wisdom that has been largely lost.

What is one such area? The present issue of [My Generation](#), the magazine of the [American Association of Retired Persons](#), has a cover story about "Jeff Bridges: Beautiful Dreamer." On the cover, he has black hair tinged with silver, although I would forgive you if you glanced and said it was brown. It's a few inches longer than mine. He's curled up, slouching, with his arms over his knees, wearing faded jeans, white socks, and tennis shoes. The man looks like a teenager. This is not an accident. I have never seen a [My Generation](#) cover with a woman who looks old enough to be admitted to the [AARP](#), and when I first saw that periodical, I mistook it for a *GenX* magazine.

Why? The core idea is that there is a short period of glory—I'll say from fifteen to twenty-five years, although some of you might place the beginning and end a little differently—and before that point, you're only a child, meaning curiously enough that you don't have access to adult pleasures; you can't drink, you can't drive—and after that point, you're a has-been. This message is ubiquitous, present not only in children's TV shows but equally in a magazine for retired people. And, in a certain manner, it makes perfect sense.

It makes perfect sense if there is nothing more to have in life than physical pleasure. Before fifteen, you can't acquire as much pleasure as someone with adult resources; after twenty-five, your capacity for youthful pleasure diminishes. And so, if one starts by assuming that the whole point of life is to have pleasure, that the point of science is to create a Utopia of spoiled children, then it follows quite simply that a child is nothing much and someone past the age of thirty is a has-been.

It follows quite simply for us, but the medievals saw it differently.

The medievals believed that the entire purpose of this life is as a preparation, an apprenticeship, a beginning, to an eternity gazing on God's glory. It means that, even in this life, there is infinitely more to seek than physical pleasure. There is more to desire. There is virtue, both earthly, natural virtues, and the merry, heavenly, deiform virtues. One can begin to be a heavenly person, enjoy Heaven's joys, and know God.

The words, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die," voice a pessimistic philosophy: enjoy pleasure because there's nothing more and we have a grim life. The medieval view sought much more than pleasure, and in following it, I want to grow more. I don't believe I'm leaving the time when I can enjoy the only good in life, pleasure. I believe I have different fruits in season coming. Some people dread their thirtieth birthday. I'm looking forward to it. I'm looking forward to turning thirty, forty, fifty, to when my hair turns tweed and then white. I'm looking forward to growing in wisdom: the interesting part of my life isn't ending, but just beginning.

What about intelligence testing? I like Madeleine l'Engle's [A Wind in the Door](#); it's a children's book with a little boy, Charles Wallace, whose IQ is "so high it's untestable by normal means." I like the story and Charles Wallace; I identify with him, and in reference to that passage began to wish the same were true of me, that my IQ were so high it was untestable by normal means. I even tried to convince myself, in moments of pride, that this was true.

It came as a great disappointment to learn not only was this literally true, that my IQ was literally so high as to be untestable by normal means, but that the threshold was so low. If the authors of the Binet-Simon test, paradigm example of the good IQ test, were to be told, "This test you've made, doesn't

really distinguish average from below average, but shows a remarkably fine discrimination at the upper strata of human intelligence," they would have regarded the test as a failure, pure and simple. The Binet-Simon test is a test for inferiority. Sources I've seen differ as to why; one gently states that it was meant to identify special needs people and give them that extra boost of special education they need to function in life. Another says, less charitably, that it's to identify certain people as inferior: exclude them; stop 'wasting' resources on them. In either case, it is less than clear to me that this is the model of test for organizations like Mensa.

Some other high-IQ societies use an adjusted model of test, where they take off the time limit, because they recognize that rushing people doesn't get best behavior, and put all the problems on anabolic steroids. This can probably boost the ceiling a little, but it has its own problems. It's a bit like taking an office where work isn't getting done, and making everybody work twenty more hours a week: if work isn't getting done, five more hours might help a little, but twenty won't fix the problem. Howard Gardner, multiple intelligence theorist, spends most of [Extraordinary Minds](#) arguing for a multiplicity of genius; in the beginning, he asks if there's anything common to all kinds of genius, and says, yes, he'd identify three things:

- There is some domain of performance.
- There is a community that appreciates the genius's performance in this domain.
- Failures.

According to Gardner, a genius fails more, and more spectacularly, than an average person.

This notwithstanding, if you're trying to get into [Mega Society East](#), what counts on the test is not what you get right; it's what you get wrong. It's not the absolutely brilliant answers you had to questions two, five, and seven; it's the fact that you missed something on questions one, four, and nine. Given the cognitive diversity at the upper end of the spectrum, there are limitations to even high-ceiling tests.

Is there any alternative? I would say yes, and I believe a hint of it comes from a story about a high school physics student. After the unit covering air pressure, the teacher wrote on an exam, "Explain how to use a barometer to determine the height of a tall building." The student wrote, "Tie a rope around the barometer, lower it from the top of the building until it hits the ground, make a mark on the rope, pull it up, and measure the length of the rope. (There are other ways of doing this.)"

This put the teacher in a bit of a bind. He called in one of his colleagues, and explained what had happened. The colleague said, "In a way that demonstrates your knowledge of physics, explain how to use a barometer to determine the height of a tall building." The student said, "Go to the top of the building with a barometer and a stopwatch. Drop the barometer, and measure the time before the barometer splatters on the ground beneath. Then use the formula  $y = \frac{1}{2} at^2$  to calculate the height of the building." The teachers conferred and gave him almost full credit.

The teacher asked what some of the other ways were: "Go outside on a sunny day, and measure the height of the barometer, the length of the barometer's shadow, and the length of the building's shadows, and use ratios to determine the height of the building." "This probably isn't the best way, but go into the basement, knock on the superintendent's door, and say,

'Mr. Superintendent! I have a fine barometer for you if you will only tell me the height of the building!'"

What this story screams out to me is not just that the student is bright enough that he could see the desired answer about calculating from the difference in air pressure. I'm positive of that. It's not just that he could give several alternate approaches. It's that he would. It's that he behaved like a gifted mind does when it's been completely insulted.

That gives a hint of an indirect approach: don't try IQ-normal-style cognitive strain questions, but look for a very different kind of thinking, and the effects of living in a world where most other people are two, three, four, five sigma below you. I wrote up the basic ideas, and e-mailed Paul Cooijmans, head of Giga and [Glia](#). He suggested I start my own high-IQ society. I thought that was a little more ambitious than I wanted to take on now, but I did create a test. I wrote it up, gave it to heads of some high-IQ societies to distribute, received very kind responses from Gina LoSasso of the [Mega Foundation](#) and Nik Lygeros of the Pi Society... and have gotten two tests filled out, which I haven't looked at because I want to read them together. The test may turn out to be nothing more than an interesting fizzle. Even then, I thought it might be interesting enough to share.

What about the glass wall? The symbol relates to me to three layers, or levels, of maturity in dealing with others. The first layer is not recognizing there is a difference. In childhood, even when I scored high in the MathCounts competition, I might have realized there was something called intelligence and I had more of it, but not that I thought all that differently: I treated others as if they were the same as me underneath. That is a

recipe for giving and receiving hurt.

When I finally let myself see that there were differences, I tried to fit in through blending in. In the short run, that's much better; there are far fewer incidents. Over time, it costs—the cost of a false self. There were some things in myself I wasn't showing anyone, not even myself.

After that, I began to erect a glass wall about myself, something that would keep things out of view before I was confident people were ready, but not permanently—and would let me draw others in. I don't think this is a final resting place—in fact, I'm almost positive it isn't—but it seems a definite step ahead of the other two steps.

What's inside the glass wall? Much of this speech hints at things inside the glass wall, but I'd like to give one concrete example.

In the book [Fearfully and Wonderfully Made](#), Phillip Yancey helps draw out stories and insights from Paul Brand, the doctor who discovered that leprosy ravages the body by destroying the sense of touch, and with it the ability to feel pain. In one of these stories, Dr. Brand tells how he left a speaking engagement sick, sat hunched in the corner of a train car, wishing the interminable train ride would be over, and finally staggered to his hotel room. He began to undress, and realized to his horror that there was no feeling in his left heel.

He pricked himself with a pin and felt nothing. He jabbed himself harder, watched a drop of blood form, and moaned for the pain that would not come. That night, he lay dressed on his bed. He knew that sulfone drugs would probably stop the spread of the disease quite quickly, but he still could not help imagine it spreading to his hands, his feet. As a doctor who worked with patients who'd lost their sense of touch, he cherished the feel

of earth in his fingers, the feel of a puppy's fur, the affection of a friend. His career as a surgeon would soon end. What's more, what would become of his movement? He, their leader, had assured others that leprosy was the least contagious of all communicable diseases, and careful hygiene could almost ensure that they would not get it. What would it mean if he, their leader, was a leper? That ugly word he'd banished from his vocabulary rose like a monster with new strength.

After a long and sleepless night, Dr. Brand got up, and took a pin to face the gristly task of mapping out the affected area. He took a breath, jabbed himself—and roared in pain. Nothing had ever felt so delicious to him as that one electric jolt of pain.

He realized what had happened. He was sick, with something mundane, and as a sick traveller had forgone his usual motion. His foot had fallen asleep. Dr. Brand was for a time too ashamed to recount that dismal experience, but I'm glad he did. The experience changed his life, and the story has impacted me.

As far as perception goes, I'm not sure if my sense of touch is more perceptive than most people's. Probably a little bit. I can say that it is integrated with other senses. There was one time I was at the supermarket, and the woman in front of me in the checkout line dropped a soda bottle a short distance. Being bored, I gently pinched the bottle, and then made a comment that seemed to me almost too obvious to be worth saying: if you pinch a soda bottle, you can tell if it's safe to open. A bottle that can be safely opened will give slightly to moderate pressure; a bottle that's shaken up is firm as a rock. Her reply, "Oh, is that the trick that you use?" caught me off guard. Feeling a shaken soda bottle like that is no more a trick to me than looking at the stove for dancing orange spots is a trick to see if I've started a grease fire.

As an American who's lived in France, I like to give my friends hugs and kisses. I'm careful how and when I ask, particularly about a kiss on the cheek, and I listen to people with my intuition before asking those questions... but that invitation (accepted or not) is usually tied to when I pull someone inside the glass wall.

What about a musing life? Neil Postman, in [Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business](#) talks about the dark side of television's effects on culture. Without going into a full analysis of Plato's Allegory of the Television, I will say that television blinds the inner eye by stimulating the surface and starving the depths. A home without a television is like a slice of chocolate cake without tartar sauce.

Without television, what happens? At times, you get bored, and then more bored, and then you come to a place on the other side of boredom with renewed creativity, sensitivity, and insight. I try to live there; like my time sense and the presence learned through wine, it gives focus to musings, such as this talk was woven from. It is a sort of fast for the mind, and makes room for a considerable degree of depth.

What is my interest in thinking inside the box? There's been a lot of homage paid to the many virtues of thinking outside the box. Perhaps many of you have stories to tell of a time when someone was extolling the many virtues of thinking outside the box, but that's not where I'm going. The praises of thinking outside the box are sung because thinking inside and outside the box complement each other, and most people are so often inside the box that it's hard for them to step out. With severely gifted individuals, the real challenge is not thinking outside the box, but thinking inside the box.

There are many times that it's better to think inside the box. Driving to work, for instance. More deeply, communicating and

negotiating requires one to understand and think like the other person, and for many people, this means thinking inside the box.

I'd also like to give one very concrete example of where it's important to think inside the box: manners.

Manners are an arbitrary collection of rules, and there is no unifying principle that everything else flows from. Respecting and valuing the person will not tell you why you should hold a fork like a pen instead of how a little boy wants to hold a knife.

Something that meaningless may be very difficult for you and me to learn, but it is important. Why? To many people, manners are the very foundation of civilized interaction, and it presents them with a needless and pointless obstacle if you say, "I respect you and I do not feel the need to observe manners in your presence."

It's been said, "Never offend people with style when you can offend them with substance;" if people are going to walk away from you offended, let them be offended by something of substance, not by crude manners.

And lastly: mystic, artist, Christian. Why do I group these together? Does being a mystic make one an artist and a Christian? No; nothing like that holds directly, but there is a common thread. It's illuminated by a conversation I had with one friend, where I said that pragmatism was a philosophical disease.

I learned shortly thereafter that pragmatism was quite important to her.

Why would I say something like that? In one conversation a few years earlier, at [Calvin College](#), one of my friends asked me why I wanted something, and didn't like my response. A little probing, and I knew why: while the words he used were, "Why do you want it?", what he meant by it, the only thing he could mean at that time, was, "What do you find it useful for?" The item, whatever it was (I don't remember), was not something I wanted

for its usefulness in letting me get something else; it was something I valued in itself. He couldn't see that.

So I asked him, "Do you value having that arm on your body?" "Uh, yes..." "Why?" "Because if I have an arm, I can grab an apple." "Why do you want that?" "Because if I grab an apple, I can eat an apple." "Why do you want that?" "Because if I eat an apple, I can live and not die!" "Why do you want that?" At that point, he gave the response I'd been waiting for: an impassioned explanation that living and not dying was not simply valued as a means to something else, but something he wanted for itself.

Pragmatism and utilitarianism have a very small circle of things that are valued outside of their usefulness to something else: the Oxford Companion to Philosophy lists only pleasure, which seems a dimly small selection to me. Franky Schaeffer's [Addicted to Mediocrity: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Christians and the Arts](#) talks about the insipid banality in the Christian art tradition: the tradition that once produced Dante and Bach has now produced [John's Christian Stores](#), and a large part of that is because Christians sold their birthright to embrace pragmatism. Where pragmatism draws a small circle of things that are embraced, Christianity, mysticism, and art draw a much larger circle: there's something there that isn't in Dewey and Mill's practical world.

Madeleine l'Engle, in [Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art](#), tells of a time in college when her professor asked on a test how Chaucer chose a particular literary device in a passage, and she wrote in a white heat of fury that Chaucer did not "choose a literary device;" that's not how an artist works at all! I had a loosely similar experience, if not involving anger; I was sharing something I was writing with a new acquaintance, and she complimented my use of personification at a specific point. I had

to reread the passage more than once to see what she meant; she made a straightforward statement, but I had not thought in those terms. A good artist may have excellent technique, but the technique is there because the art is good; the art is not good just because of the technique. Good art comes through something much more, and much more interesting, than technique: listening to the work, serving it, cooperating with it, helping an unformed idea have a shape that others can see.

What about mysticism? There is a problem here; you might say that insofar as mysticism can be explained, it is not mysticism. I will say that the characters I identify with most in literature have been characters who've had a foot in another world. Charles Wallace from Madeleine L'Engle's [A Wind in the Door](#) is not the boy genius, Dexter from Dexter's Laboratory, an abstract personification of intelligence; he is a very real and believable person. He is open to another world, not surprised to think he's seen dragons in the twins' vegetable garden, and he kythes; that is, he has a real and present communication, something beyond communication, with others. You can read about kything in the [100 ways of kything](#) on my webpage.

In Robert Heinlein's [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), Michael Valentine Smith is born as a baby boy on Mars, orphaned by all human travellers, raised on Mars by Martians in Martian culture, and brought to earth as a young man. Let's talk about culture shock for a moment. Smith causes and receives quite a lot of it, as the story narrates his progression from a Martian with the genes and ancestry of a man to a character who is both human and Martian. There are quite a few stumbling points along the way to this. At one point, early in the story, someone asks Michael what is intended to be a very routine question, but Michael doesn't get it. He has heard the words before, but he's

a bit like a top-notch English professor trying to decipher a math paper: even with a glossary to all the symbol, there's a whole way of thinking that goes with the strange words, and Michael doesn't understand it. Heinlein says that half a million years' wildly alien abstractions raced through his mind. I don't have half a million years' worth of much of anything, but I do have wildly alien abstractions. I first became a philosopher as a boy, too young to touch any of my thoughts in language; one of the questions I thought of was, "Am I human?", or, "Am I a being of the same class as those I observe around me?" I observed that my parents were linguistic creatures who moved naturally in language, that I was not linguistic in any comparable way, and concluded that I was not human. Another question I pondered was a short, simple question that could be rendered, "Can there be a perpetual motion machine, and if so, how can it be started?" The second part of the question was tied to the first; the best way I can explain it is that, given time-symmetric laws of physics, if there's a machine that will keep on going forever, then the other side of the coin is that it has been going on forever, and there's no way to start it. In middle school, I started French at about the age of ten, and in a few years was able to think more fluently in French than in English. My accent sounded more typical of a native Parisian French speaker than a Midwestern American English speaker. Why? There are a couple of reasons, differences in how the two languages were taught, but one of the basic ones is that English was here, French was there, and my way of thinking was way out there, and happened to be closer to French than English.

Blajeny, also from [A Wind in the Door](#), is a Teacher from another galaxy, and the lessons he brings are sometimes difficult: not as, "Face your worst fear ever," but as different

from what they'd expect. He tells the children they will be in his class, and Meg is elated that her brother Charles will never have to go to the red schoolhouse again; then he says something that leaves her wondering where his classroom is. Blajeny retreats inside himself, and when she's decided he won't answer, he says, "Here, there, everywhere. In the schoolyard in first-grade recess. With the cherubim and seraphim. Among the farandolae."

I am wearing [the costume you see me in](#) because of how I identify with Blajeny, because there's something of me that shines through him.

Last, what about being a Christian? There's one music professor who said that, rather than thinking that we sing a song one and then it's over, and we sing it later, and so on, we should rather think that as long as there have been created beings, there is an eternal song rising before God, a song rising as incense that will never go out, and that when we sing we step into that song. Christianity is the foundation this whole edifice of thought is built upon, and its crowning jewel. It is the soil in which other things grow, and the thoughts I have given are an example of how Christians may think.

So now in this brief time I have shared a little bit about myself; I have answered a few questions and raised many more.

Come visit my website, at [Jonathan's Corner](#); it's in your program. Of course I'd like to hear from an editor who'd like me to write something, or would like an existing manuscript, or someone who'd like to hear me speak, or someone who'd like a website built, but more than any of that I have given this talk for the same reason I've built my website: to connect. What have I left you wondering about?

# A Shaft of Grace

I would like to talk about a religious experience. I use the term 'religious experience' with some caution as it is not what is usually called a religious experience. It did not include any dreams, or visions, or insights out of nowhere; intuition was present but did not help. But it was in the fullest sense a religious experience, at least as much as any semblance of vision or ecstasy that I've had.

I had been sinking into an increasing despair at politics, economics, and what that may mean for me. I was facing the possibility that I may well not die an old man. Furthermore, my job hunt was slower than usual. And despite the Lord's impressive Providence for me at earlier times and situations in my life, often seemingly miraculous, I was worried that I might eventually be thrown into a situation—possibly a concentration camp—where I might, in Bach's words, "outlive my love for Thee." Do not say, "It could not happen here;" stranger things have happened.

All quite a lot. This past Sunday (29/12/13), I went to the Cathedral, made a miserable confession, participated in the liturgy, and then drove to my favorite Indian restaurant to have a nice meal before going home to return and fight my darkness. On the sidewalk out of the restaurant, I ran into an old friend. He mentioned another mutual friend he was going to meet.

and I went to say hello to both of them before eating by myself:

I didn't shun their company, but I didn't want to intrude on their meeting. But they had planned a get-together, and had not invited me only because they did not think of whether I would be in Wheaton. And so I joined them for dinner, in which I thawed in response to a friend's conversation, and one of them picked up the cost of my meal. This was followed by several hours of sheer joy as we went to one of their apartments, and people played games and I enjoyed the company of old friends and two new.

And that was it. The gathering at the apartment dissolved after a couple of hours, and it doesn't look like even half of that group of friends will gather together in the near future. (I asked.) But without words, without any special intuition—the only real intuition I had was while I was driving to the restaurant was that I should turn aside to another place—it was as if God had showed, "I am still sovereign. I can do whatever I want." God can, in a heartbeat, make a job show up. He has not done so yet, in a heartbeat or otherwise. But he can still provide for me, and I am not in despair, but trust.

The rule in childbearing is a few minutes of ecstasy, nine months of carrying, and then two decades of raising children. And in another department, one tastes a meal for half an hour and then digests and acts on it. After that mountaintop experience, to use the Protestant term, I have been voluntarily dislodged from despair, and am off to work: jobhunting instead of a regular job, but off to spiritual work and repenting of my sins. It is the Orthodox understanding that God gives miracles to cover for human weaknesses, and if God gave me a powerful day's experience with friends and good times, that is not a reward for grandeur so much as a crowbar to loosen real

problems. And, God willing, a seed planted for me to grow. I do not seek to return to that experience, because, in the words of Lewis in [Out of the Silent Planet](#), "A pleasure is full-grown only as a memory." The latter part of that day was delightful, and I pursue it by doing the work I have after then: first writing the first part of [Merlin's Well](#), then working on publishing it on Amazon, then writing this article, then returning to work on the front end of a web application, all the while searching for my next job.

I have not acted worthily along the way, but I'm looking forward to the next installment.

# The Sign of the Grail

George had finally gotten through the first week at Calix College, and the chaos was subsiding. Bored for a minute, and too exhausted from the busy work to start researching something, he sat down, tried to remember something strange that he meant to investigate, and tried some more.

When he finally gave up and tried to think about what else he could do, he remembered a book he had seen in his closet, perhaps left over by a previous resident. He pulled out a fan and a lamp that were placed on it, and pulled out a large book. The entire leather cover had only eleven letters, and the dark leather showed signs of wear but seemed to be in remarkably good condition. The golden calligraphy formed a single word: Brocéliande. All across the front lay dark, intricate leather scrollwork.

What was "Brocéliande?" After looking at the leather and goldwork a short while, George opened Brocéliande and read:

The knight and the hermit wept and kissed together, and the hermit did ask, "Sir knight, wete thou what the Sign of the Grail be?"

The knight said, "Is that one of the Secrets of the

Grail?"

"If it be one of the Secrets of the Grail, that is neither for thee to ask nor to know. The Secrets of the Grail are very different from what thou mightest imagine in thine heart, and no man will get them by looking for secrets. But knowest thou what the Sign of the Grail be?"

"I never heard of it, nor do I know it."

"Thou wete it better than thou knowest, though thou wouldst wete better still if thou knewest that thou wete."

"That be perplexed, and travail sore to understand."

The hermit said, "Knowest thou the Sign of the Cross?"

"I am a Christian and I know it. It is no secret amongst Christians."

"Then know well that the sacred kiss, the kiss of the mass, even if it be given and received but once per year, is the Sign of the Grail."

"How is that? What makes it such as I have never heard?"

"I know that not in its fullness. Nor could I count reasons even knew I the fullness of truth. But makest thou the Sign of the Cross when thou art alone?"

"Often, good hermit; what Christian does not?"

"Canst thou make the Sign of the Grail upon another Christian when thou art alone?"

George's cell phone rang, and he closed the book and ran to hear the call better. When he came back, though he spent an hour searching, he could not find his place in the heavy book. He turned outside.

There were a lot of people, but what he saw was the castle-like stonework of the campus, the timeworn statues, and finally

the great wood with its paths, streams, and meadows. He got lost several times, but not truly lost, as he was exploring and finding interesting places no less when he lost his sense of direction. The next time he found his way, he went to the cafeteria and sat down at a table, part listening and part sifting through thoughts. When he got home, his mind was hungry again, and he opened Brocéliande to the middle:

Merlin howled.

"Lord of Heaven and Earth, I have everything I want, or rather everything I fled to. I have left the city and the company of men, and am become as a wild beast, living on grass and nuts.

"Is this because of whose son I am? Some say I have powers from my father, serving the Light only because the prayers spoken when some learned of that dread project. Yet here outside of castle and city I have learned things hidden from most men. I can conjure up a castle from the air, but not enter and live in one: I live in the wood as a man quite mad."

Then he looked around. The trees were a verdant green, yet he found apples. Presently he came to the fountain of Brocéliande; he rang not the bell but drew deep and drank a draught. The forest were his labyrinth and his lair.

A hawk came and set him on the branch close up. Merlin said to it, "Yet I can speak with thee: no element is a stranger to me."

A sound of footsteps sounded, and Merlin ran not away. Merlin his sister Ganeida laid a hand on Merlin his arm. "Come, Merlin. This is unworthy. I have brought thee food for a journey: King Arthur summoneth thee to his court."

Merlin beheld the wood called Brocéliande. He beheld its holly, its ivy, its trees shaken by storm and wind. He thought of the animals. And there was something about this forest that drew him: it seemed larger on the inside than the outside, and there was something always that seemed shining through it, like faint and haunting music which he had by struggles learned to catch as he withdrew from castles and the world of men.

Then Ganiada did start to sing a different song, a plain and simple folk tune, and Merlin his heart settled, and he did walk with his sister.

George slowly closed the book.

He imagined the scene; there was something about Merlin that haunted and eluded him. There was—

There was a knock on the door.

He opened it. It was one of the people from dinner.

"Do you want to see a movie?"

"What movie?"

"We're still deciding. But there are a few of us going to the theater."

George thought for a moment. Up until that point he thought he didn't want to read more of the book for now. When he declined the invitation, there was a fleeting insight which he forgot the next moment.

The next day in class, the figure of Merlin had a stronger grip on his imagination.

If George had less energy, his classes might have suffered more. As it was, he was getting by, and he slowly began to realize that there was something more that gripped him than horses, swords, and armor. He kept opening more to see the beautiful fantasy so different from his world. At one point he turned the

fantasy, so different from his world. At one point he turned the page:

Then Queen Guinevere did sigh and wept sore.

A lady asked, "Milady, what is it?"

"This Grail cometh even now. Is it accursed?"

"The Round Table shattered sore hard and knights return  
with strange tales. Such a holy thing this Grail is called, yet  
when it cometh the rich Grail yet burneth like fire. Already  
King Arthur his work is unraveling.

"Will it even take from me my Sir Lancelot? Or can I take  
even my Lancelot from the Holy Grail?"

There was something in the back of George's mind. He sat  
back, thinking, and then closed the book to make a brief visit to  
the unspoilt beauty of the wood.

When he went in, he noticed a great beech tree, lying,  
weeping. It seemed that there was something trying to get out  
of the verdure. There were ferns and moss around, and he  
walked and walked. The path took many turns, and George began  
to realize several things. First, it was dark. Second, he was lost.  
Third, a chill was setting in. Fourth, he could not see even the  
stars.

Before long he was running in heavy, icy rain, branches  
lashing, until a branch hitting his chest winded him. He sat down  
in stinging pain and regained his breath, then felt around and  
crawled beneath an outcropping. Here the rain at least would not  
get to him any more. He spent the night in waking shock at what  
this great pristine nature, unsullied by human contamination, was  
really like: the forest seemed to be without reason or order  
right down to the awkward surface of the rock that he was  
painfully lying on. Long-forgotten fears returned: when a little

light broke through the clouds, were those things he saw rocks, fallen trees, or goblins? He spent a long time shivering, and when the sun rose, he thirsted for light, and got up, only half awake, and followed it until he came to the edge of the forest and saw the castle-inspired buildings of the college. A short while later he was warming up with a welcome blanket and the welcome sound of voices in conversation.

Something was eating away at the back of George's mind. Perhaps because of his weariness, his attention in class was chiefly on the flicker of the fluorescent light and how the buildings, which on the outside were so evocative of castles, were so modern on the inside. The one thing that caught his mind was a set of comments about either how we must be individuals and do our own thing or else we are all community and individuality is an illusion. He wanted to be haunted and meet hints of a larger world, and others' passionately held opinions seemed like they were taken from Newsweek and USA Today.

What was on TV? He stopped in the lobby and saw a show with a medieval set, very carefully done to convey a medieval flavor, and watched until a heroine looked at a magical apparition in a full-length mirror and said, "I am having... a biochemical reaction!" He could not explain what failed to confront him, but he walked out. It was Freya's Day, commonly shortened to "Friday." When he learned how the days of the week were named, for Norse gods or celestial bodies—namely, Sun's Day, Moon's Day, Tiw's Day, Wotan's Day, Thor's Day, Freya's Day, and Saturn's Day—something seemingly pedestrian met him with a touch of a larger world. Now, it seemed, things that looked like they could tell of a larger world confronted him with the utterly pedestrian?

His homework did not take long.

Then, amidst Bon Jovi blaring through the hall, George began read. What he was reading seemed to affect him more like a song would than a story: a lullaby almost. He read of Arthur walking into battle, carrying an icon of the Virgin above him. There were mighty blows, armies with their mounted shock troops, great knights clothed in chainmail hauberks astride elephantine destriers, and in the center Arthur holding what seemed to be a story within a story, an icon that opened out onto something larger, and yet something he could not see in his mind's eye.

Then at another place he read as Arthur crossed land and sea and placed his sword on the ground and claimed a second Britain, and then gave of his knights, his brothers, and his substance to make a place like Great Britain, with forests and orchards, fields and towns, until he had given what he could of his spirit to make a Little Britain.

George looked through and began to see things weaving in and out: an intensity, a concentration, and not just that he was entering another time but he was entering another time, though he could not tell how it was different: he only sensed that time moved differently, and that his watch told something very different.

Then all of this seemed to crystallize as a grievously wounded Sir Lancelot came to an hospitable knight and Elaine his daughter spent endless time healing his wounds. Love so overwhelmed her that she poured herself out with such intensity that when Lancelot left for the only woman he could love, her body emptied of spirit and life floated on a bier in a boat until Arthur's court wept at the most piteous tale of her love. George found himself wishing he could weep.

—over hill over dale until the night was black and neither

...over him, over all and the night was black, and neither  
candle nor star pierced it. The great knight his destrier  
shook the earth. The great knight was clad in a double coat  
of mail and the shaft of his greater spear was as a weaver's  
beam. Then he did stop to dismount and his own steps shook  
the earth.

Before him was a chalice of purest gold, radiant with light  
—radiant as the day. He walked before it, his steps shook  
the earth, and he stood taller than ever he did stand, until  
his hand grasped it.

The light blazed brighter and a voice in the air spake,  
"Lancelot, Lancelot, why mockest thou me?" The light blazed,  
and Sir Lancelot fell against the ground in tremors, and his  
horse fled far away in terror.

Then Sir Lancelot spake a question which I will not tell  
you.

The voice answered with words not lawful for man to  
write, and the pure gold chalice vanished and the light with  
it.

The knight wist not why he ran, and later he awoke him in  
a strange place where there were neither man nor beast in  
sight.

George closed the book. He had been reading for a long time,  
he told himself. What was there to do?

He looked around the school website for clubs and  
organizations, and none of the many things people were doing  
caught his eye. He walked around the campus, looking at the  
buildings. He went to the library and wandered around the  
bookshelves, and picked up a few items but set them down. Then  
he returned to his room and sat down for a while.

He was bored for the rest of the day.

That night, as he dreamed, he saw a castle, and walked into it. Whenever he looked at his body, he saw what looked like his ordinary clothing, and yet he believed he was wearing armor. He walked through hallways, chambers, the great hall, even dungeons, trying to see what he was searching for. At last he was in a room where he heard people, and smelt something ineffable. He caught a glimpse of a chalice that he could not see, yet he sensed its silhouette, bathed in indescribable light on either side, and he saw light rising above its core. But he never succeeded in seeing it.

He awoke from the strain to see it. He heard birdsong, and the fingers of the light of the dawn were brushing against his face.

Something crystallized in George's mind, and he did not need to tell himself, "I am on a quest."

The next day he went into the city to look around in the medieval institute, and tried to see what was there. He managed to walk at a brisk pace, almost run, through the museum, and was nervous over whether he would get out by the time he had to leave to catch dinner. Nothing caught his eye; nothing seemed interesting; everything seemed good only for a glimpse.

There was something eating at him.

During the next week, George discovered online reproduction sword dealers and looked at the perfectly machined character of the many closeup images available online. He didn't buy anything, but after the week thinking and failing to find other places, George returned to the museum. Maybe there was something he had missed.

He stopped at the first sword.

The sword, or what was left of it, looked like it had been eaten by worms, if that were possible. The deeply pitted surface

intrigued him; it had all the surface of the complexity of a rock, and he thought that if he could take a magnifying glass or a zoomed-in camera lens to this or that part, it could pass for the intricate surface of a volcanic rock.

The handle didn't look right at all. It was a thin square rod connecting a thick blade and a thicker pommel, and seemed the very definition of "ergonomically incorrect," as if it had been designed to gouge the wearer's hand or generate blisters. It held for George something of the fascination of a car wreck. Why on earth had the museum put such a poor-quality specimen on display?

Then he read the rather large plaque.

The plaque read:

This sword was excavated in what is now Cornwall in Great Britain and dates to the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. It is considered to be remarkably well-preserved, being one of few such finds to be straight and in one solid piece, the metal part lacking only a handguard, and is one of this museum's prized holdings and one of the most valuable gifts from an anonymous donor. The handle, of which only the metal tang remains, was probably wood or possibly other organic materials.

Think for a moment about the time and place this sword would have come from. Everything was made by hand, and there was little wealth: owning a sword would have been like owning a car today. Microscopic examination suggests that this sword was made for someone wealthy, as there are tiny fragments of gold embedded in the blade.

What was life like when nothing was made by machines or mass-produced and therefore things were more expensive

and there was less you could buy? What was life when you could not travel faster than a horse and what we today call information could not travel faster than people? What would your life have been like when you would have probably been born, lived, and died within a few miles of the same spot?

Life was hard.

But then look at the other side of the coin: can you think of anything people then would have had that you do not have today?

George looked at the sword, and tried to imagine it whole. At least he could tell what shape it suggested. And he tried to think about what the placard said, with none of the technologies he was used to. What would one do? Practice at swordplay? Wander in the forest?

George saw in his mind's eye Sir Lancelot kneeling on one knee, his sword point in earth, his sword pointing down, taking an oath. Then George looked over the sword again and it looked like Lancelot's sword: he imagined Sir Lancelot—or was it George?—laying his right hand on the sword and taking a mighty oath, and for a moment the sword in the museum took its full cruciform shape. And then as his eyes traced over the contours of the sword, it looked almost a relic, and he saw now one thing, now another: one scene from Brocéliande gave way to another, and something tugged at his heart.

He tried to imagine a great feast given by King Arthur to his nobles. There was something of that feast right in front of him, and it seemed to suggest an unfolding pageant. Knights and ladies dined with uproarious laughter, while minstrels sung enchanting ballads, and—

George realized someone was tapping on his shoulder. "Sir? Excuse me. but it's time for you to leave."

George turned and saw a security guard, and in puzzlement asked her, "Why? Have I done something wrong?"

She smiled and said, "You haven't done anything wrong, but I'm sorry, the museum is now closing. Come back another day!"

George looked out a window and saw that the daylight had completely fled. He realized he was very hungry.

He left after briefly saying, "Thank-you."

When he arrived home he was even hungrier, but even before he began eating he began looking through the same sites, selling swords.

None of them looked real to him.

After eating part of his meal, George opened Brocéliande, flipping from place to place until an illustration caught his eye.

He read:

Merlin walked about in the clearing on the Isle of Avalon. To his right was the castle, and to his left was the forest. Amidst the birdsong a brook babbled, and a faint fragrance of frankincense flowed.

Sir Galahad walked out of the castle portal, and he bore a basket of bread.

Then Galahad asked Merlin about his secrets and ways, of what he could do and his lore, of his calling forth from the wood what a man anchored in the castle could never call forth. And Galahad enquired, and Merlin answered, and Galahad enquired of Merlin if Merlin knew words that were more words than our words and more mystically real than the British tongue, and then the High Latin tongue, and then the tongue of Old Atlantis. And then Galahad asked after anything beyond Atlantis, and Merlin's inexhaustible fount ran dry.

Then Sir Galahad asked Merlin of his wood, of the stones and herbs, and the trees and birds, and the adder and the dragon, the gryphon and the lion, and the unicorn whom only a virgin may touch. And Merlin spake to him of the pelican, piercing her bosom that her young may feed, and the wonders, virtues, and interpretation of each creature, until Galahad asked of the dragon's head for which Uther had been called Uther Pendragon, and every Pendragon after him bore the title of King and Pendragon. Merlin wot the virtue of the dragon's body, but of the dragon's head he wot nothing, and Sir Galahad spake that it was better that Merlin wist not.

Then Sir Galahad did ask Merlin after things of which he knew him nothing, of what was the weight of fire, and of what is the end of natural philosophy without magic art, and what is a man if he enters not in the castle, and "Whom doth the Grail serve?", and of how many layers the Grail hath.

And Merlin did avow that of these he wist not none.

Then Merlin asked, "How is it that you are wise to ask after these all?"

Then Galahad spake of a soft voice in Merlin his ear and anon Merlin ran into the wood, bearing bread from the castle.

George was tired, and he wished he could read more. But he absently closed the book, threw away what was left of his hamburgers and fries, and crawled into bed. It seemed but a moment that he was dreaming.

George found himself on the enchanted Isle of Avalon, and it seemed that the Grail Castle was not far off.

George was in the castle, and explored room after room,

entranced. Then he opened a heavy wooden door and found himself facing the museum exhibit, and he knew he was seeing the same 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century sword from the Celtic lands, only it looked exactly like a wall hanger sword he had seen online, a replica of a 13<sup>th</sup> century Provençale longsword that was mass produced, bore no artisan's fingerprints, and would split if it struck a bale of hay. He tried to make it look like the real surface, ever so real, that he had seen, but machined steel never changed.

Then George looked at the plaque, and every letter, every word, every sentence was something he could read but the whole thing made no sense. Then the plaque grew larger and larger, until the words and even letters grew undecipherable, and he heard what he knew were a dragon's footsteps and smelled the stench of acrid smoke. George went through room and passage until the noises grew louder, and chanced to glance at a pool and see his reflection.

He could never remember what his body looked like, but his head was unmistakably the head of a dragon.

George sat bolt upright on his bunk, awake in a cold sweat, and hit his head on the ceiling.

The next day, George went to the medieval history library that was almost at the center of the campus, housed in a white limestone tower with one timeworn spire, and intricately woven with passages like rabbit holes. The librarian was nowhere in sight, and owing to his eccentricities the library still had only a paper card catalog, emanating a strange, musty aroma. George started to walk towards it, before deciding to wander around the shelves and get a feel for things medieval. The medieval history librarian was rumored to be somewhat eccentric, and insisted on a paper card catalog with no computers provided, which many of

the students said might as well have been medieval.

His first read traced the development of symbol from something that could not give rise to science to something that apparently paved the way in that a symbol and what it refers to were no longer seen as connected. It seemed hard to follow, some where the argument was obscure and even more when he followed the reasoning: he grasped it and grasped it not. As he read, he read of the cultivation of cabbages and tales of kings, and whether grotesques could let pigs have wings. He read of boys doing the work of men and men who acted like boys, of children who asked for bread and their fathers would give them stones in their bread, of careful historians ages before the great discovery of history and classicists preserving the ancient life after the ancient life met its demise, of strange things that turned familiar and yet familiar things turned strange, of time becoming something a clock could measure, of those who forged, those who plagiarized, and arguments today why no medieval author should be accused of plagiarism for what he copied, and yet he read of a world where few died of old age and minor cuts and illnesses could kill. He read of the problem of underpopulation, the challenge of having enough births, and untold suffering when there were not enough people.

Yet to speak this way is deceptive, because all these wonders and more were made pedestrian. The more he studied, the fewer wonders he met, or at least the fewer wonders he could find, and the more he met a catalog of details. He read the chronicles of kings and those seeking what could be recovered through them, and however much he read King Arthur was not mentioned once.

Though he spent weeks searching in the library, the haunting beauty of Brocéliande had been rare to begin with and now he wot of it not none.

And the fruitless search for the history of Arthur led him to knock on the librarian's door.

"I'm in a bad mood. Leave me alone!"

"Please."

"You can come in if you must, but you would be better off leaving."

"I've looked all over and found neither hide nor hair of a book on King Arthur. Does this library have nothing on him?"

"King Arthur? No, not this part of the library; look in the appropriate sections on the electronic card catalog in the regular library."

"But I want to know the history of Arthur."

"The history of King Arthur?!? What can you possibly mean?"

"I had been reading about King Arthur outside the library."

"The general library has a number of the original sources, along with more literary criticism than one person can possibly read, and what little the history of literature knows about more and less obscure authors. And our literature department has several renowned scholars on Arthurian literature. But why are you trying to find King Arthur in a medieval history library? That's as silly as looking for the history of the animals in Aesop's fables."

"You don't believe in Arthur?"

"No, I don't. Though I could be wrong. A lot of scholars, wrong as they may be, believe there was an Arthur around the 6<sup>th</sup> century, a warrior owning a horse, though the consensus is that he was not a king. These—"

"So Arthur was a knight and not a king?!?"

"No, he wasn't a knight. He couldn't have been. If there ever was such a person."

"But you said he had a horse and—"

"You're making a basic historical mistake if you're imagining a warrior then, even one with a horse, as a 'knight'. It would like a historian five or six centuries from now studying our technology, and knowing that Saint Thomas Aquinas was an author, imagining him doing Google searches and composing, in Latin of course, on his computer's word processor.

"Warriors owned horses, but stirrups hadn't reached Arthur's supposed land, and without a stirrup it is almost impossible to fight while mounted. A horse was a taxi to get a warrior to battle to fight on foot like everybody else, and nothing more. A warrior with a horse was a warrior with a better taxi to get to the scene of battle. A knight, on the most material level, is an almost invincible mounted shock troop compared to the defenseless-as-children so-called 'infantry.' And then you have the ideal, almost the mythos, of chivalry that developed about these mighty brutal warriors.

"The Arthurian legends were never even close to history to begin with, even if they hadn't grown barnacles on top of barnacles, like... a bestseller with too many spinoffs. All the versions have their own anachronisms, or rather the earlier versions are nothing like anachronisms, projecting a legendary past for the kind of knight that was then becoming fashionable. You have a late medieval Sir Thomas Mallory fitting knights with plate armor that would have been as anachronous for an Arthur of the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century to wear as it would have been for a knight of Mallory's day to be equipped with today's Kevlar version of a bulletproof vest.

"I don't think it's a particularly big deal for there to be anachronisms; the idea that anachronism is a problem is a complete anachronism in evaluating medieval literature; saying that Chrétien de Troyes built an anachronous social ideal is as

silly as complaining that the accounts of animals in a medieval bestiary are not doing the same job in the same way as a scientific biology textbook. Of course they aren't, but you're being equally silly to read a medieval bestiary as something that should be empirical scientific biology.

"Of course, getting back to anachronism, Mallory has guns which—"

"Guns?!? Machine guns? Handguns? Rifles?" George said.

"Nothing fancy, just early cannon, not a modern assault rifle. But there are none the less guns in the pivotal late medieval version of the story, which had Arthur's son and nephew, Mordred, besieging—"

"Which one was Mordred, and what was the other one's name?" George said.

"'Which one'? What do you mean..." The librarian said, pausing. "Aah, you get it. For that matter, the stories tend to include endless nobles whose family tree is, like a good nobility family tree, more of a family braid, and—"

It was around then that the conversation became something that George remembered with the confused memory of a dream. He knew that the librarian had explained something, but the closest he could come to remembering it was a discussion of how networked computers as the next generation of computing contributed to a unique medieval synthesis, or what actually seemed to make more sense of the shape of that "memory," the sound of an elephant repeatedly ramming stone walls.

What he remembered next was walking—walking through the library, walking around campus, walking through the forest, and then...

Had he been asked, he might have been collected enough to say that this was the first time in a long while he was not on a

quest.

What was he doing now?

Was he doing anything?

Where was George?

He was lost, although that didn't register on his mind. Or perhaps he wasn't lost, if "lost" means not only that you don't know where you are, but that you wish you knew.

George was in the city somewhere, if that was where he was. A great forest of steel, glass, and brick. Some was adorned by graffiti, other bits by ugly paint. This was definitely not the castle to him, but the wild wood, much more the wild wood than what was merely a place with many trees and few buildings. What made the wood a wood and not like a castle, anyway?

George looked around. In front of him was a boarded-up restaurant. The sign said, "Closed for minor renovations. REOPENING SOON." Its paint looked chipped and timeworn, and from what he could see looking in the dirty windows, it was dusty inside. What, exactly, did the menu say? George could see the menu, and some pictures of what was probably supposed to be food, but even though he was on the edge of hunger, the hazy blurs did nothing to make his mouth water.

George walked a good distance further, and saw the bright colors of a store, and heard music playing. He wandered in. Inside, the store was bustling with activity. Just inside, there was a demonstration of electronic puppies: an employee was showing the puppy off. On a whim, George walked over.

The young woman was saying words commands which the puppy sometimes did not respond to. She handed it to children to pet, who responded with exuberant warmth. But the more George watched the scene, the more the whole scene seemed off-kilter.

The puppies were cute, but there seemed to be something

much less cute when they moved. What was it? The puppy's animation seemed neither like a cute stuffed animal nor like a toy robot. It seemed like a robot in a puppy costume, but the effect was... almost vampiric.

Then George looked at the employee again. She was quite attractive, but her smile and the exaggerated energy for her role... reminded George of makeup almost covering dark circles under someone's eyes.

He ducked into an aisle. Below were not only unflavored dental floss and mint floss, but many different kinds of floss in all different colors, thicknesses, and several different flavors. But the choices in the actual floss were dwarfed by the choices in the cases: purple-and-pink containers of floss for preteen girls, larger rough-looking containers made of dark stonelike plastic for a man's man, and sundry groups—including trainers for babies who were still teething. George saw a sign above a display that said, "We bring you the freedom TO CHOOSE!"

He tried not to think about sledgehammers. He tried.

George was looking for a reason to stay in the store. There was eye-catching color everywhere, and he saw a section of posters, and started flipping through art posters, looking for something to buy, until he saw the sign above the posters. It said, "Priceless masterpieces from the greatest museums of the world, conveniently made available to you in American standard poster size and format, for only \$4.99 each."

Somehow the store's showmanlike displays seemed a bit hollow. George left.

George wandered out, something not quite clicking in his mind. He knocked on the building next door, and a voice said, "Just a minute; come in." He opened the door and saw a sight in shadows. A man was heading out a door. "As soon as I've finished taking

out the trash and washed my hands, I can help you."

A short while later, the man emerged. "Hi. I'm Fr. Elijah." He extended his hand, his head and hands standing out against the darkness and his dark robe, and shook George's hand. George said, "I'm George."

"What can I do for you?"

George stopped, and thought. He said, "I was just looking around while I was waiting for my thoughts to clear."

Fr. Elijah said, "Are you a student?"

George said, "Yes."

Fr. Elijah said nothing, but it did not seem he needed to say anything just then. George was growing calm.

"May I offer you something to drink? I was just going to make tea, and I don't have a full range of soft drinks, but there should be something worth drinking. There's a pitcher of ice-cold water if you don't care for an old man's coffee or tea."

George said "Yes."

"Wonderful. Come with me." The two began walking, and they sat down.

George looked at him.

Fr. Elijah said, "Please sit down," motioning to an armchair. "Did you want coffee, water, or tea? I have cookies. Oh, and there's milk too."

George smiled. "Could I have a chalice of milk?"

Fr. Elijah turned to get the cookies, a cup and some milk. George said, "I meant to say a cup of milk. Sorry, I was trying to be a little more serious."

Fr. Elijah said, "You can explain, or not explain. It's your choice. But I think you were being serious. Just not the way you expected. But we can change the subject. Do you have a favorite book? Or has anything interesting happened to you lately? I can

at least listen to you."

George said, "I was just at the store nearby."

Fr. Elijah asked, "What do you think of it?"

George said, "Are you sure you won't be offended?"

Fr. Elijah said, "One of the things I have found in my work is that people can be very considerate about not being offensive, but sometimes I have something valuable to learn with things people think might offend me."

"Ever wonder about the direction our society has headed? Or see something that left you wishing you could still wonder about that?"

"A lot of people do."

"I was already having a bad day when I wandered into a store, and just when I thought things couldn't get any more crass, they got more crass. I've just been invited to buy an identity with the help of a market-segment dental floss container."

"You're a man after my own heart. I've heard that the store manager has some pretty impressive connections. I've heard that if none of the dental floss containers in the store suit the identity you want to have, and you ask the manager, he can get your choice of floss in a custom container made by a sculptor to meet your whims!"

"But isn't there more to life than that?"

"I certainly hope so! Oh, and did I mention that I've found that store an excellent place for important shopping for April Fools' Day? I'm hoping to get my godson horribly artificial sugary-sweet tasting lacy pink floss in a container covered by red and white hearts and words like 'Oochie-poo.' He'll hit the roof! On second thought, he'll be expecting such a gift... I should probably give it to him on what you'd consider August 12."

"Why? What's special about August 12?"

"That's a bit of a labyrinth to sort out. Some Orthodox keep the old Julian calendar, while some keep the 'new' civil calendar, which means that those who preserve the old calendar, even if we manage not to go off in right field, are thirteen days 'late' for saints' days, celebrating July 30, the Feast of Saint Valentine, on what you'd consider August 12. What you call Valentine's Day is the Western celebration of the saint we celebrate on another day, and it's a bit of a Western borrowing to use it for pseudo-romantic purposes to pick on my godson, as that saint's feast did not pick up all the Western romantic connotations; Saint Valentine's story is a typical story of a bishop who strengthened people against paganism and was martyred eventually. Every day is a feast of some sort, and every feast—that is, every day—has several saints to celebrate... but I'm going on and on. Have I confused you yet?"

"Um, 'right field'? What does that mean?"

"Oops, sorry, personal expression. In the West people go out in left field and go loony liberal. In Orthodoxy, people go out in right field and go loony conservative. Some of the stuff I've been told would make me at least laugh if I didn't want to cry so badly. Sorry, I'm rambling, and I was trying to hear you out when it looked like you've had a rough day, right up to a store telling you there was nothing more to hope for in life than things like dental floss with a container designed for your market segment.

Let me let you change the subject."

"Um, you're probably wondering why I said, 'chalice of milk.'"

"I would be interested in hearing that, but only if you want to tell. I have a guess, but I really don't want you to feel obligated to say something you'd rather not."

"What is your guess?"

"That you said 'chalice of milk' for an interesting reason that

probably has an interesting connection to what, in life, you hope goes beyond the trivialities you were pushed into at that store. A chalice, whatever that means to you, is something deeper and richer."

George opened his mouth, then closed it for a moment, and said, "Does a chalice mean anything to you?"

"Oh, yes. A chalice means quite a lot to me."

"What does it mean to you?"

"George, have you ever seen a chalice?"

"No, but it's pretty important in something I've read."

"Would you like to see a chalice?"

"The chalice I've read about was made of purest gold. I'd imagine that if you have a fancy wine glass, maybe lead crystal, it would look poorer than what I'd imagine, and there are some things that are big enough that I'd rather not imagine."

"Well, there are some things that are bigger than can be seen, and that includes a chalice. But the chalice I have—I can't show it to you now—has the glint of gold, which has more layers than I can explain or know."

"Is there a time you can show it to me?"

"Yes, come during the Divine Liturgy, and you can see the chalice from which I serve the Eucharist. I can't explain—I know this offends some people, and I will understand if you are offended—that it would not be good for me to give you the Eucharist if you are not Orthodox. But you can see the chalice as it holds a treasure infinitely more valuable than its goldwork."

"What is that?"

"The Eucharist."

"Isn't that just a symbol?"

"Hmm, there are six hundred ways to respond to that. I can get into some of the intricacies later. If you want. Or we need

never talk about it. But...

"Saying the Eucharist is 'just a symbol' is as silly as saying that the Eucharist is 'just the body and blood of Christ'. What else do you want it to be—a designer container of dental floss?"

George's laugh was interrupted by a knock at a door. Fr. Elijah looked at his watch, and his face fell. He said, "Just when the conversation was getting interesting! I'm sorry; I have an appointment."

George said, "Well, I won't take any more of your time; I'll come on Sunday. What time?"

"The Divine Liturgy starts at 9:00 Sunday morning; I'm sorry, that isn't a very good time for college students. Arriving five minutes late isn't a big deal. Most of the professors of campus can give you directions to my parish, the Church of the Holy Trinity. And bother that I have to end our talk!"

"That's OK. Do you have some literature that you want to give me? Where are your pamphlets?"

"Hmm, that would take some time to explain, and I can explain later if you want. But I don't have any pamphlets. If you want a book I can go to the library and you can borrow one. But Orthodox people don't usually feel obligated to stuff your pockets with as much paper as we can and leave you walking away feeling guilty that you dread the prospect of reading it. Come back; I enjoyed talking with you, and if you want I can get something from the library. But only if you want. Please excuse me." Fr. Elijah stood up and bowed slightly, but reverently, to George as they shook hands.

"Coming!" Fr. Elijah said. "I'm sorry; I was just trying to wrap up a conversation. Please come in. It's been a long time since I've seen you, and I've been looking forward to it."

George stepped out, and walked out. He stopped by a window

to look into the Church building again.  
He could tell nothing that looked to him like a chalice, but  
everywhere was the glint of gold.

George wandered back with a spring in his step.  
He returned home and opened Brocéliande, and read:

Blaise turned at a slow step. "Why callest thou thyself  
empty? Hast thou none, my son?"

Merlin answered him. "Forgive me, my master, my lord."

The wind was deadly still.

Blaise turned even more fully. "What is it, my pupil?"

Merlin reached out his hand. A mighty wind blew, such as  
openeth doors that be closed and closeth doors that be  
open.

An apple tree shook of a violence and apples met their  
place on the humble earth, all apples did so which fell, save  
one which Merlin his hand did close upon it.

The wind blew and blew, stronger and stronger it blew,  
and Blaise looked upon Merlin, and spake: "Flyest thou now,  
my hawk?"

Merlin his chaste teeth closed in on the apple, and the  
great and mighty wind closed a door against the stone and  
hushed to become a soft murmuring breeze, as a still small  
voice.

Merlin looked upon his master. "Though the Grail remain a  
secret and a secret remain the Grail, men shall know it even  
under its cloak of samite most red. When a man shall grasp  
the secret of the Grail then shall he grasp the mystery of  
the Trinity."

Blaise looked upon his servant. "And who shall be in that  
grasp?"

Merlin spoke softly: "My lord, I will be not."

merlin spake sorry. my lord, I wit me not.

Blaise said, "My lord, it is well with thee."

Merlin abode in a quiet still spirit.

The hours and days passed quickly, until it was Sunday and George left a little early and arrived at the Church of the Holy Trinity early, looked at his watch and saw 8:53 AM.

He stepped inside and found things suddenly cool. There was a dazzling darkness, with pure candlelight and lamplight glittering off of gold, with fragrances of smoke and beeswax and incense. There was a soft chanting, and the funny thing was that it was hard to say whether the Church seemed full or empty. He saw few people, even for the small space, but he had rather a sense that the place was full of worshipers, mostly unseen. He could feel glory, almost as a weight.

There seemed to be a continuous faint commotion as people entered, went to the front, doing something he could not tell, and walked around. He stood as most people were standing, although some were sitting and people seemed to bow or move their hands. It is not exactly that George did not feel conspicuous as to how he was standing out, as that that was not quite the greatest way he felt conspicuous.

How did he feel conspicuous? George found no answer he liked. The whole situation seemed foreign to him, and for the first time it did not seem so much that he was examining something but that something, or someone, was examining him and judging him.

Something happened. Or rather, this time the something that happened meant that people were sitting down, in pews around the edges or on the floor, and the chant had become ordinary speech. Fr. Elijah said,

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

Last week after Liturgy, little John came up to me and said, "Fr. Elijah, I have a question." "What, I asked." "I saw Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark Friday and it was really, really cool! Could you tell me all about the Ark?"

So I paused in thought, and exercised a spiritual father's prerogative. I said, "You know what? That's a good question.

Let me think a bit and I'll answer that question in my homily." And when his father said, "But weren't you going to —" I said, "Don't worry about that. I'll blame the homily on him, and if people find it duller than a worn-out butter knife, they can call you at work and complain." And finally I got him to crack a faint smile.

So this is the homily I'm blaming on him. First of all, the Ark of the Covenant is a spiritual treasure, and is spiritually understood. It is not lost, but it is found in a much deeper way than some expect. For it is both a what and, more deeply, a who. You can look up in fact where it is, and the amazing thing is that it is still guarded as a relic rather than treated simply as something that merely belongs in a museum, and the hidden Ark is in fact greater than if it were displayed in a showcase. It is one of many treasures the Church guards, and it is at the Church of our Lady Mary of Zion in the Ethiopian city of Axum. I've been there, even if I could not see the Ark. But the Ark which holds the bread from Heaven and the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed is in the shadow of the Ark to whom we sing, "Rejoice, O Volume wherein the Word was inscribed" and whose womb is a garden of spiritual treasures, "more spacious than the Heavens" as we say, by

whom we are given the greater and in fact greatest Bread from Heaven. When we read of the Ark coming to King David and of the Theotokos or Mother of God coming to Lady Elizabeth, there are some surprising parallels which seem stunning until we recognize that that is just how Luke might be telling us that the Theotokos is someone to whom the Ark hints. There is a profound connection to the Arthurian legends, in which the Sir Galahad is granted to see into the Holy Grail and beholds a wonder beyond the power of words to tell. And it is in fact a misunderstanding on a number of levels to think that that rich Grail is confined to—

If George were sitting on a chair, he might have fallen off it. He was, fortunately, sitting on the floor. When he caught himself enough to follow the words, he listened closely:

...these other images. It was from the virgin earth that the first Adam, by whom we all live natural life, was taken. It was from the parched earth of the Virgin Theotokos that the last Adam, by whom we are called to the divine life, was given. And still this is not to tell how the first Adam, wanting to become God, lost his divinity, until God became the Last Adam, raising up Adam that all of us who bear Adam's likeness might become divine, bearing the likeness of God. Death entered when we took and ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and now everlasting begins when we obey the summons to take and eat the Fruit from the Tree of Life.

Is it possible to call Mary Magdalene the Holy Grail? Yes and amen. We can call Mary Magdalene the Holy Grail in a very deep sense. She spoke before the Emperor, and that incident is why after all these years Christians still color

incident is why after all these years Christians still color Easter eggs, red eggs for the Orthodox Church as they were for Mary Magdalene, when she presented a red egg to the Emperor, perhaps miraculously. There are only a few dozen people the Church has ever honored more. She bears the rank of "Equal to the Apostles," and an angel told her the mysterious news of the Resurrection, and it was she who told the Apostles who in turn would be sent ("Apostle" means "Sent One") to the uttermost ends of the earth.

The Holy Grail is that vessel which first held the blood of Christ, and it is the shadow of that symbol in which the body and blood of Christ become real so that they can transform us. The Eucharist is misunderstood through the question of just what happens when the priest consecrates the gift, because the entire point of the transformation of the gifts is the transformation of the faithful so that we can be the Body of Christ and have the divine blood, the royal bloodline, the divine life coursing through our veins. God the Father the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven and earth is named. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each the King for whom every kingdom is named, so that the Kingdom of Heaven is more, not less, of a Kingdom than the kingdoms we can study on earth.

In the third prayer before communion, we are invited to pray, "O Thou Who by the coming of the Comforter, the Spirit, didst make thy sacred disciples precious vessels, declare me also to be a receptacle of his coming." Mary Magdalene bears powerful witness to what a disciple can be if she becomes a humble earthen vessel in which there is another coming of Christ. She became the Holy Grail, as does every one of us transformed by the power of Christ's

body and blood. If you only ask questions about the transformation of bread and wine, the Holy Grail is merely a what... but if you recognize the larger transformation that has the smaller transformation as a microcosm, the Holy Grail can also be a who: you and I.

It would take much longer to even begin to speak of that nobility of which you will only find the trace and shadow if you study royalty and their bloodlines. I have spoken enough.

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

George was at once attracted, entranced, repulsed, and terrified. It seemed like more than he had dared to dream was proclaimed as truth, but that this meant he was no longer dealing with his choice of fantasy, but perhaps with reality itself. The chanting resumed. There was a procession, and what was in it? Ornate candles, a golden spoon and something that looked like a miniature golden lance, something covered with a cloth but that from its base might have been an intricately worked golden goblet, a cross that seemed to be glory itself, and other things he could not name. It was not long before George heard, "The holy things are for those who are holy," and the reply—was it a correction?—immediately followed: "One is holy. One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen."

George wanted to squirm when he heard the former, and when he heard the latter, he headed for the door. The spiritual weight he had been feeling seemed more intense; or rather, it seemed something he couldn't bear even though he hoped it would continue. He felt, just for a moment that this was more than him having an experience, but he failed to put his finger on what more it might be.

Once outside, he tried to calmly walk home, but found himself running.

George found himself walking, but in completely unfamiliar surroundings. He spent a good deal of time wandering until he recognized a major road, and walked alongside it until he returned home, hungry and parched.

He opened Brocéliande for a moment, but did not feel much like reading it. George went to check his email, began looking through his spam folder—to see if anything important got through, he told himself—and found himself wandering around the seedier side of the net.

In the days that followed, people seemed to be getting in his way, his homework was more of a waste of time, and somehow Brocéliande no longer seemed interesting.

Friday, George missed dinner and went, hungry, to a crowded store where a white-haired man stood right between him and the food he wanted... not only blocking the aisle with his cart, but adding a third 12-pack of soda to the bottom of his cart... and seeming to take forever to perform such a simple task.

After waiting what seemed too long, George refrained from saying "Gramps," but found himself hissing through his teeth, "Do you need help getting that onto your cart?"

The white-haired man turned around in surprise, and then said, "Certainly, George, how are you?"

George stopped.

It was Fr. Elijah.

"Can, um, I help you get that in your cart?"

"Thank you, George, and I would appreciate if you would help me choose another one. Do you have a favorite soda?"

"This may sound silly, but Grape Crush. Why?"

"Help me find a 12-pack of it. I realized after you came that

it was kind of silly for me to inviting people like you inside and not having any soda for them, and I've been procrastinating ever since. Aah, I think I see them over there. Could you put that under your cart?"

George began walking over to the Grape Crush.

Fr. Elijah asked, less perfunctorily, "How are you, George?" and reached out his hand. At least George thought Fr. Elijah was reaching out his hand, but it was as if Fr. Elijah was standing on the other side of an abyss of defilement, and holding out a live coal.

Fr. Elijah shook George's hand.

George tried to find his footing on shifting ground, and managed to ask, "Fr. Elijah, how are you going to get that soda out to your car?"

"Usually someone from the store helps me put things in my trunk or something; I've never found a grocery store to be a place where nothing is provided."

The chasm yawned; George felt as if he were clothed in filthy rags.

"Um, and at home?"

"The Lord always provides something. Sorry, that sounded super spiritual. Usually it's not too long before someone strong comes by and can carry things."

George tried to smile. "I'm fine. How are you?"

Fr. Elijah made no answer with words. He smiled a welcoming smile, and somehow the store began to remind him of Fr. Elijah's office.

George kept waiting for Fr. Elijah to say something more, to answer, but Fr. Elijah remained silent. There seemed to be a warmth about him, as well as something he feared would burn his defilement, but Fr. Elijah remained silent, and pushed his cart,

which had a small armload of groceries and a heavy weight of soda cases, to the register.

"I can help you load things into your car, Fr. Elijah."

Fr. Elijah turned with warmth. Gratitude was almost visible in his features, but he remained strangely silent.

George momentarily remembered to grab a sandwich, then returned to Fr. Elijah in line.

George began to wonder why Fr. Elijah was not speaking to him. Or rather, that was the wrong way to put it. George could not accuse Fr. Elijah of being inattentive, but why was he silent?

George began to think about what he had been doing, and trying not to, to think of something else, to think of something else to talk about. But images returned to his mind, and a desire to—he certainly couldn't mention that.

Where were they? Fr. Elijah had just pushed the cart to his car, and slowly fumbled with his keys to unlock his trunk. George thought with a shudder about what it would be like to an old man to load cases of soda, even 12-packs.

"I can help you unload the soda at your house."

Fr. Elijah turned and made the slightest bow.

Once inside the car, George made a few nervous remarks about the weather. Fr. Elijah simply turned with what must have been a fatherly smile, but said nothing.

George did not consider himself strong, but it was only a few minutes for him to get the handful of cases of soda tucked into a slightly messy closet.

Once back in the car, Fr. Elijah seemed to arrive almost immediately at the dorm.

George said, "Now I remember. I wouldn't ask for another ride back, but I should have asked to borrow a book from your library."

Fr. Elijah turned. "Should you?"

George said, "What do you mean, should I? Are you mad at me? Didn't you tell me that I could borrow any book in your library if you wanted?"

Fr. Elijah said, "For all I am concerned now, you may borrow the whole library, if you want to. Or keep it, if you want."

"Then why don't you want me borrowing a book now?"

"I have many good books you could read, but right now, you don't really want one of my books."

"What do you mean?"

"If you genuinely want to borrow a book, I will gladly talk with you and suggest what I think would be your deepest joy. But why are you asking me for a book now?"

"I thought it would be polite to..."

Fr. Elijah waited an interminable moment and said, "Something is eating you."

George said, "You have no right to—"

Fr. Elijah said, "I have no right to this discussion, and neither do you. Thinking in terms of rights is a way to miss the glory we were made for. But let us stop looking at rights and start looking at what is beneficial. You don't have to answer, but are you happy now?"

George waited, and waited, and waited for an escape route to open up. Then he said, and the saying seemed like he was passing through white-hot ice, "I've been looking at—"

Fr. Elijah said, "Stop, You've said enough."

George said, "But how did you know?"

Fr. Elijah sighed, and for a moment looked like he wanted to weep. "George, I would like to say something deep and mysterious about some special insight I have into people's souls, but that is not it. I am a father, a confessor, and one of the

biggest sins I hear in confession—'biggest' not because it is unforgivable; Jesus was always ready, more than ready, to forgive this kind of sin, but 'biggest' because it keeps coming up and causing misery, is the sort of sin you've been struggling with. I count myself very fortunate that I grew up in an age when you could have all the basic utilities without getting all sorts of vile invitations coming whether you want them or not, and I am glad that I do not feel obligated to purchase some nasty pills because I'm not a real man unless I have the same drives I had at the age of eighteen. What a miserably small and constricted caricature of manhood! I count myself a real man, much more because I have not suffered what tends to become such a dreary dissipation and deflation of any real manhood."

George said, "You're not mad?"

Fr. Elijah raised his hand, moved it up and down and side to side, and said, "I am blessing you, priceless son."

George said, "How can I be free of this?"

Fr. Elijah said, "Come with me. Get back in the car."

They drove for a few more minutes, neither one needing to say anything, until George noticed with alarm the shape of the hospital.

George said, "Where are we going?"

Fr. Elijah said, "To the emergency room."

George looked around in panic. "I don't have money for—"

"Relax. None of the treatment you will be receiving will generate bills."

"What on earth are you—"

"I'm not telling you. Just come with me."

They walked through a side door, George's heart pounding, and George noticed two people approaching immediately.

Fr. Elijah turned momentarily, saying, "Buenos noches,

Señoras," and motioned with his hand for them to follow him.

As they and George followed, Fr. Elijah said, "Because of the triage in an emergency room, and because mere seconds are a matter of life and death in treating really severe injuries, people with relatively 'minor' injuries that still need medical attention can wait for an interminable amount of time."

Fr. Elijah suddenly stopped. George saw a boy with skinned knees, whose mother was slowly working through paperwork. Fr. Elijah said, "Take away his pain."

George looked at him, halfway to being dumbfounded.

"What?"

Fr. Elijah said, "You heard me." Then he turned and left, so that George saw only Fr. Elijah's back and heard from him only broken Spanish.

George felt grateful that at least he wasn't too easily grossed out. He could look at lacerated flesh and eat if he needed to. George sat next to the boy, smelled an overwhelming odor from his blood, and suddenly felt sick to his stomach.

George tried to refrain from swearing about what Fr. Elijah could possibly have meant. Badger the hospital into giving anaesthesia sooner? Kiss it and make it better? Use some psychic power he didn't have? Find a switch on the back of the kid's neck and reboot him?

For a while, nothing happened, until the boy stopped sobbing, and looked at him, a little bit puzzled.

George said, "Hi, I'm George."

The boy said, "Mr. George."

George tried to think of something to say. He said, "What do you get when you cross an elephant with a kangaroo?"

"What?"

"Really big holes all over Australia."

The boy looked at him, but showed no hint of a smile.

"Do you not get it?" George asked.

The boy said, very quietly, "No."

"An elephant has a lot of weight, and a kangaroo bounces up and down. If you put 'weight' and 'bouncy' together, then you get something that, when it bounces, is so heavy it makes big holes in the ground."

The boy said nothing until George added, "That's what makes it funny."

The boy made himself laugh loudly, and just as soon winced in pain.

George tried to think of what to do. After a while, he asked, "What's your favorite color?"

When the boy said nothing, George looked at his face and was surprised at the pain he saw.

"What is your name?"

"My name is Tommy."

George thought about what to say. He began to tell a story. He told of things he had done as a boy, and funny things that had happened (the boy didn't laugh), and asked questions which met with incomprehension. And this went on and on and on.

George wondered why he was having so much fun.

Then George looked at Tommy.

When was the last time George had even begun to do something for someone else?

George realized three things. First, he had stopped talking. Second, a hand was holding tightly to his sleeve. Third, there was something he was trying very hard not to think about.

George looked, and Tommy asked, "Mister, are you a knight? I want to be a knight when I grow up."

George had never before felt such shame that he wished the

earth would swallow him up.

"Mister?"

"No, I am not a knight."

"You seem like a knight."

"Why?"

"You just do. Do you know anything about knights?"

"I've been reading a book."

"What's it called?"

"Brocéliande."

"Tell me the story of Brookie-Land."

"I can't."

"Why?"

"Because I haven't read all of it."

"What have you read?"

George closed his eyes. All he could remember now was a flurry of images, but when he tried to put them together nothing worked.

George was interrupted. "Do you have a suit of armor?"

Immediately, and without thought, George said, "What kind of armor? I mean, is it chain mail, like a steel, I mean iron, sweater, or is it the later plate armor that gets into the later depictions?"

Because if there were a King Arthur, he would—"

"Did King Arthur know powerful Merlin? Because Merlin could —"

"I've read a lot about Merlin—he could build a castle just with his magic. And it apparently matters whose son he is, but I couldn't—"

"I want you to show me—"

A voice cut in. "Tommy!"

"Yes?" the boy said.

"The doctor is ready to see you... Sir, I'm sorry to interrupt,

but—"

"Why does the doctor want to see me?"

"Because she wants to stitch up your knees, Silly Sweetie. Let the nurses roll you away. I'm glad—"

Tommy looked in puzzlement at his knees, saw how badly lacerated they were, and began screaming in pain.

There was a minor commotion as the nurses took Tommy in to be stitched up, or so George would later guess; he could never remember the moment. He only remembered walking around the emergency room, dazed.

Truth be told, though, George felt wonderful. He faintly noticed hearing Fr. Elijah's voice, saying something in Spanish, and joined a group of people among whom he felt immediate welcome. Then the woman who was on the bed was taken in, and Fr. Elijah, and to his own surprise, George, bid farewell to the other members of the group.

George and Fr. Elijah were both silent for a long time in the car.

Fr. Elijah broke the silence.

"Would it be helpful to talk with me about anything?"

"I have to choose just one?"

"No, you can ask as many questions as you want."

"Besides what I started to tell you—"

"Yes?"

"When I was talking with that boy, I mean Tommy, the boy you introduced me to, I—I'm not sure I would have said exactly this, but I've been spending a lot of time reading Brocéliande and no time choosing to be with other people... would you keep that book for me, at least for a time?"

"I certainly could, but let's look at our option. You sound less than fully convinced."

"I don't want to give it up."

"Well, yes, I wouldn't want to give it up either. But is that it?"

"No... I'm really puzzled. Just when I thought I had managed to stop thinking about never-never land and start thinking about Tommy, the kid asked me about never—I mean, he said that he wanted to grow up to be a knight, and he asked me if I was a knight. Which I am not."

"That's very mature of you..."

"And?"

"What would you imagine yourself doing as the right thing?"

"Getting away from that silly desire and be with other people instead."

"Hmm."

"Hmm what?"

"Have you ever read C.S. Lewis's 'The Weight of Glory'?"

"No."

"Ok, I want to stop by my office before I drop you off at home, because I'm going to go against my word and give you literature to read. Although I only want you to read a few pages' essay out of the book, unless you want to read more essays—is this OK?—"

"I suppose."

"Because C.S. Lewis talked about the idea of unselfishness as a virtue, and said that there's something pitiable about letting unselfishness be the center of goodness instead of the divine love. Or something like that. And the reason I remembered that is that somewhere connected with this is this terrible fear that people have that their desires are too strong, and maybe their desires are too much in need of being deepened and layered, except I think he only said, 'too weak.' Today I would add: in a

much deeper way that you can remedy by dangerous pills in your spam.

"Maybe you don't need to get rid of that book at all... maybe you should lend it to me for a time, and let me enjoy it, but maybe not even that is necessary."

"Why?"

"My guess is that if you read enough in that book—or at least the ones I've read—you may notice a pattern. The knight goes to the company of the castle and then plunges into the woodland for adventure and quests, and you need a rhythm of both to make a good story. Or a good knight."

"I fail to see how I could become a knight, or how knighthood applies to me."

"Hmm..."

"Hmm what?"

"Maybe that's a can of worms we can open another time... For now, I will say that the reason the stories have knights doing that is not because the knights wore armor and rode horses, but because the people telling the stories were telling the stories of men. Who need both castle and wood. Keep reading *Brocéliande*, and push it further. Push it to the point that your college and your city are to you what the castle was to the knight. Or even so that you don't see the difference. And alongside your trek into the enchanted wood, meet people. I would suggest that you find a way to connect with people, and work with it over time. If

I may offer a prescription—"

"Prescription?"

"A priest is meant to be a spiritual physician, or at least that is what Orthodox understand. And part of the priest's job is to prescribe something. If you're willing."

"I'll at least listen."

"First, I want you to spend some of your time with other people. Not all."

"Doing what?"

"That's something you need to decide, and even if I can offer feedback to you, I would not make that decision for you. You need to have a think about it."

"Second, something for you to at least consider... Come to me for confession. I cannot give the sacrament I give to Orthodox, but I can bless you. Which isn't the immediate reason I mention it. Even if I were not to bless you, and even if Christ were not listening to your confession, there would still be power in owning up to what you have done. It gives power in the struggle."

"Third, do you access the Internet through a cable or through wireless?"

"An ethernet cable. I don't have a laptop, and I've heard that the wireless network on campus is worth its weight in drool."

"Do you have a USB key?"

"Yes."

"Then give me your Ethernet cable."

"What kind of Luddite—"

"I'm not being a Luddite. I'm offering a prescription for you... There are different prescriptions offered for the needs of different people."

"So for some people it is beneficial to visit—"

"For me it has been. When I was trying to figure out what was going on, I went to a couple's house, and with their permission started looking through the pictures in their spam folder until I'd had more than enough. And I wept for a long time; I suddenly understood something I didn't understand about what I was hearing in confession. I still pray for the people photographed and those looking at the photograph, and some of the women's

faces still haunt me—"

"The faces haunt you?"

"Yes. Understand that at my age, some temptations are weaker... but I looked at those faces and saw that each one was somebody's daughter, or maybe somebody's son, and my understanding is that it's nothing pleasant to pose for those pictures. At least the faces I saw reminded me of an airline stewardess trying really hard to smile peacefully to someone who is being abrasive and offensive. But as I was saying, I count my hour of looking to be of the greatest spiritual benefit. But it would not benefit you, and it is my judgment that in your case a little of what programmers call a 'net vacation'—though I invite you to use lab and library computers—could help you in—"

"Do you know what it's like to give up the convenience of computers in your room?"

"Do you know what it's like to ride a horse instead of a car for a short time? I do..."

"But riding a horse is at least... like... um... it's more like Arthur's world, isn't it?"

"If you want to look at it that way, you're welcome to..." Fr. Elijah stopped the car and stepped out, saying, "Please excuse me for a moment." The shuffling seemed to drag on, and Fr. Elijah stepped out with a book and got back in the car. "Oh, and I almost forgot. Please don't make this a matter of 'I won't do such-and-such or even think about it,' because trying not to think about a temptation is a losing game. I am inviting you to a trek from castle to wood, and wood to castle, with both feeding into a balance. Here is the book with 'The Weight of Glory' and other essays. Now..."

Calix College was in sight almost immediately, and Fr. Elijah waited outside George's dorm for what became a surprisingly

long time... he wondered if he should go up and see if George had changed his mind, and—

George walked out and handed him a cable in the dark. It was thick and stiff.

"I thought Ethernet cables weren't this thick and stiff."

"It's my power cable. I put stuff I need on my USB key."

"Good man."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye, and George, one other thing..."

"Yes?"

"There is no better time to be in a Church than when you know how unworthy you are."

"Um..."

"What?"

"I appreciate how much you're stretching, but..."

"George, I want to ask you something."

"I've been serving the Divine Liturgy for thirty-eight years now. How long have I been worthy to do so?"

"Is this a trick question? All thirty-eight?"

"It is indeed a trick question, but the answer is not 'thirty-eight.' I have never been worthy to serve the Divine Liturgy, nor have I ever been worthy to receive communion, nor have I ever been worthy to pray at Church, or anywhere else. We can talk about this if you like, but am not just being polite when I say that there is no better time to enter the Church than when you know yourself unworthy. Maybe we can talk later about what trumps unworthiness. For now, I wish you good night, and I would be delighted to see you join and adorn our company on Sunday."

George climbed up in his room and sat in his armchair, and it felt like a throne. He was exhausted—and on the other side of shame. He began dutifully opening the C.S. Lewis book, glanced at

the title, then tossed it aside. It was not what he really wanted. He picked up Brocéliande, wiped the dust off the cover with his hand, and opened to its middle, to its heart. George read:

rode until he saw a river, and in the river a boat, and in the boat a man.

The man was clad all in black, and exceeding simple he appeared. At his side was a spear, and was a basket full of oysters filled.

"I ask your pardon that I cannot stand. For the same cause I can not hunt, for I am wounded through the thighs. I do what I might, and fish to share with others."

The knight rode on, Sir Perceval he hyght, until he came upon a castle. And in that castle he met a welcome rich, before a King all in sable clad round, and a sash of purple royal girt about his head, and full majestic he looked.

Then in walked a youth, bearing a sword full straight, for it were not falchion neither scimitar, but a naked sword with a blade of gold, bright as light, straight as light, light as light. The very base of that sword were gem work, of ivory made and with sapphires encrusted. And the boy was girt tightly with a baldric and put the sword in its place. In utmost decorum the sword hung at his side.

The boy placed what he shouldered at the feet of the King.

Spake the King: "I ask your forgiveness that I do not rise. Partake of my feast."

Simpler fare was never adorned by such wealth of wisdom. The body was nourished, and ever more spirit in the fare that was read.

Anon processed one man holding a candelabra of purest

gold with seven candles, anon another, anon a maiden mother holding a Grail, it was such a holy thing! Anon a lance that ever bore three drops of blood. And ever Perceval wondered, and never Perceval spake, though it passed many a time. With a war inside him Sir Perceval kept him his peace. Anon the King spake, "See thou mine only food," and anon came the Grail holding not a stone neither a snake but a single wheaten host, afloat as a pearl in a sea of wine, red as blood. And never the King ate he none else.

Here a page was ripped out from Brocéliande, with yellowed marks where once tape failed to mend what was torn.

The damsel arose from her weeping. "Perceval! Perceval! Why askedst thou not thine enquiry?"

George soon fell into a deep and dreamless sleep. Saturday he rested him all the day long: barely he stirred. In his dream, George heard a song. All was in darkness.

The song it came out of a mist, like as a mist, melodic, mysterious, piercing, like as a prayer, mighty, haunting, subtle, token of home and a trace of a deep place. How long this continued he wot not.

The one high, lilting voice, tinged with starlight, became two, three, many, woven in and out as a braid of three strands, or five, or ten, as a Celtic knot ever turning in and out. And as it wove in and out, it was as the waters of a lake, of an ocean, of a sea, and George swam in them. George was ever thirsty, and ever he swam. He swam in an ever-rippling reflection of the Heavens at midnight, a sea of unending midnight blue and living sapphire.

George's feet sunk and he walked on the noiseless loam. Up

about him sprung blades of grass and he walked into a forest growing of emerald and jade atop pillars of sculpted earth. Anon he walked slowly and slowly he saw a farm with the green grass of wheat growing of the fertile fecund field.

Upon a ruins he came, a soft, silent place where a castle still lingered and the verdant moss grew. Then through a city he walked, a city alive and vibrant in its stones, though its streets were a for a moment at a rest from its men. And in that city, he walked into the Church his heart, and found a tome opened upon a wooden stand entwined by vines.

George looked for a moment at the volume, and for a moment he saw letters of sable inscribed in a field argent. Then the words shifted, grew older, deepened into the depth of a root and the play of quicksilver. The script changed, the words spoke from afar, and became one word whose letters were hidden as behind a veil, one word inscribed at once in ciphers of luminous gold and congealed light that filled the book and shone all around it until—

George was awake, bright awake, wide awake, looking at a window the color of sunrise.

He arose to greet the coming of the dawn.

George went to Church and arrived almost an hour earlier than the 9:00 Fr. Elijah had given, and found to his surprise that although there were few other people, things had already begun. The fragrance of frankincense flowed and gold glittered, and he caught a word here and a phrase there—"Volume wherein the Word was inscribed," "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal," "Blessed is the Kingdom," "Lord have mercy." Then he heard a phrase he had heard innumerable times in other contexts. A shibboleth later taken from the New Testament, "The just shall live by faith," completely broke the illusion. George had had

plenty of time to get sick of words he knew too well, or so it appeared to George. Yes, he was glad people understood them, but wasn't there more to understand than that? Even if they were both straightforward and important...

The homily began.

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

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

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

In one of the minor prophets, Habakkuk, the prophet calls out to the Lord and decries the wickedness of those who should be worshiping the Lord. The Lord's response is to say that he's sending in the Babylonians to conquer and if

say that he is sending in the Babylonians to conquer, and if you want to see some really gruesome archaeological findings, look up what it meant for the Babylonians or Chaldeans to conquer a people. I'm not saying what they did to the people they conquered because I don't want to leave you trying to get disturbing images out of your minds, but this was a terrible doomsday prophecy.

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

"The just shall live by faith."

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

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

Paul does not say, "The just shall live by sight," even as he invokes the words "The just shall live by faith "

He inverts the words, "The just shall live by faith."

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

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

George was awash and realized with a start that he was not knocked off his feet, gasping for air. He felt a light, joyful fluidity and wondered what was coming next. This time he realized he was sure he saw a chalice; the liturgy seemed to go a little more smoothly and quickly.

As soon as he was free, Fr. Elijah came up to him. "Good to see you, George. How are you?"

George said, "Delighted... but I'm sorry, I haven't read 'The Weight of Glory' for you yet."

Fr. Elijah said, "Good man... no, I'm not being sarcastic. Put first things first, and read it when you have leisure. How did you find the homily?"

George said, "It was excellent... by the way, it was really for me that you preached last week's homily, right? You seemed to be going a good bit out of your way."

"It was really for you, as it was also really for others for reasons you do not know."

"But weren't you getting off track?"

"George, I have a great deal of responsibility, concerns, and duties as a priest. But I have a great deal of freedom, too. I can, if you want, draw on King Arthur and his court every service I preach at from now until Christmas."

"How much do you mean, I mean literally? One or two? Four or five?"

"Huh? 'Literally'? Um, there is a temptation in the West to

devote entirely too much time to what is literal. I was exaggerating when I said every service from now until Christmas... but, if you want, I'd be perfectly happy to do that literally, for every service you're here." Fr. Elijah extended his hand. "Deal?"

George paused in thought a moment. "Um, you've said that I could take all the books in your library and keep them if I want. I know you were exaggerating, but..."

"Yes, I was. But I am not exaggerating when I say that you can take them if you want."

"Don't you love books?"

"Immensely, but not as much as I want to love people! They're just possessions, and there are much greater treasures in my life than a good book, even though books can be quite good. Can we agree that I'll preach on something in Arthurian literature every liturgy I preach at until Christmas?"

"What if I'm not here?"

"We can make it part of the deal that I'll only preach on that topic if you're here."

George hesitated, and then shook his hand. "Deal."

Fr. Elijah smiled. "Some people have said my best homilies and best surprises have come from this kind of rash vow."

George started to walk away, and then stopped.

Fr. Elijah said, "Is something on your mind?"

George said, "What if other people don't like you preaching on something so odd? What will you do if people complain?"

Fr. Elijah said, "Then I can give them your cell phone number and have them call you at all hours of the day and night to grouse at you for foisting such a terrible proposal on me. Now get some coffee. Go! Shoo!"

After getting home, George did his laundry, looked to see if anyone was hanging out in the lounge (everybody was gone), and

played games in the computer lab. It was a nice break.

The next day in math class, the teacher drew a grid on the board, drew dots where the lines crossed, erased everything but the dots, and set the chalk down. "Today I'd like to show a game. I'm handing out graph paper; draw dots where the lines cross.

We're going to have two people taking turns drawing lines between dots that are next to each other. If you draw a line that completes a little square, you get a point. I'd like a couple of students to come up and play on the board." After a game, there was a momentary shuffle, and George found himself playing against the kid next to him. This continued for longer than he expected, and George began to piece together patterns of what would let his opponent score points, then what laid the groundwork for scoring points...

The teacher said, "Have any of you noticed things you want to avoid in this game? Why do these things lead to you giving points to your opponent when you don't want to, or scoring points yourself? This kind of observation is at the heart of a branch of mathematics called 'combinatorics.' And almost any kind of game a computer can play—I'm not talking about tennis—is something that computers can only play through combinatorics. I'd like to show you some more 'mathematical' examples of problems with things we call 'graphs' where a lot of those same kinds of things are—"

She continued giving problems and showing the kinds of thought in those problems.

George felt a spark of recognition—the same thing that attracted him to puzzles. Or was it something deeper? Many "twenty questions" puzzles only depended on identifying an unusual usage of common words, "53 bicycles" referring to "Bicycle" brand playing cards rather than any kind of vehicle, and

so on and so forth. Some of what the teacher was showing seemed deeper...

...and for the first time in his life, the ring of a buzzer left George realizing he was spellbound in a math class. It set his mind thinking.

In English class, he winced, as just as before-class chatter seemed about to end, one of the other students said, "A man gets up in the morning, looks out his window, and sees the sun rising in the West. Why?"

George was not in particular looking forward to a discussion of literature he wasn't interested in, but he wanted even less to hear people blundering about another "twenty questions" problem, and cut in, "Because the earth's magnetic poles, we suppose, were fluctuating, and so the direction the sun was rising from was momentarily the magnetic West."

The teacher laughed. "That isn't the answer, is it?"

The student who had posed the question said, "Um... it is..."

The professor said, "So we are to imagine someone going to a gas station, saying, 'Which way is East?', and the attendant responding with, 'Just a sec, lemme check... I know usually this way is East, but with the Earth's magnetic fluctuations, who knows?' You know that in a lot of literature, East and West are less like numbers than like colors?"

"Um... How could a direction be like a number or a color?"

"There's colorful difference and colorless difference. If I tell you there are 57 pens in my desk, I haven't said anything very colorful that tells much about pens, or about my desk. But if I tell you a rose is a delicate pink, I've told you something about what it's like, what it's like, to experience a rose."

"So what color is East, then? Camouflage green?"

"East isn't a color, but it's like a color where camouflage

green and fiery red are different. In both Greek and Russian, people use the same word for 'East' and 'sunrise'... and if you're really into etymology, English does this too, only we don't realize it any more. 'East' in English originally means 'sunrise,' as 'Easter' comes from the Anglo-Saxon name of a goddess of light and spring. Such terrible things the Orthodox miss out on by their quaint use of 'Pascha.' For us, the 'big' direction, the one which has the longest arrow or the biggest letter, the one all other directions are arranged around, is North; in Hebrew, it's East. There is a reason many churches are arranged East-West and we often worship towards the East, and that has meant something for the U.S... Would you agree that we are part of the West?"

"So our land is the worst land?" George said.

"Well, if you read enough Orthodox nut jobs, yes... particularly if this land is their home. But U.S. land, or part of it at least, is called utter East... the one U.S. state where Orthodoxy isn't edgy, exotic, fruitcake or 'other,' is Alaska, where there has been a native Orthodox presence, strong today, for over two hundred years. You know how, in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C.S. Lewis has a wood nymph speak an oracle that has drawn Sir Reepicheep all his life?

"Where sky and water meet,  
Where the waves grow sweet,  
Doubt not, Reepicheep,  
To find all you seek,  
There is the utter East.

"There's something big you'll miss about the holy land of Alaska if you just think of it as fully a state, but just one more state just like every other state. It's the only state if 'state'

state, just like every other state. It's the only state, if state is an adequate term, with a still-working mechanical clock on the outside of a public building that was made by an Orthodox saint.

Among other things.

"And the idea of holy land that you would want you to travel to feeds into things, even in Protestant literature like Pilgrim's Progress, which you will misunderstand if you treat the pilgrimage as just there as a metaphor for spiritual process. I have found it very interesting to look at what people classify as 'just part of the allegory,' even though we will read no simpler allegory among the readings for this class. Now in reading for today, have any of you had an experience like Pilgrim's wakeup call at the beginning of Bunyan?"

George's head was swimming.

Why were his classes so dull before this week? He remembered previous math lessons which, in various ways, failed to give him puzzle solving, and in annoyance, turned to previous English lessons, when—

—why hadn't he paid attention? Or, more accurately, when George had paid attention, why hadn't he let it be interesting?

Philosophy also turned out to be interesting; the professor began the unit on medieval philosophy by asking, "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?", eliciting various forms of derision, then asking people what they were deriding, began asking "How many of you can touch the head of the same pin at once?", produced a pin, and after students made various jostling efforts, asked whether a pin could accommodate a finite or infinite number of angels.

This was used to a class discussion about the nature of matter and spirit and whether angels dancing on the head of a pin would push each other away the way human bodies would...

and at the end of class the professor began asking if people wanted to talk about how unfortunate it was that medieval philosophers had to use the poetic image of angels dancing on the head of a pin where others would have used the colorless language of analytic philosophy.

In chemistry, the professor did nothing in particular to make things interesting. George still enjoyed the lecture as it built to a discussion of isotope distributions as used to compute average molecular weights.

George was quite surprised when the weekend approached, spent the weekend playing card games, and wondered at how quickly Sunday came.

On Sunday, George entered the strange world of the Church building. It seemed more, not less, strange, but things began to make sense. "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." was something he noticed often, and he, if not understanding, was at least comfortable with the continual hubbub as people seemed to be moving about, sometimes to the front.

As the service passed, he found his eyes returning to, and then fixed on, an icon that showed three ?angels? sitting around a stone table. In the back was a mountain, a tree, and a building, a faroff building that George somehow seemed to be seeing from the inside...

The perspective in the picture was wrong. Wait, the perspective wouldn't be that wrong by accident... the picture looked very distorted, and George wanted to reach out and—

George looked. The perspective vanished, not at some faroff place on the other side of the picture, but behind him, and the picture seemed at once faroff and something seen from inside.

And what was it, almost at the heart of the icon, or

somewhere beneath it, that the three peaceful, radiant, great ? angels? almost seemed clustered around? It looked like a chalice of gold.

George was looking, trying to see into the picture, wishing he could go closer, and seeing one person after another come closer in the dance of song and incense. George instinctively found himself backing up, and then realized people were sitting down and Fr. Elijah began:

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

Sir Thomas Mallory in *Le Morte d'Arthur* has any number of characters, and I want to describe one of them, Sir Griflet, who is completely forgettable if you don't know French: he appears briefly, never stays in the narrative for very long, never does anything really striking at all. His lone claim to fame, if you can call it that, is that Mallory refers to him as "Sir Griflet le fils de Dieu." For those of you who don't know French, we've just been cued in, in passing, that by the way, Sir Griflet is the Son of God.

Now why would this be? There some pretty striking things you can do if you are a character in that work. Sir Griflet is not a singular character who has the kind of energy of Sir Galahad, or in a different but highly significant way, Merlin. For that matter, he does not have even a more routine memorability like Sir Balin who wielded two swords at the same time. He's just forgettable, so why is he called le fils de Dieu, I mean the Son of God?

In Chretien de Troyes, who is a pivotal author before Mallory, a character with a name that would become "Griflet" is equally pedestrian and is named "fis de Do", son

of Do, which has a root spelling of D-O where the word for God in that form of French is D-E-U. So a starkly pedestrian character, by an equally pedestrian language error, seems to have his father's name mixed up with how you spell the word for God. How pedestrian, disappointing, and appropriate.

There is a somewhat more interesting case in the story of a monk who believed that Melchizedek was the Son of God, and this is not due to a language error. If you were listening when the readings were chanted from the Bible, you would have heard that Melchizedek was "Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life: but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually." This may be surprising to us today, but that's because most of us have lost certain ways of reading Scripture, and it was a holy monk who thought this. He made a theological error, not a mere language error, and when his bishop asked his assistance in praying over whether Melchizedek or Christ was the Son of God, he arrived at the correct answer.

Now let me ask you who is really the Son of God. Do you have an answer now?

I'm positive you're wrong. It's a forgettable person like Sir Griflet or Melchizedek.

When the Son of God returns in glory, he will say, "Depart from me, you who are damned, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you showed me no hospitality; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick or in prison, and you did not visit me." And when the damned are confounded and ask when they could have possibly failed to

do that, he will answer them, "I swear to you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it for me."

We, in our very nature, are symbols of the Trinity, and this does not mean a sort of miniature copy that stands on its own in detachment. The Orthodox understanding of symbol is very difficult to grasp in the West, even if you haven't heard people trying to be rigorous or, worse, clever by saying "The word is not the thing it represents." And talking about symbols doesn't just mean that you can show reverence to a saint through an icon. It means that everything you fail to do to your forgettable neighbor, to that person who does absolutely nothing that draws your attention, you fail to do to Christ.

And if you are going to say, "But my neighbor is not Christ," are you not straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel in what you are being careful about? Your neighbor as such is not Christ as such. True, but this is really beside the point. It betrays a fundamental confusion if any of the damned answer their Judge and say, "But I wasn't unkind to you. I was just unkind to other people." We are so formed by the image of Christ that there is no way to do something to another person without doing that to Christ, or as this parable specifically says, fail to do. And I'd like you to stop for a second. The last time you were at an unexpected funeral, did you regret more the unkind thing you said, or the kind word you failed say, the kind action you failed to take? Perhaps it may be the latter.

Christ hides in each of us, and in every person you meet. There is a mystery: the divine became human that the human might become divine. The Son of God became a man that men might become the Sons of God. God and the Son of God

might become the Sons of God. God and the Son of God became man that men might become gods and the Sons of God. Christ took on our nature so that by grace we might become what he is by nature, and that does not just mean something for what we should do in our own spiritual practices. It means that Christ hides in each person, and to each person we owe infinite respect, whether they're boring, annoying, mean, lovely, offensive, fascinating, confusing, predictable, pedestrian, or just plain forgettable like old Sir Griflet.

You owe infinite respect.

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

Did George want to go up to the icon? He went up, feeling terribly awkward, but hearing only chant and the same shuffle of people in motion. He went up, awkwardly kissed the three figures someplace low, started to walk away in inner turmoil, turned back to the image, bowed as he had seen people see, and kissed the chalice of wine.

It was not long before he saw Fr. Elijah come out with a chalice, and draw from it with a golden spoon. This time he noticed people kissing the base of the chalice. There was nothing awkward about them, and there seemed to be something majestic that he began to catch a glimmer of in each of those present.

George later realized that he had never experienced worship "stopping" and coffee hour "beginning." The same majestic people went from one activity into another, where there was neither chanting nor incense nor the surrounding icons of a cloud of witnesses, but seemed to be a continuation of worship rather than a second activity begun after worship. He was with the

same people.

It didn't occur until much later to George to wonder why the picture had a chalice... and then he could not stop wondering. He picked up Brocéliande and read:

The knight and the hermit wept and kissed together, and the hermit did ask, "Sir knight, wete thou what the Sign of the Grail be?"

The knight said, "Is that one of the Secrets of the Grail?"

"If it be one of the Secrets of the Grail, that is neither for thee to ask nor to know. The Secrets of the Grail are very different from what thou mightest imagine in thine heart, and no man will get them by looking for secrets. But knowest thou what the Sign of the Grail is?"

"I never heard of it, nor do I know it."

"Thou wote it better than thou knowest, though thou wouldst wete better still if thou knewest that thou wote."

"That is perplexing and hard to understand."

The hermit said, "Knowest thou the Sign of the Cross?"

"I am a Christian and I know it. It is no secret amongst Christians."

"Then know well that the sacred kiss, the kiss of the mass, even if it be given and received but once per year, is the Sign of the Grail."

"How is that? What makes it such as I have never heard?"

"I know that not in its fullness. Nor could I count reasons even knew I the fullness of truth. But makest thou the Sign of the Cross when thou art alone?"

"Often, good hermit; what Christian does not?"

"Canst thou make the Sign of the Grail upon another Christian when thou art alone?"

"What madness askest thou?"

"Callest thou it madness? Such it is. But methinks thou wete not all that may be told."

"Of a certainty speakest thou."

"When thou dwellest in the darkness that doth compass round about the Trinity round about that none mayeth compass, then wilt thou dwell in the light of the Sign of the Grail with thy fellow man and thy brother Christian, for the darkness of the Trinity is the light of the Grail."

George got up, closed the book, and slowly put it away. He wondered, but he had read enough.

George dreamed again of a chalice whose silhouette was Light and held Light inside. Then the Light took shape and became three figures. George almost awoke when he recognized the figures from the icon. George dreamed much more, but he could never remember the rest of his dream.

That week, Fr. Elijah's homily was in George's mind. He passed the check-in counter as he walked into the cafeteria, began to wonder where he might apply Fr. Elijah's words... and stopped.

The line was moving slowly; he had come in late after wandering somewhat. Sheepishly, he stopped, looked at the woman who had scanned his ID, and extended his hand. "Hi, I'm George."

The woman pushed back a strand of silver hair. "Hi. It's good to meet you, George. I'm Georgina."

George stood, trying to think of something to say.

Georgina said, "What are you majoring in?"

"I haven't decided. I like reading... um... it's really obscure"

I haven't decided. I like reading... um... it's really obscure, but some stuff about Arthur."

"King Arthur and the Round Table?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful, son. Can you tell me about it sometime? I always love hearing about things."

George said, "Ok. What do you... um..."

"I been working at this for a long time. It's nice seeing all you students, and I get some good chats. You remind me of my grandson a little. But you're probably pretty hungry now, and the lines are closing in a few minutes. Stop by another day!"

George ate his food, thoughtfully, and walked out of the cafeteria wishing he had said hi to more of the support staff.

That week, the halls seemed to be filled with more treasure than he had guessed. He did not work up the courage to introduce himself to too many people, but he had the sense that there was something interesting in even the people he hadn't met.

On Wednesday, George went to register for his classes next semester, and realized his passwords were... on his computer, the one without a power cord.

After a while, thinking what to do, he knocked on a floormates' door. "Um, Ivan?"

"Come in, George. What do you want?"

George hesitated and said, "Could I borrow a power cord? Just for a minute? I'll give it right back."

Ivan turned around and dragged a medium-sized box from under his bed. It was full of cables.

"Here, and don't worry about returning it. Take a cord. Take twenty, I don't care. I have them coming out of my ears."

George grabbed one cord, then remembered he did not have the cord for his monitor. He took another. "I'll have those back"

the cord for his monitor. He took another. I'll have these back in a minute."

"George, you're being silly. Is there any reason you need not to have a power cord?"

"Um..." George opened his mouth and closed it. Then he hesitated. "No."

George left, registered online, shut his computer down, left the room, did some work at the library, and went to bed.

Thursday he was distracted.

Friday, it was raining heavily, and after getting soaked in icy rain running to and from his classes, George decided he would check his email from his room... and found himself wandering through the spam folder, and threw the cords out in the dumpster.

Sunday he walked into church with hesitation, and Fr. Elijah almost immediately came over. "Yes, George?"  
George hesitated.

Then he told Fr. Elijah what was going on.

Fr. Elijah paused, and said, "George, do you know about the Desert Fathers?"  
"No."

"A group of people a bit like the hermits in Arthurian legend. Some people think that Merlin was originally based on such monks... but aside from that speculation, they were much holier than either of us. And there was one time when someone asked them, 'What do you do?' And what do you think the Desert Father said?"

"Pray? Worship? Live a good life?"

"'We fall and get up, fall and get up, fall and get up.' That is the motion of Orthodox life, and if you see prostrations, you will literally see us fall and get up. I'm not sure if you think that if you repent of a sin once, the burden's over and it's all behind

you repent of a sin once, the hard part is over and it's all behind you. In my sins, I have to keep repenting again and again. You have fallen, now get up. And get up again. And again. And again. And keep getting up.

"The Lord bless you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

George walked away still feeling unworthy, and everywhere saw a grandeur that seemed to be for others more worthy than him. Everything around him seemed royal, and Fr. Elijah preached:

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

In our commemorations, we commemorate "Orthodox kings and queens, faithful princes and princesses," before we commemorate various grades of bishops. The bishop is in fact royalty; instead of calling him "Your Majesty," we call him "Your Grace," "Your Eminence," "Your Holiness," "Your All Holiness." If you do research, you will find that the bishop is more than a king: the bishop is the Emperor, and wears the full regalia of the Roman Emperor.

One question that has been asked is, "The king for the kingdom, or the kingdom for the king:" is the king made king for the benefit of the kingdom, or is the kingdom a privilege for the benefit of the king? The Orthodox choice of now requiring bishops to be monks is not because married persons are unfit, or rather necessarily more unfit, to serve. Most of the apostles in whose shadows the monastic bishops stand were married, and the monk bishops I have met consider themselves infinitely less than the married apostles. But a monk is given to be a whole burnt offering where nothing is kept back and everything is offered to God

to be consumed by the holy sacrificial fire. (Or at least that's what's supposed to happen, but even if this is also what's supposed to happen in a marriage, it's more explicit in monasticism.) And it is this whole burnt offering, unworthy though he may be, who makes a bishop: Orthodoxy answers "the king for the kingdom:" the king is made king for the benefit of the kingdom, the bishop serves as a whole burnt offering for the benefit of the diocese.

Now let me ask: Which of us is royalty? And I want you to listen very carefully. All of us bear the royal bloodline of Lord Adam and Lady Eve. It's not just the bishops. I will not go into this in detail now, but the essence of priesthood is not what I have that "ordinary" Orthodox don't have. It's what I have that Orthodox faithful do have. And without you I can celebrate the liturgy. And the essence of royalty is not what a king or bishop has that a "commoner" or faithful does not have; it's what king and bishop share with the ordinary faithful. The Greek Fathers have no sense that "real" royal rule is humans ruling other humans; that's a bit of an aberration; the real royal rule is humans ruling over what God has given them and over themselves, and doing that rightly is a much bigger deal than being one of the handful of kings and bishops.

And each of us is called to be what a bishop is: a whole burnt offering in humble service to the kingdom—large or small is not really the point—over which the Lord has appointed us king. It may mean showing conscience by cleaning up your room—and if you have a first world abundance of property, it is a very small way of offering them back to the Lord to keep them in good order. It means carefully stewarding precious moments with other people,

maybe saying, "I hope you have a wonderful day," and saying it like you mean it, to support staff. And it means humbly ruling your kingdom within, in which both Heaven and Hell may be found. It is when you serve as king, the king made for the kingdom, that your kingdom will be your crown and glory.

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

After Church, a young woman stormed up to Fr. Elijah. She had, at as far arm's length from her body as she could hold it, a clear trash bag holding a pink heart-shaped piece of artisan paper that appeared to have writing on it. She stopped opposite Fr. Elijah and said, "Do you know anything about this note?"

Fr. Elijah smiled gently. "It appears someone has sent you some sort of love note. How sweet!"

"Were you involved?"

"What, you think I would do something like that? I'm hurt!"

The young woman stood up straight and put her hand on her hip. Fr. Elijah turned to George and said, "Would you like to know what's going on?"

The young woman said, "Yes, I'd love to hear you explain this."

Fr. Elijah said, "George, the elephant population in Sri Lanka is in some peril. They're not being hunted for their ivory, let alone for their meat, but there is a limited amount of land, and farmers and elephants are both trying to use an area of land that makes it difficult for them to both support themselves. So some people tried to think about whether there was a way to make a win-win situation, and make the elephants an economic asset. They asked themselves whether elephants produce anything. And it turns out that something that eats the

enormous amount of food an elephant eats does, in fact, produce a lot of something."

George said, "I don't see the connection. Have I just missed that you're changing the subject?"

The young woman said, "He hasn't changed the subject."

Fr. Elijah said, "They're using it to make hand-crafted artisan paper, colored and available in a heart shape, which you can buy online at [MrElliePooh.com](http://MrElliePooh.com) if you're interested."

George looked at Fr. Elijah in shock and awe.

The woman said, "Grandpappy, you are such a pest!"

Fr. Elijah lightly placed an arm around her shoulder and said, "George, I'd like to introduce you to my granddaughter Abigail. She has a face as white as alabaster, raven-black hair, and lips are red as blood. And she has many merits besides being fun to pick on."

Abigail stuck out her tongue at her grandfather and then shifted to his side. "And my grandfather does many fine things besides be obnoxious... Can't live with him, can't shoot him... You should get to know him, if you haven't." She gave him a gentle squeeze. "There are brownies today, George, and they're great! Can I get you some?"

George read in Brocéliande, and wandered in the wood, and the castle of Calix College, and the surrounding city. Fr. Elijah began to introduce fasting, and George found something new in his struggles... and began to make progress. Nor was that the only thing in George's life. He began to find the Middle Ages not too different from his own... and he was puzzled when he read in Brocéliande:

And in that wood anon saw Sir Yvain a lion fighting against a primeval serpent, and the serpent breathed fire

against the lion his heel, and a baleful cry did the lion wail.

Then Lord Yvain thought in his heart of which animal he should aid, and in his heart spake, "The lion is the more natural of the twain." And anon he put his resources on the side of the lion, and with his sword he cleft the ancient serpent in twain and hew the serpent his head in seven, and warred against the wicked wyrm until he were reduced to many small bits. And he cleaned his sword of the serpent his venomous filth, and anon the lion kept him at his side.

And anon Sir Yvain slept and an advision saw: an old woman, whose colour was full of life and whose strength intact and yet who were wizened, riding upon a serpent and clothed in a robe black as coal, and spake and said, "Sir

Yvain, why have ye offended me? Betake ye as my companion." Then Sir Yvain refused her and there was a stench as brimstone aflame. Then a woman clad in white, riding astride a lion, new as white snow did courtesy and said, "Sir Yvain, I salute thee." And about her was a fragrance of myrrh.

Anon Sir Yvain awoke, and sore amazed was he, and none could interpret his advision.

George spoke with Fr. Elijah, and asked him what the passage meant. Fr. Elijah said, "What does this passage mean? You know, that isn't as big a question in Orthodoxy as you think... but I'll try to answer. In fact, I think I'll answer in a homily."

"It had better be impressive."

"Fine. I'll preach it as impressive as you want."

"When?"

"On Christmas."

That evening, George called Fr. Elijah to say that he was going home for Christmas and then later in the week said "Fr

home for Christmas... and then, later in the week, said, "Fr. Elijah? Do you know anybody who could keep me? My parents were going to buy me a ticket home with frequent flier mileage on an airline, but my grandfather is ill and my mother used up those miles getting a ticket... and money is tight... I don't know what I'm going to do."

"Well, you could talk with your College and try to get special permission to stay over break... but I'd prefer if you stayed with me. Because we agreed that I would only preach on the Arthurian legends, including your Old Law and New Law, if you were there... and I was so looking forward to preaching a Christmas homily on the Arthurian legends."

"Can't you preach it without me?"

"We agreed and shook hands. I have that homily for Christmas, but only if you're there."

"Um... I would be an intruding—"

"George, I am a priest because I love God and I love people. And I do meet people quite a lot, but my house is empty now. It would be nice to have some young energy and someone to share more than a Christmas dinner with?"

"Are you sure?"

"You know how to get to my place. I'll see you whenever you want to come over."

On Christmas, Fr. Elijah preached,

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

Christ is born! Glorify him!

In the Arthurian legends, there is a story of a knight who sees a serpent fighting a lion, kills the serpent, and wins a kind response from the lion. In some versions the knight has a vision in which one woman appears on the serpent and

another on the lion, and we learn that these women represent the Old Law and the New Law.

What are the Old Law and the New Law? One can say the Torah or Law of Moses, and the Gospel, and that is true up to a point, but the "Old Law" is not just a take on Judaism. Sir Palomides, a Saracen, described with profound confusion between Islam and paganism (and the problem with Islam is not that it is pagan but that it is not pagan enough—it is more emphatic about there being one God, even more than the one God is), becomes a Christian and is asked to renounce the Old Law and embrace the New Law. Even if Sir Palomides is in no sense a Jew.

In the ancient world, it is not enough to say that the Orthodox Church understood itself as the fulfillment of Judaism, politically incorrect as that may be. The Orthodox Church was even more fully the fulfillment of paganism, and if you understand what was going on in Plato, you understand that paganism was deepening. The Orthodox Church is the place where that final deepening of paganism took place. And I would like to explain for a moment why Orthodoxy is pagan and neo-"pagan" forms like Druidry aren't.

The popular stereotype is that paganism was merry and free until Christianity's grim hand came down, and that's like saying that difficult toil was carefree until someone came along and with a grim hand invited people to a feast. Pagan virtues—courage, justice, wisdom, moderation—are retained in Christianity, but they are not the virtues of joy by themselves. C.S. Lewis said that if you're not going to be a Christian, the next best thing is to be a Norseman, because the Norse pagans sided with the good gods, not because they were going to win, but because they were going

to lose. The Norse decision was to meet the Day of Doom, called Ragnarok, and go down fighting on the right side. And so the Norse have a tale of the war-god Tyr who took and kept an oath even at the price of letting a wolf bite off his right hand, and there is something very much like ancient paganism in keeping an oath though it cost your right hand.

What Orthodoxy offered paganism in the ancient world was precisely not a grim hand flattening everything, but retaining the virtue already recognized in paganism while deepening them with faith, hope, and love that live the life of Heaven here on earth. The Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love are the virtues that can see beauty, that bring Heaven down to earth, that can call for the whole Creation to worship God: as we sing at the Eucharist, joining the Song that summons the host of angels, sun, moon and stars, heavens and waters above the heavens, sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command, mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl, kings and all people, princes and rulers, young men and maidens, old men and children—all called in the Psalmist's summons to praise the Lord.

If you want to know how today's "neo-paganism" can fail to be pagan, I would recall to you the Medieval Collectibles website which offers a medieval toilet cover so you can have a real medieval coat of arms on your, um, "throne." The website's marketing slogan is "Own a piece of history," but you're not owning a piece of history... or think of the interior decorator who was told, "I want an authentic colonial American bathroom," to which the decorator replied, "Ok, so exactly how far from the house do you want it?"

Some have noted that the majority of books written by Orthodox today are by Western converts, and there is a reason for that. The Reformation almost created literate culture, but the opposite of literate is not illiterate, but oral, in a way that neo-paganism may want to create but is awfully hard to recreate. Even in its spiritual reading the Orthodox Church remains an oral culture in its core while it uses writing: many of its most devout would never write a book, and even now, sensible Orthodox will answer the question, "What should I read to understand Orthodoxy?" by saying "Don't read, at least not at first, and don't ever let reading be the center of how you understand Orthodoxy.

Come and join the life of our community in liturgy."

Orthodoxy is not better than classical paganism in this regard, but it is like classical paganism and it keeps alive elements of classical paganism that neo-paganism has trouble duplicating. (A neo-"pagan" restoration of oral culture bears a hint of... I'm not sure how to describe it... an oxymoron like "committee to revitalize" comes close.) After years of the West tearing itself away from nature, people in the West are trying to reconnect with nature, and some neo-"pagans" are spearheading that. But look at Orthodoxy. Come and see the flowers, the water and oil, the beeswax candles and herbs, the bread and wine that are at the heart of Orthodox worship: the Orthodox Church has not lost its connection with the natural world even as it uses technology, and it may even have a fuller connection with the natural world than paganism had; classical Rome could sow salt in the soil of Carthage and go out of their way to pollute out of spite, which even environmentally irresponsible companies rarely do today. Which isn't getting into the full depth of a

spiritually disciplined connection to nature like that of St. Symeon the New Theologian—in the Orthodox Church we call him "new" even though he's from the fourteenth century—but it's missing the point to ask if Orthodoxy is pagan because of the role of the saints in worshiping God. If you want the deep structure, the culture, the way of life, of paganism, the place where you will find it most alive is precisely Orthodoxy.

The Arthurian author Charles Williams makes a very obscure figure, the bard Taliesin, the pilgrim who comes to Byzantium sent to bring a treasure and returns with the Pearl of Great Price, the New Law. In Stephen Lawhead, it is Merlin who appears as the culmination of the Druidic Order and the apex of the Old Law: the old learned brotherhood is disbanded and Merlin proclaims the New Law, and this is really not just a story. The Evangelical Orthodox Church was formed when a group of Protestants tried to do something very Protestant, reconstruct the original Christian Church through studying old documents. Very Protestant. And they came to a certain point, that when they quizzed an Orthodox priest, they realized something. And the Evangelical Orthodox Church entered the Orthodox Church because they realized that the Old Law of Protestant searching to reconstruct the ancient Church needed to be fulfilled in what they realized was the New Law. The Holy Order of MANS—MANS is an acronym, but not in English; it stands for *Mysterion, Agape, Nous, Sophia*, some terms from Greek that are deep enough to be hard to translate, but something like "profound mystery, divine love, spiritual eye, wisdom." Do these mean something Christian? Do they mean something esoteric? In fact the Holy Order of MANS was

something of both, and they pushed their tradition deeper and deeper... until the Holy Order of MANS was dissolved and many of its people followed their leader's sense that their Old Law led to this New Law. If you know the story of the Aleut religion in Alaska, the shamans—and it is difficult to explain their "shamans" in contemporary terms; perhaps I should refer to them as people who had tasted spiritual realities—said that certain people were coming and to listen to the people who were to come. And the people the shamans foretold were Orthodox monks who had in turn tasted of spiritual realities, such as St. Herman of Alaska. Not, necessarily, that moving from paganism to Orthodoxy was that big of a change for them. It wasn't. But the Aleuts recognized in these monks something that was very close to their way of life, but something that could deepen it, and it was because of their depth in their Old Law as pagans that they were ready for an Orthodox New Law. Stephen Lawhead has a lot of carefully researched history—at times I wished for a little less meticulous research and a little more riveting story—but whether or not anything like this can be confirmed archaeologically in the Celtic lands, the same kind of thing can be confirmed, even as having happened very recently.

But when I say "Merlin," many of you do not think of the herald of the New Law, and for that matter many of the older sources do not do this either. If a boy today is enchanted by just one character from the Arthuriad, it is ordinarily not King Arthur, Pendragon though he may be, nor Sir Galahad, who achieved the Holy Grail in some versions, nor Sir Lancelot, who is proven to be the greatest knight in the world, nor the Fisher-King, nor the fairy enchantress

Morgana le Fay, nor King Arthur's peerless Queen Guinevere, whose name has become our "Jennifer." It is the figure of Merlin.

Today, if you ask what Merlin was—and I intentionally say, "what," not "who," for reasons I will detail—the usual answer is, "a wizard." But if you look at the stories that were spread from the Celtic lands, the answer is, "a prophet." In the Old Testament, one of the prophets protests, "I am neither a prophet, nor a prophet's son," and another prophet says something to the Lord that somehow never gets rendered clearly in English Bible translations never choose to get right: "You violated my trust, and I was utterly betrayed." The Hebrew word for prophet, 'nabi', means "called one," and one never gets the sense in reading the Old Testament prophets that the prophets, when they were children, said, "I want to grow up to be a prophet" the way people today say, "I want to be the President of the United States."

And this idea of Merlin as prophet is not just a different or a more Christianly correct word. The Arthurian legends may be thought of today as "something like fiction;" even when people in the Middle Ages questioned their historical accuracy, those people were throwing a wet blanket on something a great many people took as literal fact. There is a book called *The Prophecies of Merlin*, which was taken extremely seriously for centuries, as the word of a prophet.

And one gets the sense that in modern terms Merlin's identity was not a self-definition that he chose, not in modern terms, but something that was thrust upon him.

It may sound strange to some if I say that the earlier attempt to build a castle on Merlin's blood, and Merlin's

later calling a castle out of the wind, relate to Christ. But if you think I am pounding a square peg into a round hole, consider this: Sir Galahad, whom some consider a painfully obvious Christ-figure, whose strength is as the strength of ten because his heart is pure and who is always strong in the face of temptation, enters the world after Sir Lancelot, the greatest knight in the world and a man who goes above and beyond the call of duty of faithfulness in his devotion to another man's wife, goes to a castle, is given the Arthurian equivalent of a date-rape pill in the form of a potion that makes him think his hostess is the woman he's been carrying on with, and that night sires Galahad. You may call this a magical birth story if you like, but it doesn't give us much advance notice that the son born will turn out to be the Arthurian icon of purity who will achieve the Grail.

So how is Merlin, who reeks of magic, introduced? In the oldest surviving work that flourished outside of Celtic circles, in fact written by a Celtic bishop, Merlin appears when King Vortigern searches for a boy without a father, and hears Merlin being teased for being without a father.

And let me be clear, this is not because his father has passed away. We learn that the Devil wished to be incarnate, could only come into the world of a virgin, found a virgin who was spiritually pure, having only slipped in her prayers once, and thus the person meant to be the anti-Christ was conceived. The Church, just in time, said powerful prayers and the boy, born of a virgin without a sire, commanded all the power over the natural world he was meant to, but would serve the good. Now is anyone going to say that that's not a reference to Christ? Merlin is most interesting because of how the story itself places him in the shadow of Christ.

One thing that's very easy to overlook is that in the story where there's a terrible storm and Christ is sleeping in the front of the boat while his disciples are asking if he doesn't care that they were going to die, is not just that the disciples were right: in that part of the world there were storms that could very quickly flood a boat and kill people when the boat sank. Christ stands up, and says something to the storm before rebuking the disciples for their lack of faith. And that's when the disciples really began to be afraid. Mark's Gospel is the one Gospel with the simplest, "I don't speak Greek very well" Greek, and at this point he uses the King James- or Shakespeare-style Greek Old Testament language to say that when Jesus commands the storm to be still and it actually obeys him, that is when they are most terrified.

Before Jesus stopped the storm, they were afraid enough; they knew the storm they saw was easily enough to kill them. But this was nothing compared to the fear out of which they asked, "Who is this, that even the wind and the waves obey him?" This person who had been teaching them had just displayed a command over nature that left them wondering who or what he was, a "what" that goes beyond today's concern about "who am I?" and has something that cannot be reached by angst-ridden wrestling with who you are.

Something like that question is at the heart of debates that people argued for centuries and are trying to reopen. What, exactly, was Jesus? Was he an ancient sage and teacher? Was he a prophet? A healer or a worker of wonders? Someone who had drunk of deeper spiritual realities and wanted to initiate others into the same? Was

he something more than a man, the bridge between God and his world?

The answer taken as final was the maximum possible. It was "Every one of these and more." It pushed the envelope on these even as it pushed into a claim for the maximum in every respect: Christ was maximally divine, maximally human, maximally united, and maximally preserved the divine and human while being the final image both for our understanding of what it is to be God and what it is to be human.

And what, finally, would we have if we deepened Merlin? What if he were the son, not of the worst finite creature, but of the best and infinite Creator? What if he had not simply power over nature but were the one through whom the world was created and in whom all things consist? What if we were dealing with, not the one who prophesied that a few would find the Holy Grail, but the one who gave the Holy Grail and its gifts that are still with us? What if Merlin were made to be like the pattern he is compared to? When Merlin is deepened far enough, he becomes Christ.

The Christian lord of Cyprus was out hawking when his dearly beloved hawk—I don't know if the hawk was a merlin, but I can say that a merlin is a type of hawk—became entangled in the brush in the wood. Loving the hawk dearly, he ordered that the branches be cut away so that he would still have this hawk, and when that was done, not only was his hawk found, but an icon showing the Queen and Mother of God on a throne, and the Divine Child enthroned upon her lap and an angel on either side. They found what they were looking for, but they also found a singularly majestic icon of the Incarnation.

The Christ Mass, the Nativity, is an invasion in the dead of winter. It is the feast of the Incarnation, or more properly one of the feasts of the Incarnation, which is not something that stopped happening once after the Annunciation when the Mother of God bore the God-man in her womb.

Everything that the Christ Mass stands for will eventually be made plain, but the Christ Mass is a day of veiled glory. When God became man, he was born in a stable. When Christ returns, he will appear riding on the clouds. When he came, a choir of angels proclaimed the news to shepherds and a few knees bowed. When he returns, rank upon rank of angels will come in eternal radiant glory and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the manifest glory of God the Father. When he came once, a star heralded the hour of his birth. When he returns, the stars will fall as ripe figs from a tree and the sky itself will recede as a vanishing scroll. Every thing that is a secret not will be made plain, but he first came in secret...

...and he comes today in secret, hidden in us. For the Incarnation was not finished after the Annunciation, but unfolds still as Christ is incarnate in the Church, in the saints like St. Herman of Alaska, a wonderworker who was seen carrying logs weighing much more than himself, stopped a forest fire, calmed a stormy sea, and left behind a body preserved from corruption as it was on display for a month at room temperature, and left behind much of the Aleut Orthodox community that remains to this day—and also in us. And the Incarnation is still unfolding today. The castle of the Arthurian world is more than stone walls and a

porticullis; the castle is almost everything we mean by city, or society, or community. And it is the castle writ large that we find in the Church, not only a fortress waging war against the Devil but a people ruled by her Lord. This Castle is at once founded upon a fluid more precious than ichor, not the blood of a boy without a father but the blood of a God-man, without father on the side of his mother and without mother on the side of his Father. It is the Castle still being built by the wind of his Spirit still blowing—and remember that the world behind the Medieval West did not always stow "spirit" and "wind" in sealed watertight compartments: the wind blows where it will and the Spirit inspires where it will, so this Castle has a Spirit blowing through it that is more windlike than wind itself.

And until the Last Judgment, when every eye will see him, even those that pierced him, it is his will to be incarnate where he is hidden behind a veil to those who cannot see him: incarnate in the Church and in each of us, called to be his saints, and called to become Christ.

Christ is born! Glorify him!

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

Fr. Elijah turned around, stopped, bent his head a moment, and at last turned back. "Oh, and one more thing... George's number is in the parish directory, and these homilies that talk about King Arthur and his court have been all his fault. If there's anything at all that you don't like about them, I invite you to call him at all hours of the day and night to grouse at him for foisting such terrible ideas on me."

That evening, George came, and after some hesitancies, said,

"What are you talking about?"

When can I become Orthodox?

"At Pascha. We can continue working, and you will be received in the Church."

George thanked him, and began to walk out.

"Um, Fr. Elijah, aren't you somewhat surprised?"

"George, I was waiting for you to see that you wanted to become Orthodox. Go back to your reading."

The Christmas break passed quickly, and the first class after break was the introduction to computer science. The professor said, "Most of my students call me Dr. Blaise, although you can use my last name if you're comfortable. I wanted to offer a few remarks.

"Many of your professors think their class is your most important class, and that entitles them to be your number one priority in homework and demands outside the classroom. I don't.

I believe this class is a puzzle piece that fits into a larger puzzle. Exactly how it fits in will differ, depending on whether you become a major—which I invite you to consider—or whether you choose an allied major but focus on something other than computer science, or whether your interests lie elsewhere and I am broadening your horizons even if your main interests lie somewhere else. I will try to help give you a good puzzle piece, and in office hours especially I want to support you in helping fit this piece of the puzzle into the broader picture.

"My best student was a mechanic; car and airplane mechanics, for instance, are solving a problem with a system, and I have never been so stunned at how quickly a student learned to debug well as with this mechanic. I've found that people who know something about physics, mathematics, or engineering pick up computer work more quickly even if you don't see a single physics equation in this class: learn physics and programming is a little

easier to learn. And it goes the other way, too, one of my

easier to learn. And it goes the other way too: one of my colleagues in the math department explained that students who know the process of taking something and writing a computer program to reach the desired results, correctly, are prepared to do something similar in mathematics, and take something and write a correct proof to reach the desired results. Learn something in one hard science and you have an advantage in others."

One student raised her hand. "Yes?" Dr. Blaise asked.

"What about those of us interested in philosophy or religion? What if we're doing something computers won't help us with? Are you going to teach us how to use word processors?"

"Well, I'd point out that there is a long tradition of studying mathematics—geometry—as a sort of mental weightlifting before studying philosophy or theology. Or some of my poet friends say that it's a way of poisoning the mind, and I'll respect them if they want to say that. But for many of you, it is useful, even if we don't teach word processing—ask the lab tech for sessions that will teach you how to use computer software. Computer science is about something else; computer science isn't any more about how to use computers than astronomy is about how to use telescopes."

The student raised her hand again, slightly, and then put it down.

Dr. Blaise said, "I'd like to hear your thought. If you aren't convinced, other people probably aren't convinced either, and it will do everybody good to have it out in the open."

"Um... But why does..." She paused, and Dr. Blaise smiled. "I want to study English."

"Good stuff. So does my daughter. It's a bit of a cross-cultural encounter, and I think it can benefit English students for the same reason my majors benefit from taking English

For the same reason my majors benefit from taking English classes. But never mind programming specifically; I want to talk about how the disciplines can integrate. Programming won't help you the same way as some of the humanities will, but I'd like to talk about how things might fit together.

"I saw one of your English professors, a lovely medievalist who knows the Arthurian legends well. She was talking with one of the campus ethicists, who has interests in the history of moral theology. The topic of discussion? One that you might wince at, on the short list of positions the Catholic Church is unpopular for: contraception. And the ethicist said he'd found something he thought the medievalist literature professor might find interesting.

"The history of contraception, like almost any other big question, involves a lot of other things. And one of those things involves a suggestion by John Noonan, not for one of several proposed answers for a question, but of an answer to a puzzle that has no other answers, at least as of the time Noonan wrote.

"The vision of courtly love, and what is celebrated in that love between a man and a woman—probably another man's wife, for what it's worth—is an ideal that was all about celebrating 'love', and in this celebration of 'love,' there was a big idea of 'Play all you want; we will encourage and celebrate play, whether or not you're in marriage; just be sure that you do it in a way that won't generate a child.'

"Scholars do have difficulty keeping a straight face in the idea that the courtly romances are coded messages about secret Cathar teachings. They aren't. But they flourished as nowhere before in a land where something of Catharism was in the air, and, like contraception, the idea of celebrating 'love' and encouraging people, 'Play, but do it in a way that don't generate a child' is not exactly Cathar, but is the sort of thing that could

child is not exactly Cathar, but is the sort of thing that could come if Catharism was in the air.

"And, the ethicist went further, the Arthurian romances are done in such a way that it is very difficult to demonstrate any clear and conscious authorial understanding of Cathar teachings, let alone coded messages sent to those 'in the know'... but that doesn't mean that Catharism had nothing to do with it. And not just because strict Cathars would have taken a dim view of this way of taking their ball and running with it. A very dim view, for that matter.

"Catharism, called Gnosticism as it appeared in the ancient world and various other things as it resurfaces today, has various things about it, and not just wanting to celebrate love to high Heaven while understanding this wonderful 'love' as something which one should be able to do without generating children. That's not the only thing, and it is one point of including Cathar elements without doing them very well.

"Catharism, or Gnosticism or whatever the day's version of it is called, is deeply connected with magic, and this occult element has a lot of ideas, or something like ideas, if you get very deep into it. And in the Arthurian legends, there is an occult element, but it isn't done very well. There are dweomers all over the place, and Merlin and almost every woman work enchantments, not to mention that all sorts of items have magical 'virtues', but the English professor had almost no sense that the authors were really involved with the occult themselves. It was kind of a surface impression that never had any of the deeper and darker features, or the deeper secret doctrines of one in the know. It kind of portrays magic the way a poorly researched TV show portrays a faroff land—there may be a sense of interest and enchantment untainted by actual understanding of what is being

portrayed.

"And besides that surface impression, there is something of self-centered pride. The only people who really have a pulse are nobles living in large measure for themselves, knights who are trying to do something impressive. Commerce never seems to really taint the screen of luxury; furthermore there is a sense that being in fights for one's glory is no great sin, and it doesn't really matter what those fights do to the others. It's a very different view of fighting from 'just war.'

"The Arthurian legends are undoubtedly classics of world literature, and it is terribly reductive to say that they're simply a bad version of Cathar doctrine. That denigration of their literary qualities is not justified, just as dismissing Star Wars as just a bit of violent Gnosticism or Catharism or whatever is out of line. Star Wars would never succeed if it were just dressed up Gnosticism.

"But it does raise the question of whether the literature of courtly love, so foundational to how people can understand 'love' today and understand what it means to celebrate 'love' and say that the Catholic Church hates love between men and women if it will not recognize that contraception will help that love be celebrated with less unwelcome 'consequences'... It raises the question, not of whether the literature is bad literature and not worth study, but whether it is very good literature that contains something fatal."

There was one more question, and Dr. Blaise began discussing computer science. At least George believed later that the professor had been discussing computer science, and trusted others' reports on that score.

But George did not hear a word more of what Dr. Blaise said that day.

The computer science class was a night class, and when it was finished, George found himself surprised when he entered the parsonage.

Fr. Elijah was sitting, his back to the door, staring into the fireplace. A large volume, looking like an encyclopedia volume, was sitting open on Fr. Elijah's sparsely appointed desk. Fr. Elijah, his back still to the door, said, "Come in, George. What is the matter?"

George said, "I hope I didn't interrupt—"

Fr. Elijah said, "I was just resting a bit after reading something. St. Maximus's language gives me such trouble."

George rushed over to the desk. "Maybe I can help." He looked, and looked again, until he realized the volume had columns of Latin and Greek. The volume was printed, but it looked old, and there were worm holes.

"Come in and sit down, George. You don't need to be reading St. Maximus the Confessor quite yet, even if your Greek is better than mine, or you find the Latin easier. Now sit down. You didn't come here so you could help me understand the Greek, even if I wouldn't be surprised if, bright lad as you are, you know Greek a good deal better than I do."

"It's Greek to me," George said, forcing a smile, and then shaking. Fr. Elijah rose, turned around, and said, "Sit down in my chair, George, and enjoy the fire. I'll step out into the kitchen, make some hot cocoa, and then we can talk. I wish my cat were still around; she was a real sweetheart, and she would sit in your lap and purr. Even if it was the first time she met you." Fr. Elijah left, silently, and went about making hot cocoa. He returned, holding two mugs, and gave one mug to George. "I put extra marshmallows in yours."

Then Fr. Elijah sat down in a smaller chair, in the corner, and

sat, listening.

George blurted out, after some silence, "I think the Arthurian stuff I read may be Gnostic."

Fr. Elijah took a sip.

"One of the people in my class said that Arthurian literature arose because of the Cathars."

Fr. Elijah took another sip.

"Or something like that. It seems that a lot of what people do as glorious things in courtly literature is Gnostic."

Fr. Elijah took a slow sip, and asked, "Like what?"

"Well, the ideal of love is big on celebrating love, only it's better if children don't get in the way, and you're careful to keep children out of the way. And there's magic all over the place, and nobles are superior."

Fr. Elijah took another sip.

"At least that's how I remember it, only I'm probably wrong."

Fr. Elijah stroked his beard for a moment and said, "Well, that's a big enough question that we should respect the matter by not trying to sort it out all at once. Let's not assume that because it is so big a question, we are obligated to rush things. If it is a big question, we are more obligated not to rush things."

"Why?"

"Ever hear of Arius or Arianism?"

"You mean racism?"

"No, not that spelling. A-R-I-U-S and A-R-I-A-N-I-S-M. The race-related bit is spelled with a 'Y'."

"Ok."

"Arius was a deacon who was really worried that his bishop was saying something wrong. So he rushed to correct his bishop, and in his rush to correct the Orthodox Church founded a heresy. He gets it worse in the Orthodox liturgy than even

Judas; various other heretics are accused of being taught by Arius.

"There were two mistakes he made. The biggest and worst mistake was fighting the Orthodox Church when they said he was wrong, and that was the real problem with Arius. But another mistake was trying to rush and fix the problem of heresy he thought his bishop was guilty of.

"Holier men than either of us have rushed and said something heretical in their rush job. I'm not sure either of us are going to go warring against the Church and trying to fix it has thought about our correction and said 'No,' but if you've raised a big question, or your class has, that's all the more reason not to rush."

George said, "So what should we do?"

Fr. Elijah said, "Take a deep breath and a sip of cocoa," and waited. Then he said, "Now what is it that has you so wound up?"

"I thought there was really something in what I was reading."

"There probably is."

"But the idea of love, and all the magic, are some sort of second-rate Cathar stuff."

"Why do you think that?"

"Well, I'm not sure... um... well, they're big on the experience of love."

Fr. Elijah sank a little into his chair. "In other forms of Gnosticism, there is an idea of some things as experience... and they are understood as experiences, significant as experiences, and not as significant for other reasons... and I can see some pretty Gnostic assumptions feeding into that ideal of love. You may be right..."

"But isn't love to be celebrated? How else could it be celebrated?"

"In the New Testament times, celibacy was encouraged despite the fact that it was giving up something big. But the something big is not the obvious 'something big' people would be worried about giving up today... it's having children to carry on one's name. There is a good deal more.... People, even with hormones, were interested in some other things besides pleasurable experiences. There is more I could explain about what else besides 'being in love' could make a happy marriage between happy people, but... Sorry, I'm ranting, and you're not happy."

"Fr. Elijah, if what I'm saying makes sense, then why on earth did you preach those homilies? Were you lying... um, I mean..."

"Don't look for a nicer word; if you think I might have been lying, I would really rather have you bring it out into the open than have it smouldering and damaging other things. No, I'm not angry with you, and no, I wasn't lying."

"Then why—"

"George, allow me to state the very obvious. Something was going on in you. And still is. It seemed, and seems to me, that you were coming alive in reading the Arthurian legends. As a pastor or priest or spiritual father or whatever you want to call me, I made an appropriate response and preached homilies that blessed not just you, but also several other people as well. Now, maybe, you are shattered, or maybe you are ready to begin hungering for something more. You know how, in classic Gnosticism, there's a distinction the Gnostics hold between the so-called 'hylic' people who don't have much of any spiritual life, meaning people who aren't Christian in any sense, and the 'psychic,' meaning soulish, not ESP people, of Christians who have a sort of half-baked spiritual awakening, and the 'pneumatic,' meaning spiritual, Gnostics who are the real spiritual

elite?"

George said, "It doesn't surprise me. It's absolute bosh from beginning to end. It has nothing to do with the truth."

Fr. Elijah closed his eyes for a moment. "George, I am not quite sure I would say that."

"What, you're going to tell me the Gnostics had it right?"

"They had more right than you think; they're seductively similar to Christianity. They wouldn't have anywhere near the effect they're having if it were any other way."

"You know how Orthodox Christianity is patted on the head as a sort of lesser outer revelation that is permissible for those who have reached the outer courts but are not ready to enter the inner sanctum of the Gnostics' secret knowledge? That's backwards. The Gnostic 'knowledge' might be excusable for people who have not reached the inner reaches of Orthodoxy. It is the Gnostic that is the light-weight spiritual reality. And it is the light-weight spiritual reality that is the Old Law which the New Law fulfills more than the Old Law can fulfill itself. You reacted to something in the Arthurian legends because there is something there, and if you now know that they are not the New Law, I will ask you to excuse me if I still hold those legends to be an Old Law that finds its completion in the New Law. The highest does not stand without the lowest, and part of the New Law is that it makes a place for the Old Law. Including that spark of life you saw in the Arthurian legends."

"But why preach as if you found so much in them? I were to ask you to do something silly, like preach a sermon on how things have been censored out of the Bible, would you do that too?"

George took a breath. "I'm sorry; you can change the subject if you want."

Fr. Elijah said, slowly, "I have a question for you, and I want

you to think carefully. Are you ready for the question?"

George said, "Yes."

"Can we know, better than God, what the Bible should say?"

"No."

"But quite a lot of people do think that. A lot of people seem to be trying to help the Bible doing a better job of what it's trying so hard to say, but can't quite manage. Or something like that."

"I've read some liberals doing that."

"It's not just liberals. Let me give one example. George, have you been big in Creation and evolution debates?"

"Not really."

"Christians have several options, but for the Newsweek crowd, there are only two options. Either you're a young earther, or you're an evolutionist, and the new 'intelligent design' is just the old creationism with a more euphemistic name. Rather depressing for a set of options, but let's pretend those are the only two options.

"Now are you familiar with what this means for dinosaurs?"

"Um..."

"The connection isn't obvious. We've seen, or at least I have, cartoons in magazines that have cave men running from T. rexes or hunting a brontosaurus. Which is, to an evolutionist, over a hundred times worse than having cave men whining loudly about the World Wide Wait. There's a long time between when the last dinosaurs of any kind, and the first humans of any kind, were around. As in hundreds of millions of years longer than humans have been around in any form. On that timeline, it's a rather big mistake to have humans interacting with dinosaurs.

"But if you have a young earth timeline, with the whole world created in six days, then it's not such a ludicrous idea that

humans might have interacted with dinosaurs... and your English Bible offers an interesting reason to believe that humans have seen living dinosaurs. Have you read the book of Job?"

George said, "Um, no. It's one of a lot of..."

Fr. Elijah interrupted. "There's a lot in the Bible to read, and even people who read the Bible a lot don't read it quickly unless they're speed-reading, and then it still takes them a couple of weeks. If you can call that 'reading the Bible;' I've tried it and I think it's one of the sillier things I've tried—a sort of spiritual 'get rich quick' scheme. I was smart enough to stop. But if you check your English Bible, you will see in Job a creature called the 'behemoth,' perhaps because the translators on the King James Version didn't know how to translate it, and the 'behemoth,' whatever that may be, is a mighty impressive creature. We are told that it is not afraid though the river rushes against it, suggesting that whatever the behemoth is, it is a big beast. And we are told that it stiffens or swings its tail like a cedar, the cedar being a magnificent, and quite enormous, tree which reaches heights of something like one hundred fifty to two hundred feet. And regardless of where you stand on Creation and evolution, the only creature that has ever walked the earth with a tail that big, or anywhere near that big, is one of the bigger dinosaurs. So the Bible offers what seems to be excellent evidence that people have seen dinosaurs—alive.

"Which is all very lovely, of course given to the English Bible. But first, the 'behemoth' is in fact an overgrown relative of the pig, the hippopotamus, and second, it isn't really talking about his tail. The same basic image is translated unclearly in the Song of S—"

George spit out a mouthful of soda and took a moment to compose himself. "I'm sorry. Did I—"

Fr. Elijah looked around. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that as you were taking a sip. Let me get you a napkin. Here."

George said, "Ok, so maybe there are some other vivid images that have been, bowlderized—you know, edited for television.

Anything more? Were any ideas censored?"

Fr. Elijah said, "A bit murky, but I'm tempted to say 'yes.' One idea has been made less clear; there may be other tidbits here and there. A couple of forceful passages that may be interpreted as implying things about contraception don't come across as clearly. But that may not be censorship; there is a double meaning that is hard to translate correctly in English. I don't find the English translation strange. But there's one story in the Old Testament, where the future King David is running from King Saul, who is leading a manhunt and trying to kill David. There are a couple of points that David could have killed Saul, and at one of these points, David's assistant either encourages David to kill Saul or offers to kill Saul himself, and David says what your English Bible puts as, 'I will not lay my hand on the Lord's anointed,' or something like that. Would you like to know what it says in Hebrew or Greek, or in Latin translation?"

George said, "Um..."

Fr. Elijah got up. "I wasn't expecting that you would; it's really not that important or even as impressive as some people think. If you don't know those languages, it may be easiest to see in the Latin. Aah! Here's my Latin Bible. Just a minute. Let me get my magnifying glass." After almost dropping a dark green Bible with golden letters on the cover, and an interminable amount of flipping, he said, "What is this word here?"

"I don't know Latin."

"Never mind that. What does that word look like?"

"It's a lowercase version of 'Christ,' with an 'um' added."

"Yes indeed. And at the top it says the name of an Old Testament book, in Latin 'Liber Samuhelis.' What do you think the word you pointed out means?"

"I told you that I don't know Latin."

"What's an obvious guess?"

"Um..." George paused. "Christ."

"Yes indeed."

"What does the lowercase 'c' mean?"

"It means nothing. As a matter of language-loving curiosity, the text is in Latin; either in the manuscripts or in this printed Bible, capitalizations follow a different rule, and 'christus'/'christum' /... isn't automatically capitalized. Now why is the Old Testament book of Samuel using the equivalent of the 'Christ'?"

"Because the Latin is messed up?"

"Ernk. Sorry. Bzzt. Thank you for playing, but no. The Latin is fine. It's the English that's messed up. The Latin correctly translates, 'I will not lay my hand on,' meaning violently strike, 'the Lord's Christ.' Didn't you know that the word 'Christ' means 'anointed'?"

"Yes, but..."

"The Bible, Old Testament and New, uses 'Christ' for those who are anointed—the Son of God, prophets, priests, kings, and ultimately the people of God. The whole point of becoming Christian is to become by grace what Christ is by nature, and even if we can never be perfect in Christ, there is something real that happens. If you ever become Orthodox, you will be 'Christed,' or in the related and standard term, 'chrismated,' meaning, 'anointed with holy oil.' And, at a deeper level, the anointing is about anointing with the Holy Spirit, as Christ was. And the New Testament in particular says a lot about Christ, but

the Bible calls Christ or Christs others who are anointed. But the Bible translations, coincidentally by people who have much less room for this in their theology, introduce a division that isn't in Hebrew, Greek, or the Catholic Church's Latin, and translate the Hebrew 'moshiah' or the Greek 'christos' one way when it refers to the one they think is 'really' Christ, and another way when it refers to other Christs even if what the text says is, quite literally, 'Christ.' They introduce a very clear divide where none exists in the text, using a language shenanigan not entirely different from some mistranslations translating 'God' with a big 'G' when the Bible talks about the Father, and a 'god' with a little 'g' when the Bible refers to Christ. Perhaps your Bible's translators still say 'anointed one,' but there is some degree of censorship. The reader is saved the shock of too many correctly translated and explicit statements that we are to be little Christs, Sons of God, living the divine life—there's a word for the divine life in Greek that is different from the word for mere created life, and that dimension doesn't seem to come through. It's not all censorship, but there's something not quite right about the translators who refuse to either consistently say 'Christ,' or else consistently say 'Anointed One,' so that the readers never get the something important in the Bible that Western Christianity does not always get. But there is enough mystery in the Bible. Sacred Scripture is unfathomable even apart from relatively few areas where the translators try to make sure that the reader does not get the full force of the what the text is saying. God exceeds our grasp; he is and ever shall be Light, but whenever we try to shine a light to search him out, its beam falls off in darkness, and the God who is Light meets us beyond the cloud of darkness enshrouding him.

"I say this to answer your question, which I know was purely

rhetorical. I'd prefer not to scandalize people and have to clean up the pieces later, but even the tough old women you see in our parish aren't so prissy as you might think. But I want to more directly speak to your intent, and the deep question behind your asking if, because you had hypothetically asked me, I would preach a sermon about the Bible and censorship. I wasn't crossing my fingers or simply saying what I thought would please you, when I preached about the Arthurian legends, and there is nothing I wish to take back. I really was preaching in good faith."

"Then I don't want Brocéliande for now."

George said, "You may like the book. I don't. I don't want it any more."

"Then may I take a look at it? I would like to have it, to look at. If you don't want it any more, that's fine, but you can have it back any time."

"Fine. Maybe it will be better for you than for me."

"By the way, what are you doing for Spring Break?"

"Dunno. Do you have any suggestions?"

"There are some truly beautiful places where you could get blasted out of your mind, acquire a couple of new diseases, and if you time it right, come back still in possession of a rather impressive hangover."

"Um..."

"Yes?"

"Why don't we just cut to the chase and get to your real suggestion?"

"Aah, yes. It turns out that there's a finishing school which is offering a week-long intensive course in the gentle art of polite conversation, but—oh, wait, I was going to suggest that to my granddaughter Abigail. I would never make such a suggestion to you. Finishing school—what was I thinking? What I was really

wondering was whether you have considered one of the alternative spring breaks."

"Like Habitat for Humanity? But I have no skill in construction."

"That's not really the point. Last I checked, Habitat for Humanity had nothing on their website about how only seasoned construction workers can be of any use."

"But aren't there a lot of things that could go wrong?"

"Like what?"

"I might hit myself on the thumb with a hammer."

"If you're worried about being at a loss for words, last April Fool's Day my godson gave me a book listing bad words in something like a thousand languages, and you can borrow it.

There are worse things in life than hitting your thumb with a hammer, and if it's that big of an issue, I'd be happy to ask the head of Habitat for Humanity to refund your wasted time. If you're worried about getting sunburned, the store next door has an impressive collection of sunscreen containers, giving you options that rival those for dental floss. I personally recommend the SPF 30 in your choice of soft pastel-hued plastic bottles with a delicate floral scent created through a carefully blended confection of unnatural chemicals. I don't think that Habitat is going anywhere where you'd be in real danger of snakebite, but I can help find a kit you can use to bite the snake back. Have I left something out?"

A week later, and (though he did not tell Fr. Elijah) realizing that Abigail was also a student at Calix College, George returned. Fr. Elijah said, "Why the long face, George? Just a minute while I make some tea."

"Um, I'm not signed up for the alternative spring break."

"George, I only asked you to consider... tell me what's on your

mind... if you want to."

"I was in line, and I just missed signing up."

Fr. Elijah sat in silence.

"I could have gone, but there was a girl in line after me, and she really wanted to go. I let her have the last slot."

"Excellent. Some would call it sexist, but I'd call it one of the finer points of chivalry."

Fr. Elijah paused and then said, "Could you come with me to the house for a second?"

George gulped.

Fr. Elijah led George out to the house and rummaged on a shelf before pulling out a CD. "George, could you put this in the CD player and hit play? I've figured out how to use the CD player several times, but I keep forgetting, and I don't want to keep you waiting." He handed the CD to George and said, "I'll be right out. I need to make a phone call." He stepped into another room and closed the door.

George looked at the CD, did a double take, and looked at the player. He began to hear a rap beat.

As I walk through the valley where I harvest my grain,  
I take a look at my wife and realize she's very plain.

But that's just perfect for an Amish like me.

You know, I shun fancy things like electricity.

At 4:30 in the morning I'm milkin' cows.

Jebediah feeds the chickens and Jacob plows... Fool!

And I've been milkin' and plowin' so long that

Even Ezekiel thinks that my mind is gone.

I'm a man of the land! I'm into discipline!

Got a Bible in my hand and a beard on my chin.

But if I finish all my chores and you finish thine,

—

Then tonight we're gonna party like it's 1699!  
We been spending most our lives, living in an Amish  
paradise.

I've churned butter once or twice, living in an Amish  
paradise.

It's hard work and sacrifice, living in an Amish paradise.  
We sell quilts at discount price, living in an Amish paradise.

A local boy kicked me in the butt last week.

I just smiled at him and turned the other cheek!

I really don't care; in fact, I wish him well.

'Cause I'll be laughing my head off when he's burning in Hell!

But I ain't never punched a tourist even if he deserved it

An Amish with a 'tude? You know that's unheard of!

I never wear buttons but I got a cool hat.

And my homies agree, I really look good in black... Fool!

If you'll come to visit, you'll be bored to tears.

We haven't even paid the phone bill in 300 years

But we ain't really quaint, so please don't point and stare;

We're just technologically impaired!

There's no phone, no lights, no motorcar,

Not a single luxury,

Like Robinson Caruso,

It's as primitive as can be!

We been spending most our lives, living in an Amish  
paradise.

We're just plain and simple guys, living in an Amish paradise.

There's no time for sin and vice, living in an Amish paradise.

We don't fight. We all play nice, living in an Amish paradise.

Hitchin' up the buggy, churnin' lots of butter,

Raised a barn on Monday, soon I'll raise another!

Think you're really righteous? Think you're pure in heart?

Well, I know I'm a million times as humble as thou art!  
I'm the pious guy the little Amlettes wanna be like,  
On my knees day and night, scorin' points for the afterlife,  
So don't be vain and don't be whiny,  
Or else, my brother, I might have to get medieval on your  
heinie!

We been spending most our lives, living in an Amish  
paradise.

We're all crazy Mennonites, living in an Amish paradise.  
There's no cops or traffic lights, living in an Amish paradise.  
But you'd probably think it bites, living in an Amish paradise.

Fr. Elijah walked back into the room and served the tea,  
smiling gently.

George said, "Um..."

Fr. Elijah said, "Yes?"

"I'm not sure how to put this delicately."

"Then put it indelicately. Bluntly, if you wish."

"I hadn't picked you out for a Weird AI fan."

"It was a present."

"Who would buy you a Weird AI CD?"

"A loved one."

"Um... do you ever do something less spectacular, like play  
chess?"

"I'm not a big fan of chess, and besides, I've visited the  
chess club at the Episcopalian church, and it seems the Anglican  
Communion isn't going to produce that many more good chess  
players."

"Why?"

Fr. Elijah sipped his tea. "Can't tell a bishop from a queen."

George coughed, sputtered, tried to keep a straight face, and  
then tried to steer the conversation back "When were you given

...continued to steer the conversation back. "When were you given  
the Weird AI CD?"

"For April Fools' Day. The present is much appreciated."

"I like Weird AI, but why did you play that?"

"Because I was just on the phone."

"And?"

"I've just arranged for you to spend your Spring Break at an  
Amish paradise."

"Um..."

"Yes?"

"Are you joking?"

"No."

"Are you being serious?"

"Yes."

"Are you being sadistic again?"

"Yes, I'm being very sadistic."

"Why?"

"I'm not saying."

"I'll be bored to tears."

"Perhaps. But boredom can be good, and not just because it  
can build character."

"Um... Never mind. I've grown rather fond of computers. I've  
found out the hard way that I rather need them."

"If it's that hard for you to spend a few days without spam,  
you can use your cell phone to read all the insulting messages  
telling you that you can't handle money, or that you need snake  
oil diets, or some part of your body is too small, or you're not  
man enough for a relationship with a real woman and must  
content yourself with pixels on a screen. And if you forget leave  
your cell phone at home, you might be able to borrow one of  
theirs."

"Amish don't use phones or the Internet. They're 'iust

...technologically impaired;' didn't the song say that?"

"You can ask them; I'm sure one of them would be willing to lend you his cell phone."

"Um..."

"Let's forget about that; we can talk about it later if you want. Anyway, after school gets out, come over here with your bag. Someone else is doing some running, and will give you a ride. He's a bit hard of hearing, so he's not much good for chatting in the car, but he's a great guy. But you can gripe to him about how backwards the Amish are."

"Oh, and one more thing... I'm not exactly sending you into bear country, but if one of the workmen were attacked by a bear, I'd be very worried."

"Um..."

"Yes?"

"That seems obvious."

"But not for the reason you think. I'll explain why after you return."

There was a knock on the door, and Fr. Elijah opened it.

"George, I'd like to introduce you to Jehu. Jehu, this is George. Oh, George, I'm sorry for being a pest, but could you open your bag and pull out everything inside?"

George looked at Fr. Elijah, rolled his eyes, and began unpacking.

"Which of these items mean anything at all to you? Which have a story, or were expensive, or were a gift?"

George looked at Fr. Elijah, who stood in silence.

"You can put anything that means anything to you in this closet; it will be here when you get back. I'm not sending you to a den of thieves, but..."

George began shuffling and sorting while Fr. Elijah waited.

When he was finished, Fr. Elijah said, "How much does your windbreaker mean to you?"

"It's new, but I want to have it with me on the trip."

"Take it off. You have an old sweatshirt or two."

"Sorry, I insist on this one. It doesn't mean that much to me."

Fr. Elijah said, "If you must..."

George said, "I've taken enough out. Have a good evening." He stiffly shook Fr. Elijah's hand. "You better have a good reason for your odd behavior."

Fr. Elijah said, "I can explain later, if you need me to."

George repacked the remaining half of his luggage into the duffle bag, and left with Jehu.

Some days later, Fr. Elijah heard a knock and opened the door. "George, George! How are you? I must hear about your trip. That's a lovely jeans jacket you have there. Is there a story behind it?"

George gave Fr. Elijah a look that could have been poured on a waffle, and then began quickly taking his coat off.

Fr. Elijah said, "You wouldn't throw a coat at an old man who doesn't have the reflexes to block it... I must hear the story about the coat, though."

George closed his mouth for a second, and then said, "Filthy sadist!"

Fr. Elijah said, "It sounded like you had an interesting trip."

"Did you call and ask them to be obnoxious?"

"I did no such thing."

"Honest?"

"I called and asked them to go easy on you."

"You called and asked them to go easy on me?"

"Well, you seem to have gotten through the matter without

getting any black eyes."

"You call that going easy? These guys are pacifists, right?"

"That depends on your idea of a 'pacifist'. If you mean that they don't believe you should use violence to solve conflicts, then yes, they are pacifists."

George said, "And..."

"But does that make them wimps? In any sense at all?"

"You did say that you would be worried if one of them were attacked by a bear... Why?"

"I'd be worried for the bear."

George sunk down into his chair.

"You must have some stories to tell."

"They wanted help raising a barn, and they wouldn't let me do any of the stunts they were doing without a harness, but when I went to the outhouse, things shook, and when I opened the door, I was over ten feet in the air."

"Earthquake?"

"Forklift. I don't know why they had one."

"Did you ever think you would sit on such a high throne? I have a suspicion that's higher than even my bishop's throne."

"We are not amused."

"You are using the royal 'We,' Your Majesty. Excellent."

"The first day, I didn't take off my shirt at work, but I did take off my windbreaker, and when I left, they nailed it to the beams!"

"Excellent. Is that why Your Majesty has a new, handmade jeans jacket?"

George gave Fr. Elijah another look that could have been poured on a waffle.

"I should maybe have told you... They don't think anything of nailing down any clothing that's taken off as a practical joke. Did

you ever get an opportunity to nail down some clothing or something of theirs?"

"Yes, but like a gentleman, I did not."

"That was rude of you."

"You mean they're offended at what I didn't do?"

"No; I just said it was rude. They wouldn't be offended. But what I was going to say is that the women have lots of denim, and are very adept at sewing new clothes; it's almost like making a paper airplane for them. Or maybe a little bigger of a deal than that. But you seem to be laboring under a sense that since the Amish are such backwards people, they aren't allowed to have a sense of humor. Were you surprised at the sense of humor they had?"

"Filthy sadist!"

"So did you get bored with nothing interesting to do besides surf the web through your cell phone?"

George said, "Filthy sadist!" Then he paused.

Fr. Elijah sat back and smiled. "George, I believe you have a question."

George hesitated.

"Yes? Ask anything you want."

George hesitated again, and asked, "When can I come back?"

Fr. Elijah just laughed.

George walked around, and had a few chats with Abigail on campus. She started to occupy his thoughts more... and George wondered if he really wanted to dismiss all of the literature of courtly love.

He tried to put this out of his mind the next time he saw Fr. Elijah.

He thought he'd pay a visit, and knocked on Fr. Elijah's door.

Fr. Elijah said, "I'm glad you're here, George. Did you know

that a man-eating tiger got loose on the campus of Calix College?"

George stood up and immediately pulled his cell phone out of his pocket. "Do the police—"

"Sit down, George, and put your cell phone away, although I must commend your gallant impulse. This was before your time, and besides, George, it starved."

George said, very forcedly, "Ha ha ha."

"Sit down, please. Have you had any further thoughts about your holiday with the Amish?"

"It seems a bit like King Arthur's court. Or at least—"

"Why would that be?"

George sat for a while, and said nothing.

"Are you familiar with Far Side comic strips?"

"Yes."

"I expected so. You like them, right?"

"Yes, but I haven't read them in a while."

"Do you remember the strip with its caption, 'In the days before television'?"

"Can't put my finger on it."

"It shows a family, mesmerized, sitting, lying, and slouching around a blank spot where there isn't a television... I think you've had a visit to the days before television. You didn't even need a time machine."

George sat in silence for a moment.

Fr. Elijah continued, "If you want, I can show you the technique by which the Bible is censored, and how the translators hide the fact that they've taken something out of the text. But do you know the one line that was censored from the movie production of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

—the Disney one, I mean?"

"I didn't notice that anything was censored."

"Well, you're almost right. Now it seems to be religion that is censored, Christianity having replaced sex as the publishing world's major taboo, and Disney did not censor one iota of the stuff about Aslan. But there is one line of the book that almost gets into the movie, but then Father Christmas merely makes a smile instead of verbally answering the question. Do you know what that line is?"

"What?"

"'Battles are ugly when women fight.'"

"Um... I can see why they would want to smooth over that."

"Why? Battles are ugly when men fight. There is a reason why Orthodox call even necessary fighting 'the cross of St. George.' 'Cross,' as in a heavy, painful burden. I've dealt pastorally with several veterans. They've been through something rough, much rougher than some people's experience with, say, cancer. And it is my unambiguous opinion, and that of every single soldier I've spoken to at length, that battles are ugly... whether or not women fight. Therefore, battles are ugly when women fight, and you'd really have to not understand battle, think it's the same thing as a violent fantasy or watching an action-adventure movie, to deny that battles are ugly when whatever group fights."

"So why make such a big deal over a single line, 'Battles are ugly when women fight?' Why is that one line worth censoring when Disney has the guts to leave Aslan untouched? What's a bigger taboo in the media world than Christ?"

"Umm... I can't put my finger on it."

"Ok, let me ask you... What do you think of the Amish women?"

George tried not to stiffen.

"I'm sorry, George, I meant besides that... When you're my age you can forget that for women to dress very modestly can—"

"Then what did you mean?"

"Imagine one of those women in a fight."

George tried not to make a face.

Fr. Elijah said, "My understanding is that they're strong and hard workers, probably a lot stronger than many men you know."

George said, "Um..."

"Would you deny that they are strong? And tough, for that matter?"

"No..."

"Does it bother you in the same way to imagine an Amish man having to carry a gun into combat?"

"No. He'd be pretty tough."

"But the women are pretty strong and tough too. Why does it bother you to think about one of them entering combat and fighting?"

George said nothing.

"The women strike you as stronger and tougher than many men that you know. So they're basically masculine?"

"Fr. Elijah... the women there almost left me wondering if I'd met real women before, and the men left me wondering if I'd met real men before. I don't know why."

"I think I have an answer for why the idea of an Amish woman fighting in battle bothers you more than an Amish man fighting in battle."

"What?"

"I've been reading through Brocéliande. Let me read you a couple of passages." Fr. Elijah returned momentarily, and flipped through Brocéliande before reading:

Sir Galahad he rode, and rode and rode, until saw he a dragon red. Anon the wyrm with its tail struck a third of the trees against the earth that Sir Galahad they might slay.

Anon Sir Galahad warred he against the wyrm.

The dragon charged, and anon Sir Galahad his horse trembled, and Galahad gat him down to earth. The dragon laughed at Sir Galahad's spear which brake to-shivers, and breathed fire red as Hell.

Sir Galahad gat him behind his shield, and then charged with his sword, though it should break as rotted wood. Anon the dragon swept him, though his helm saved Sir Galahad his head from the rocks.

Then Sir Galahad, who his strength was as the strength of a thousand because his faith was pure, leapt him and wrestled against the beast. Anon the beast turned and tore, against the knight, until the knight he bled sore. Never was such combat enjoined, but the knight held his choke until the dragon his death met.

Fr. Elijah pulled the bookmark out, and found one of several other bookmarks:

Rose the smoke of incense, of frankincense pure the garden did fill. 'Twere many women present, that hyght Lady Eva, and Lady Elizabeth, and Lady Anna, and Lady Martha, and Queen Mary. Sang they a song, 'twere of one voice, and in that song kept they a garden: in the garden was life. Queen Mary a radiant Child gave suck, and others gave life each in her way.

Verdant was the place of their labour.

Fr. Elijah said, "I think you're missing the point if you're

trying to tell if there are differences between men and women  
by asking who is tougher."

"Why?"

"It's like asking what the differences are between apples and oranges, and then thinking you need to justify it with a measurement. So you may say that apples are bigger than oranges, until you realize that navel oranges are the size of a grapefruit and some varieties of apples don't get that big. So maybe next you measure a sugar content, and you get really excited when you realize that maybe oranges have a measurably lower Ph than apples—a scientist's way of measuring how sour they are—until someone reminds you that crabapples are so tart you wouldn't want to eat them. And all this time you are looking for some precise scientific measurement that will let you scientifically be able to distinguish apples and oranges...

"Is it simply a measure of some difference in physical strength that makes you not like the idea of an Amish woman in battle? If you knew that the women were equally as strong as the men, identically strong, or tough or whatever, would that address..."

George hesitated. "But..."

Fr. Elijah sat silently.

"But," George continued, "the idea of an Amish woman in battle... I know some girls who wanted to go into the military, and it didn't bother me that much. And the Amish women are pacifists."

"So if those women were gung-ho military enthusiasts, even if they weren't soldiers, then you wouldn't mind—"

"Ok, ok, that's not it. But what is it about the Amish?"

"George, I think you're barking up the wrong tree."

"So what is the right tree? Where should I be barking?"

"When people notice a difference with another culture, at least in this culture they seek some 'That's cultural' explanation about the other culture."

"So there's something about this culture? Ours?"

"George, let me ask you a question. How many times in the Arthurian legends did you see someone invite a man to be open about himself and have the courage to talk about his feelings?"

George was silent.

"We still have the expression, 'wear the pants,' even though it is no longer striking for a woman to wear trousers. It used to be as striking as it would be for a man to wear a skirt."

"Um... you don't approve of women wearing pants?"

"Let's put that question on hold; it doesn't mean the same thing. Abby wears trousers all the time. I wouldn't want her to do otherwise."

"But..."

"George, when have you seen me at the front of the church, leading worship but not wearing a skirt?"

"Um..."

"But I wouldn't want you wearing a skirt. The question of wearing a skirt, or pants, or whatever, is like trying to make a rule based on size or tartness or whatever to separate apples from oranges."

"It's the wrong question, then?"

"It's fundamentally the wrong question... and it misleads people into thinking that the right question must be as impossible to answer as the wrong question. Never mind asking who is allowed to wear pants and who is allowed to wear a skirt. We're both men. I wear a skirt all the time. You shouldn't. And, in either case, there is a way of dressing that is appropriate to men, and another to women, and that propriety runs much deeper

than an absolute prohibition on who can wear what. And this is true even without getting into the differences between men's and women's jeans, which are subtle enough that you can easily miss them, but important."

"Like what?"

"For starters, the cloth is hung on men's jeans so that the fabric is like a grid, more specifically with some of the threads running up and down, and others running side to side. On women's clothing, jeans included, the threads run diagonally."

"And this is a deliberately subtle clue for the super-perceptive?"

"It changes how the cloth behaves. It changes the cloth's physical properties. Makes women's clothing run out faster, because it's at just the right angle to wear out more quickly. But it also makes the cloth function as more form-fitting. On men's jeans, the cloth just hangs; it's just there as a covering. On women's jeans, the cloth is there to cover, but it's also there to highlight. This, and the cut, and a few other things, mean that even if men and women are both wearing jeans, there are differences, even if they're subtle enough that you won't notice them. Men's jeans are clothing. Women's jeans are more about adornment, even—or especially—if it's something you're not expected to notice."

"So we do have differences?"

"We do have differences despite our best efforts to eradicate them. We want men to be sophisticated enough to cultivate their feminine sides, and women to be strong enough to step up to the plate."

"Um, isn't that loaded language?"

"Very. Or maybe not. But one of the features of Gnosticism is that there keeps popping up an idea that we should work towards

androgyny. Including today."

"Like what?"

"Um, you mean besides an educational system that is meant to be unisex and tells boys and girls to work together and be... um... 'mature' enough not to experience a tingle in the relationship? Or dressing unisex? Or not having too many activities that are men only or women only? Or not having boys and men together most of the time, and women and girls together? Or having people spend long periods of time in mixed company whether or not it is supposed to be romantic? Or an idea of dating that is courtly love without too many consciously acknowledged expectations about what is obviously the man's role, and what is obviously the women's role? Or—"

"Ok, ok, but I think there was more—"

"Yes, there is much more to the Amish, or the Arthurian legends, than what they hold about men and women. But there is also much more in what they hold about men and women—all the more when they are telling of Long Ago and Far Away, so that political correctness does not apply to them, so that men who go on great quests can be appreciated even by a woman who thinks men would be better off if they would just learn to talk more about their feelings and in general hold a woman's aspirations of conversational intimacy. And the Amish are 'technologically impaired,' or whatever you want to call them, so they're allowed to have real men and real women despite the fact that they are alive today. But the pull of men taught to be men, and women taught to be women, is powerful even if it's politically incorrect, and—"

George interrupted. "Is this why I was trying to keep a straight face when you were asking me to imagine an Amish woman carrying a gun?"

Fr. Elijah thought. "For an Amish man to have to fight in battle would be bad enough. An Amish woman entering a battlefield would be something that would cut against the grain of their life as women. It's not so superficial as the women being dainty and not strong enough to hold a gun."

"The men seem stronger and tougher than the women, though."

"Yes, but is it only a matter of being tougher? Is what you observed simply a matter of the women being tough but the men being tougher?"

George was silent.

Fr. Elijah looked at his watch and winced. "Always when I'm having a good conversation... George, I'm sorry, but I've got someone coming over any minute, and a bit of preparation.

Sorry..."

George picked up his belongings, and Fr. Elijah blessed him on his way out. Then George stepped out, and Fr. Elijah momentarily opened the door. "Oh, and by the way, George, I have some more of that paper, if you want to write her a love note." He closed the door.

George scurried away, hoping that Fr. Elijah hadn't seen him blush.

It was not much later that April Fool's Day came, falling on a Sunday. George did not feel brave, and paid a visit to Bedside Baptist. The days seemed to pass quickly with Abigail in the picture.

On Earth Day, George listened and was amazed at how many references to Creation he heard in the liturgy—not just the reference to "his mother, the earth," but how plants and trees, rocks, stars, and seas, formed the warp and woof by which the Orthodox Church praised her Lord. The liturgy left him wishing

Fr. Elijah would put off his preaching and say something to  
celebrate earth day...

Fr. Elijah stood up.

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

Today is Earth Day, and I thought that that would  
provide an excellent basis for my preaching today. The very  
opening chapters of *Genesis* are not about man alone but man  
and the whole Creation. There are some very interesting  
suggestions people have made that when *Genesis* says that  
we were told not only to "be fruitful and multiply," but "fill  
the earth and subdue it," the word translated "subdue" is  
very gentle, almost an embrace, as a mother nurtures a child.

Which is a very lovely image, but is absolute hogwash.

The word translated "subdue" is the word Christ uses for  
exactly what Christians must not do by "lording their  
authority" over other Christians as the heathen do. The  
book of *Genesis* tells of this beautiful Creation and then has  
God charge us with a charge that could much better be  
translated, "trample it under foot." And what better day  
than Earth Day than to talk about why we should trample the  
earth under foot, told to us in a text that is resplendent  
with natural beauty?

Many people today call the earth 'Gaia', and that is well  
and good. Today one calls a man 'Mr.' and a woman 'Miss' or  
'Ms.' or 'Mrs.' if there is no other honorific, and as much as  
adults all bear that title, in Latin every woman bears then  
name of 'Gaia' and every man bears the name of 'Gaius.' And  
if we are speaking of the earth, it is well and proper to call  
her *Gaia*; only someone who understands neither men nor

women would think of her as a goddess.

women would think of her as sexless!

If you are dealing with a horse, for instance, it helps to keep in mind that they are prey animals with a lot of fear.

Never mind that they're much bigger than you; they're afraid of you, as you would be afraid of a rat, and need to be treated like a small child. But you can only deal with a horse gently after it is broken and after you have made it clear that it is you holding the reins and not the horse. You need to be able to treat a horse like a little child if you are to handle them... but if you spoil it, and fail to establish your authority, you have a terrified small child that is stronger than an Olympic athlete. You do need to be gentle with a horse, but it is a gentleness that holds the reins, with you in charge.

There are a number of fundamental difficulties we face about being in harmony with nature, and one of the chief ones is that we are trying to be in harmony with nature the wrong way. We are trying to take our cue from our mother the earth, perhaps instead of taking our cue from technology. And it is excellent to treat Gaia gently, and perhaps technology is in fact quite a terrible place to take our cue from, and something else we absolutely need to trample under foot, but there is something mistaken about the rider taking his cue from the horse. In *Genesis* we are called to rule material Creation as its head: we are to give it its cue, rather than following. Perhaps you have seen the *Far Side* cartoon that says, "When imprinting studies go awry" and shows a scientist last in line with ducklings follow a mother duck... which is very funny, but not a recipe for a life well lived. We are made from the same clay as horse and herb, but unless we are deeply sunk into the even worse cues

we will take from technology when we fail to rule it, we do not serve our best interests—or the earth's—when we ask her to dance and expect her to be our lead.

But enough of what is politically incorrect in the West, where we say that men should not lead and mean, in both senses, that humans should not lead the rest of Creation and that males should not lead females. I could belabor why both of those are wrong, but I would like to dig deeper, deeper even than saying that lordship applies to every one of us even if we are all "a man under authority," including me.

Patristic exegesis of the rule over Creation is first and foremost of a rule over our passions and over ourselves. We are not fit to lead others or Creation if we have not even learned to lead ourselves; "better is a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." If you are following a Western model, then you may be thinking of a big enterprise for us to start ruling Creation which is really beside the point. If you save yourself through ascetical mastery, ten thousand will be saved around you. Never mind that this is mystical; it is a matter of "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you." You become a leader, and a man, not by ruling over others, but by ruling over yourself.

We are in Great Lent now, the central season of the entire Orthodox year, not because it is about ruling others or about ruling Creation—it isn't—but because it is about ruling ourselves. We are not to seek a larger kingdom to rule outside ourselves; we are to turn our attention to the kingdom within, and rule it, and God will add a larger kingdom outside if we are ready. The first, foremost, and last of places for us to exercise lordship is in ourselves, and our

rule over the Creation is but an image of our rule over ourselves, impressive as the outer dominion may be.

We bear the royal bloodline of Lord Adam and Lady Eve, and we are to be transformed into the image of Christ. Let us seek first the Kingdom of God, with all that that means for our rule over ourselves.

In the Name of the Lord and Father, and of the Son who is Lord, and of the Heavenly King, who is the Holy Ghost,  
Amen.

After his Sunday dinner, George thought it would be a good time to wander in the wood.

In the forest, he found himself by a babbling brook, with the sound of a waterfall not far off. George brushed off a fallen mossy log and sat down to catch his breath.

George began listening to the birdsong, and it almost seemed he could tell a pattern. Then two warm hands covered his eyes.

George tried to look up, remembered his eyes were covered, and brought his own hands up to his face, briefly touching a small, soft pair of hands. Then he said, "It's definitely a man..."

Then George turned. Abigail was sticking out her tongue.

Abigail's dress was a rich, deep, deep red, the color of humble earth seen through a ruby. A pair of bare white feet peeked out from beneath a long flowing skirt, a wide, golden straw hat sat atop her locks, and dark, intricate knotwork lay across her heart.

George looked down at his own feet and saw his own worn combat boots, before looking at Abigail's face. She smiled and said, "Boo!"

George said, "What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?"

"Taking a walk, as I do from time to time."

"Must be pretty rare for you, if this is the first time I've seen you."

"You're in the woods more often than I am?"

A squirrel darted out, climbed across Abigail's foot, and scurried away.

George asked, "It wasn't afraid of you?"

"Most of them aren't, at least not that much of the time." George looked at her, and she said, "It's not such a big deal, really. Read any good books lately?"

"No, and—ooh, I told Fr. Elijah I'd read C.S. Lewis, something or other about 'glory.' I need to get back to him."

"Maybe it's a box you're not meant to open, at least not yet... if I know Grandpa, he's probably forgotten about it completely."

"But I should—"

"You should leave it a closed box, if anything. How are you?"

George looked at the forest—how like a garden it looked—and then Abigail. He was at something of a loss for words. He looked down at her alabaster feet, and then her face. "Having a good day."

She smiled, and a sparrow flew between them. "There's a hawk in here somewhere, only it's hard to find. You can spend a lot of time exploring this forest. I'm having a good day, too."

George sat for a while, trying to think of something to say, and Abigail said, "You're being pretty quiet now."

George said, "I've been looking at majoring in math."

Abigail said, "Um..."

"You know how to tell if a mathematician is an extravert?"

"Nope."

George looked down and said, "He looks at your feet when they're talking to you."

Abigail giggled. "Have you heard my Grandpappy's theory on how PMS got its name?"

George said, "Um..."

She giggled again. "Something about 'Mad Cow Disease' being taken."

George stiffened, and looked for something to say.

Abigail said, "Stop it, George. Just stop it. Don't you get it? Don't you stand and listen or sing the hymn where the the Mother of God is honored as the Ewe that bore the Lamb of God and the Heifer that bore the Unblemished Calf?"

George's mind raced. "I suppose that if, in the same breath, Christ is called—"

Abigail interrupted. "Next time you're in Church, listen, really listen, as the Mother of God is honored, then listen as Christ our God is worshiped. There's a difference. Don't try to analyze it or even put your finger on it. Just listen, and... George, do you understand women? At all?"

George looked for something to say, but found nothing.

A dark cloud blew across the sky, and cold rain began to fall more heavily until it poured.

George said, "May I lend you my jacket?"

Abigail said, "I'm fine."

The rain grew colder, and began to pelt. George and Abigail both rose and began scurrying towards campus. George took off his jacket and started to place it around Abigail's shoulders.

Abigail said, "I don't—"

George looked down and said, "I'm wearing boots and you have bare feet," and wrapped his jacket around her shoulders. Then a gust of wind tore at Abigail's hat, but George caught it.

Then they ran back, with George shivering under his threadbare T-shirt. When they got back, he went to his dorm

and she to hers. George called Abigail and was fine and she was OK

and she to hers. George called Abigail and confirmed she was OK, took three long, hot showers, and spent the rest of the evening sinking into a lounge chair in his bathrobe, sipping cocoa, and thinking.

Tuesday evening, George found time to visit Fr. Elijah. He wanted to talk about another subject. Definitely another subject.

"Fr. Elijah, are you busy?"

"I hope not... come in."

"After all this, I still want the Holy Grail."

"Excellent thing, my son... the chief point of life is to search for the Holy Grail."

"But will I find it? I mean... I'm not sure what I mean."

"May I show you something old?"

"As far as material age goes, it is much older than the Holy Grail."

The old man opened a desk drawer, and fished out a small box.

"I thought this might interest you," he said, and took something out of the box, and placed it in George's hand.

George looked the item over. It looked like a piece of bark, not much larger than a pebble, and yet it seemed heavy for a piece of bark. "Is this stone or wood? I can't tell which it is."

"Is it stone or wood? In fact, it is petrified wood... from the Oak of Mambre."

"Oak of Mambre? Should I have heard of it before?"

"You probably have, and if you can't remember it, there is something you're missing."

"What is the Oak of Mambre?"

"I'll tell you in a bit. When you grasp the Oak of Mambre, you hold the Holy Grail."

"How?"

"The Oak of Mambre is older than any of the civilizations you

The Oak of Mambre is older than any of the civilizations you know; for that matter, it might be older than the practice of writing. Do you know about Abraham?"

"The one Paul calls the father of all who believe?"

"Yes, that Abraham. The Bible tells how Abraham met three men who came to him, and showed the most lavish hospitality, giving them the costliest meal he could have given. And it was then that the men promised the impossible. It is clear enough later that these men were in fact angels, were in fact God.

"From the West, you may not know that even if we Orthodox are big on icons, it's fingernails to a chalkboard when Orthodox see the Father portrayed as the proverbial old man with a beard. Christ may be portrayed because of his incarnation; the same is not true of the invisible Father, who is not and never will be incarnate. Icons of the Father have been fundamentally rejected, but there was one exception. From ancient times there has been an icon of Abraham's hospitality to the three men, or three angels, and centuries ago one iconographer showed something deeper: it is the same three men or angels, but instead of a table with a lamb as in the old version of the icon, there is an icon with a chalice atop an altar. In both the old and the new form of the icon, the Oak of Mambre is in the back, and it is this same oak for which I have shown you a fragment."

"Is it holy because it is old?"

"Being old does not make a thing holier. The pebbles in your yard are of stone ages older than the oldest relic. Though they are, admittedly, part of the earth which received Christ's blood on the cross, and which Bulgakov rightly calls the Holy Grail.

"A thing is kept and preserved because it is holy, and if people will try to keep a holy thing for a long time, it will probably be old to most of the people who see it. Same reason most of the people who have seen the Liberty Bell saw it when it

most of the people who have seen the Liberty Bell saw it when it was old because people have been keeping it for a long time, much longer than the time when it was new, so most of the people who have seen, or will see, the Liberty Bell, see it as an old treasure. But back to holy things: a holy thing is, if anything, timeless: when there arose a great evil in Russia and Marx's doctrine helped people try to make paradise and caused a deep, deep river of blood to flow, the communists in the Orthodox heartland of Russia made martyrs, and in that torrential river of blood made more Orthodox martyrs than the rest of history put together. God will preserve saints' relics from that, and it may be that there are more relics from the past century than all centuries before. And they are not the less holy because they are new. But let us return to the Oak of Mambre and why, if you grasp it, you hold the Holy Grail."

"Ok. Why is that?"

"The Church has decided that the only legitimate way to portray an icon of the Trinity is in the hospitality of Abraham. And the Icon of the Holy Trinity is the deepest icon of the Holy Grail—deeper even than an icon that I can show you that shows the Mother of God as a chalice holding her Son. Where is the Holy Grail in this icon?"

"Is it that little thing in the center?"

"In part. Where else is it?"

George looked long and hard, seemed to almost catch something, before it vanished from his face.

"There are different interpretations," Fr. Elijah said, "and the icon conceals things; even the angel is a protecting veil to a reality that cannot be seen. But in the layers of this icon, the deepest glimpse sees the Father on the left, the Spirit on the right, and the Son in blood red clothes in the center, encased as in a chalice, showing the reality in Heaven for which even the

in a chance, showing the reality in Heaven for which even the Holy Grail is merely a shadow."

George turned the stone over in his hand with awe, closed his eyes, and then looked at the relic he held in his hand. "So I am holding the Holy Grail."

Fr. Elijah said, "Yes, if you look on it with enlightened eyes. Where else do you meet the Holy Grail?"

"In every person I meet?"

"'Tis hard to answer better than that. When you become Orthodox, you will receive the Eucharist and kiss the chalice, and, perhaps, find that the Holy Grail is achieved not by an unearthly isolated hero, but by a community in common things."

"But why do people kiss the Holy Grail? I mean the chalice?"

"If you call it the Holy Grail, even if your tongue slips, you may be understanding it. The Western view is that there is one original chalice and the others are separate sorts of things; in Orthodoxy, what is the same between the Holy Grail and 'another' chalice runs infinitely deeper than what separates them; the 'real' thing is that they are the same."

"But why the kiss?"

"Let me ask you a question. Do you think a kiss has more to do with worship, or with mental calculations?"

"Does it have to do with either?"

"You haven't read the Bible in Greek."

"What does the Greek Bible have to do with it?"

"Quite a lot, but it will take me a bit to explain why. But there is a deep tie."

"The main word for reverence or worship, in the Greek Bible, literally means to kiss. Part of what you'll keep coming to again and again is that the West understands the mind as the thing that calculates, and the East understands the mind as what knows, and is enlightened, because it tastes and even more

knows, and is enlightened, because it tastes and even more deeply because it worships. I don't know how to put this clearly, in terms that will make sense to someone who does not know the spiritual realities involved. There is a false kiss—I dare say, the kiss of Judas or a kiss that is hollow like the kiss of Judas—that is nothing more than a calculated act. But there is also a kiss that has something to do with worship, and it is no error that Orthodoxy has things 'with love and kisses.' We embrace icons, crosses, holy books, each other with reverence that includes a kiss. And rightly done, such kisses are connected to worship."

"I still don't understand why."

"Let me make a momentary detour; I'll get back in a moment. Old texts can be at once something we genuinely experience a deep connection to, and something treacherously unfaithful to our assumptions. What would you say, for instance, that the medieval Scholastics are talking about when they use the word that is usually translated, 'intellect'?"

"I try to keep my mind free of preconceptions, especially when dealing with something unfamiliar."

"So you'd be open to anything they'd say about the intellect's ability to draw logical conclusions from one thing to another?"

"They can let the intellect draw conclusions however they want to."

"But here's the thing. They don't. It is a fundamental error to read 'intellect' as 'the thing that reasons by logical deduction. Saying that the 'intellect' is what makes deductions by reasoning from one thing by another is like saying that an object's height is what you measure with a bathroom scale, or that its weight is measurable with a ruler. It's a fundamental error; the intellect is precisely what does not reason from premises to conclusions."

"Then what is the intellect?"

Then what is the intellect?

"I usually don't use the term 'intellect' for it; the closest English equivalent I can think of is 'spiritual eye'. But even that misses what exactly this spiritual eye connects with. And this spiritual eye was known to the Greek Fathers no less than the Latin scholastics; if anything, the Greek Fathers were more attuned to it. Scholastic theology is an exercise, to a large degree, of that which reasons; the theology of the Fathers comes from another place. The spiritual eye is that which connects with spiritual realities, that which worships above all—and if you want a good, short definition for what 'intellect' means besides 'what IQ is supposed to measure,' use the definition 'where one meets God.' If reasoning deduces what you may not see yet, the spiritual eye sees, and knows by what it can see, not by what it can pull from other things it already has. This reasoning from one thing shines like the sun in Western Scholasticism."

"And that's something you don't have in Orthodoxy?"

"We do have it. But reasoning shines like the moon: it reflects the light of the sun in each of us, the sun of our mind's spiritual eye. It plays more of a supporting role."

"And what does all of this have to do with your ritual kiss?"

"There was an awful video I heard was shown in one of your college's psychology classes; I don't know if you've seen it. It was talking about one psychological theory, and discussed how reward and such could be used to reduce autistic behaviors. And it showed a scientist, or psychologist, or something, who was patiently training a little girl to not do whatever he was trying to stop her from doing, and the girl lit up when he gave her a kiss. And then, along with a fake-sounding Mommy-ese talking in a high-pitched voice which I assure you was not spontaneous, he

started to use almost forced kisses to, well..."

George cut in. "Manipulate her?"

"Yes, you found the word I was looking for. The one time I heard Abigail talking about that video, she said there was a bit of bristling going through the class; the students were uncomfortable with something about that video and its one more mere technique, a mere tool, for changing a little girl's behavior."

"Is the spiritual eye, or whatever, spontaneous? Is it about spontaneity?"

"I'll have to think about that... I'm not sure I've seriously thought about whether the spiritual eye is spontaneous. But spontaneity is not the issue here. The point has to do with what place a kiss should come from if it is not to be hollow. Have you noticed that none of the icons I've showed you have a signature?"

"Because the iconographers are not supposed to be what we think of in the West as artists, with their own signature style and their big egos?"

"A little bit. Iconography is art, and artistry and talent do mean anything: the iconographer is not a cog in a machine—and may be doing something much bigger than trying to use art supplies for self-expression. There is something self-effacing about iconography—something very self-effacing—but you find that when you bow down and efface yourself, it is you doing something much bigger than otherwise. Writing icons is a form of prayer, a spiritual exercise, and it is said—just like we speak of 'writing' icons rather than 'painting' them—that it is inadequate for an iconographer to sign the icon, because the icon is written, not merely by the iconographer's hand, but by his his spiritual eye. It is ever much more than a merely material process, and when you become Orthodox you may sense icons

that have spiritual depth and icons that let you see no further than the wood, and if you receive this gift, you will be responding to the spiritual process out of which the icon arose."

"I have sensed something... the icons still look like awkward pictures to me, but I'm starting to find something more."

"That is good. And your mouth—with which you breathe in your spirit, and show the reason of speech, and will receive the Eucharist—is not that by which you may give a kiss; it is that through which you may give the kiss that comes from and to some extent is the embrace of your spiritual eye. That's when a kiss is furthest from the hollow kiss that Judas gave. The knowledge of the spiritual eye is something I have discussed as sight, but in the ancient world all people recognized something touch-y about all the five senses, not just one. And this knowledge and drinking are exemplars of each other, draughts from the same fountain, and it is not an accident that 'know' has a certain sense in the Bible between, for instance, Adam and Eve: the spiritual eye knows by drinking in, and it is a fundamental error to think that the holy kiss has nothing to do with knowledge."

"This sounds like a fairy tale."

"Maybe you know your fairy tales, and know that there is something magic about a kiss. As one scholar put it, examples of the kiss as a means of making and breaking enchantments have been found in the folklore of almost every culture in the Western world. Orthodoxy has something more than this enchantment. There is a spiritual mingling, and even the Eucharist is understood as a kiss, and a kiss that embraces others: in the Eucharist, the body of Christ is offered up, including a token of bread for every parishioner—before being distributed. Have you not noticed that the best bishops and the

most devout of the Orthodox, give the best kisses? But let me step back a bit.

"The difference in understanding symbol is one of the biggest differences between East and West. In the West, at least in its modern forms, a symbol is a detached and somewhat arbitrary representation. In the East a symbol is connected, cut from the same cloth as it were. The difference between Orthodoxy and various Protestant schools is not whether the Eucharist is a symbol, but what that means—that the Eucharist is an arbitrarily detached token, connected only in the viewer's mind, or whether it is connected and in fact the same on a real level.

"We are made in the image of God, which means that how you treat others is inseparable from how you treat God: you treat God with respect, love, or contempt as you meet him in the person of others. And the things that we reverently kiss in Orthodoxy are all connected with God. We show our reverence to God in how we treat them. And if a person is being transformed according to the likeness of Christ, then it is fitting to reverently kiss that person and show respect for the Lord.

"To give the holy kiss rightly is a microcosm of faith and community. You cannot do it alone, nor can you do it apart from worship. If you look at the things that fit together in a fitting kiss, you have love, God, your neighbor... there are a great many actions that are listed in the Bible, and many of them are holy actions, but only one is called holy: the holy kiss. If you grasp the Holy Grail in your heart, and you grasp this kiss in its full sense, you will know that the sacred kiss in which our souls are mingled is the Sign of the Grail. It is the eighth sacrament."

George was silent for a long time. "I don't think I know enough to be Orthodox."

Fr. Elijah said, "Join the club! I know I don't know enough."

"But you're a priest!"

"And you cannot become Orthodox without entering the royal priesthood. You aren't ready to be Orthodox just because you know a certain amount; you're ready when you're ready for the responsibility, like getting married, or getting a job, or any other of a number of things. You are ready when you are ready to take the responsibility to return the Creation as an offering to God and shoulder a priestly office. And, in your case, I might add, when you enter the great City and Castle called the Church, and are ready for the Sign of the Grail."

"All I know now is my own unworthiness."

"Good. You're growing! Ponder your unworthiness and give it to God. Do you want to take Brocéliande back now?"

George gladly took the book back. He returned to his room, and some time later, George began reading:

The hermit spoke. "Listen as I tell the history of Saint George.

"The King wept sore. 'The land is weeping, the land itself weeps. The dragon hath devoured every damsel of the land, every last one, and now it seeketh mine own. I bewail the death of my joy and my daughter.'

"Then Saint George said, 'By my faith I will protect her and destroy this fiend,' and Saint George prayed and gat him his destrier and armed him and fewtered his spear and rode out and faced the sea.

"And the dragon arose from the sea and his deeps. And venom were in the wyrm his heart, and the grievous stench of death stank all round.

"Then the serpent charged upon Saint George the ever

victorious knight, and the dragon breathed fire which brake  
and were quenched upon Saint George his shield, a grand  
cross gules upon a field or.

"Then Saint George made him the Sign of the Cross.

"Then Saint George smote the dragon, the great paladin  
his great spear dove into the dragon his mouth and dolve far  
beyond that insatiate devouring maw, until the dragon his  
head were riven asunder from the dragon his body trampled  
by Saint George his horse. And Saint George hurled the  
wurm his head into the dark thrice cursed valley far outside  
of the castle.

"That day the King and the whole castle made such  
merriment as had never been since, for we do not know  
merriment today. There were jugglers and jesters and a  
table full filled, and before evensong the King gave George  
the hand of the King his daughter. That were the gayest of  
all."

The knight asked the hermit, "Why speakest thou me of  
this history?"

The hermit spake unto him and answered, "Sir knight,  
thou hast given me not thine name. What be it?"

"Thou entreatest of me my name? Thou askest what none  
hath asked of me aforetimes. My name is called Sir Perceval.  
And now I ask of thee of what I have asked not aforetimes.  
Had Saint George heard tell of whom doth the Grail serve?"

George slowly closed the book, and put it on a shelf. He  
momentarily wondered why he treated Brocéliande as something  
to read alone. There was something that seemed just out of his  
reach.

And then George realized something deep, deep inside  
himself

.....

Then it was Holy Week.

Or at least George wanted it to be holy week for him, too.

George found himself standing in Church, in the holiest of surroundings, and struggling to pray. Memories arose; painful memories of stinging things done by those he loved. Voluptuous images sometimes followed. He struggled to pray, but his mind remained locked in earthly struggles. His body ached in the long services: there were icons, chanting, and incense without, and struggles within. He wanted to rest in worship, and he couldn't.

In his mind, he remembered a moment when a beggar had come to him, and wouldn't stop pleading no matter how much he annoyed George. The image filled his mind, and George was startled when he turned and saw the beggar's face on the wall.

Why was that?

George was looking at an icon of Christ.

He had fallen short, and not only in seeing that beggar as nothing but an annoyance. Did George really have no common bond with that beggar?

For that matter, did George have no common bond with the civilization that he disdained, the civilization that included everybody he knew from the beggar to his parents, the civilization that gave him everything from his clothing to his language? Was it there for no other purpose than for him to criticize and feel superior to?

Fr. Elijah, moving amongst the congregation, swung the censer before George in veneration.

George barely noticed that some of these thoughts were giving way, and he was aware, with almost a painful sharpness, of something else.

George mulled over Fr Elijah's words about hollow kisses, and

then started to see how hollow George was.

Unworthy thought he felt, George stood with growing awe and wonder, waiting until Great and Holy Thursday, the one day in holy week where wine was allowed. "Ordinary" wine was allowed, held in honor and in remembrance of the Last Supper, when wine became the blood of Christ and the eucharistic chalice was forever given to men. This day, if anything, was to George the feast of the Holy Grail.

And so he stood entranced, as if he were entering from afar. He watched the Last Supper as here and now, as Fr. Elijah stood "in the flame" before the altar, and then listened as he read the Gospel according to St. John the Evangelist, of the night when Christ loved his disciples to the last, and prayed out from the glory he shared with the Father before the worlds had begun.

And Fr. Elijah read and read, reading until George's body ached from standing.

Then someone walked over to twelve unlit candles, and lit one.

The first.

George's heart sank. There were eleven candles still to go.

The readings continued, and became shorter, until the twelve candles were lit. George began to feel anger at the unending readings—until he heard Christ's words from the garden of Gethsemane: "What, could you not watch with me one hour?"

Who were those words spoken to?

And then, when the readings had run their course, the liturgy followed—at once unlike an intimate gathering in an upper room in external appearance, but yet like the place that feels like home though nothing on the outside resembles the home. George thought for a moment about a historical reconstruction of the Last Supper pursued through academic rigor in archaeology... and then realized he needed no such thing. He was watching the Last

Supper all around him, and in the words of Fr. Elijah's remark,  
"You didn't even need a time machine."

Or was this liturgy a spiritual time machine? Certainly time flowed in the most interesting ways, now quickly, now slowly, swirling about in eddies... there was something George could not put his finger on, but he understood for a moment what could make a person imagine a way to turn back time.

And so George found himself almost surprised when Fr. Elijah said, "He gave it to his holy disciples and apostles, saying, 'Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins.'"

Then the faithful sealed this with their, "Amen."

Then Fr. Elijah said, "Likewise, he took the cup of the fruit of the vine, and having mingled it, offering thanks, blessing, and sanctifying it, he gave it to his holy disciples and apostles, saying, 'Drink of this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.'"

The disciples around him sealed this, with their, "Amen."

George looked in wonder at the chalice that was raised. He thought, "This is it. This is the Holy Grail, forever given, that belongs to Christ's disciples."

As the liturgy continued, and Fr. Elijah proclaimed the Holy Gifts, the people continued to seal the Gifts with their "Amen," and George watched as they received from the chalice, and kissed the chalice in reverence, and (though George paid this little attention) Fr. Elijah's hand.

George found himself basking in the glow of that long moment for as the liturgy continued and Fr. Elijah anointed those around him that they may be healed in soul and body.

As he walked home, he thought, "I have seen the Holy Grail. It has been under my nose. Very soon I will be one of those who

share it, one of those the Holy Grail belongs to."

When George got home, he slept as peacefully as he slept in ages.

Then George entered the Church on Great and Holy Friday.

The whole service moved slowly, felt like something great but alien that slipped through George's fingers no matter what he did to grasp it. Around him were some who were silent, some who were singing, and some who were weeping. A great cross was brought out, and a great icon of Christ hung on it with nails.

And then something clicked in George's heart.

Some years before, he had been at a martial arts demonstration and saw a fifth degree black belt standing like a picturesque statue, looking quaint and exotic, holding a beautiful pair of fans. And then, for an instant, there was a flurry of motion as he was attacked by six other black belts with swords. And then, an instant later, George saw a fifth degree black belt standing like a picturesque statue, looking quaint and exotic, holding a beautiful pair of fans, and all around him were six other black belts with swords, on the ground, crying.

That had for long been the greatest display of power George had seen.

Now something was at the back of his mind.

Here was a new image of strength.

Were they the same?

Were they different?

Was the true nature of strength, strength in weakness?

The fifth degree black belt showed strength behind apparent weakness—or at least what looked like weakness to an outsider like George; he had no idea what it would look like to someone who was not a barbarian like him. To him, the martial arts demonstration seemed to show strength, if a show was needed,

and a strength great and powerful enough to vastly understate  
itself. And the One before him on the cross showed more of the  
same... or was that really true?

Was it?

Something about that did not sit well.

Inside George's heart flashed an icon that had been on his  
mind—of a Man, his head bent, a purple robe about his wounded  
body. The robe was royal purple to mock the "pretender," his  
hands were bound, and a crown of thorns rested atop his bent  
head.

Atop the icon was an inscription in Greek and in English:

Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΗΣ ΔΟΞΗΣ  
THE KING OF GLORY

George raised his eyes to the crucified God.

This was another kind of strength.

George began to weep.

This was the strength that prayed, if there was any way, that  
the cup might pass from him.

This was the strength that prayed, "Thy will be done."

This was the strength that drank the cup to the dregs, and  
shattered it forever.

This was

THE KING OF GLORY  
THE KING OF KINGS  
THE LORD OF LORDS  
THE GOD OF GODS  
THE LION OF JUDAH  
THE FIRSTBORN OF THE DEAD  
THE RESURRECTION AND ETERNAL LIFE

THE NEW MAN AND THE LAST ADAM  
THE UNCREATED GOD  
THE DIVINE, ORDERING WISDOM  
THROUGH WHOM ALL THINGS WERE MADE  
BY WHOM ALL THINGS WERE MADE  
IN WHOM ALL THINGS CONSIST  
THE LORD OF THE CHURCH AND ALL CREATION  
THE BRIDEGROOM OF THE CHURCH AND ALL CREATION

Had *George* ever known what it was to worship?  
*George* stood in awe of the one who was, in truth, the Holy  
Grail...  
or rather, the one for whom the Holy Grail was but a shadow.  
And who was *George* next to such holiness and power?  
Unclean and defiled.

When *George* had thought about going to his first confession,  
it had looked to him like the least attractive part of the picture  
of becoming Orthodox. But now, even if he knew even more  
dread, he wanted, not so much to be unburdened for himself, but  
to turn himself in and render what was due.

He didn't just think he needed to. He simply knew that it was  
something that he owed with from the core of his being.

What evil had he not practiced?

He prayed aloud, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy  
on me, a sinner," and then in spirit and body fell prostrate  
before his God and Lord.

*George* returned home, mindful of his sin, but ever so much  
more mindful of the greatness of the Lord and Savior.

He spent Saturday in the terrifying struggle to repent of his  
sin, to face his sin and write the spiritual blank check that he  
feared in the unconditional surrender of rejecting sin.

When he confessed his sin, Fr. Elijah blessed him, said "I'm

When he confessed his sin, Fr. Elijah blessed him, said, "I'm sorry I can't give you the sacramental absolution yet—that will follow your chrismation," and then said, "Welcome home, son.

Keep repenting."

And then the vigil was upon them.

It began with George standing in the center of the action as he stood before the congregation and, answering Fr. Elijah, renounced the Devil and all his works, rejecting sin, schism, and heresy, and vowed himself to Christ as a member of the Orthodox Church.

Then Fr. Elijah anointed George with sacred chrism, chrismating him with the fragrant oil of anointing that sealed George as a little Christ, as spiritual prophet, priest, and king, as one of the faithful in the Orthodox Church. This oil of spiritual blessing that worked in him more deeply even as it was wiped away from his skin—the emblem of the Spirit that penetrated like a sword. Fr. Elijah absolved George of his sins, and then the newly illumined servant of God George, stood before the congregation.

Then George faded into the background while the vigil unfolded, and he could never remember all of it—only that it seemed like a treasurehouse from which more and more wondrous treasure was brought forth. George remembered later the incense, the chant of "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death," the call of "Christ is risen!" and its answer, "He is risen indeed!", repeated triumphantly, in English, in Slavonic, in Arabic, in Spanish... and most of all George remembered the faces around them. There was something more deeply radiant and beautiful than that of someone who had won millions of dollars. The vigil lasted for hours, but though George ached, he barely minded—he almost wished it would last for

hours more

hours more.

When it was time for the homily, Fr. Elijah stood up, his face radiant, and read the age-old homily of St. John Chrysostom, read at all kinds of Orthodox parishes on Pascha for ages:

If any man be devout and loveth God,  
Let him enjoy this fair and radiant triumphal feast!

If any man be a wise servant,  
Let him rejoicing enter into the joy of his Lord.

If any have labored long in fasting,  
Let him now receive his recompense.

If any have wrought from the first hour,  
Let him today receive his just reward.

If any have come at the third hour,  
Let him with thankfulness keep the feast.

If any have arrived at the sixth hour,  
Let him have no misgivings;  
Because he shall in nowise be deprived therefore.

If any have delayed until the ninth hour,  
Let him draw near, fearing nothing.

And if any have tarried even until the eleventh hour,  
Let him, also, be not alarmed at his tardiness.

For the Lord, who is jealous of his honor,  
Will accept the last even as the first.

He giveth rest unto him who cometh at the eleventh hour,  
Even as unto him who hath wrought from the first hour.

And He showeth mercy upon the last,  
And careth for the first;  
And to the one He giveth,  
And upon the other He bestoweth gifts.

And He both accepteth the deeds,  
And welcometh the intention,

And honoureth the acts and praises the offering.  
Wherefore, enter ye all into the joy of your Lord;  
Receive your reward,  
Both the first, and likewise the second.  
You rich and poor together, hold high festival!  
You sober and you heedless, honor the day!  
Rejoice today, both you who have fasted  
And you who have disregarded the fast.  
The table is full-laden; feast ye all sumptuously.  
The calf is fatted; let no one go hungry away.  
Enjoy ye all the feast of faith:  
Receive ye all the riches of loving-kindness.  
Let no one bewail his poverty,  
For the universal Kingdom has been revealed.  
Let no one weep for his iniquities,  
For pardon has shown forth from the grave.  
Let no one fear death,  
For the Saviour's death has set us free.  
He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it.  
By descending into Hell, He made Hell captive.  
He embittered it when it tasted of His flesh.  
And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry:  
Hell, said he, was embittered  
When it encountered Thee in the lower regions.  
It was embittered, for it was abolished.  
It was embittered, for it was mocked.  
It was embittered, for it was slain.  
It was embittered, for it was overthrown.  
It was embittered, for it was fettered in chains.  
It took a body, and met God face to face.  
It took earth, and encountered Heaven.

It took that which was seen, and fell upon the unseen.  
O Death, where is thy sting?  
O Hell, where is thy victory?  
Christ is risen, and thou art overthrown!  
Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!  
Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice!  
Christ is risen, and life reigns!  
Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave.  
For Christ, being risen from the dead,  
Is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.  
To Him be glory and dominion  
Unto ages of ages.  
Amen.

And then the prayers moved very quickly—joyously—radiantly  
—and the Eucharist was served, George being called up first  
among the faithful to receive it.  
Then the newly illumined servant George received Jesus  
Christ as his Lord and Savior.  
And George kissed Fr. Elijah's hand and the chalice,  
forgetting it was the Holy Grail.  
And when the liturgy finished, Fr. Elijah announced to the  
congregation, "You may kiss the convert."  
Then the feast began,  
a faint fragrance of frankincense flowed,  
and a fragrant fragrance of flowers flowed.  
Fr. Elijah spoke a blessing,  
over a table piled high with finest meats  
and puddings  
and every good thing,  
and the fruit of the vine poured out.

Every door and every window was opened,  
and the wind blew where it willed,  
and the wind blew where it pleased,  
and George settled in to his home,  
grateful to God.

Then someone told a Russian folktale,  
and someone began singing,  
and people began dancing,  
and a little boy chased a little girl,  
clutching a flower.

And men and women,  
children,  
young and old,  
saluted George with a kiss,  
every last one  
of his brethren.

And the crystalline light  
of a sapphire sky  
blew through the window,  
and angels danced,  
and saints below cracked red Pascha eggs,  
red in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene,  
a holy grail,  
and George laughed,  
and wanted to weep,  
for joy.

Then George and Abigail talked long.

George could never remember now long the celebration  
seemed to last. It seemed that he had found a garden enclosed,  
a fountain sealed, filled with every kind of wonder, at once  
Heaven and home, at once chalice and vine, maiden and mother,

ancient and alive. It was the family George had forever wanted to enter.

Then George kissed Abigail—a long, full kiss—and absolutely nothing about it was hollow.

When he stepped back, Fr. Elijah tapped him on the shoulder. "By the way, George... I know this is down the road, but let me know when you two get engaged. I'd be happy to do your wedding."

George looked at Abigail, paused, and said, "Abigail, do you see how the candlelight glistens off your Grandpappy's bald spot? Isn't it romantic?"

Fr. Elijah and Abigail turned to each other and said, "It's about time!"

Then Fr. Elijah said, "Welcome to the Castle of the Saints, George. Welcome home."

# Silence: Organic Food for the Soul

We are concerned today about our food,  
and that is good:  
sweet fruit and honey are truly good and better than raw sugar,  
raw sugar not as bad as refined sugar,  
refined sugar less wrong than corn syrup,  
and corn syrup less vile than Splenda.  
But whatever may be said for eating the right foods,  
this is nothing compared to the diet we give our soul.

The ancient organic spiritual diet  
is simple yet different in its appearances:  
those who know its holy stillness  
and grasp in their hearts the silence of the holy rhythm,  
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,  
grasp the spiritual diet by their heart,  
by its heart,  
by God's heart.

What treasure looks good next to it?  
It is said that many would rather be rich and unhappy  
than poor and happy,  
stranger still than thinking riches will make you happy:  
Blessed stillness is a treasure,

and next to this treasure,  
gold and technology are but passing shadows,  
no better to satisfy hunger than pictures of rich food,  
no better to satisfy thirst than a shimmering mirage,  
for like the best organic food,  
a diet of stillness gives what we deeply hungered for,  
but deeply missed even seeking  
in our untiring quest to quench our thirst with mirages.

And we have been adept at building mirages:  
anything to keep us from stillness.  
Perhaps technology, SecondLife or the humble car,  
perhaps romance or conversation,  
perhaps philosophy or hobbies,  
not always bad in themselves,  
but always bad when pressed into service  
to help us in our flight from silence,  
which is to say,  
used the only way many of us know how.

There is a mystery,  
not so much hard to find as hard to want:  
humble yourself and you will be lifted up,  
empty yourself and you will be filled;  
become still and of a quiet heart,  
and you will become home to the Word.

"But my life is hard," you say,  
"You might be able to afford luxuries like these,  
but I can't."

Take courage.

[Read the lives of the saints,](#)  
and find that stillness grows,  
not on the path that is spacious and easy to walk,

but the way that is narrow and hard:  
strength is not found  
in ease and comfort,  
but among athletes with no choice but to strive.

We believe in life before death:  
we live the life of Heaven here on earth,  
and those things in life that seem like Hell  
are our stepping stones:

"she shall be saved in childbearing:"  
from the politically incorrect Bible.

Can't women have something more equitable?  
But the truth is even more politically incorrect.

That is how all of us are saved:  
in suffering and in struggle,  
such as God gives us,  
and not when dream,  
and by our power  
we make our dreams come true.

[Weston Price](#) fans,  
who say that an ancient diet nourishes  
far better than modern foods  
manipulated like plastic,  
newfangled corn and sunflower oil,  
gone rancid then masked by chemical wizardry,  
marketed as health food in lieu of wholesome butter,  
could be wrong in their words  
how we need ancient nourishment and not plastic foods.  
They could be wrong about our needs,  
but it is a capital mistake to say,  
"That may have worked in golden ages,  
but we need a diet that will work

for us now in our third millenium."  
If [Weston Price's movement](#) is right,  
then we need the nourishment of timeless traditions,  
now more than ever.  
Saying "No, we need something that will work today,"  
is like saying, "No, we're very sick,  
we are weak and we must focus on essentials:  
healthy people may visit a doctor, but not us."  
But even if the food we eat matters, and matters much,  
the question of what we feed our body  
is dwarfed by the question of what we feed our souls,  
and over the centuries  
our spiritual diet has turned  
from something organic and nourishing  
to something that might almost be plastic:  
inorganic, yet made from what spiritual leaders call rancid.  
The right use of technology is in the service of spiritual  
wisdom,  
but the attractive use of technology is to dodge spiritual wisdom,  
for one current example,  
cell phones and texting not only a way to connect,  
but a way to dodge silence,  
a way to avoid simply being present to your surroundings,  
and this is toxic spiritual food.  
Cell phones have good uses,  
and some wise people use them,  
but the marketing lure of the iPhone and Droid,  
is the lure of a bottomless bag:  
a bottomless bag of spiritual junk food:  
portable entertainment systems,  
which is to say,

portable "avoid spiritual work" systems.  
Someone has said,  
"Orthodoxy is not conservative:  
it is radical,"  
which is striking but strange politically:  
if Orthodoxy is not captured by a Western understanding of  
conservatism,  
further off the mark is it to try to capture it with any Western  
idea of radicalism.

but there is another sense in which it is true:  
not in our design to transform the world,  
but in God's design to transform us.

I thought I was a man of silence.  
I avoid television, occasionally listen to music,  
but never as a half-ignored backdrop.

Recently I learned,  
by the grace of a God who is radical,  
that I did not know the beginning of silence.  
"Hesychasm," in the Orthodox term,  
described by a rhythm of praying,  
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,  
in the Church under the authority of a good priest,  
an authority for your sake and mine,  
is a doorway to strip off layers of noise,  
and maybe a portal to joy.

So small-looking on the outside,  
and so spacious if you will step in.  
Concerned about organized religion?  
Eastern Orthodoxy is quite disorganized, some have said,  
but we won't go into that.

Negativity about organized religion

is part of the toxic spiritual diet  
it is so hard to avoid.

Some have said that people concerned about organized religion  
are really concerned about someone else having authority over  
them.

Though I am self-taught in some things,  
an author with a few letters after his name  
but not even a high school course in non-academic writing,  
Aristotle's words are apropos:

"He who teaches himself has a fool for a master."

There are always choices we must make for ourselves,  
Orthodoxy actually having wisdom to help free us in these  
choices,

but trying to progress spiritually without obedience to a spiritual  
guide who can tell you "No,"  
is like trying to be healthier without paying attention to stress in  
your life, or what you eat, or exercise.

I speak from experience:

I still trip in the light,

but I do not want to go back to how I tripped in the dark.

"Keep your eyes on Jesus,  
look full in his wonderful face,  
and the things of this world  
will grow strangely dim  
in the light of his glory and grace,"  
says the cherished Protestant hymn:  
but it does not say how,  
and silence is how.

Do you long for honors the world bestows,  
and are never satisfied with what you have?

Mirages look good,

but the place of a mirage is always outside our grasp,  
something it looks like we might reach tomorrow,  
not something that is open to us right now.  
And it is not until we let go of the mirage we want so much  
that we see right next to us  
a chalice  
of living water  
that can quench our thirst now.  
Pride, lust, anger and remembrance of wrongs, envy, wanting  
to use people—  
all of these urge us to look away  
wanting to quench our thirst on mirages  
and blind our eyes  
to the chalice  
of living water  
that we are offered,  
and offered here and now.  
And it isn't until you rest and taste the waters,  
the living waters of the chalice that is always at hand,  
that you realize how exhausting it is  
to chase after mirages.  
The Church prays through the Psalm,  
"But I have quieted and calmed my soul,  
like a child quieted at its mother's breast,  
like a child that is quieted is my soul."  
When a child quieted at its mother's breast,  
cares melt away,  
and to the soul that knows silence,  
the silence of Heaven,  
for Heaven itself is silent  
and true silence is Heavenly,

the things of this world grow strangely dim.  
Do you worry? Is it terribly hard  
to get all your ducks in a row,  
to get yourself to a secure place  
where you have prepared for what might happen?  
Or does it look like you might lose your job,  
if you still have one?

### The Sermon on the Mount

urges people to pray,  
"Give us this day our daily bread,"  
in an economy  
when unlike many homeless in the U.S. today,  
it was not obvious to many  
where they would get their next meal.  
And yet it was this [Sermon on the Mount](#)  
that tells us our Heavenly Father will provide for us,  
and tells us not to worry:  
what we miss  
if we find this a bit puzzling,  
we who may have bank accounts, insurance, investments  
even if they are jeopardized right now,  
is that we are like a child with some clay,  
trying to satisfy ourselves by making a clay horse,  
with clay that never cooperates, never looks right,  
and obsessed with clay that is never good enough,  
we ignore and maybe fear  
the finger tapping us on our shoulder  
until with great trepidation we turn,  
and listen to the voice say,  
"Stop trying so hard. Let it go,"  
and follow our father

as he gives us a warhorse.

If you have a bank account, or insurance, or investments,  
you may be better at making your clay statue,  
better than the people who heard the [Sermon on the Mount](#),  
but the Lord says to us as much as them,  
"Let your worries be quieted  
as you enter silence,"  
to give us a warhorse.

And when we let go of taking on God's job,  
of taking care of every aspect of our future,  
we find that he gives us better than we knew to seek:  
if we thirst for worldly honor to make us feel significant,  
if we covet luxuries to make us feel better,  
and we learn holy silence,  
the things of the world grow strangely dim.

People hold on to sin because they think it adorns them.

Repentance is terrifying,  
because it seems beforehand  
that repentance means you will forever lose some shining part of  
yourself,

but when you repent,  
repentance shows its true nature  
as an awakening:

you realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell,"  
and, awakened, you grasp Heaven in a new way.  
Let go of the mirage of doing God's job of providence,  
by your own strength,  
and let go of the mirage of getting enough money  
to make you happy,  
and when you give up this misshapen clay horse,  
find a warhorse waiting for you:

God will provide better than you know to ask,  
perhaps giving you a great spiritual gift  
by showing you you can live without some things,  
and this just the outer shell holding spiritual blessings  
next to which billions of dollars pale in comparison.

("Who is rich? The person who is content.")

And if like me you are weak and wish you had more honor,  
you may taste the living water next to which worldly honor is an  
elusive mirage  
always shimmering, always luring, and never satisfying, at least  
not for long,  
and ride the warhorse,  
and wonder why you ever thought worldly honor would make you  
happy.

A saint has said,  
that when you work,  
seven eights of the real task  
is watching the state of your heart  
and only one eighth is the official task.

Proverbs likewise tells,  
"Keep your heart with all vigilance,  
for from it flow the springs of life."

Guard your heart.

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true,  
whatsoever things are honest,  
whatsoever things are just,  
whatsoever things are pure,  
whatsoever things are lovely,  
whatsoever things are of good report;  
if there be any virtue,  
if there be any praise,

think of these things."

What you put before your heart matters.

Your heart will be conformed to whatever you place before it:

a good deal of your spiritual diet  
is simply what you place before your mind:

mental images above all else,

"Be careful, little eyes..."

There is a distinction between

where one meets God,

and that which reasons from one thought to another:

to us today, "mind" or "intellect" is that which reasons,

but the Church has long known the heart of the intellect or mind:

where one meets God.

And the poisoning of our spiritual diet

has moved us

from knowing the mind as the heart that meets God

to growing and over-growing that which reasons,

so that it is at the heart of our lives,

in Christians as much as the atheist,

is the secular view of mind,

like psychology,

in its secular flight

from religious knowing

of who the human person is

and what is the heart of the human mind.

Learn to live out of that by which you worship:

drink living water,

because it is exhausting

to chase after mirages

in worrying and scheming

in the part of us which reasons,

that which is only the moon  
made to reflect the light  
of the sun,

that by which we worship,  
the spiritual eye  
made for a God who is Light.

"We have a sister,  
whose breasts are not grown,  
what shall we do for our sister  
in the day when she shall be spoken for?

If she be a wall,  
we will build on her a palace of silver:  
and if she be a door,  
we will inclose her with boards of cedar."

In your mind be a garden locked and a fountain sealed,  
that which worships  
not forever dispersed,  
forever exhausted,  
in treating that which reasons  
as the heart of your mind:

learn the prayer of the mind in the heart.

The ancient organic spiritual diet is prayer, silence, fasting,  
liturgy, giving to the poor, tithing, reading the Bible and the  
Fathers and saints' lives, and many other things.

You eat it as you would eat an elephant:  
one bite at a time.

Your task today is to eat one day's worth:  
tomorrow's concerns are tomorrow's concerns.

# Singularity

**Herodotus:** And what say thee of these people? Why callest thou them the Singularity, Merlin?

**John:** Mine illuminèd name is John, and John shall ye call me each and every one.

**Herodotus:** But the Singularity is such as only a Merlin could have unravelled.

**John:** Perchance: but the world is one of which only an illuminèd one may speak aright. Call thou me as one illuminèd, if thou wouldst hear me speak.

**Herodotus:** Of illumination speakest thou. Thou sawest with the eye of the hawk: now seest thou with the eye of the eagle.

**John:** If that be, speak thou me as an eagle?

**Herodotus:** A point well taken, excellent John, excellent John. What speakest thou of the Singularity?

**John:** A realm untold, to speak is hard. But of an icon will I speak: inscribed were words:

'Waitress, is this coffee or tea?'

'What does it taste like?'

'IT TASTES LIKE DIESEL FUEL.'

'That's the coffee. The tea tastes like transmission fluid.'

**Herodotus:** Upon what manner of veneration were this icon worshipped?

**John:** That were a matter right subtle, too far to tell.

**Herodotus:** And of the inscription? That too be subtle to grasp.

**John:** Like as a plant hath sap, so a subtle engine by their philosophy wrought which needeth diesel fuel and transmission fluid.

**Herodotus:** [laughs] Then 'twere a joke, a jape! 'Tis well enough told!

**John:** You perceive it yet?

**Herodotus:** A joke, a jape indeed, of a fool who could not tell, two different plants were he not to taste of their sap! Well spoke! Well spoke!

**John:** Thou hast grasped it afault, my fair lord. For the subtle engine hath many different saps, no two alike.

**Herodotus:** And what ambrosia be in their saps?

**John:** Heaven save us! The saps be a right unnatural fare; their substance from rotted carcasses of monsters from aeons past, then by the wisdom of their philosophy transmogrified, of the subtle engine.

**Herodotus:** Then they are masters of Alchemy?

**John:** Masters of an offscouring of all Alchemy, of the lowest toe of that depravèd ascetical enterprise, chopped off, severed from even the limb, made hollow, and then grown beyond all reason, into the head of reason.

**Herodotus:** Let us leave off this and speak of the icon. The icon were for veneration of such subtle philosophy?

**John:** No wonder, no awe, greeteth he who regardeth this icon and receive it as is wont.

**Herodotus:** As is wont?

**John:** As is wanton. For veneration and icons are forcèd secrets; so there is an antithesis of the sacra pagina, and upon its light pages the greatest pages come upon the most filled with lightness, the icons of a world that knoweth icons not.

Let me make another essay.

The phrase 'harmony with nature' is of popular use, yet a deep slice of the Singularity, or what those inside the Singularity can see of it, might be called, 'harmony with technology'.

**Herodotus:** These be mystics of technology.

**John:** They live in an artificial jungle of technology, or rather an artificial not-jungle of technology, an artificial anti-jungle of technology. For one example, what do you call the natural use of wood?

**Herodotus:** A bundle of wood is of course for burning.

**John:** And they know of using wood for burning, but it is an exotic, rare case to them; say 'wood' and precious few will think of gathering wood to burn.

**Herodotus:** Then what on earth do they use wood for? Do they eat it when food is scarce or something like that?

**John:** Say 'wood' and not exotic 'firewood', and they will think of building a house.

**Herodotus:** So then they are right dexterous, if they can build out of a bundle of gathered sticks instead of burning it.

**John:** They do not gather sticks such as you imagine. They fell great trees, and cut the heartwood into rectangular box shapes, which they fit together in geometrical fashion. And when it is done, they make a box, or many

boxes, and take rectangles hotly fused sand to fill a window. And they add other philosophy on top of that, so that if the house is well-built, the air inside will be pleasant and still, unless they take a philosophical machine to push air, and whatever temperature the people please, and it will remain dry though the heavens be opened in rain. And most of their time is spent in houses, or other 'buildings' like a house in this respect.

**Herodotus:** What a fantastical enterprise! When do they enter such buildings?

**John:** When do they rather go out of them? They consider it normal to spend less than an hour a day outside of such shelters; the subtle machine mentioned earlier moves but it is like a house built out of metal in that it is an environment entirely contrived by philosophy and artifice to, in this case, convey people from one place to another.

**Herodotus:** How large is this machine? It would seem to have to be very big to convey all their people.

**John:** But this is a point where their 'technology' departs from the art that is implicit in τέχνη: it is in fact not a lovingly crafted work of art, shaped out of the spirit of that position ye call 'inventor' or 'artist', but poured out by the thousands by gigantical machines yet more subtle, and in the wealth of the Singularity, well nigh unto each hath his own machine.

**Herodotus:** And how many can each machine can convey? Perchance a thousand?

**John:** Five, or six, or two peradventure, but the question is what they would call 'academical': the most common use is to convey one.

**Herodotus:** They must be grateful for such property and such philosophy!

**John:** A few are very grateful, but the prayer, 'Let us remember those less fortunate than ourselves' breathes an odor that sounds truly archaic. It sounds old, old enough to perhaps make half the span of a man's life. And such basic technology, though they should be very much upset to lose them, never presents itself to their mind's eye when they hear the word 'technology'. And indeed, why should it present itself to the mind his eye?

**Herodotus:** I strain to grasp thy thread.

**John:** To be thought of under the heading of 'technology', two things must hold. First, it must be possessed of an artificial unlife, not unlike the unlife of their folklore's ghouls and vampires and zombies. And second, it must be of recent vintage, something not to be had until a time that is barely past. Most of the technologies they imagine provide artificially processed moving images, some of which are extremely old—again, by something like half the span of a man's life—while some are new. Each newer version seemeth yet more potent. To those not satisfied with the artificial environment of an up-to-date building, regarded by them as something from time immemorial, there are unlife images of a completely imaginary artificial world where their saying 'when pigs can fly' meaning never is in fact one of innumerable things that happen in the imaginary world portrayed by the technology. 'SecondLife' offers a second alternative to human life, or so it would seem, until 'something better comes along.'

**Herodotus:** My mind, it reeleth.

**John:** Well it reeleth. But this be but a sliver.

For life to them is keeping one's balance on shifting sand; they have great museums of different products, as many as the herbs of the field. But herein lies a difference: we know the herbs of the field, which have virtues, and what the right use is. They know as many items produced by philosophy, but they are scarce worse for the deal when they encounter an item they have never met before. For while the herbs of the field be steady across generations and generations, the items belched forth by their subtle philosophy change not only within the span of a man's life; they change year to year; perchance moon to moon.

**Herodotus:** Thou sayest that they can navigate a field they know not?

**John:** Aye, and more. The goal at which their catechism aims is to 'learn how to learn'; the appearance and disappearance of kinds of items is a commonplace to them. And indeed this is not only for the items we use as the elements of our habitat: catechists attempt to prepare people for roles that exist not yet even as the students are being taught.

Though this be sinking sand they live in, they keep balance, of a sort, and do not find this strange. And they adapt to the changes they are given.

**Herodotus:** It beseemeth me that thou speakest as of a race of Gods.

**John:** A race of Gods? Forsooth! Thou knowest not half of the whole if thou speakest thus.

**Herodotus:** What remaineth?

**John:** They no longer think of making love as an action that in particular must needeth include an other.

**Herodotus:** I am stunned.

**John:** And the same is true writ large or writ small. A storyteller of a faintly smaller degree, living to them in ages past, placed me in an icon:

The Stranger mused for a few seconds, then, speaking in a slightly singsong voice, as though he repeated an old lesson, he asked, in two Latin hexameters, the following question:

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

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

The storyteller saw and saw not his future. 'Tis rare in the Singularity to fabricate children 'by vile arts in a secret place' But the storyteller plays us false when he

secret place. But the story never plays as false when he assumes their interest would be in a 'cunningly fashioned image of the other'. Truer it would be to say that the men, by the fruits of philosophy, jump from one libidinous dream to another whilest awake.

**Herodotus:** Forsooth!

**John:** A prophet told them, the end will come when no man maketh a road to his neighbors. And what has happened to marriage has happened, by different means but by the same spirit, to friendship. Your most distant acquaintanceship to a fellow member is more permanent than their marriage; it is routine before the breakable God-created covenant of marriage to make unbreakable man-made covenants about what to do if, as planned for, the marriage ends in divorce. And if that is to be said of divorce, still less is the bond of friendship. Their own people have talked about how 'permanent relationships', including marriage and friendship, being replaced by 'disposable relationships' which can be dissolved for any and every reason, and by 'disposable relationships' to 'transactional relationships', which indeed have not even the pretension of being something that can be kept beyond a short transaction for any and every reason.

And the visits have been eviscerated, from a conversation where voice is delivered and vision is stripped out, to a conversation where words alone are transmitted without even hand writing; from a conversation where mental presence is normative to a conversation where split attention is expected. 'Tis yet rarely worth the bother to make a physical trail, though they yet visit. And their philosophy as it groweth yet

they yet visit. And their philosophy, as it groweth yet more subtle, groweth yet more delicate. 'Twould scarcely require much to 'unplug' it. And then, perhaps, the end will come?

**Herodotus:** Then there be a tragic beauty to these people.

**John:** A tragic beauty indeed.

**Herodotus:** What else hast thou to tell of them?

**John:** Let me give a little vignette:

Several men and women are in a room; all are fulfilling the same role, and they are swathed with clothing that covers much of their skin. And the differences between what the men wear, and what most of the women wear, are subtle enough that most of them do not perceive a difference.

**Herodotus:** Can they not perceive the difference between a man and a woman?

**John:** The sensitivity is dulled in some, but it is something they try to overlook. But I have not gotten to the core of this vignette:

One of them indicateth that had they be living several thousand years ago they would not have had need of clothing, not for modesty at least, and there are nods of agreement to her. And they all imagine such tribal times to be times of freedom, and their own to be of artificial restriction.

And they fail to see, by quite some measure, that prolonged time in mixed company is much more significant than being without clothing; or that their buildings deaden all of a million sources of natural awareness: the breeze blowing and the herbs waving in the wind; scents and odours as they appear; song of crickets' kin chirping and song of bird the sun as it

...there is the chirping and song of birds, the sun as it shines through cloud; animals as they move about, and the subtleties and differences in the forest as one passes through it. They deaden all of these sensitivities and variations, until there is only one form of life that provides stimulation: the others who are working in one's office. Small wonder, then, that to a man one woman demurely covered in an office has an effect that a dozen women wearing vines in a jungle would never have. But the libertines see themselves as repressed, and those they compare themselves to as, persay, emancipated.

**Herodotus:** At least they have the option of dressing modestly. What else hast thou?

**John:** There is infinitely more, and there is nothing more. Marriage is not thought of as open to children; it can be dissolved in divorce; it need not be intrinsically exclusive; a further installment in the package, played something like a pawn in a game of theirs, is that marriage need not be between a man and a woman. And if it is going to be dismantled to the previous portion, why not? They try to have a world without marriage, by their changes to marriage. The Singularity is a disintegration; it grows more and more, and what is said for marriage could be said for each of the eight devils: intertwined with this is pride, and it is only a peripheral point that those who further undefine marriage speak of 'gay pride'. A generation before, not mavericks but the baseline of people were told they needed a 'high self-esteem', and religious leaders who warned about pride as a sin, perhaps as the sin by which the Devil fell

from Heaven, raised no hue and cry that children were being raised to embrace pride as a necessary ascesis. And religion itself is officially permitted some role, but a private role: not that which fulfills the definition of religare in binding a society together. It is in some measure like saying, 'You can speak any language you want, as long as you utter not a word in public discourse': the true religion of the Singularity is such ersatz religion as the Singularity provides. Real religion is expected to wither in private.

The Singularity sings a song of progress, and it was giving new and different kinds of property; even now it continues. But its heart of ice showeth yet. For the march of new technologies continues, and with them poverty: cracks begin to appear, and the writing on the wall be harder to ignore. What is given with one hand is not-so-subtly taken away with the other. The Singularity is as needful to its dwellers as forest or plain to its dwellers, and if it crumbles, precious few will become new tribal clans taking all necessities from the land.

**Herodotus:** Then it beseemeth the tragedy outweigheth the beauty, or rather there is a shell of beauty under a heart of ice.

**John:** But there are weeds.

**Herodotus:** What is a weed?

**John:** It is a plant.

**Herodotus:** What kind of plant is a weed? Are the plants around us weeds?

**John:** They are not.

**Herodotus:** Then what kinds of plants are weeds?

**John:** In the Singularity, there is a distinction between 'rural', 'suburban', and 'urban': the 'rural' has deliberately set plants covering great tracts of land, the 'suburban' has fewer plants, if still perhaps green all around, and the 'urban' has but the scattered ensconced tree. But in all of them are weeds, in an urban area plants growing where the artificial stone has cracked. And among the natural philosophers there are some who study the life that cannot be extinguished even in an urban city; their specialty is called 'urban ecology'. The definition of a weed is simply, 'A plant I do not want.' We do not have weeds because we do not seek an artificial environment with plants only present when we have put them there. But when people seek to conform the environment to wishes and plans, even in the tight discipline of planned urban areas, weeds are remarkably persistent.

And in that regard, weeds are a tiny sliver of something magnificent.

**Herodotus:** What would that be?

**John:** The durability of Life that is writ small in a weed here in the urban, there in the suburban is but a shadow of the durability of Life that lives on in the sons of men. Mothers still sing lullabies to their dear little children; friendships form and believers pray at church far more than happened in the age where my story was told, a story dwarfed by what was called the 'age of faith'. The intensity of the attacks on the Church in a cruel social witness are compelled to bear unwilling witness to the vitality of the Church whose death has been greatly exaggerated: and indeed that Church is surging with

vitality after surviving the attacks. The story told seems to tell of Life being, in their idiom, 'dealt a card off every side of the deck'—and answering, 'Checkmate, I win.' I have told of the differences, but there are excellent similarities, and excellent differences. For a knight whoso commandeth a wild and unbridled horse receiveth greater commendation than a knight whoso commandeth a well-bred and gentle steed.

**Herodotus:** The wind bloweth where it listeth. The shall live by his faith. Your cell, though it be wholly artificial, will teach you everything you need to know.

**John:** Thou hast eagerly grasped it; beyond beauty, tragedy, and beyond tragedy, beauty. Thou hast grasped it true.

# "Social Antibodies" Needed: A Request to Orthodox Clergy

Some time ago, a pastor contacted me and asked permission to quote one of my poems. We've been in contact at least occasionally, and he sent me an email newsletter that left me asking him for permission to quote.

Let me cite the article in full (©2014 Pastor Vince Homan, used by very gracious permission):

When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is wise. Proverbs 10:19

I recently violated a longstanding position I have held; to avoid all further interaction with social media, particularly Facebook. It wasn't necessarily because of any moral high ground; it was more because I had already mastered e-mail and was satisfied with my online accomplishments. In addition, I didn't have any additional time or interest to keep up with pithy little sayings, videos, cartoons, social life, or even cute kiddie pictures. But now I am back in the cold

or even cute kiddie pictures. But now I am happily in the fold of Facebook users (particularly if there is a picture of one of my grandbabies on it). In addition, it has allowed me to discover that there are literally dozens of people who are just waiting to be my friends. However, the real reason I'm on Facebook is work related. Thanks to the good work done by a few of our church members; both of our churches have excellent Facebook pages. In order to access those pages, I needed an account, so—here I am. And though all seems well with the world of Facebook, I am discovering that it is not always the case. For all the "warm fuzzies," and catching up with friends and family it offers ... there is also a dark side.

At a recent continuing education event I attended, the speaker presented some dire consequences to uninhibited use of social media. He reported that social media had replaced money as the number one contributor to marriage problems. He said it wasn't so much affairs that online relationships led to; rather it was the persistent flirting that broke down barriers and hedges, which once protected the marriage. Such interaction often led to a downward spiral, corrupting and compromising the marriage vow. One in five divorces involves the social networking site Facebook, according to a new survey by the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. A staggering 80% of divorce lawyers have also reported a spike in the number of cases that use social media for evidence of cheating, with Facebook by far the biggest offender. Flirty messages and and photographs found on Facebook are increasingly being cited as proof of unreasonable behavior or irreconcilable differences. Many cases revolve around social media users who get back in touch with old flames they hadn't heard from in many years.

PBS recently hosted a webinar, *This Emotional Life*, about the internet's impact on relationship and marriage.<sup>[i]</sup> One of the panelists, Theresa Bochard, explored the issue a bit farther in an article originally published on PsychCentral.com. She said that after reading hundreds of comments and emails from people who have been involved in online relationships or emotional affairs as well as the responses on several discussion boards, she concluded that while the internet and social media can foster intimacy in a marriage, it seems to do more harm than good. She reported that an astounding 90% of opposite-sex online relationships were damaging to the marriage. Facebook affairs are threatening healthy couples too.

"I have suggested to myself to write a thank you note to the inventors of Facebook and Myspace because they have been responsible for a significant percentage of my income," says marriage counselor Dr. Dennis Boike. He's not kidding. "I'm having people say I never would have expected me to do this. It's in the privacy of my computer. I'm not going out anywhere, I'm not dressing for it, I'm not smelling of another's perfume. There are no tell-tale signs except my computer record." But a new study suggests Facebook can also help disconnect you from your better half. The site, which boasts more than 350 million active users, is mentioned in over 20% of divorce petitions, according to Divorce-Online.

Prominent Houston divorce attorney Bucky Allshouse can understand why. "It's really kind of shocking what people put on Facebook," says Allshouse. Perhaps it's not so shocking that the social networking site can essentially pour kerosene on "old flames." Most online relationships start out

benign: an email from a person you knew in college, friending an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend on Facebook (as suggested by Facebook: "people you might know"), getting to know a co-worker or acquaintance better online. But the relationship can take a dangerous turn very quickly if you're not careful and even more easily if you are doing most of the talking behind a computer.

We have no non-verbals with which to interpret people's conversation when we communicate online. What we say can be misinterpreted and come off in a way we don't intend. Or worse, we purposely allow our conversation to drift into an unhealthy area, where we put out "feelers" to see if the person we are communicating with will do the same. We will text things to people that would make us blush if we said them in person. All too often the end result is flirting, compromising our values, and allowing the secrecy of social media to sweep us off our feet and into a quagmire of social dysfunction. This is not a victimless choice. Many times, inappropriate conversations through social media lead to great pain with children, spouses, parents, and friends.

One such instance occurred when Jonathan found Sharon on Facebook, 20 years after he dumped her one week after their high school prom. She had never married, while he had and was also the father of two teenagers. During months of emailing and texting, Sharon proved a sympathetic listener to his sense of isolation and loneliness within his own marriage. He found they could talk easily, picking up with the friendship they had had years before. They shared feelings they had never shared with others. After a few months, they decided to cross a few states and meet half way. Then, they talked of marriage. Shortly after, Jonathan went

through with his divorce and months later he and Sharon married. Not surprisingly, and after only four months, they divorced. What happened? Fantasy was hit hard by reality. They went into a marriage without really spending time to know each other as they are today. Their romance was fueled by their history (as 18-year-olds) not their adult present. The romantic idea of reconnecting with an old lover, at a time Jonathan was unhappy in his marriage, was a recipe for danger.

In talking about it later, Jonathan realized he had not intended to start up a romance; he hadn't intended to leave his marriage in the first place. As he and Sharon shared feelings, he felt more cared for by her than by his wife. When asked who raised the issue of marriage, he wasn't sure. "Perhaps she pushed it, but I may have been just been musing something like, 'Wouldn't it have been great if we got married,' and that led her to talk about marriage. I wonder if I led her on. Did I promise more than I had realized and then feel in love with my own fantasy?"<sup>[ii]</sup>

When we cross barriers that were intended to keep us safely within the parameters of our marriage vows, we start in internal conflict—one that attacks our emotional and mental center. Conversations with people of the opposite sex can lead to flirtations. Flirtations can lead to imaginations which lead to fixations ... and there is a fine line between fixation and passion. Promiscuity is rarely a random act. It is pre-meditated. Something triggers our thoughts. And that something can be social media.

Christians must be wary of intimate conversations with people of the opposite sex; it is a trap that too many good people have been caught in. Paul wrote: "We are casting down

imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). It is good advice; cast down imaginations ... take every thought captive, because it is often out of our imaginations and thoughts that bad choices are born. Jesus said something similar. Speaking to the disciples he warned, "But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:18-19). The battleground is not the computer or cell phone; it is the heart and the mind. But secretive messaging avenues like social media offers can help plant the seed for a battle that good people lose every day.

Dr. Karen Gail Lewis, a marriage and family therapist of 39 years and author of numerous relationship books, offers these social networking guidelines for married couples.

1. **Be clear about your agenda in contacting the other person.**
2. **Limit the frequency of your time online.** This sets a good boundary around the social networking contact.
3. **Don't talk intimately.** By not sharing intimacies with your correspondence, you reduce the chance of sending a message that you want a more intimate relationship.
4. **Let your spouse know with whom you are contacting.** This openness makes it clear you have nothing to hide. (I would add, especially so if you are contacting a person of the opposite sex).<sup>[iii]</sup>
5. **Share your outgoing and received emails/texts with your spouse.** Sharing communications removes any

chance for jealousy or misunderstandings (I would add, share passwords with your spouse; give them full access to your social media sites).[iv].

6. **Do not meet in person unless your spouse is with you.** Meeting up with old friends with your spouse by your side is a reminder that you two are a team and removes sending mixed messages to your former lover. This also reinforces the importance of fixing your marriage before playing with the flames of old flames.[v].

Jesus taught us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16). Social media is a place that Scripture applies. I believe in the sanctity of marriage. I believe a person places their personal integrity and honor on the line in the marriage vow more than anything else in their life. And I believe marriage is under attack from multiple directions. I have officiated at many young couples weddings. I spend time with each one, warning them of the potential pitfalls and dangers; encouraging them to make their marriage a priority each day. Because I know the reality; many of the ones I marry won't make it. It's not because they are bad people or people of no character; but they get caught in a trap, and they can't seem to find a way out. And I also know most of them deeply regret their decisions after the fallout of their choices turn to consequences.

Social media can be a wonderful thing. I love keeping in touch with family and looking at pictures of the grandbabies. Now our churches are using social media to share the gospel. But Christians should be wary of the potential dangers. We must keep up our barriers at all times. James warned,

" Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters" (James 1:14-16). Indeed, we must not be misled, rather be guided by the protective barriers God has placed around us; especially so if we are married. We must watch our words carefully and keep our thoughts captive. The sanctity of our marriage vow demands it.

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Vince

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[i] <http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/blogs/does-internet-promote-or-damage-marriage>

[ii] <http://www.hitchedmag.com/article.php?id=903>

[iii] Parenthetical mine

[iv] Parenthetical mine

[v] <http://www.hitchedmag.com/article.php?id=903>

This article left me reeling.

In part, I wondered if my collection in [The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#) as it then existed was simply wrong. Or if someone might rightly say to me, "What you give in [The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#) is helpful up to a point, at least for someone with a similar background to yours. However, regular people need much more concrete guidance." What struck me very concretely about Pastor Vince's article is that it gave very practical advice on how married people can appropriately handle Facebook.

The article reminded me of remarks I'd seen by people interested in making computers that people can actually use that the Apple Macintosh was the first computer worth criticizing. Perhaps some detail of the guidance in the article above could be criticized: perhaps much of it should be criticized: but it may be the first article I've seen on the topic that was worth criticizing.

## The concept of "social antibodies": it's not just Facebook

[Paul Graham's "The Acceleration of Addictiveness"](#) is worth reading in full. (It's also worth quoting in full, but he's asked nicely that people link to it instead of reposting, which is a fair request. So I am linking to it even though I'd prefer to reproduce the whole article.)

[The Acceleration of Addictiveness](#) talks about a little bit bigger picture about things that are addictive. Though he mentions Facebook as something that's even more addictive than television, he's clear that the big picture is more than addictive little Facebook. Graham talks about a concept of "social antibodies" which I think is incredibly useful.

Decades ago, smoking cut through the US like a hot knife through butter. But, while smoking is still dangerous and there still continue to be new smokers, we no longer have glamour shots of celebrities holding cigarettes in some flashy, sophisticated, classy pose. Smoking is no longer "sexy;" over the past 20 years it has been seen as seedy, and "smoker" is not exacty the kindest thing to call someone. (I remember one friend commenting that he could think of a number of terms more polite than "smoker," none of which were appropriate to the present company.) As a society, the US has developed social antibodies to smoking now.

There are many things that we need "social antibodies" for, and we keep developing new technologies, Facebook included, that need social antibodies. The six prescriptions in the quoted articles are essentially social antibodies for how to use Facebook without jeopardizing your marriage. They may seem harsh and excessively cautious, but I submit that they are easier to go through than divorce. Much easier. A piece of cake! And I quote Pastor Vince's article because it's something we need more of.

## **A helpful parallel to technology: Wine as an example**

Simply not drinking alcoholic beverages is an option that I respect more as I think about it, but for the sake of this discussion, I will leave it on the side. I am interested in helpful parallels for "social antibodies" in moderation and restraint in using technology, and as much as I may respect people who do not drink, that option is not as interesting for my investigation. This is especially true because people living in my society assume that you are not abstaining from every technology that can cause trouble. So with a respectful note about not drinking alcohol at all, I want to look at social antibodies for moderate, temperate, and appropriate use of wine.

Wine and liquor slowly increased in strength in Western Europe, slowly enough that societies had at least the chance to build social antibodies. This makes for a marked contrast to escape through hard liquor among Native Americans, where hard liquor blew through decimated nations and peoples like escape through today's street drugs would have blown through a Europe already coping with the combined effects of the bubonic plague and of barbarian invasions. Perhaps there are genetic differences affecting Native Americans and alcohol. A Native American friend told me that Native American blood can't really

cope with sugar, essentially unknown in Native American lands apart from some real exceptions like maple syrup. And lots of alcohol is worse than lots of sugar, even if some of us wince at the level of sugar and/or corn syrup in the main US industrial diet. (Even those of us not of Native American blood would do well to restrict our consumption of artificially concocted sugars.)

But aside from the genetic question, introducing 80 proof whiskey to societies that did not know how to cope with beer would have been rough enough even if there were no genetic questions and no major external stresses on the societies. If there was something of a stereotype about Native Americans and whiskey, maybe part of that is because hard liquor that had been developed over centuries in the West appeared instantaneously, under singularly unfortunate conditions, in societies that had not even the social antibodies to cope with even the weaker of beers.

I cite [St. Cyril of Alexandria, The Instructor, Book Two, Chapter II: On Drinking](#) as a model for approaching alcohol (and, by extension, a serious reference point in understanding moderate use of technology), with some reservations. The translation I link to is obscure and archaic, and if you can get past that, the individual prescriptions are the sort that would only be all kept (or, for that matter, mostly kept) by the sort of people who are filled with pride that they observe ancient canons more strictly than any canonical bishop. In other words, don't try these directions at home unless you know you are in agreement with your priest or spiritual father. But [the chapter of The Instructor on wine](#) offers a **priceless** glimpse into real, live social antibodies on how to navigate dangerous waters. This is a live example of the sort of things we need. [The book as a whole](#) covers several topics, including clothing and boundaries

between men and women, and they could serve as a model for pastoral literature to address the challenges offered to spiritual life today. Not specifically that online interactions between men and women **introduce** an element of danger. That element of danger has always been there, and always will be there. But online interactions frame things a little differently. This means that people with social antibodies that would show appropriate caution face-to-face might not recognize that you have to compensate when dealing with the opposite sex online, or might not intuit exactly how you have to compensate when dealing with the opposite sex online.

I would like to close this section with a word about wine and why I drink it. The politically incorrect way of putting this point is to say that wine is something which literally and figuratively is not part of Islam. Islam works out, in stark relief, what it means to subtract the Incarnation from Christian faith. It means that not only has the Son of God not become incarnate in Christ, but all the more does God become incarnate in his children. It means that Holy Communion is just a symbol, and wine could absolutely, absolutely never become the blood of God. Water is necessary and wine is not, [as St. Clement tells us](#), but the Orthodox Church that regards Islam as a Christian heresy used fermented wine exclusively in the Eucharist, and condemned heretics' use of pure water for the same purpose. And my reason for drinking a little wine is that wine has an elasticity that bears the meaning of Jesus's first miracle, turning water into even more wine when wine ran out at a wedding where the guests were already pretty drunk, and it bears the meaning of the Holy Mysteries: few if any material substances are as pregnant with spiritual depth as wine. [Ecclesiastes](#) is perhaps the most dismal book in the entire Bible, and "[Go, eat thy bread with mirth, and drink thy wine with](#)

a joyful heart" is close to being the only invitation to joy in the book. I do not say that this is a reason why people who have decided not to drink should change their mind. However, the theological motive to drink in Christianity comes from a higher plane than the admittedly very real reasons to be careful with alcohol, or else abstain. It's deeper.

## Is the iPhone really that cool?

One news story reported that police officers had started using drug dealers' confiscated iPhones, and realized they were incredibly useful. And I wouldn't dispute that at all.

I would say that having an iPhone is a little, but not quite, like being able to call 911, which is the most important number for you to be able to call. 99% of the time it is inappropriate and perhaps illegal to call 911, but the (less than) 1% of the time you should be calling 911, it can save your life. Literally. And I use my iPhone over 1% of the time; besides built-in phone, email, notes, and looking things up on the web, and including my personal logistical dashboard, and apps like GPS, my iPhone makes me more productive, and unsexy nuts and bolts usage has been very useful.

So I wouldn't agree with [Come With Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated my iPhone](#) that the iPhone is simply "Terrible For Productivity." It certainly can be, and unrestrained use will be. And for that matter I've seen a lot of exquisitely produced apps in the App Store, and though I've written one iPhone app, I've found precious few apps that look genuinely useful to my purposes. But I am glad I have my iPhone, am not struggling to rein in inappropriately heavy use, and I believe it makes me more productive.

The LinkedIn article [Come With Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated My iPhone](#) talked about how one family decided to get rid of their iPhones. The author talked about how the iPhone had taken over their lives. They suggested that trying to use their habit to use the iPhone in moderation was a nonstarter, however enticing it may look. And, on a sobering note, they had earlier tried to avoid using smartphones, even for work. And I am convinced they made the right choice: not having any smartphone use is better than addictive smartphone use, hands down. And while I am cautious about advertising responsible smartphone use to people who can't live without their iPhone—the analogy drawn in [the LinkedIn article](#) was, "In hindsight, it's like an alcoholic saying 'I thought I could have it in the house and not drink it.'" But I have iPhone use which is defensible, at least in my opinion; I have drawn a boundary that is partly tacit and partly explicit, and while it can be criticized, it is a non-addictive use of the iPhone. I average less than one text a day; I do not compulsively check anything that's out there. A few of the guidelines I found are,

1. **Limit the time you spend using your smartphone.** The general Orthodox advice is to cut back a little at once so you never experience absolute shock, but you are always stretched a little bit outside your comfort zone. That may be a way to work down cell phone use, or it may not. If you compulsively reach for your smartphone, you might leave it in one room that you're not always in. Put a boundary between yourself and the smartphone.
2. **Limit how often you check your cell phone unprovoked.** When I'm not at work, I try to limit checking email to once per hour. Limit yourself to maybe once per hour, maybe

more, maybe less, and restrain yourself.

3. **When you're going to bed for the day, you're done using your smartphone for the day.** I am not strict in this; I will answer a call, but checking my iPhone, unprovoked, after my evening prayers or my bedtime is a no-no.
4. **Don't use the iPhone as a drone that you need to have always going on. This includes music, texting, games, and apps, including Vince's hero, Facebook.** Perhaps the single biggest way that this violates Apple's marketing proposition with the iPhone is that the iPhone is designed and marketed to be a drone that is always with us, a bit of ambient noise, delivering precisely what the Orthodox spiritual tradition, with works like [The Ladder](#), tell us is something we don't need.

The iPhone's marketing proposition is to deliver an intravenous drip of noise. The Orthodox Church's Tradition tells us to wean ourself from noise.

5. **iPhones have "Do Not Disturb" mode. Use it.** And be willing to make having "Do Not Disturb" as your default way of using the phone, and turn it off when you want "Please Interrupt Me" mode explicitly.
6. **Don't multitask if you can at all avoid it.** I remember reading one theology text which claimed as a lesson from computer science, because people can switch between several applications rapidly, that we should take this "lesson" to life and switch between several activities rapidly. And in a business world where multitasking has been considered an essential task, people are finding that multitasking is fool's gold, an ineffective way of working that introduces a significant productivity tax where people could be doing much better. Smartphones make it trivially easy to multiask.

Don't, unless a situation calls for it.

I note with some concern that the most I've been shocked at someone using an iPhone was when 12 and under kids were manipulating the iPhone, not to get something to done, but to activate the iPhone's smooth animations. Looking over their shoulders in shock has felt like I was eavesdropping on a (non-chemical) acid trip. Children's use of iPhones driven by slick animated transitions between applications are even more unhelpful than what the business world means by multitasking. (This feature of kids' use of iPhones has made me kind of wish iPhones were not used by people under 18.)

Now I should post this with a clarification that this is, so to speak, pastoral advice to myself. I've found the basic approach helpful, and priests and spiritual fathers may draw on it if they choose in their best judgment to take something from it, but I have not been ordained or tonsured, and I would fall back on the maxim, "As always, ask your priest." My reason to post them is to provide another reference point beyond those given to "social antibodies" in dealing with technology. With these antibodies, I hold the reins, or at least I hold the reins a little better than if I didn't have these antibodies. But I am aware of something vampiric, something that sucks out energy and life, in even my more moderate use of some technologies, and I am a little wary of comparing my use of technology to moderate and sober use of alcohol. Appropriate use of alcohol can be good, and apart from the risk of drinking getting out of control, it is an overall positive. I'm leery of claiming the same for my use of technology, even if I've tried hard to hold the reins and even if I may do better than average. There is something that has been drained from me; there is something that has been sucked out of

me. Maybe I am less harmed than others: but my use of technology has harmed me. I am wary of saying now, "I've found the solution."

In dealing with another passion besides sexual sin, namely anger, people have started to develop "social antibodies:" as mentioned briefly by Vince Homan, we don't have the important channels of people's nonverbal communication, which flattens out half the picture. And when we are angry, we can flame people in emails where there is no human face staring back to us, only letters on the screen that seem so right—or perhaps not nearly right enough!—and write hurtful flames unlike anything we would dare to say in person, even to someone who hurt us deeply. And on that score, people seem to me to have developed social antibodies; I've been in lots of flamewars and given and received many unholy words, but I don't remember doing that recently, or seeing flames wage out of control on many mailing lists, even if admittedly I don't spend much time on mailing lists. But sexual dangers are not the only dangers online, and for online flaming, most of the people I deal with do not flame people like I did when I was first involved in online community. I've acquired some "social antibodies," as have others I meet online. Some social antibodies have already developed, and the case is not desperate for us as a Church learning how to handle technology in the service of holy living instead of simply being a danger.

## Pastoral guidance and literature needed

I visited Amazon to try to get a gauge on how much Orthodox pastoral resources about appropriate use of computers, mobile, internet, and technology were out there, a sort of [The Instructor](#) for technology today, and my search for [orthodox internet](#) found 109 resources from Christianity, Judaism, and the occult, none of which seemed to be about "How does an Orthodox Christian negotiate the social issues surrounding computers, smartphones, tablets, the Internet, apps, and technology?" Some other searches, such as [orthodox pastoral internet](#), [orthodox pastoral smartphone](#), and [orthodox pastoral technology](#) turned up nothing whatsoever. A search for "[orthodox technology](#)" turned up one page of search results with... several connected works of my own. Um, thanks, I think. I guess I'm an expert, or at least a resource, and even if I didn't want to, I should probably make myself available to Orthodox clergy, with my spiritual father and bishop foremost. But this compliment to me, if it is such (maybe it means I'm off the rails) caught me quite off-guard; I was expecting to see at least some publications from people with pastoral authority and experience. But seeing as I'm the local expert, or at least a first author for this particular topic, I'll briefly state my credentials. I have been an Orthodox Christian for a decade, so no longer a recent

convert, [have works on social dimensions of technology dating back as far as 1994](#), have two years of postgraduate theology under slightly silly conditions at [Cambridge](#), and two more years under very silly conditions at a sort of "Monty Python teaches theology" PhD program (one Orthodox priest consoled me, "All of us went through that"), but did not complete the program. I grew up with computers back when my home computer access meant going to an orange and black terminal and dialing up a Dec MicroVAX on a 2400 (or less) baud modem, was on basically non-web social networks years before it became a buzzword, have worked with the web since before it went mainstream, much of it professionally. I've been bitten by some of the traps people are fighting with now. And I'm also kind of bright. So I guess I am, by default, a local expert, although I really think a responsible treatment of the issues raised here would see serious involvement from someone with pastoral qualifications and experience. I haven't been tonsured, at least not yet, and perhaps not ever.

But I would ask priests reading this piece to consider a work on a sort of technological appendix to [The Rudder](#), or maybe I shouldn't say that because I have only barely sampled [the ancient canons](#). But I would like to see ideally two pastoral works parallel to [The Instructor, Book II](#): one for pastoral clergy use, and one for "the rest of us faithful." When I was a lay parish representative at a diocesan conference, there was talk about appropriate use of the internet; Vladyka PETER read something that talked about the many legitimate benefits we have received from using computers, but talked about porn on the internet, which is a sewer I haven't mentioned; he said that young people are spending hours per day looking at porn, and it's more addictive than some street drugs, and he commented how porn

has always been available, but you used to have to put on a disguise and a trenchcoat, and go leave your car in front of a store with the windows covered up, where now, it finds you and it comes free with a basic utility in the privacy of your home. And the biggest thing I can say about freedom from porn comes from the entry for porn in [The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#):

There is a story about a philosopher who was standing in a river when someone came to him. The philosopher asked the visitor, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under the water for a little while, and asked him the second time, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under water for what seemed an interminable time, and let him up and asked, "What do you want?" The visitor gasped and said, "Air!" The philosopher said, "When you want Truth the way you want air, you will find it."

The same thing goes for freedom from the ever-darker chain called pornography, along with masturbation and the use of "ED" drugs to heighten thrills (which can cause nasty street drug-like effects [and a doomed search for the ultimate sexual thrill that decimates sexual satisfaction] even in marriage).

And I would like to suggest some guidelines for fighting Internet porn, quite possibly the most commonly confessed sin among young men today. Sexual sins are among the most easily forgiven: but they are a deep pit. So, in the interest of providing a "dartboard" draft that's put out for people to shoot at. I am intentionally saying more rather than less because it's easier for a pastoral conversation to select from a set of options than

a pastoral conversation to select from a set of options than furnish arbitrarily more additional options. Here are several things I'd consider, both sacred and secular:

I have heard of some helpful things being said in response to confession of sexual sin, such as, "St. Basil said that a man in lust is like a dog licking a saw; the salt it likes tasting is the taste of its own woundedness," and so there is a vicious cycle.

However, I have not heard of a list anywhere near this complete being given when a man confesses a very common (now) sin. Maybe parts of it could be incorporated into advice given at confession.

1. **If your right eye offends you, tear it out and throw it away from you: for it is better for you that one part of your body should die than that your whole body should be thrown into Hell.**

These words are not to be taken literally; if you tore out your right eye you would still be sinning with your left eye, and the Church considers that it was one of Origen's errors to castrate himself. But this is a forceful way of stating a profound truth. There is an incredible freedom that comes, a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light, when you want purity the way you want "Air!", and you apply a tourniquet as high up as you need to to experience freedom.

Give your only computer power cable to a friend, for a time, because you can't have that temptation in the house? That is really much better than the alternative. Have the local teenager turn off display of images in Chrome's settings? That is really much better than the alternative. Webpages may look suddenly ugly, but not nearly as ugly as bondage to porn. Only check email at the library? That is really much better than the alternative. These tourniquets may be

revised in pastoral conversation, but tearing out your right eye is much more free and much less painful than forever wanting to be free from addiction to porn, but also secretly hoping to give in to the present temptation; as the Blessed Augustine prayed, "Lord, give me chastity, but not yet."

There is a great deal of power in wanting purity **now**, and once you go slash-and-burn, the power is amazing.

2. **Install content-control software, such as [Norton Family](#) / [Norton Family Premier](#), and have things set up so that only the woman of the house knows the password to make exceptions.** There are legitimate needs for exceptions, and I remember being annoyed when I went to customize [Ubuntu Christian Edition](#) and finding that a site with all sorts of software to customize the appearance of Ubuntu was blocked, apparently because of a small sliver of soft porn in the wallpaper section of a truly massive site. There will be legitimate exceptions, but it cuts through a lot of self-deception if you get the exception by asking your wife.
3. **Don't bother trying to find out how to disable porn-mode "Incognito Mode" on your browser; set up a router to log who visits what websites.** However much browser makers may tout themselves as being all for empowerment and freedom, they have refused to honor the many requests of men who want freedom from porn and parents who care for their children in many, many voices asking for a way to shut off porn mode.

[There is an antique browser hidden in /usr/bin/firefox on my Aqua-themed virtual machine](#), but even with that after a fair amount of digging, I don't see any real live option to browse for instance Gmail normally with a browser that doesn't offer porn mode. But there is something else you should

know.

Routers exist that can log who visits what when, and if you know someone who is good with computers (or you can use paid technical support like [the Geek Squad](#)), have a router set up to provide a log of what computers visited what URLs so that the wife or parents know who is visiting what. The presence of a browser's porn mode suddenly matters a lot less when a router records your browsing history **whether or not** the browser is in porn mode.

4. **Rein in your stomach. Eat less food. Fast.** It is a classic observation in the Orthodox spiritual tradition that the appetites are tied: gluttony is a sort of "gateway drug" to sexual sin, and if you cut away at a full stomach, you necessarily undermine sexual sin and have an easier contest if you are not dealing with sexual temptation on top of a full stomach.

And it has been my own experience that if I keep busy working, besides any issues about "Idle hands are the Devil's workshop," the temptation to amuse and entertain myself with food is less. So that cuts off the temptation further upstream.

If you eat only to nourish the body, it helps. Even if nourishing food tastes good, cutting out junk like corn-syrup-loaded soft drinks, or anything sold like potato chips in a bag instead of a meal, and moderating consumption of alcohol (none before going to bed; it doesn't help), will help.

5. **When you are tempted, ask the prayers of [St. John the Much-Suffering of the Kiev Near Caves](#), perhaps by crossing yourself and saying, "St. John the Much-Suffering, pray to God for me."** In the Orthodox Church you may ask the prayers of any saint for any need, but St.

John is a powerful intercessor against lust. That is part of why I asked [Orthodox Byzantine Icons](#) to hand-paint an icon of St. John for me: a little so I would have the benefit of the icon myself, and the real reason because I wanted [Orthodox Byzantine Icons's catalogue](#) to make available the treasure of icons of St. John the Much-Suffering to the world, which they would.

As I write, the icon is in the process of production, and I hope that it will be available within a couple of weeks. **Ask to know when the icon of St. John the Much-Suffering is available.**

Other saints to ask for prayer include [St. Mary of Egypt](#), [St. Moses the Hungarian](#), [St. Photina](#), [St. Thais of Egypt](#), [St. Pelagia the Former Courtesan](#), [St. Zlata the New Martyr](#), [St. Boniface](#), [St. Aglaida](#), [St. Eudocia](#), [St. Thomais](#), [St. Pelagia](#), [St. Marcella](#), [St. Basil of Mangazea](#), [St. Niphon](#), and [St. Joseph the Patriarch](#). (Taken from [Prayers for Purity](#).)

6. **Buy and pray with a copy of [Prayers for Purity](#) when you are tempted, and when you have fallen.** It is an excellent collection and helps when you know you should praying but words are not coming to mind.
7. **If you have been wounded, bring your wound to confession the next weekend. (And try to have a rule of going to church each week.)**

It can be powerful, when you are facing a temptation, not to want to confess the same sin again in a couple of days.

But in parallel with this remember when a visitor asked a saintly monk what they did at the monastery, and the saintly monk answered, "We fall and get up, fall and get up, fall and get up." Fall down seven times and rise up eight: fall down seventy-seven times and rise up seventy-eight: keep on

repenting for as long as you need to to achieve some freedom, and know that some saints before you have risen after falling very many times.

8. **Buy a prayer rope, and use it.** When you are tempted, keep repeating a prayer for one prayer rope, and then another, and another, if you need it. Pray "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," or to St. John the Much-Suffering, "Holy Father John, pray to God for me," or to St. Mary of Egypt, "Holy Mother Mary, pray to God for me."
9. Use the computer only when you have a specific purpose in mind, and not just to browse. Idle hands are the Devil's workshop; **For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind.; Do not look around in the streets of a city, or wander about in its deserted sections. Turn away your eyes from a shapely woman, and do not gaze at beauty belonging to another; many have been seduced by a woman's beauty, and by it passion is kindled like a fire.**  
Men's roving sexual curiosity will find the worst-leading link on a page, and then another, and then another. Drop using roving curiosity when you are at a computer altogether; if you need to deal with boredom, ask your priest or spiritual father for guidance on how to fight the passion of boredom. But don't use the Internet as a solution for boredom; that's asking for trouble.
10. **Use a support group, if one is available in your area.** If I were looking for a support group now, I would call Christian counseling centers in the area if available. Talking with other people who share the same struggle can help.
11. **Use [XXXchurch.com](http://XXXchurch.com), or at least explore their website.**

Their entire purpose is buying you your freedom from lust.  
12. **Yearn for purity.**

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

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

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

...

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

When we are in lust, God does not seem real to us. Rejecting lust allows us to start being re-sensitized to the beauty of God's creation, to spiritual sweetness, to the lightness of Heavenly light. Lust may feel like you're losing nothing but gaining everything, but try to be mindful of what you lose in lust.

And that's my best stab at making a "dartboard," meant so people will shoot at it and make something better, and more

complete and less one-sided in navigating the pitfalls of technology. This isn't the only trap out there—but it may be one of the worst.

I would suggest that we need a comprehensive—or at least somewhat comprehensive—set of guidelines for Orthodox use of technology. Such a work might not become dated as quickly as you may think; as I write in the resources section below, I unhesitatingly cite a 1974 title as seriously relevant knowing full well that it makes no reference to individually owned computers or mobile devices: it's a case of "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Or, perhaps, two works: one for clergy with pastoral responsibilities, and one for those of us laity seeking our own guidance and salvation. I believe that today, we who have forms of property and wealth undreamed of when Christ gave one of the sternest Luddite warnings ever, **Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth**, can very easily use things that do not lead to spiritual health: sometimes like how Facebook can erode marriages that are well defended as regards old-school challenges.

The best I know, secondhand perhaps, is that today's Church Fathers, on Mount Athos perhaps, are simply saying, "Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!" What they want instead sounds like a liberal political-social experiment, where people who have grown up in an urban setting and know only how to navigate life there, will move en masse and form some sort of Amish-like rural communities.

Or perhaps something else is envisioned: mass migration to monasteries? Given all that monasticism offers, it seems sad to me to receive the angelic image, of all reasons, only because that's the only remaining option where you can live a sufficiently Luddite life. I have heard of spiritual giants who incomparably excel me saying that we should stop using recent technology at

all. I have yet to hear of spiritual giants who incomparably excel me, and who live in places where technology is socially mandated, advise us to unplug completely. For that matter, I have yet to hear of any Orthodox clergy who live in places in the world where technology is socially mandated say, only and purely,  
"Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!"

The Orthodox Church, or rather the Orthodox-Catholic Church, is really and truly Catholic, Catholic ultimately coming from the Greek kata, "with", and holos, "whole", meaning "with the whole", meaning that the entirety of the Orthodox Church belongs to every Orthodox-Catholic Christian: the saints alike living and dead, the ranks of priesthood and the faithful, and marriage and monasticism in entirety belong to every Orthodox Christian, every Orthodox-Catholic Christian: and giving the advice "Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!" as the limits of where the Orthodox-Catholic Church's God and salvation can reach, is very disappointing. It's comparable to saying that only monastics can be saved.

Total avoidance of all electronic technology is guidance, but not appropriate guidance, and we need advice, somewhat like the advice that began on how to use Facebook, to what I wrote about iPhones or internet porn. A successful dartboard makes it easier to say "What you said about \_\_\_\_\_ was wrong because \_\_\_\_\_ and instead we should say \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_." And I am trying to raise a question. I am trying to raise the question of how Orthodox may optimally use technology in furtherance of living the divine life.

## **Is astronomy about telescopes? *No!***

I would close with a quote about technology—or is it?  
Computer science giant Edgser Dijkstra said,

Computer science is no more about computers than  
astronomy is about telescopes.

And how much more must Orthodox discussion of how to use  
technology ascetically be no more about technology than  
astronomy is about telescopes? The question is a question about  
spiritual discipline, of how the timeless and universal wisdom of  
[the Bible](#), [the Philokalia](#), and [the canons of the Seven Ecumenical  
Councils](#).

## Resources for further study

All the Orthodox classics, from [the Bible](#) on down. The task at hand is not to replace the [Philokalia](#), but to faithfully adapt the [Philokalia](#) (and/or [the Seven Ecumenical Councils](#) to a new medium, as it were. The principles of [the Bible](#), [the Philokalia](#), and [the Seven Ecumenical Councils](#) are simply not dated and simply do not need to be improved. However, their application, I believe, needs to be extended. We need ancient canons and immemorial custom that has the weight of canon law: however ancient canons express a good deal more about face-to-face boundaries between men and women than boundaries in Facebook and on smartphones. We need guidance for all of these.

[St. Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor, cjsh.name/instructor](#). I reference [Book II](#) and its chapter on [wine](#) as paradigms we might look too.

[Jerry Mander, Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television, cjsh.name/elimination](#). Mander is a former advertising executive who came to believe things about television, with implications for computers and smartphones, For instance, he argues that sitting for hours seeing mainly the light of red, green, and blue fluorescent pixels is actually awfully creepy. Mander has no pretensions of being an Orthodox Christian, or an Orthodox Jew for that matter, sounded an alarm

in his apostasy from advertising that is worth at least hearing out. (Related titles, good or bad, include [The Plug-in Drug](#) and [Amusing Ourselves to Death](#).)

# Some Thoughts About Heaven

The book of Hebrews talks about how this world is not really our home, about how we are wanderers who are passing through on our way to a better country, a Heavenly one.

As wealthy and non-persecuted Christians, we form a distinct minority among the historic community of Christians... while there may be some exceptions, suffering is a present and notable reality for most people across most of time.

Contemporary American culture is a painkilling culture which tries to use distractions to mask the reality of suffering, but historic Christianity has taken a different approach.

One of the things done in historic Christianity, in part in response to suffering, instead of trying to make everything be perfect on earth (which is what the Teacher in Ecclesiastes put a lot of effort in to, coming to the conclusion that "Everything was meaningless... under the sun." (Eccl. 2:11) — without involving God, everything is meaningless, and the attempt to make a life without suffering is vain), is instead to place a major emphasis on Heaven, and on hoping for what we will have in Heaven.

There was one believer who was being tortured in China, inside a container of water through which electric shocks were run. In between the shocks, he asked his torturers, "How much?"

How much are you getting paid for this?" He was able to patiently wait through the pain, knowing that he was going to be paid an eternal reward in Heaven; his torturers eventually gave up in frustration.

Heaven is perhaps the ultimate embodiment of Paul's words about how God can do "immeasurably more than we all ask or imagine." It will have wonders far beyond our current ability to fathom, and, as Lewis wrote in his introduction to *The Great Divorce*, any detailed description we can write must be highly speculative. Paul and John barely scratched the surface in their writings about Heaven, and they both had detailed visions of Heaven (which I have not). But there are some things which are available for us to look forward to in Heaven, and even they are amazing...

Here are some of the things which I am looking forward to in Heaven:

- We will see God face to face, and develop with him the most full and intimate relationship which we can have.
- We will be freed from the now unending struggle with sin and temptation. We will no longer, in a spiritual sense, shoot ourselves in the foot.
- Evil will no longer impede the action of good. It will be like, after all your life walking with a heavy load on your back, having that load taken off and being able to dance freely.
- God's redemption will be complete. This will mean, among many other things, that things will be better than had there never been a Fall.
- More will be said of this later.
- As to God's specific redemption — God who has manifested his power by choosing the weak to shame the strong, the

poor to shame the rich, the foolish to shame the wise (I Cor. 1:27 and context) — I would like to quote another chapter of "The Way of the Way".

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## XXXIX Heaven

The blind will see God's face.  
The dumb will sing praises to him.  
The deaf will listen to the eternal song.  
The lame will dance for joy.  
Those convulsed by spasms will rest in perfect  
stillness.  
The leprous will feel God's touch.  
But all this is dwarfed by the shadow of the wonder  
beyond wonders.  
Sinners will be made holy.

- We will be in community with all of the saints across all of time... with Mary, with Paul, with Peter, with John, with Abraham, with Moses, with Elijah... We will be able to speak with the many giants whom history has paid scant attention to but who are great heroes in God's Hall of Fame... with everyone. We will be reunited with loved ones who have passed away. With all of them we will be able to slowly develop close friendships.
- A child once described Heaven as one big, long hug... We will be able to hug and kiss and tickle and chase and roughhouse with the other saints.
- Perhaps one of the greatest treasures we will have in Heaven

will, apart from God, the angels, and the other saints (for God and all that there is will, in a very real sense, belong to us), not be so much in what we have as who we become. We will become perfect in virtue, fully united with God (and yet even now we are of one spirit with the Father (Rom. 6:17)), and we will have great joy in God and in who we will be even if there were no other blessing to Heaven.

I'm not sure how to express this adequately... Much of Western thought has sought to create happiness by the control of external circumstances — what possessions you have, how other people treat you, and so on and so forth. And indeed, those things have a great impact on day-to-day mood swings. But other philosophies (ergo, many Eastern, and for that matter at least some of Western — ergo, the Catholic ascetic tradition)) have sought another route, that of changing internal circumstances. When Paul says that he has discovered the secret of being happy in every circumstance, he doesn't give something which will radically alter external circumstances to what he would like. Rather, he says that it is what he has in Christ that makes him happy — if that may be called internal (I am using clumsy wording to try to avoid conveying the impression that God is just a part of us), with due respect to the fact that God is more than us and exists independently of us, it is internal circumstance, who we are in relation to God, that can make us happy.

God is not, ultimately, God because he lives in Heaven, or because he is omnipotent and omniscient, or because he created "Heaven and earth, ... all things visible and invisible"... A malevolent deity could theoretically have all those attributes and still most definitely not be God. He is

God because he IS. Those other things are consequences of who HE IS (which capital letters are what the sacred Hebrew name 'Yahweh' means).

And we will be children of God, conformed to the likeness of Christ, ever changing from glory to glory.

- We, as Christ's bride, will be united to him. Christ, who gave his life for us as his body and bride to make us holy, has been keeping himself pure for us, and will make us pure for him. Then we will be united with him, and it will be like a wedding night.

And — this thought struck me over the summer — we aren't the only ones who are eagerly awaiting that time. Christ is, too.

- God created us as persons, with both an individual and a community side. In this fallen world, societies have usually quashed at least one of these sides — this is collectivism and individualism respectively — and often at least part of both. In Heaven, we will be made perfect in both our individual and community sides.

On the individual side... For me to become more like Christ does not mean that I should speak Aramaic and Greek, create yokes and other wooden items, and wear first century clothing. It means that I should speak English and French, study mathematics and pursue my other interests, and wear twentieth century clothing. Imitating him more closely, becoming more and more the person he wants to be, means in some ways becoming more and more clearly distinguished from any other person — just as, the more and more an object comes into view, clear lighting, and good focus, it looks more and more unlike any other object. So, by becoming more and more like Christ, I will become more and

more unique and distinctive, more and more the one single person God wants me and no one else to be.

On the community side... It means that we will all be united with God, perfectly and seamlessly integrated. It means that we will be brought completely into moral and spiritual connection. It means that we will have close and intimate relationships that (even though husband and wife can now become one flesh, which will not be possible then) we know only the slightest hints of here. It means that there will be perfect order. As a body, we are not a conglomeration of cells of different species, but rather cells of one single organism that all bear the one single and universal genetic code — the genetic code of true life.

To bring them together... We are different parts that will make up one single pattern together with God. We are like the different parts of one single body — for if you take one of those parts and cut it off from the body, it will die and cease to be itself; united as a part of the body, it is both every bit as much integrated as it could possibly be, and every bit as distinguished from the other as it could be. (In this regard we are both unlike a drop of water returning to the ocean, which becomes united only when it ceases to be a drop — which is how the Hindu faith pictures a spirit being united with God — and like a drop drawn from the ocean, which becomes its own entity only by ceasing to be a part of what it was before.)

- I have a lot of interests, and if I had a thousand lives to live, I would be quite able to find interesting things to do in each one. I have chosen primarily to study mathematics, but I would very much enjoy studying languages... or medicine... or writing... or...

In Heaven, there will be time and opportunity to cultivate each of those possibilities in as much detail as I want. And this is equally true of the interests of other people as well.

- We will be able then to drink freely from the wellspring of Truth. Now, we see darkly and through a glass; then, we shall see fully, face to face.
- "In my Father's house there are many rooms..." It is difficult for me to imagine that the dwelling-places prepared for each of us in God's mansion are not specially and uniquely prepared for each person, and that we will not perhaps at least have some creative power and choice in what is put in the rooms (but even if we don't, it will be good and perfect).
- In Eden, man was given the power to create. That ability has been twisted by the Fall, but we can still create incredibly beautiful materials now. I can't wait to see what creation will be like in Heaven.
- An acquaintance, who is a musician, talked about what it will be like to spend thousands and thousands of years working at perfecting melodies.
- Role play is an enjoyable recreation now, with a fallen creativity and imagination and nothing created except in the imagination... in whatever forms it may take in Heaven...
- The Second Coming will be the last chapter in one story — the story of the Great War, which began when the highest angel set himself against God and a third of the angels joined him to become dragons, worms, serpents, demons, and devils, which has been unfolding throughout all of history, with the Incarnation as its central event, in which every person has a role, and which will close with the total defeat of Satan and all his minions and the perfection of the saints to be united with Christ. But it will also be the first chapter

in another story, a story greater still, a story in which we are "ever changing from glory to glory", a story with an infinitude of chapters, a story which not only words but knowledge and imagination utterly fail me to describe.

- In Eden, man saw by lights God created. In the New Jerusalem, there will be no lights, for the Lamb himself will be their light. (Rev. 22)
- In Eden, man was given a natural, physical body. In the New Jerusalem, men will be resurrected, and their bodies will be resurrected to become even more glorious, even more wonderful — supernatural, spiritual bodies.
- In Eden, man was created in the image of God, and in the psalms, men are even called gods. In the New Jerusalem, the redeemed will share in the divine nature. (II Peter 1:4)

# So You've Hired a Hacker (Revised and Expanded)

There is a wonderful variety among humans. Ethnicity and culture provide one of the most important dimensions—but there can be profound differences between two people who look the same. If neither appreciates the differences, and thinks, "He's just like me—only not doing a very good job of it," there will be conflicts that can be prevented. If they understand their differences, both can profit. This document is written so that you can understand your hacker and enjoy a more productive working relationship.

Managers and hackers both vary, but there are some things that come up again and again. That's why this document exists. I am concerned with a particular kind of clash that most hackers have with many managers—a conflict that is more easily resolved if both parties understand each other.

What are some of the common differences between managers and hackers? There are several, but let me list five important ones:

<b>Managers</b>	<b>Hackers</b>
Tends to be very	Intent on

<p>concerned with morality, and wants to connect with society and contribute. Rises to positions of responsibility, not only in business, but in church and volunteer organizations. Lives by responsibility and duty.</p>	<p>cultivating knowledge and skill. Rises to tremendous levels of competency with technology and other things. High level of discipline used to continually refine abilities.</p>
<p>Thinks concretely. Good at small talk, and at the logistical details needed to run a business.</p>	<p>Thinks abstractly. Good at deep discussions, and thinking about the hard concepts needed to work with technology.</p>
<p>Measures own contribution to society by the extent to which he adds to rules and sees that people live by following rules. Tends to equate rules with morality or the good of society.</p>	<p>Far more aware of the limitations of rules. Does not equate rules with morality or the good of society. Very likely to notice rules that are hurting your company—yes, they do exist, and they're</p>

	more common than you think.
Closely resembles about 40% of the population; most people have dealt with many similar people before, and can easily understand managers.	Thinks in an uncommon way found in perhaps 5% of the population; will encounter many people who have never known well anyone who is similar. Can't count on other people understanding him.
Is such a dominant force in human society that he can easily forget that others might be different. Works well with people because of how much he holds in common with so many others. Needs to work at understanding people like hackers.	May have intense powers of concentration. Prizes an offbeat and clever sense of humor. At times, painfully aware of inconsistencies that are invisible to the people who are acting hypocritically. Marches to the beat of a different drummer, and needs to work at understanding people like managers.

Managers and hackers complement each other. If they work

at it, they can enjoy a long and fruitful working relationship.

# Questions and Answers:

## Section 1: Basic Understanding

1.1: Won't my hacker break into my computer and steal my trade secrets?

Point of clarification. There are two communities of people that call themselves 'hackers'.

One of these groups is the one you've heard about—those who take pride in breaking into other people's computers.

That is all the media understands 'hacker' to mean, but there is another community, an older and much more interesting one, that is insulted by being mistaken for the first community. They are as insulted as an automotive engineer would be if the media said 'automotive engineer' when they meant 'car thief', and the engineer learned through bitter experience that, whenever he told people he was an automotive engineer, people thought he was only a car thief.

Your hacker is an automotive engineer, not a car thief. He is a hacker because he loves computers, and loves to do impressive things with them. He doesn't want to steal your trade secrets, and it would be good manners of you not to confuse "automotive engineer" hackers with "car thief" hackers—whom he refers to as 'crackers', or the extremely negative 'script kiddies'

pejorative script kiddies .

## 1.2: Was it a good idea to hire a hacker?

It depends on the job. A hacker can be dramatically more effective than a non-hacker at a job, or dramatically less effective. Jobs where hackers are particularly good are:

- Systems administration
- Programming
- Design
- Web-related development

Jobs where hackers are particularly bad are:

- Data entry
- "Computer operator", where the "computer operator" has to use software (especially Microsoft software) that he can't improve.

More generally, a job that requires fast and unexpected changes, significant skill, talent, and is not very repetitive will be one a hacker will excel at. Repetitive, simple jobs are a waste of a good hacker, and will make your hacker bored and frustrated. No one works well bored and frustrated.

The good news is, if you get a hacker on something he particularly likes, you will frequently see performance on the order of five to ten times what a "normal" worker would produce. This is not consistent, and you shouldn't expect to see it all the time, but it will happen. This is most visible on particularly difficult tasks.

## 1.3 Wait, you just said "ten times", didn't you? You're not serious, right?

Yes, I am serious; a hacker on a roll may be able to produce, in a period of a few months, something that a small development group (say, 7-8 people) would have a hard time getting together over a year. He also may not. Your mileage will vary.

will vary.

IBM used to report that certain programmers might be as much as 100 times as productive as other workers, or more. This kind of thing happens.

#### 1.4 How should I manage my hacker?

The same way you herd cats. It can be quite confusing; they're not like most other workers. Don't worry! Your hacker is likely to be willing to suggest answers to problems, if asked. Hackers are known for coming together and producing impressive software without any business people to tell them what to do. That's how Perl was produced. And Linux. And quite a few other things, great and small. Most hackers are nearly self-managing.

#### 1.5 I don't understand this at all. This is confusing. Is there a book on this?

There are several books that explain important pieces of the puzzle, and some of them are listed in a reading list [below](#). If you read from the list and ask your hacker to help you connect the dots, you've got a good chance at understanding your hacker much better.

## Section 2: Social issues

2.1: My hacker doesn't fit in well with our corporate society. She seems to do her work well, but she's not really making many friends.

This is common. Your hacker may not have found any people around who get along with hackers. You may wish to consider offering her a position telecommuting, or flexible hours (read: night shift), which may actually improve her productivity. Or, even better, hire another one.

2.2: My hacker seems to dress funny. Is there any way to

impress upon him the importance of corporate appearance?

Well... let's look at your view of clothing first, so that you'll have a better chance at understanding how your hacker sees things differently.

You believe in showing respect for the company and those you work with. To you, much of that respect revolves around little details. These details are to you much of the substance of respect—such as that classy suit you wear to the office. So when a hacker wears jeans and a t-shirt to work, he must be showing disrespect, right?

Not really. Those jeans—kneeholes and all—are what he wears to see his best friend, whom he respects deeply. If your hacker happens to be a Christian, he may wear jeans and a T-shirt to church on Easter. I sometimes do, and when I dress up for church, it is more to avoid distracting other churchgoers than any need of fancy clothes in order to worship God. Hackers look past appearances, and it seems strange to them that you think they need uncomfortable clothes to work well: if it's what's inside the clothing that matters, why not wear something comfortable and be able to concentrate better?

If your hacker isn't dressing up, how can he still respect your company? He works hard, solves problems, and probably thinks about ways to help your company be more productive—even when he's at home. If he wants to wear comfortable clothing at work, it's not disrespect; he just understands what IBM, Microsoft, and Ford all recognize: employees are most productive when they choose what to wear—not their company. If you ask your hacker respectfully, he'll probably wear clothing without any holes, and might even dress up for a few special occasions.

Your suit is a professional asset. It helps other people see your professionalism. Your hacker's t-shirt is also a professional asset. It's part of a culture that judges a person by what's inside his clothing, and he works better when comfortable. He doesn't try to get you to dress like him; why don't you extend the same courtesy to him?

2.3: My hacker won't call me by my title, and doesn't seem to respect me at all.

Your hacker doesn't respect your title. Hackers don't believe that management is "above" engineering; they believe that management is doing one job, and engineering is doing another. They may well frequently talk as if management is beneath them, but this is really quite fair; your question implies that you talk as if engineering is beneath you. Treat your hacker as an equal, and she will probably treat you as an equal—quite a compliment!

2.4: My hacker constantly insults the work of my other workers.

Take your hacker aside, and ask for details of what's wrong with the existing work. It may be that there's something wrong with it. Don't let the fact that it runs most of the time fool you; your hacker is probably bothered by the fact that it crashes at all. As your customers will be—consider your hacker to be an early warning system. He may be able to suggest improvements which could dramatically improve performance, reliability, or other features. It's worth looking into.

You may be able to convince your hacker to be more polite, but if there appear to be major differences, it's quite possible that one or more of your existing staff are incompetent by his standards. Note that hackers, of course,

have different standards of competence than many other people. (Read "different" as "much higher".) Is this necessarily appropriate? All people have weaknesses. It would perhaps be nicer if hackers were more charitable to people who can't match their talent, but you're lucky to have someone on staff who's competent enough for this to be a problem.

### **Section 3: Productivity**

3.1: My hacker plays video games on company time.

Abraham Lincoln said, "If I had ten hours to chop down an oak tree, I'd spend the first eight sharpening my axe."

Some jobs are done best by getting your hands dirty immediately: if you hire a kid to rake your leaves, you probably want him to start raking as soon as he arrives. But if you contacted a building contractor to make a new office building in the morning, and he was pouring concrete by the end of the day, you would not be impressed—at least not in a good way. Something is very wrong: there are all sorts of things that need to happen first. If your contractor begins work by pouring concrete, you will end up paying for some very expensive mistakes that could have been completely avoided by simple preparation.

Your hacker is probably honest, too honest to start off by writing poor-quality code "so my manager will think I'm working." He'd rather be productive and spend two weeks preparing rather than two years fixing needless mistakes.

Perhaps it would be easier if hacker ways of preparation coincided with what you do when working—writing memos or something like that. But there is an elusive productive zone,

and your hacker is doing whatever he can to gain that productivity. I often write best after taking meandering walks—and, if you have difficulty believing that walks are a way to produce something good, I'd encourage you to read [A Dream of Light](#)—which, walks and all, took me very little time to write. I averaged over ten times the normal speed of a professional writer. Your hacker who plays games on company time is using the same areas of his mind as I did. Your hacker is sharpening his axe, and it's a good idea for him to do so.

Hackers, writers, and painters all need some amount of time to spend "percolating"—doing something else to let their subconscious work on a problem. Your hacker is probably stuck on something difficult. Don't worry about it.

3.2: But it's been two weeks since I saw anything!

Your hacker is working, alone probably, on a big project, and just started, right? She's probably trying to figure it all out in advance. Ask her how it's going; if she starts a lot of sentences, but interrupts them all with "no, wait..." or "drat, that won't work", it's going well.

3.3: Isn't this damaging to productivity?

No. Your hacker needs to recreate and think about things in many ways. He will be more productive with this recreation than without it. Your hacker enjoys working; don't worry about things getting done reasonably well and quickly.

3.4: My hacker is constantly doing things unrelated to her job responsibilities.

Do they need to be done? Very few hackers can resist solving a problem when they can solve it, and no one else is solving it. For that matter, is your hacker getting her job

done? If so, consider these other things a freebie or perk (for you). Although it may not be conventional, it's probably helping out quite a bit.

3.5: My hacker is writing a book, reading USENET news, playing video games, talking with friends on the phone, and building sculptures out of paper clips. On company time!

He sounds happy. The chances are he's in one of three states:

- Basic job responsibilities are periodic (phone support, documentation, et al.) and there's a lull in incoming work.  
Don't worry about it!
- Your hacker is stuck on a difficult problem.
- Your hacker is bored silly and is trying to find amusement. Perhaps you should find him more challenging work?

Any of these factors may be involved. All of them may be involved. In general, if the work is challenging, and is getting done, don't worry too much about the process. You might ask for your corporation to be given credit in the book.

3.6: But my other workers are offended by my hacker's success, and it hurts their productivity.

Do you really need to have workers around who would rather be the person getting something done, than have it done already? Ego has very little place in the workplace. If they can't do it well, assign them to something they can do.

## **Section 4: Stimulus and response**

4.1: My hacker did something good, and I want to reward him.

Good! Here are some of the things most hackers would like to receive in exchange for their work:

- Understanding.
- Understanding.
- Understanding.
- Respect.
- Admiration.
- Compliments.
- Discounts on expensive toys.
- Money.

The order is approximate, but the most important one is the most difficult. If you can give that to your hacker, in his eyes you will be a cut above most other bosses—and he just might work for you longer.

Try to remember this good thing your hacker just did the next time you discover he just spent a day playing x-trek. Rather than complaining about getting work done, write it off as "a perk" that was granted (informally) as a bonus for a job well done. Don't worry; hackers get bored quickly when they aren't doing their work.

4.2: My hacker did something bad, and I want to punish him.

Don't. 30 years of psychological research has shown that punishment has no desirable long-term effects. Your hacker is not a lab rat. (Even if he were a lab rat, punishment wouldn't work; at least, not if he were one of the sorts of lab rats the psych research was done on.) If you don't like something your hacker is doing, express your concerns. Explain what it is that bothers you about the behavior.

Be prepared for an argument; your hacker is a rational entity, and presumably had reasons. Don't jump on him too quickly; they may turn out to be good reasons.

Don't be afraid to apologize if you're wrong. Your hacker will never think less of you if you admit to a mistake. He

might be disappointed if you've made a mistake and can't admit it, but he will never look down on you for admitting you were wrong. If your hacker admits to being wrong, don't demand an additional apology; so far as the hacker is concerned, admitting to being wrong probably is an apology.

4.3: I don't get it. I offered my hacker a significant promotion, and she turned it down and acted offended.

A promotion frequently involves spending more time listening to people describing what they're doing, and less time playing with computers. Your hacker is enjoying her work; if you want to offer a reward, consider an improvement in title, a possible raise, and some compliments.

Make sure your hacker knows you are pleased with her accomplishments—that's what she's there for.

4.4: My company policy won't let me give my hacker any more raises until he's in management.

In the Bible, Paul describes roles in the Christian church, and then compares these community members to parts of the human body (I Corinthians 12:14-26, NIV):

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part,

where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts,  
but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!"  
And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"  
On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to  
be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think  
are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the  
parts that are unpresentable are treated with special  
modesty, while our presentable parts need no special  
treatment. But God has combined the members of the  
body and has given greater honor to the parts that  
lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body,  
but that its parts should have equal concern for each  
other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if  
one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

This is a deep insight into human community. It's not just  
about religion. Executives, managers, programmers,  
salespeople, secretaries, and other employees all contribute  
something fundamental to a company. Janitors? Those people  
are important? Well, if janitors aren't important, fire them,  
and streamline your business. The halls may be a bit stinky  
with all that rotting trash, and two of the secretaries may  
sneeze every time someone walks by and kicks up dust. Your  
insurance covers emergency treatment and rabies shots  
when a rat creeps out of a mound of garbage and bites you,  
right? Your star saleswoman couldn't close a key sale  
because she was in the hospital with food poisoning after...  
wait a minute. Maybe those janitors we all look down on  
deserve a second look. Maybe they contribute more to the  
physical well-being of other employees than almost anyone

else you have on staff. Maybe they're important after all.

Eye, hand, stomach, and sturdy back muscles all contribute something. Sometimes the observation—"My group adds something unique and vital, something that no other department gives."—to a conclusion that is not justified: "My group's contribution to the company is better and more important than anyone else."

This conclusion also affects how companies allocate money: the people who set salaries believe they're the most important employees. Because it's management who sets the salaries, the belief:

A manager is a more important employee than a non-  
manager

creates a policy like

Every manager must be paid more than any non-  
manager

or

No matter how much an employee does for the company, there's an artificial limit on how much you can reward him unless he gives up his work, which he is good at, and becomes a manager instead.

If that's what you believe—a prejudice that would shock any true leader—then I don't think I can help you much. I would simply encourage you to finish the job. Send a memo out to all employees saying:

We believe that every manager makes a more

important contribution to this company than any non-manager. If you're not a manager, you're only a second-class citizen with our company. If you don't like this, you can leave.

And be ready for an exodus. Your hackers won't be the only ones to decide you're too stupid to work with. They'll just be the first.

Does that sound unattractive? You do have a better alternative. Your hacker can quite possibly earn \$200/hour or more, if he wants—his talents are worth it. If your company policy imposes a salary ceiling on non-managers, your company policy is broken. Fix your company policy, find a loophole (say, a consultant given a contracted permanent consulting position with benefits), or else get ready to have one of your most productive employees leave because your company policy is broken and you couldn't work around it. I can't believe the hacker on my staff is worth as much as we're paying.

Ask the other in the staff what the hacker does, and what they think of it. The chances are that your hacker is spending a few hours a week answering arcane questions that would otherwise require an expensive external consultant.

Your hacker may be fulfilling another job's worth of responsibilities in his spare time around the office. Very few hackers aren't worth what they're getting paid; they enjoy accomplishing difficult tasks, and improving worker efficiency.

## **Section 5: What does *that* mean?**

5.1: My hacker doesn't speak English. At least, I don't think

so.

Your hacker is a techie, and knows a number of powerful concepts that most English-speakers don't know. He also knows words for those concepts. Guess what? The concepts are unusual concepts, and the words are unusual words. He doesn't use standard words for many things because there aren't any standard words to explain the cool things he does.

Your best bet is to pick up a copy of TNHD (The New Hacker's Dictionary). It can be found at <http://catb.org/jargon> or from a good bookstore. If you have trouble understanding that reference, ask your hacker if she has a copy, or would be willing to explain her terms.

Most hackers are willing to explain terms. Be ready for condescension; it's not intended as an insult, but if you don't know the words, she probably has to talk down to you at first to explain them. If you're bothered by this, think about explaining to a non-professional how to keep a project on task—if you can't use any words longer than five letters. That's what your hacker is doing when she tries to explain technical concepts in non-technical words. Please understand if she sounds a little condescending.

It's a reasonably difficult set of words; there are a lot of them, and their usage is much more precise than it sounds. Hackers love word games.

It is also possible that English is not your hacker's native language, and that it's not yours either. Feel free to substitute a more appropriate language.

5.2: I can't get an estimate out of my hacker.

This is easier to understand with an analogy. Imagine two situations:

In the first situation, you drive for work on the same

roads, at the same time, as you have for the past five years, and listened to the traffic report in the shower.

In the second situation, you are out in the middle of nowhere, travelling to see a distant relative, and you realize that you've forgotten to buy a hostess gift for the people you're driving to visit. You stop by a gas station to ask where you can find a gift shop which would sell a dolphin statuette. The attendant says, "Take the road you're on, and turn off onto the second side street you see. Keep on going until you hit the second stop sign after John's general store. It's in the third town you'll see."

Now, in both cases, think about answering the question, "How long will it take?"

In the first case, you probably know the answer: "Twenty-six minutes, twenty-two if I hit the lights right." In the second case—well, given that you don't know how long the route is, what the speed limits are, or how you will find the sign once you reach the right town, the best answer is, "I don't know."

When you ask a hacker how long a task will take and he says, "I don't know," he isn't being difficult. Fixing a broken network, when you don't know why it's down, is much more like the second situation than the first. You don't need to throw a pity party for your hacker because he has to work in unfamiliar territory and doesn't even know how long a task will take. He doesn't look at it that way; he likes the challenge. But it does mean that he accepts tasks before he knows exactly how he'll do them, and he is responsible enough to say "I don't know," and not tell you something he's simply made up. Your hacker is a driver who thrives on finding his way in unfamiliar territory, with washed-out

bridges and incomplete directions among the surprises. You might be glad you have someone who likes that kind of assignment.

Your hacker hasn't figured out how hard the problem is yet. Unlike most workers, hackers will try very hard to refuse to give an estimate until they know for sure that they understand the problem. This may include solving it.

No good engineer goes beyond 95% certainty. Most hackers are good engineers. If you say that you will not try to hold him to the estimate (and mean it!) you are much more likely to get an approximate estimate. The estimate may sound very high or very low; it may be very high or very low. Still, it's an estimate, and you get what you ask for.

5.3: My hacker makes obscure, meaningless jokes.

Another one that's a little hard to explain.

Imagine that you are visited by a brilliant wayfarer. He strives to understand those around, silently tolerates a great many things that seem strange to him, and brings with him cultural treasures unlike anything your culture has to offer. One day, he tries to share some of them with you.

Should you be bothered?

That's what's happening when your hacker tells you obscure technical jokes. He could be trying to make you feel stupid, but let's be charitable. Your hacker is uncommonly intelligent—he might be a member of Mensa. Intelligent people think a little bit differently, and a genius may seem like someone from another world. Your hacker probably understands you better than you understand him—and when he shares jokes with you, he's giving you a chance to see something special. If you feel brave, you might even ask him to explain some of them.

But don't be bothered when he tells you jokes that take a while to explain. Some of them are quite interesting.

5.4: My hacker counts from zero.

So does the computer. You can hide it, but computers count from zero. Most hackers do by habit, also.

## Section 6: Is there anything else I should know?

6.1: I've found this document to be tremendously helpful. Is there anything I can do to say thank-you?

Wonderful of you to ask, and you certainly can. There are two authors who've contributed to this document, an original and a revision author. Both would appreciate cash donations (e-mail the [original/revision](#) authors for details). **The revision author would be very happy to receive a link to his home page: [Jonathan's Corner \(Sitemap\)](#) (Browse around and see what he has to offer!)**

You might also consider buying a couple of books through the links on these pages; you get cool books, and the authors get pocket change. :) The books listed in the original version will give money to the original author, while the books added in the revision will give money to the revision author.

If you'd like to give something to one of the authors, but don't know which, why not flip a coin?

6.2: Are there any books that will help me understand my hacker?

Excellent question. Yes, there are. The following list is suggested:

- [Please Understand Me](#) or [Please Understand Me II](#)  
What I said above about common manager/hacker differences was drawn from [Please Understand Me](#) as

well as experience. Most hackers are intuitive thinking types, while managers who are confused by hackers tend to be sensate judging types. If you're in a hurry, buy *Please Understand Me* and read the descriptions for sensate judging and intuitive thinking types. You may find them tremendously helpful in understanding hackers. I've found them tremendously helpful in understanding managers.

*Please Understand Me* came out in the 1970s and describes what people are like. *Please Understand Me II* came out in the 1990s and describes both what people are like and what they can do. (It's about twice as long.)

I prefer *Please Understand Me*.

- [The New Hacker's Dictionary \(available online\)](#)  
Read the introduction and appendices; they're worth their weight in gold. Then read a definition a day—you'll learn a lot. This book is probably the #1 hacker classic, and provides an invaluable asset into understanding hacker thought. Don't worry if parts of it are hard to understand—you'll still learn something, and your hacker can probably explain the harder parts.
- [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) or [Firestorm 2034](#)  
*Stranger in a Strange Land* is a classic novel about a person who is raised by Martians and is brought to earth, a Martian mind in the body of a young man. There are not any hackers in this story, but if you can understand the protagonist in this story, you may find it much easier to understand and appreciate your hacker. Think of it as driving an automatic after you've learned to drive a stick.

*Firestorm 2034* is a story about a medieval genius

brought to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He is traumatized by his first contacts with computers, but grows to be fascinated, and learns to program. The reader is with him as he understands technology and makes a discovery in artificial intelligence. This book was written to convey insight into certain kinds of people. If you read it, you should find it easier to understand your hacker—and perhaps grasp technology a little better, to boot! It is my second novel.

Ok, why is an unknown author putting his book next to a Heinlein classic? A few reasons:

- It draws heavily on Heinlein's work.
- It's less than a third as long as Stranger. To a busy leader, that counts for a lot.
- It's written by someone who understands technology, and who weaves technology deeply into the story.
- Readers like it. One actually said he liked it better than Stranger.
- There's less stuff that's likely to offend you.
- I have been published in more than one respected journal. The editor of the high-IQ journal Ubiquity saw my work, and asked to feature me in their fall/winter 2001 issue—with a biography, a few writings, a painting, and a four dimensional maze.

I'm not completely unknown as an author. But it's your call which novel to read—and I won't question your judgment if you choose Stranger.

- [Guiding the Gifted Child](#)

This award-winning title is a very practical book because it conveys understanding. It does a good enough job of

it to be useful to several different kinds of people. It will help you understand the sort of people who become hackers.

This also is the only book on this list specifically intended to help people guide hacker-like people.

- [The Cathedral and the Bazaar](#)

Perhaps this has happened already. Or perhaps it will happen any day.

You try to reason with your hacker, and say, "Windows was made by the heavily funded efforts of a major corporation. Linux was made by some programmers on their spare time, and you can get it for free. Is Linux really as good as Windows?"

Your hacker rolls his eyes, appears to be counting to ten, gives you a very dirty look, and slowly says, "Is the upcoming band performance next door—live, in concert—really as good as this scratched-up CD?"

Your hacker believes that open source software is normally better than Microsoft, and has very good reason to do so. This book explains why—and it may help you to get better software for less money, and put your business in a more competitive position. As far as hacker culture goes, it only illuminates a small part, but it does so very well.

Unfortunately, none of these books was specifically written to explain hacker culture to non-hackers.

Fortunately, your hacker can help you connect the dots and put things together. Just ask him!

6.3: Has this FAQ been published?

The original version, in some form, has been bought by [IBM DeveloperWorks](#), which funded part of the work. You

could read their version (nicely edited) by following this link (non-functional as of 12/31/01; I've contacted IBM requesting a current URL and am waiting to hear back). IBM has also bought another article, the Manager FAQ, a guide to managers for hackers who are frustrated and confused by corporate life. The original author is justifiably happy with his work.

I am working towards publishing the revised and expanded version.

What's the copyright status on this? Can I make copies and share it with a friend who's confused by his hacker?

You may distribute as many copies of this document as you want. The original FAQ has the following notice:

This document is copyright 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999 Peter Seebach. Unaltered distribution is permitted.

When I let the original author know I was interested in a revision, and asked what the copyright status was, he said it was covered by the [Artistic License](#). All changes in this revision are also covered by the Artistic License, all added material copyright 2001 by Jonathan Hayward. Distribute freely.

What's the author's e-mail, and what's the official distribution site?

The original is officially distributed at <http://www.plethora.net/~seeb/faq/hacker.html> by [seeb@plethora.net](mailto:seeb@plethora.net), and the revision is at [cjayward.com/hacker/](http://cjayward.com/hacker/) by [jshayward@pobox.com](mailto:jshayward@pobox.com).

Are there any people the revision author would like to thank?

Yes. Jonathan Hayward would very much like to thank the original author, Peter Seebach, for writing an excellent FAQ.

original author, Peter Seebach, for writing an excellent FAQ  
and for giving him permission to modify it.

Any disclaimers?

DISCLAIMER: Both authors are hackers. Bias is  
inevitable.

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# The Spectacles

I got up, washed my face in the fountain, and put out the fire. The fountain was carved of yellow marble, set in the wall and adorned with bas-relief sculptures and dark moss. I moved through the labyrinth, not distracting myself with a lamp, not thinking about the organ, whose pipes ranged from 8' to 128' and could shake a cathedral to its foundation. Climbing iron rungs, I emerged from the recesses of a cluttered shed.

I was wearing a T-shirt advertising some random product, jeans which were worn at the cuffs, and fairly new tennis shoes. I would have liked to think I gave no hint of anything unusual: an ordinary man, with a messy house stocked with the usual array of mundane items. I blended in with the Illusion.

I drove over to Benjamin's house. As I walked in, I said, "Benjamin, I'm impressed. You've done a nice job of patching this place since the last explosion."

"Shut up, Morgan."

"By the way, my nephews are coming to visit in two weeks, Friday afternoon. Would you be willing to tinker in your laboratory when they come? Their favorite thing in the world is a good fireworks display."

"Which reminds me, there was one spice that I wanted to give you. It makes any food taste better, and the more you add, the better the food tastes. Pay no attention to the label on the

bottle which says 'arsenic'. If you'll excuse me one moment..." He began to stand up, and I grabbed his shoulder and pulled him back down into the chair.

"How are you, Benjamin?"

"How are you, Morgan?"

I sat silent for a while. When Benjamin remained silent, I said, "I've been spending a lot of time in the library. The sense one gets when contemplating an artistic masterwork is concentrated in looking at what effect *The Mystical Theology* had on a thousand years of wonder."

He said, "You miss the Middle Ages, don't you?"

I said, "They're still around—a bit here, a piece there. On one hand, it's very romantic to hold something small in your hand and say that it is all that is left of a once great realm. On the other hand, it's only romantic: it is not the same thing as finding that glory all about you.

"The pain is all the worse when you not only come from a forgotten realm, but you must reckon with the Illusion. It's like there's a filter which turns everything grey. It's not exactly that there's a sinister hand that forces cooperation with the Illusion and tortures you if you don't; in some ways things would be simpler if there were. Of course you're asking for trouble if you show an anachronism in the way you dress, or if you're so gauche as to speak honestly out of the wisdom of another world and push one of the hot buttons of whatever today's hot issues are. But beyond that, you don't have to intentionally cooperate with the Illusion; you can 'non-conform freely' and the Illusion freely conforms itself to you. It's a terribly isolating feeling."

Benjamin stood up, walked over to a bookshelf, and pulled out an ivory tube. "I have something for you, Morgan. A pair of spectacles."

"Did you make these?"

"I'm not saying."

"Why are you giving me eyeglasses? My eyes are fine."

"Your eyes are weaker than you think." He waited a moment, and then said, "And these spectacles have a virtue."

"What is their virtue? What is their power?"

"Please forgive me. As one who has struggled with the Illusion, you know well enough what it means to deeply want to convey something and know that you can't. Please believe me when I say that I would like to express the answer to your question, but I cannot."

I left, taking the glasses and both hoping that I was concealing my anger from Benjamin and knowing that I wasn't.

---

I arrived at home and disappeared into the labyrinth. A bright lamp, I hoped, would help me understand the spectacles' power. Had I been in a different frame of mind, I might have enjoyed it; I read an ancient and mostly complete Greek manuscript to The Symbolic Theology to see if it might reveal new insights. My eyes lingered for a moment over the words:

That symbol, as most, has two layers. Yet a symbol could have an infinite number of layers and still be smaller than what is without layer at all.

I had a deep insight of some sort over these words, and the insight is forever lost because I cared only about one thing, finding out what magic power the spectacles held. I tried to read a cuneiform tablet; as usual, the language gave me an embarrassing amount of trouble, and there was something strange about what it said that completely lacked the allure of being exotic. Wishing I had a better command of languages, I moved about from one serpentine passageway to another, looking at places, even improvising on the organ, and enjoying none of it.

Everything looked exactly as if I were looking through a children's toy. Had Benjamin been watching too much Dumbo and given me a magic feather?

After a long and fruitless search, I went up into my house, put the spectacles in your pocket, and sat in my chair, the lights off, fatigued in mind and body. I do not recall how long I stayed there. I only know that I jumped when the doorbell rang. It was Amber. She said, "The supermarket had a really good sale on strawberries, and I thought you might like some."

"Do you have a moment to to come in? I have Coke in the  
fridge."

trriage.

I had to stifle my urge to ask her opinion about the spectacles' virtue. I did not know her to be more than meets the eye (at least not in the sense that could be said of Benjamin or me), but the Illusion was much weaker in her than in most people, and she seemed to pick up on things that I wished others would as well. We talked for a little while; she described how she took her family to a pizza restaurant and her son "walked up to a soda machine, pushed one of the levers you're supposed to put your cup against, jumped in startlement when soda fell on his hand, and then began to lick the soda off."

"I've got to get home and get dinner on, but—ooh, you have new glasses in your pocket. Put them on for a moment."

I put my spectacles on, and she said something to me, but I have no idea what she said. It's not because I was drained: I was quite drained when she came, but her charm had left me interested in life again. The reason I have no idea what she said to me is that I was stunned at what I saw when I looked at her through the spectacles.

I saw beauty such as I had not begun to guess at. She was clad in a shimmering robe of scintillating colors. In one hand, she was holding a kaliedoscope, which had not semi-opaque colored chips but tiny glass spheres and prisms inside. The other hand embraced a child on her lap, with love so real it could be seen.

After she left, I took the spectacles off, put them in their case, and after miscellaneous nightly activities, went to bed and dreamed dreams both brilliant and intense.

---

When I woke up, I tried to think about why I had not recognized Amber's identity before. I closed my eyes and filtered through memories; Amber had given signals of something interesting that I had not picked up on—and she had picked up on things I had given. I thought of myself as one above the Illusion—and here I had accepted the Illusion's picture of her. Might there be others who were more than meets the eye?

I came to carry the spectacles with me, and look around for a sign of something out of the ordinary. Several days later, I met a tall man with crownrowed greying hair. When I asked him what he studied in college, he first commented on the arbitrariness of divisions between disciplines, before explaining that his discipline of record was philosophy. His thought was a textbook example of postmodernism, but when I put my spectacles on, I saw many translucent layers: each layer, like a ring of an oak, carried a remnant of a bygone age. Then I listened, and his words sounded no less postmodern, but echoes of the Middle Ages were everywhere.

I began to find these people more and more frequently, and require less and less blatant cues.

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I sat in the living room, waiting with cans of Coca-Cola. I enjoy travelling in my nephews' realms; at a prior visit, Nathan discovered a whole realm behind my staircase, and it is my loss that I can only get in when I am with him. Brandon and Nathan had come for the fair that weekend, and I told them I had something neat-looking to show them before I took them to the fair.

I didn't realize my mistake until they insisted that I wear the spectacles at the fair.

---

I didn't mind the charge of public drunkenness that much. It was humiliating, perhaps, but I think at least some humiliations are necessary in life. And I didn't mind too much that my nephews' visit was a bummer for them. Perhaps that was unfortunate, but that has long been smoothed over. There were, however, two things that were not of small consequence to me.

The first thing that left me staggered was something in addition to the majesty I saw. I saw a knight, clad in armor forged of solid light, and I saw deep scars he earned warring against dragons. I saw a fair lady who looked beautiful at the skin when seen without the spectacles, and beautiful in layer after layer below the skin when seen with them. The something else I saw in addition to that majesty was that this beauty was something that was not just in a few people, or even many. It was in every single person without exception. That drunken beggar everyone avoided, the one with a stench like a brewery next to a horse stable—I saw his deep and loyal friendships. I saw his generosity with other beggars—please believe me that if you were another beggar, what's his was yours. I saw the quests he made in his youth. I saw his dreams. I saw his story. Beyond all that, I saw something deeper than any of these, a glory underneath and beneath these things. This glory, however disfigured by his bondage to alcohol, filled me with wonder.

The reason the police kept me in the drunk tank for so long was that I was stunned and reeling. I had always known that I was more than what the Illusion says a person is, and struggled to convey my something more to other people... but I never looked to see how other people could be more than the grey mask the Illusion put on their faces. When I was in the drunk tank, I looked at the other men in wonder and asked myself what magic

lay in them, what my spectacles would tell me. The old man with an anchor tattooed to his arm: was he a sailor? Where had he sailed on the seven seas? Had he met mermaids? I almost asked him if he'd found Atlantis, when I decided I didn't want to prolong the time the police officer thought I was drunk.

This brings me to the second disturbing find, which was that my spectacles were not with me. I assumed this was because the police had locked them away, but even after I was released, determined inquiry found no one who had seen them. They looked interesting, oddly shaped lenses with thick gold frames; had a thief taken them when I was stunned and before the police picked me up?

The next day I began preparing for a quest.

---

It filled me with excitement to begin searching the black market, both because I hoped to find the spectacles, and because I knew I would experience these people in a completely new light.

I had dealings with the black market before, but it had always been unpleasant: not (let me be clear) because I did not know how to defend myself, or was in too much danger of getting suckered into something dangerous, but because I approached its people concealing the emotions I'd feel touching some kind of fetid slime. Now... I still saw that, but I tried to look and see what I would see if I were wearing my spectacles.

I didn't find anything that seemed significant. The next leg of my journey entailed a change of venue: I dressed nicely and mingled with the world of jewellers and antique dealers. Nada.

I began to search high and low; I brainstormed about what exotic places it might be, and I found interesting people along the way. The laborers whom I hired to help me search the city dump almost made me forget that I was searching for something, and over time I chose to look for my spectacles in places that would bring me into contact with people I wanted to meet...

Some years later, I was returning from one of my voyages and realized it had been long (too long) since I had spoken with Benjamin. I came and visited him, and told him about the people I'd met. After I had talked for an hour, he put his hand on my mouth and said, "Can I get a word in edgewise?"

I said, "Mmmph mph mmmph mmph."

He took his hand off my mouth, and I said, "That depends on whether you're rude enough to put your hand over my mouth in mid-sentence."

"That depends on whether you're rude enough to talk for an

hour without letting your host get a word in edgewise."

I stuck my tongue out at him.

He stuck his tongue out at me.

Benjamin opened a box on his desk, opened the ivory case inside the box, and pulled out my spectacles. "I believe these might interest you." He handed them to me.

I sat in silence. The clock's ticking seemed to grow louder, until it chimed and we both jumped. Then I looked at him and said, "What in Heaven's name would I need them for?"

# Spirit

**Links:** Read anything good lately?

**Dexios:** An article that tries to catch you by beginning, "They really should have put it into my contract: I, the undersigned, hereby agree to spend one-half to three-quarters of all class time explaining why watching Dawson's Creek and thinking vague thoughts about God is not a valid substitute for attending mass." The students weren't affected by the usual exhortations, until she happened on a visit to monastic worship.

**Links:** ...And?

**Dexios:** The students were perfectly welcome, but the monks were there worshipping God and the students were welcome to join the monks worshipping God. And that got their attention when a whole legion of ill-starred [attempts to get their attention](#) failed. One student said, "With all the other masses, it's like it was all about me or something. With this mass, I got the feeling it was about God." And that succeeded where words about "It's commanded," or "It's good for you," failed.

The students weren't really asking "Why should I go to mass?" at all; they said that because they couldn't form the words to ask what they really meant.

**Links:** And that was...?

**Dexios:** "Why should I go to **that** mass?"

**Links:** Wow. I'm surprised you're siding with a bunch of rebellious—how old are they?

**Dexios:** Students at a Catholic high school. And as to rebellious—teenagers are likely to rebel and be rebels without a cause if they have too much trouble finding a good enough cause, but there's something that has to do with spirit that isn't rebellious at all. They rejected counterfeit coin.

**Links:** "Spirit?" As in—

**Dexios:** Um, as in—[pause]

**Links:** —as in something you're thinking about?

**Dexios:** Yes.

**Links:** So you're saying these students were super spiritual?

**Dexios:** Yes. No. Saying that they're super spiritual is an answer to the wrong question. Sure, I'd love to bring two (or however many it was) busloads of kids to our parish and show them how Orthodox worship is taken seriously even if you're not monks, but if you're thinking of spirit as some special quality that has an incense rising up from the best people's heads, that's exactly what it's not. I would say it's natural, if people hadn't heard a million voices saying that appetite is the only thing that's natural about us. These kids weren't showing spirit because they were being urged to be spirit enough to want real worship and not a show—if anything, they were spirit enough for that despite people urging them that shows dressed up as worship were good enough for them. And the author of the

article didn't say that every now and then she sees a kid with a halo and that kid wants a real worship service, and is so spiritually snobbish that only a monastic service will satisfy him. (She said the services were "relaxed, by monastic standards," whatever that means.) What she was saying was that everyday, normal kids kept asking her why they should go to mass until she showed them...

A real mass. Or rather, one where monks were there to worship God and other people were quite welcome to join them in worshipping God.

**Links:** [pause] In Spirit and in Truth.

**Dexios:** In Spirit and in Truth. And I realized just now that the article has more going on in it than just spirit. It has a million other substitutes for spirit that people aren't happy with. Maybe it wasn't just spirit that resonated with me.

**Links:** Where else?

**Dexios:** Maybe your art history education simply talked about different eras and cultures choosing different strengths to develop—

**Links:** —it did—

**Dexios:** —but in mine there was a story of progress: at first medieval art was crude, and then changes began in medieval art that resulted in art getting better and better at being like a photograph until eventually artists weren't an expensive substitute for a photograph. The history of Western art was a history of progress, starting with medieval art that didn't look like a good photograph up to Enlightenment neo-classicism that could give a good photograph a run for

its money. Which is exactly right, except that it's backwards.

**Links:** Let me guess. You're going to say that the medieval art was spiritual, or spirit?

**Dexios:** Something like that, because the baseline for medieval art was similar [to icons](#). They hadn't gone to such scientific lengths to get a scientifically correct rendition of the human body for the mirror image of why pastors get their science illustrations wrong.

Pastors and theologians get their science wrong because their focus is on theology and just a little science is brought in to make a point—and the fact that the science is usually wrong shows that their hearts are in the right place. But scientific art, unlike medieval art but like "The Oaths of the Horatii" by Jacques Louis David, for which he sketched first skeletons and then muscles and then bodies and only then painted bodies complete with clothes, represents a fall from a spiritual center of gravity.

**Links:** But the material world is good, and understanding it is good.

**Dexios:** Um...

**Links:** Which of those do you want to deny?

**Dexios:** Do you believe I have to deny that the material world is good? Or, alternately, that understanding the material world is good?

**Links:** Unless you want to say some very strange things about science.

**Dexios:** Ugh, I was hoping to avoid saying strange things about science. But first of all, you seem to be treating "understanding the natural world" and "science" as

interchangeable, so that it is inconceivable what "understanding the human body" could mean besides "learning scientific facts about the body."

**Links:** And how exactly would I learn about the body apart from science?

**Dexios:** Let's see, you could look **A**ppreciate art that portrays the human form, or discover how your body behaves by playing **B**aseball, or have a **C**hiropractic massage, if there is such a thing, or **D**ance, or—

**Links:** —didn't you say something about "alignment of the stars, alignment of the bones..." yesterday?

**Dexios:** You interrupted me! I was hoping to work my way up to something profound. But let's put massage under '**M**' and forget about the alignment of the bones. I don't want to get into alternative medicine, besides saying that it seems a hint that people have some sense that their bodies have to have more to do with spirit than the almost mechanical view of "Western medicine", which is powerful and yet considered narrow in some circles.

And now for something related to the other horn for your dilemma.

Having enough to eat is good. So is having clothing, and a roof over your head in nasty weather. But the [Sermon on the Mount](#) tells us not to seek after these things: yes, we need them, and the Heavenly Father knows this well enough. But we are to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and his perfect righteousness, making our center of gravity there, and making a spiritual center of gravity. Oh, and by the way, the other things will be given to us as well, even though that

isn't the point. The point, if I may use slightly non-Sermon-on-the-Mount language, is to have a spiritual center of gravity.

**Links:** But aren't you changing the subject of the [Sermon on the Mount](#)? Unless you talk about being poor in spirit, the [Sermon on the Mount](#) doesn't use the word "spirit."

**Dexios:** Matthew's Gospel talks about the Kingdom of Heaven and John's talks about abundant or eternal Life. As concepts they are not identical but you cannot treat them as dealing with separate realities, which would make the crudest fallacy. The [Sermon on the Mount](#) barely uses the word "spirit," but nothing from the ages is a better resource on living as spirit. And the distinction between 'Spirit', big 'S', and 'spirit', little 's', is not what you think.

**Links:** What do you mean?

**Dexios:** The distinction doesn't exist in Greek, or at least is not forced in that if you write "spirit" you have to decide if it has a big or little 's'. A lot of people think they need to place a vast chasm between big 'S' spirit and little 's' spirit so that it's almost two different words. But body is not so much the opposite of spirit as where spirit unfurls, and our spirits, little 's', are not so much the opposite of the Holy Spirit as where God's Spirit unfurls.

But this is a minor point. Nitpicking about a little or big 'S' on "Spirit", I mean. Body is profoundly important. Far from being a mere enemy of spirit, it is a proper counterpart, and that means that when you know the proper meaning of body, you know that it is where spirit unfurls, and the difference between a holy icon

and secular art is not that secular art takes a high view of the body in contrast to holy icons, but icons take a high view of the body by letting it get inspired by spirit. Literally and figuratively, body is meant to be where spirit unfurls, and the monk who lives a life of "contemplation" and the "secular" Christian who lives contemplation in the world are both spirit at work. But may I make a more concrete illustration of spirit? In social ethics, perhaps?

**Links:** What are Orthodox social ethics?

**Dexios:** "Our social program is the Trinity," as Orthodox seem to not be able to stop repeating. I'm not sure you have to say "Trinity" instead of, say, plugging in spirit, but what it is becomes clearer by contrast with Catholic social ethics. Catholic social ethics addresses a question that isn't addressed in the Bible, or at least looks at its question in a very different light.

**Links:** What did they see? A better way to solve an old problem?

**Dexios:** Well, that would at least be their interpretation, and when they present things their way, it's kind of hard to see any other way of seeing it.

**Links:** What is the basic question?

**Dexios:** The basic question they address is, "What should be done about the poor," and the way they interpret that question is, "What societal structures should be erected so that poverty isn't the same sort of issue?"

**Links:** But isn't that how the problem is approached today?

**Dexios:** Maybe, but its differences from how the Gospel interprets the problem are profound. If you look in the Bible, poverty looms large. Where the Old Testament

theocracy had done things by force, the New Testament calls people to responsibility and generosity.

"Give to the one who asks of you" and all that. But nowhere in the Gospel is there an agenda for societal reform. There are no quasi-statist outlines for how the government should take from the rich and redistribute to the poor: Christians are told what they should do, not how the government should approach things differently.

It is not, in terms of the Gospel precepts, an improvement to go from people learning to be sons of God and in their sonship exercising almsgiving and generosity as profound and powerful spiritual discipline, to coercion that transfers other people's resources while denying them the power to choose and all but snatching from their hand most opportunities to be generous. It is apparently perceived that by thinking in the terms of secular ideologies in imitation of various secular and anti-Christian movements, the Catholic Church is growing enough to take an effective approach that will make a real difference. Or perhaps it is not growth but a failure to understand what exactly is going on in Christ's movement.

**Links:** But the New Testament is not pure capitalism.

**Dexios:** Indeed not. I operate within a capitalist system because that is where God has placed me; but that doesn't mean that I have to make capitalism my God.

**Links:** I've read that in the ancient Church there were some rather communist people who were big into selling lands and liquidating property.

**Dexios:** Yes, and they are not a support for imposing communism.

**Links:** They seem pretty communist in what they chose to me.

**Dexios:** They seem pretty communist in what they chose to me too. The Bible has high praise for people who in their sonship choose to give away everything that makes them wealthy. I've heard today about one man who gave away his Ferrari to become a monk. That discipleship is singularly beautiful, and it is not the same thing as imposing a plan that takes away other people's wealth and the opportunity to even be generous in giving it away. There are few things a capitalist community needs more than the salt and light of people who show that there are bigger things in life than wealth.

But that does not mean that the high virtue of selling one's property and giving away the proceeds should be forced and have its virtue and power flattened out. [The story of Ananias and Sapphira](#) seems to have a clear point. Ananias and Sapphira owned their property and were under no obligation to sell it. When they did sell it, although they pretended to lay all of the money at the apostles' feet they were under no obligation to donate any of it, let alone all of it. Their sin was in lying to God and saying that they had given everything when they kept something back. For that sin alone God struck them both dead. Even if the story implies something deeper about selling one's property and laying the proceeds about the apostles' point, it gets to that point by explicitly saying that there is no obligation to give. Which perhaps suggests that giving at its best is not a matter of what is required but the deiform, Christian, flowing, free virtue of generosity

which is infinitely more than duty.

**Links:** I think I am beginning to see what's wrong with thinking Acts encourages communism.

**Dexios:** I should hastily clarify that most of the Catholic social teaching I've read does not endorse communism; they take somewhat different positions but the general drift is that even though the encyclicals adopt features of socialism, socialism and communism were off limits to Catholics.

**Links:** Then why try so hard to show that the New Testament endorses voluntary giving rather than involuntary communism?

**Dexios:** Because people trying to get you to see things the Catholic social ethics say, in effect, "Why are you fussing so much about us asking for a few coercive measures to give from the rich to the poor? Can't you see that the New Testament waxes eloquent about the glory of Early Church communism, which goes much further than the modest and sensible measures we happen to ask for?" But it doesn't—perhaps Christians in their discipleship and giving went further than these social reforms would ask for; they went further in that. But the "communism" in the New Testament was a matter of voluntary discipleship and generosity, not coercion. And therefore the New Testament is a profound warrant to rising above greed and giving up possessions, but that passage at least is not a warrant for the kind of social reform it is used to endorse.

**Links:** If I can sum up what you're saying, you're saying, "Care for the poor in the Gospel is an aspect of spirit and discipleship, and by trying to institute compulsory

programs that destroy the opportunity for voluntary generosity, you're destroying the opportunity for spiritual discipleship." Correct?

**Dexios:** That is correct.

**Links:** Then what do they say to that objection? Or do they not address it?

**Dexios:** Um... that is hard to unravel. Do you want me to try?

**Links:** At least try.

**Dexios:** Are you familiar with behaviorism? Behaviorism's fallen out of favor, but it is a psychological school that dealt with how people behave after reward and punishment—but with no acknowledgment of emotions, beliefs, or other internal states—

**Links:** How does that draw people?

**Dexios:** That's not clear to me, but it was influential. At any rate, and this is the analogy I'm trying to draw, that in behaviorist teaching, people do not say, "There is no soul," but they draw the student to look at things so that the possibility of a soul is never even considered. This was said to introduce Michael Polanyi, a philosopher who worked with tacit and personal scientific knowledge. Similarly, the Catholic social ethics sources I've read do not raise the objection of sonship and voluntary giving to explicitly rebut it, but rather frame things so that concept is never even thought of or considered.

There are a couple of ways of doing this, but besides not considering it, they quote Biblical and patristic praise for voluntary giving as a straightforward example for why we should support coercive social programs. No explanation is offered; no acknowledgment is given that

giving as a matter of New Testament spiritual discipleship could be something other than a support for institutional and partly statist programs that work by coercion. Most readers, I expect, will look at things the way they're supposed to see, and think that New Testament praise of giving applies to giving through social programs.

One thing that did surprise me was that it wasn't just conservatives who were offering criticism. There were apparently some people on the left who were all for social programs and planning, but weren't entirely thrilled that the Pope was entering their domain. It might have come across as an intrusion from another domain, like advice to mathematicians on how to solve the  $3x+1$  problem.

**Links:** The  $3x+1$  problem? What's that?

**Dexios:** Take a counting number; if it's even, divide by two, but if it's odd, multiply by three and add one. If you get a calculator and keep doing this, you'll see that any number you try gives 4, then 2, then 1, then cycles back to 4, 2, 1, etc. But even though if you'll do this many times and the same thing keeps happening, it's proven obnoxiously hard to prove that the thing that happens every time you try does, in fact, happen no matter what number you start with. A lot of mathematicians have spent a lot of effort without solving it, but actually solving the problem has proven as elusive as designing a society without problems, or at least without major ones. Solving the problem will be an incredibly big deal, maybe the mathematical event of the century, should it ever be solved.

But can you imagine how the mathematical community would respond if the Vatican tried to advise it on the most productive way to try to solve the  $3x+1$  problem?

**Links:** Um... but the Papacy is not ordinarily associated with authority in mathematics. Isn't ethics a little less unusual of a thing for the Vatican to be talking about?

**Dexios:** It's not strange that a Pope was talking about ethics; the surprising thing is that the Pope was answering a question that has little in the way of spirit. Almost every little question and every specific answer in these encyclicals is about what is to be coerced. The encyclicals manage to talk about care for the poor without almost ever exhorting Catholics and the rich to be generous. The idea that caring for the poor could be an occasion for virtue has remnants here and there, but the basic substance of the answer was in terms of what coercive mechanisms should take of those who have, not how the rich should voluntarily give or how people should grow in virtue.

Spirit is not something abstract from daily decisions; it is present, among other things, in being generous to beggars and allowing your money and what you do with it to be progressively transformed into spirit. When the question of caring for the poor becomes something where one person's generosity is ridiculed and the question is framed as what should be coercively taken from people and made as a coerced gift without generosity, then an area that has much room for spirit to be manifest is drained of spirit.

Other criticisms came that papal teaching was Utopian, that it was a thinly disguised Marxism, and I

forget what else—there was one encyclical entitled "Mater et Magistra", "Mother and Teacher", and one pundit said there was something making the rounds about "Mother, yes; teacher, no." Usually the critiques came from conservatives, but there were liberals who wished the Vatican would proclaim the Gospel. Maybe I'm being naive, but it doesn't seem impossible to me that atheists who are big into social planning, and who do not believe in the Gospel, none the less think that the Pope can give something by preaching the Gospel that they with their social plans cannot. I think there's a lot of respect in that. What I would suggest is running through most, if not necessarily all, is that once upon a time the Pope used his authority to make saints, and now he seems to be exchanging his birthright for something much less, making social blueprints.

**Links:** But you must acknowledge that society is better off for such efforts, right?

**Dexios:** There is a certain set of blind spots that accompanies those assumptions; it is blind spots, I suggest, that has people look at pre-Vatican-II Catholics living in terms of spirit, giving to the world as saints, and caring for the poor in their generosity, and treat that as something murky and confused that Catholics have outgrown in the progress since Vatican II.

One of the things that comes with the social prescriptions, alongside a coercive character that stunts generosity, is that whatever the solution is, the answer is an institution, perhaps a state organization or something done by it. And no one questions whether this

is the best way to do things; one would think it was the only way conceivable. But in fact it is not the only way.

In the ancient world, a great many things that have today been transformed into big, impersonal institutions—charity, hospitality, medicine, what would today be insurance, manufacture and production, commerce, and so on and so forth—were handled by smaller and more personal institutions. I might comment by the way that it's lost on most people today is that when women were associated with the home that meant they were associated with the beating heart of charity, hospitality, manufacture, and many other things, so that the image of the depressed housewife with no company and nothing but housework to do is as anachronous to read into the ancient world as telephones or the internet: what feminism is reacting to is not the traditional society's place for women, but what is left of it after that place, and most of what is connected to it, is torn to shreds.

Even today there are some things we do not relegate to impersonal institutions—romantic love and friendship, for instance. And I don't know if there is a resurgence of home business due to the internet—perhaps certain modern changes cannot represent the last word.

But when Popes started to decide they needed a social teaching to fill out a deficiency, everything besides being coerced is filtered through impersonal institutions. And though one may see a pause once or twice to make fun of people being generous to beggars the way they did on the ancient world, the vision of progress does not stop to question whether filtering

everything through a big institution was a big idea. I haven't read through all the sources, but I haven't read anything yet that stopped to explain "Here's why John 3:16 did not say, 'For God so loved the world that he formed a sanitized, impersonal organization.'"

Perhaps I am asking society to open a door that was forever closed; the earliest encyclicals tried to resurrect medieval-style guilds, and it is not clear to me why other sources mock this decision to try to resurrect a vibrant institution that worked long and well in one time in favor of speculation about institutions not proven to work in any time. My point is not that many things are done by impersonal organization today but that when the Catholic Church opens its mouth for social teaching, no one seems to consider that anything besides an impersonal organization powered by coercion could be desirable. By contrast, our social program is spirit: God so continues to love the world that he continues to send his saints, his sons, that whosoever believes through their life of spirit and their divine love might have eternal life from his only-begotten Son. (And a million smaller and less eternal changes, too.)

**Links:** So then another way to get at the point of "Our social program is the Trinity" is to say, "The Orthodox Church's approach to living socially does not need a Utopian blueprint for society."

Would I be correct in hearing queer quotes when you use the word "progress"?

**Dexios:** I usually hear "fashions" when I read a Catholic social ethicist writing about progress. It is progress given the assumptions of a particular perspective, and

(usually) given a lack of understanding of what was moving away. Again to return to my example of deprecating pre-Vatican-II days when Catholics tried to become saints and, I would say, benefit society by becoming spirit—and the "progress" to an activist approach to society—what we have is not a movement from the less advanced to the more advanced but a fashion shift from something that has fallen out of favor to something that will presumably fall out of favor. And in this case, a step back.

**Links:** What do you mean?

**Dexios:** To borrow an image which Catholic author Peter Kreeft borrowed from C.S. Lewis, ancient ethics asked three ethical questions while modern ethics answers one (usually, but maybe two). To visualize these questions with the image of a fleet of ships at sea, the first question is how the ships can avoid bumping into each other, and this question is shared by ancient and modern ethics. The second question is how the ships can keep shipshape and maintain themselves inside, and even though this question cannot really be separated from the first question, only some modern ethics addresses it. The third question, which is the most important one, is why the ships are out at sea in the first place.

If we look at the deprecated, Orthodox model of becoming saints and being Heavenly minded enough to be of earthly good, then on a proper understanding that approach is something that says something to answer each of these questions; on that count at least, it is robust. If we look at the activist model, then things are reduced to one question, how the ships can be kept

from bumping into each other, perhaps forcibly. It does reasonably well given that narrowing of focus, but it only answers that one question.

Now I would suggest that it is dubiously a moral advance to addressing three major questions to addressing one. Perhaps moral depth cannot always be settled by counting questions addressed, but this moral "advance" has been achieved by almost completely shutting off two out of three substantial questions.

Which would appear to be not progress, but impoverishment.

**Links:** I think I can see how when you see the word "progress" you want to supply an English translation of "fashion". Or would you rather say "regress"?

**Dexios:** I don't want to analyze whether "regress" would be true, but I would rather speak of "fashion." When fashions shift, people go from emphasizing some things to others. People become sensitized to some things and blinded to others. And, perhaps, sometimes, there will be real regress some times and real progress others. But there is a tendency for a fashion to see its waxing popular as progress, and I wish people could have the ability to say, "Maybe this is progress, maybe this is regress, and maybe this is just a fashion shift that, like most fashion shifts, looks like genuine progress once you adopt its peculiar sharp sensitivities and its peculiar blind spots." And no fashion shift is devoid of spirit, but if you are looking for where spirit is to be found, the house of fashion delivers less than it promises.

**Links:** It seems to me that Utopian dreams have never been fully realized but they have been realized somewhat,

and that makes a big difference. You know that the wealthy nations may owe some of their wealth to oppression but some of it is due to the Utopian dreams of Adam Smith among others, who have discovered Midas's secret?

**Dexios:** Don't you mean Midas's curse?

**Links:** Don't you mean Midas's blessing?

**Dexios:** In the story of Midas, Midas gained the "blessing" of turning everything he touched to gold. And it was wonderful, or it seemed wonderful, to kick pebbles and watch gold nuggets fall to earth. But then food turned to inedible gold, and drink likewise, and if I understand the story correctly he embraced his daughter only to have her reduced to nothing but a golden statue. Then he began to be blessed, and spiritual gold was forged when he realized that maybe turning everything to gold wasn't such a good idea. Unfortunately, we haven't gained the same transformation to spiritual gold when we are bombarded by advertisements.

Malcolm Muggeridge said that nothing proves "Man does not live by bread alone" like discovering the secret of mass-producing bread, and we have not only enough bread for everybody but enough meat for most beggars to eat meat regularly. People say, "I'm not rich; I'm in debt," and have no idea that they can purchase a month's food without suffering real financial injury. Which, to a great many people who don't know where their next meal is coming from, might as well be the ability to buy a BMW without facing any real financial obstacles. It seems for many of us by definition rich means "having more money than us because we couldn't

possibly be rich."

**Links:** What's the downside?

**Dexios:** One U.S. woman was visiting a woman in Central America, I forget where. They were having coffee when she looked around her hostess's kitchen and met a dawning realization... "There isn't any food on your shelves."

"No... but there will be... and it's a good thing that I don't have any food now, because if I had it, why would I need to trust God for? But I will have food later..."

**Links:** We're spiritual kindergardeners, aren't we?

**Dexios:** If even that. That woman is spirit. She is sonship and sainthood. She is the [Sermon on the Mount](#), and if we patronize her when we patronize "those less fortunate than ourselves," we might also patronize St. Francis of Assisi for not knowing how to make a difference in the world. Not that I envy her poverty. But I envy her finding the [Sermon on the Mount](#) in her poverty, and it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to have what she has.

If capitalism is the most effective Utopian vision, it produces a Utopia for spoiled children. It may well deliver what the Utopian specifics in Catholic social teaching wouldn't get working, but what capitalism delivers and what much Catholic Utopianism tries to deliver does not make people better, or nobler, or wiser. In the particular classically liberal capitalist societies I know, most people have about as many creature comforts as we know how to make—air conditioning in Habitat for Humanity houses, meat for the homeless,

television for everyone who's not homeless—and medicine and safety push back suffering and death so that you have a good chance of not dying young, and many, many people die segregated off in nursing homes so the rest of society does not have to be visibly reminded that people grow old and die. Utopia is not something that may someday exist if social planners someday get things right; it exists here and now because social planners got what they were trying to do right.

**Links:** But is suffering good? Does the Bible ever talk about wonderful suffering?

**Dexios:** Let me quote:

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. [Rom 5.3-4](#). I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [Rom 8.18-9](#). For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. [I Cor 1.5-7](#). ...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the

resurrection from the dead. [Phil 3.10](#). Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. [Col 1.24](#). For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. [Heb 2.10](#). But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. [I Pet 4.13](#).

At least for people like us who live in Utopia, you can think that all the things a spoiled child wants are your right and if you are really suffering—maybe you won't be so crass as to say that any suffering is God's punishment, but you'll still think it's an interruption that keeps you from the normal course of Christian life. But honoring God in suffering is the normal course of Christian life. Besides what I quoted, there's the book of Job where God lays his honor on the line based on what Job will do when he has miserable suffering. I don't know how to capture all the complexity of the Biblical views on suffering, but if suffering is praised as a sharing in the sufferings of the Son who was made perfect through suffering, then maybe it's not doing the world a favor to engineer away suffering, even if that is possible.

It's not just that the Gospel works best without suffering and now we may have good enough social plans to get the Gospel to where it works best. I fear Catholic social plans if they botch and have weird side effects like social plans sometimes do, but I fear them

even more if they achieve what they want. Perhaps this is easy to say from Utopia, but having what Utopia provides, I have real doubts about whether it makes me spirit. In those things that most make me a mature man, I think Utopia is overrated. I may have some maturity through the discipline of going against the flow, but there's a way where comfort can make faith lukewarm where intense persecution would make it stronger.

Catholic social planning is trying to make good that is only available to a majority available to everyone. I wish they had a somewhat bigger version of good to be sharing.

**Links:** So you are suspicious of efforts to help the poor.

**Dexios:** I am suspicious of some efforts and participate in others. I try to feed the hungry, and besides directly showing kindness to beggars I support charities—but these charities provide more than a spoiled child would want. They support people's spiritual needs, like churches. I don't believe education needs to be put on quite as high a pedestal as some people give it, but I support education.

I guess I need to clarify. My point wasn't to say exactly what everybody in the world should have; when someone speaks to me out of pain, I rarely talk about pain as occasion for spiritual growth. But in Catholic social teaching people seemed to be saying "Wouldn't it be nice if people had this, and this, and this," and listed a number of things that for the most part do not make people better, or nobler, or wiser. There may be a discussion of duties alongside rights, but much of the encyclicals were about how much it would be better to

have such things, and living in a society where most people do have those sort of things, I needed to say, "This is not what you think it is."

**Links:** Is there anything specific that you would say that you want for the poor, and that you would try to help them come to it?

**Dexios:** Absolutely.

I want them to become spirit in as full a sense as possible. I want them to glorify God and enjoy him forever. I want them to live the life of Heaven that is meant to be here and now and not just after our resurrection. I want them to be transfigured, spirit, soul, and body, into the likeness of Christ, and to be little Christs. I want them to become divine, partakers of the divine nature. I want them to own the Kingdom of Heaven and live the Divine Life. And maybe it would be nice if some of them could send missionaries to the first world, to share some of their riches. And I would like the world to profit from their wealth as the poor are chosen to shame the rich. And not just to follow the vogues of the first world.

**Links:** Question: What do you think about non-Christian texts, like the Tao Te Ching, Bhagavad-Gita, or Gospel of Thomas?

**Dexios:** Um...

**Links:** You're going to say something nasty about Eastern religions, aren't you?

**Dexios:** Asking what I think about non-Christian texts like the Tao Te Ching, the Bhagavad-Gita, or the Gospel of Thomas is like asking what I think about different forms of indoor exercise, like weightlifting, aerobics,

and sticking your face in the fan.

The Tao Te Ching is spirit, and indeed words can be spirit, not just Christian words. So is the Bhagavad-Gita. From all I have heard, they are deep, deeper than a whale can dive, and they have taught healthy communities what it means to be human for thousands of years.

But a society that embraces Gnosticism sticks its face in the fan. Gnosticism unlike Hinduism and Taoism comes up again and again and each time it's a downward spiral that does not give spirit to a society that embraces it the way Hinduism and Taoism do.

**Links:** I've read some Gnostic sacred texts and they engaged my spirit like almost nothing else; they drew me in.

**Dexios:** I'm not surprised. Gnostic scripture is spiritual porn. Sorry to use that image, but...

**Links:** Are you just calling names, or is there a substantive reason for that unflattering comparison?

**Dexios:** Marriage is spirit, and it incorporates a number of things into its partnership, including what repeated studies have found is the best environment to enjoy sex. But no marriage that's lasted much longer the honeymoon has got there simply by sailing on pleasure; marriage is a crown of thorns, like monasticism, and part of the benefit it provides is not just an environment for children to grow up, but an environment for the parents to grow up. The best marriages are not a Utopia for spoiled children but a little Utopia for mature adults.

Marriage is like spirit and spirit is like marriage,

including what can be misunderstood as the spiritual erotic, a haunting, exotic factor that belongs there even if it is ultimately beyond the erotic. But that doesn't mean that exotic haunting all day long is what you should be getting. It doesn't mean, in other words, that Gnosticism is the best way to be spirit.

**Links:** Have you read the Gnostic Scriptures?

**Dexios:** I've read a good number of Gnostic sacred texts.

There are a lot of people today who've heard that the Gnostic scriptures show the human face of Jesus, and the canonical Gospels make him seem so divine he's not human. I've heard some people say that the best way to rebut that is to actually get people to read the Gnostic sacred texts, because the Gnostic sacred texts give some people what other people try to get from LSD, and their Christ is exotic and spiritual and several other things that do not include being human, not like the Jesus who wept at Lazarus' death and prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane with sweat like drops of blood—something medical that occasionally happens when people are too stressed out to possibly describe and that we do not need to explain away.

**Links:** So if people actually READ the texts they'll stop saying "Here at last is the human face of Jesus."?

Um, from the look on your face, you don't like that question.

**Dexios:** Let me draw an analogy. There was one time when some art was displayed at a coffeeshop, and some people thought it was a big deal because it showed nudity. It struck me as... maybe I haven't always been chaste in looking at nude artwork, but I honestly didn't

see what the big deal others saw. In a sense it wasn't any more exciting than a cartoonish schematic diagram; it didn't pose a problem to me because I didn't understand how the art worked.

Then... I had been looking at the art and not understanding it, and suddenly something clicked and I did understand it, and when it communicated to me... Other artwork can just celebrate the human form, if this was like a schematic diagram it was schematic and focused attention on the sexual. When it clicked, the artwork went from simply being weird to being much more seductive than what we're told a "celebration of the human form" is supposed to be.

And that is exactly what happened when I read enough Gnostic scripture. I read a little and it seemed weird. I read more and it clicked and I felt its pull. And I have been changed somewhat, and not entirely for the better.

**Links:** How could it change you?

**Dexios:** Once you have drunk from a well, you thirst for it.

**Links:** Do you really think that Gnosticism and The da Vinci Code are such a bad well to thirst for, such a bad spirit? There's more spirit in The da Vinci Code, though maybe not as you're using the term, than anything else to hit the shelves for a while. And it's well-written.

**Dexios:** I know it's well-written; after reading a bunch of Christian reports accusing it of being garbage literature, I feel its pull. I read it and to my consternation I want Mary Magdalene to be the Grail, and I seem to want to exchange a eucharistic Cup by which the Lord's blood pulses in believer's veins to

believing that there is a very dilute royal bloodline alive in a few people I haven't met, which is an exchange of gold for copper, but still something the book left me wanting. There is indeed a lot of spirit in it; it makes a good lure.

**Links:** Calling the book's good points a "lure" is harsh, if the only real thing you're going to acknowledge it is—what is it that this "lure" points to?

**Dexios:** Despair.

I was quite struck when I read a book entitled *Against the Protestant Gnostics*, written by a Protestant, by the way, and it said that Gnosticism besides being an a-historical phenomenon entirely hinged on one mood: despair.

The hope Dan Brown offers in *The da Vinci Code* is a hope of despair. It's a hope that there's some sexy secret to be had behind appearances, behind the here and now, and whatever else he may have wrong about earlier forms of Gnosticism being lovely and humane, he's dead right about digging for something deeply hidden. You may have heard that some Gnostics taught that the world around us was made by an impotent, inferior, evil God and is evil. Even if not everybody said that in so many words the here and now that God gives us is something despicable. It is something to despair in and try to get around for some good that maybe more spiritual people can find. Is this good news?

**Links:** Hmm. I'd just assumed that the worst thing about Dan Brown was his anti-Catholicism. But you're pretty critical of the Catholic Church too.

**Dexios:** Indeed, because it misses the mark. It comes close

in some ways, but it misses the mark. But Dan Brown doesn't seem hostile to the Catholic Church because of where it misses the mark, because of where it hits it.

Whatever its imperfections may be, the Catholic Church has for about two thousand years been teaching people to be human and live lives of spirit, and live them in the here and now. Whatever other fussing I may make of the Catholic Church, it would be strange of me to deny that the Catholic Church offers something better than despair. Maybe I could wish they would do a better job of it, but the Catholic Church offers hope, and not just because a recent Pope had some very uplifting words about living in hope. Hope is a very deep root in the Catholic Church, and it lends shape to all sorts of other things.

**Links:** So maybe Dan Brown doesn't offer the purest form of spirit, or maybe people would be better off if they could get to spirit in not such a despairing way. But doesn't Dan Brown deserve credit for at least getting people to devote attention to matters of spirit?

**Dexios:** There's a story where a princess is having a dreamlike meeting with her fairy grandmother many generations removed. Her nurse doesn't believe the princess's extraordinary tales about the grandmother, and when the princess wants to know, "Is it naughty of Nurse to not believe in you?" the grandmother only says, "It would be naughty of you."

Quite probably there are people for whom Dan Brown is a step up, who move from unspiritual despair to spiritual despair. Quite certainly there are people learning from better sources, such as Taoism and

Hinduism again, and are brought into spirit. And certainly I am glad that the high school students who ask, "Why go to mass?" can join monastic Catholic worship, not so much because it is monastic as because it is worship worthy of human beings. But I as Orthodox could not join them.

**Links:** Why not?

**Dexios:** Because however God deals with other people, it would be naughty of us.

God can move through non-Orthodox resources, and non-Christian ones. But when he places someone in full communion with his Church, the Orthodox Church, things that are permissible under partial communion are no longer permissible: though I am loth to speak of communion as a resource, God will work through other resources in a genuine way to people who only have those other resources, but when we have the opportunity to drink from the pure source we are not to take our substance from downstream. And it would be naughty of us, whether or not it would be naughty of others, to refuse to recognize the Orthodox Church of Christ as the fountain from which we drink.

**Links:** It would be depriving spirit of flourishing in body, wouldn't it?

**Dexios:** I know that I'd say that for Dan Brown and other people who think that being Gnostic is the hidden root of spirituality. Against these I say that spirit is a great banner that when it unfurls gives shade to people—watching, travelling, listening to music, Starbuck's—

**Links:** Starbuck's? Doesn't that, well—

**Dexios:** If you mean to purchase your identity at Starbuck's

then it will run short. But if you learn to enjoy things in the spirit, if you know there is more to life than food and drink, then an occasional treat can include Starbucks. Stewardship isn't tight-fisted, and if you don't need commercial products like some kind of sacrament, you are freed to truly enjoy them.

**Links:** But what if the way people are naturally led to approach Starbucks is as a sacrament?

**Dexios:** What if? So we live in a wealthy society. So when someone asks, "Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth?" people just hit the snooze button. So advertising is an abominable manipulation to make people covet things they don't need. If you are to live a life of spirit, then that means living a life of spirit in this economy, living simply and generously, and not laying the reins on the horse's neck. Your responsibility is to let what you buy be body where your life of spirit is manifest, and if Starbucks tries to sell you an identity, and that identity is inimical to living a life of spirit, your responsibility is still to live a life of spirit that unfurls itself in how you use wealth.

**Links:** This makes sense now that you say it, but where did you get that?

**Dexios:** That is one of the things that may, or may not, be added to us if we seek first the Kingdom of God, and it is not essential for everyone.

**Links:** Then what is essential?

**Dexios:** Spirit. Contemplation. Don't ask where to strike the balance between action and contemplation. Pursue contemplation, and don't be surprised if after a time the way God tells you to contemplate is to plant a tree.

**Links:** Where did you get "plant a tree" from?

**Dexios:** Martin Luther. When he was asked what he would do if he knew the Lord were returning tomorrow, instead of talking about praying long prayers or wailing about his sins, he simply said what he was planning on doing, which was to plant a tree. If it was really OK for him to plan to plant a tree, as he did, then there's no particular reason that if the Lord were returning the next day he should be suddenly embarrassed about legitimate, spiritual activity and try to be super-spiritual.

Contemplation seems to include a lot of planting a tree. It can mean entering a monastery, but it can also mean working a job, making friendships, shooting hoops, and playing with the neighbor's children. If we go to church, or try to cultivate a discipline of quiet, that means quite a lot of "secular" things, a "secular" body for spirit to be manifest in. And people who give up on doing big things for God often end up doing tremendous things for God as part of their contemplation.

**Links:** Huh? How does that work? Or are you just being down on activists?

**Dexios:** Ever hear about a Wesley boy trying to do serious work for God?

**Links:** No.

**Dexios:** One of the Wesley brothers believed that missionaries were the biggest super-Christians, and so got everything arranged to be a big missionary for God.

And then he hit rock bottom. He failed as a missionary, returned a failure, and then fell lower than rock bottom when, on the ship, there was a terrible

storm, and he was afraid for his life and puzzled about why there were men on deck singing. When he asked them if they were afraid, they said that no, they were not afraid, because they believed in Jesus. That finished him.

Only after that happened did he become one of the biggest forces in American Christianity.

**Links:** You make God sound cruel.

**Dexios:** If you expect God to share an activist mentality then God looks very cruel, but God isn't a secular activist. This wasn't even a social justice issue; Wesley said "God, I'll be a really good hammer and do really impressive work," and if anything, God said, "I don't want a hammer. I want a son." People who try to be activists sometimes make the best sons after they fail as activists, but the reason God didn't endorse Wesley's plan about how he was going to make a difference was that God makes a difference through people, and however big and important the work is that needs to be done, God makes sons first and foremost, and never circumvents sonship to "cut to the chase" and get to the important part, because to him sonship is the important part, and he can equip people to do results once they fail as hammers if need be.

There's a big difference between "I'll do the best I can" and "I'll lay myself before God and work as he is at work." The difference is whether your power is a matter of spirit. There was a visiting African pastor who came to the U.S. and said, "It's amazing what you can do without the Holy Spirit;" that stinging compliment is one God's sons need not hear. The

[Sermon on the Mount](#) says more about where our power should come from than what we should achieve; the Gospel is about trusting God, not just about the fate of our souls but getting things done here on earth. It's challenging and it becomes all the more challenging when you realize how broken of a world we live in.

And perhaps God also does things through people who think they know how mountains are moved here on earth and try to short-circuit God's call to become a son like his Son. God could still work with them if they more fully spirit. Spirit has its own power in God.

**Links:** Let me change the subject, or maybe I'm not changing the subject. Where do the seven sacraments fit into this?

**Dexios:** Baptism, Holy Communion, Holy Matrimony, the Sign of the Cross, reverently Bowing, the Holy Kiss, and the Blessing of Fruit—

**Links:** —that's a rather strange list of seven sacraments!

**Dexios:** It seems perfectly natural to me. If it seems strange to you, then perhaps there's something you don't understand about the usual list. Holy Communion, Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Ordination, Marriage, and Unction for Healing are not the Seven Exceptions. They may be the biggest seven—but you don't understand them until you realize that there's either one sacrament or a thousand, and that a thousand little things in our piety are the same sort of thing as The Big Seven. Like blessing fruit to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Transfiguration!

**Links:** But why bless fruit then? Do you also bless candles to celebrate the Annunciation?

**Dexios:** I'd have to look up when we bless candles, but it does not seem strange to me to bless fruit. The Transfiguration is not just when the Son of God shone, but it is specifically when his body, the first of the material world to be drawn into spirit, shone. It was a first taste of the Transfiguration when the rest of his kingdom comes in force, and the Holy Transfiguration of Christ ultimately becomes the holy transfiguration of the whole Creation, and its fruits. Today people might pick something else to represent Creation's productivity, but grapes and fruit come from Creation and are a part of it, and in a sense by blessing fruit on the Feast of the Holy Transfiguration we know what it means, that it's not just something way back when that's only about Christ, but about something that is meant to expand through the whole Creation of which Christ is head. Just as Christ is to be the first of many sons and draw mankind into him, so his body is the first case of matter drawn into the divine, of body that is spirit, and his coming was the beginning of a shockwave that keeps reaching out.

**Links:** So is the Transfiguration a big enough deal that it's worth adorning with a sacrament, like many other holidays.

**Dexios:** That makes it sound like something external. The spirit of the Transfiguration is the spirit of sacrament, and of icons. I've said earlier that spirit transforms body, or should; now I'll go further and say that God makes us spirit through body. If you try to understand Holy Communion and ask the wrong questions, you're in danger of stopping at learning what happens after the

priest has consecrated the elements, even though it's important that the bread and wine have become the body and blood of Christ they represent. That's only half the story. The rest of the story is when this bread and wine that have become the body and blood of Christ are partaken by the faithful, and the faithful are transformed. Our bodies are not a mere ornament as we partake of the divine nature; we partake of the Church and Creation, and the divine life, precisely when we receive what has been transformed that it may transform us. God makes us spirit through not only our bodies but his material creation: the Word became flesh, and the flesh became Word, and the Word keeps becoming flesh, and the flesh keeps becoming Word, and the shockwave ever reaches outward.

**Links:** And the Church has a lot of blessings, from a traveller's blessing to blessing Pascha baskets, doesn't it? And there are many sacred actions as we say our prayers, aren't there? I imagine if you counted all the sacramental rites and sacred actions you'd actually wind up with more than the figure of one thousand that you grabbed.

**Dexios:** But the nature of a sacrament doesn't really end up there. Ultimately the world is icon and sacrament. A man is the microcosm of the universe, but you have to understand that the "universe" is the spiritual as well as physical world, and that "microcosm" means that the spiritual and physical are all bound up in miniature. In a man who is spirit, they are more tightly bound together: you can look at most people's faces and if they're not masking then you can see into their spirit; spirit and

body do not war against each other. And if you understand how our bodies are in fact the bodies of our spirits, and our spirits are the spirits of our bodies, then you understand that in "man writ large", the universe that is the opposite of man the microcosm, then matter is pregnant with spirit.

Perhaps the crowning jewel is the kind of rite over which a priest presides. It is a crowning jewel of the warp and woof of "mundane" life, if life is ever "mundane" properly understood. For one example, you may have heard of the clergy shortage in Alaska: something like a third of the state population is Orthodox but there are precious few priests. And a congregation asked the bishop what to do as they cannot often have a priest to worship. The bishop said only two things. One of them I will not mention. The other was to eat together.

Holy Communion casts a long shadow. Part of this means that a priest can bless fruit and anyone can partake of it, and maybe there's a blessing even if it's not a big deal as the Eucharist. But you're missing something if that's the only place you look.

A meal with other people is part of the Eucharist unfurling. It's not directly the Eucharist, but if you understand what the Eucharist is then a common meal stands in its luminous shadow. The bishop's advice was not simply a substitute for imperfect times; even when there is a priest it is good for the Eucharist to unfurl into a common meal, and however nice it is for the priest to bless the food that's not all that is going on. Table fellowship is common communion and "common"

conceals a wealth of majesty. It's not a really different thing from the Eucharist.

**Links:** [pause] It seems like I want to learn it all. What else is there to learn?

**Dexios:** Not to learn everything. You can learn about the priest, whose role I haven't covered, but what I've said about us needing monks applies even more strongly to one person given over to be spirit in a way that helps others be spirit. There is spiritual discipline, which almost as many different shapes as sacrament—I haven't talked about fasting: the demons always fast but only someone like us with body and spirit can be transformed and have his body become spirit by fasting. I haven't talked about—  
If you want to become more spirit, why don't you think of an act of spirit and do that?

# The Steel Orb

I awoke, seared by pain. The images dispersed. What were they?

a flat rectangular courtyard, where brick pillars enshrined a walkway, and in the center was a great pool, filled not with water but with silt impressed with intricate patterns—a place that was silent and still, cool in the shade, with robed men moving slowly and conversing without breaking the stillness

alleys and courtyards and tunnels and passageways that made for a labyrinth, with a byzantine structure only exceeded by turgid forms beneath its surface—I was moving through it before I had grasped its rhythm

a vortex, draining life and beauty, draining the life out of—there was also a single grain of incense, its fragrance filling—there had been a storm, with wind and water and lightning moving faster than I could keep pace with, a storm, a storm—then I awoke.

I had washed up on a beach, barely conscious, torn by thirst. I did not see the city in the distance; I saw only a man, clad in a deep blue robe. I tried to call out to him, but I was torn by violent coughs.

Then the scene blurred, and I passed out of consciousness.

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When I regained consciousness, I was in a room. There was a man whose hand was on my heart; he looked familiar, I thought.

A woman handed him a cup, which he placed to my lips.

Time passed. I could feel warmth and coolness moving through me. My thoughts slowly quickened. He reverenced me, making on himself the great sign, bowing, and kissing me. I went to stand, but he held me down. "Take a time of rest now. In a day I will introduce you to the city."

I looked at him. The blue robe looked familiar. A question did not arise in my mind; I only wondered later that I did not ask if he had been expecting me, or if he knew I wanted to be a Teacher. Something in his repose kept the question from arising.

The woman looked at me briefly. "My name is Pool. What languages do you know?"

If anything, I sank further back into my chair. I wished the question would go away. When she continued to listen, I waited for sluggish thoughts to congeal. "I... Fish, Shroud, Inscription, and Shadow are all languages that are spoken around my island, and I speak all of them well. I speak Starlight badly, despite the fact that they trade with our village frequently. I do not speak Stream well at all, even though it is known to many races of voyagers. I once translated a book from Boulder to Pedestal, although that is hardly to be reckoned: it was obscure and technical, and it has nothing of the invisible subtlety of 'common' conversation. You know how—"

The man said, "Yes; something highly technical in a matter you understand is always easier to translate than children's talk. Go on."

"And—I created a special purpose language," I said, "to try to help a child who couldn't speak. I did my best, but it didn't work."

I still don't understand why not. And I—" I tried to think, to remember if there were any languages I had omitted. Nothing returned to my mind.

I looked down and closed my eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm not very good with languages."

The woman spoke, and when I looked up I noticed her green veil and the beautiful wrinkles about her eyes. "You novices think you know nothing and need to know everything. When I was near your point in life, I knew only six tongues, and I'm still only fluent in four." She revered me, then stepped out the window. Her husband followed, although their spirits still seemed to blow in the wind through the window.

I fell into a deep and dreamless sleep, and I awoke with a start. The man was just stepping into the window, and I could hear a clink of silver. "Will you come to the marketplace? I want you to find the Galleria."

He still had not told me his name, nor I mine, but as we walked, I told him about the great storm; it was wild on land but wilder at sea. He wondered that I survived the storm, let alone that I washed up; he quoted the proverb, "Where the wind blows, no one knows." We came to a merchant with dried fruits; he looked at some oranges. "Have you seen Book since you came back?"

"Yes, but I didn't get to talk with him long."

"What did he say?"

"He only said two things. The first was, 'Put my little daughter down!' Then the second was... let me see if I can remember. He began to say, 'No, don't throw her in the—' But I couldn't hear the rest of what he hoped to say, because he threw a bucket of salt water at me. Which reminds me, I don't have salted fish today, but I have some of the finest oranges

from the four corners of the world. This orange grew in an orchard where it is said that the trees once bore jewels. I could sell you this fine assortment for two silver pieces each."

My host sounded astonished. "Two silver pieces each? You are a dear friend, of much more value than the wares you sell. I doubt if you paid two silver pieces for this whole lot of fruit—look at this one! It must have rotted before it was dried. I can talk a bit, but I'm only buying wheat today." He turned away.

The merchant grabbed his arm. "Don't go yet. I'll give you a friend's price." I think he said something else impressive, but their haggling could not hold my interest. The market was pungent with strange smells. I recognised the smell of spices, but what else was there? Something strange. I could hear a tantalizing sound of gears, but that was not it. There was a soft sound of wind. What was evading my mind?

I realised my host was walking, holding a bag with some dried oranges. I hastened to follow him.

"My name is Fortress," he said.

"I am Unspoken."

"Unspoken... That's an ambiguous name. You seem to be shrouded in mystery. Have you seen the Galleria?"

We stopped in the Temple, drinking the flow of chant and incense, and reverencing the holy icons. Then we walked out. Fortress showed me a hedge maze in a public park, with a great statue in the centre. I looked at the pedestal, and something caught my eye. "There's a passage down hidden in the pedestal to the statue. Where does it go?"

He laughed. "You're subtle."

I waited for him to continue.

He remained silent.

I asked him, "Will it help me find the Galleria?"

He said, "It helps me find the Galleria. It will only distract you from it. The far wall of the pedestal opens to a passage down, but it only reaches a network of caves where boys play.

There is nothing in there that will interest you."

"Then what," I asked, "am I to do to find the Galleria?"

"Why don't you search? The Galleria is not outside the boundaries of this little labyrinth. Only beware of the first solution you want to latch onto. That is often a distraction, and if you are to find a solution you are looking for, you need to be able to grasp something slippery in a place you are not looking."

I knocked on earth with my ear to the ground; I looked at the cracks between stones; I even scraped a piece of chalk someone had left on the stones, trying to see if its trace would show me a different stone. I found a few loose items; someone had forgotten a brush, and I pushed a lot of earth aside. I searched and searched, but I found no sign of a passage, no sign of anything unusual save the echoes of a hollow shaft in the stone beneath the statue. It was easy for me to find the mechanism to open the pedestal; indeed, I saw a boy emerge from it. I looked around near the statue: could I be missing a second passage nearby? Yet here the search was even more frustrating.

Fortress gave me a slice of orange, and I searched, hot, parched, the whole day through. I was near the point of tears; nothing in the ground offered the faintest trace of a way down.

I sat back in desolation. I rested my back against a hedge; I could see the sleepy sun's long golden fingers sliding across the hedge. I closed my eyes for a few minutes to rest; I opened my eyes, and could see that the sun's fingers had shifted. My bleak eyes rested on a funny bulge in the hedge. That was odd; it looked almost as if—I stared. Standing out from the hedge, illuminated in stark relief, was a bas-relief sculpture.

Someone in a robe—what color robe?—swam in the ocean. He swam down, down, down, down, deeper than a whale can dive, and still deeper. Something about the picture filled me with cool, and I began to see through it, began to see the web that it was—I felt a touch on my head. "You've found the Galleria. Would you like to go home now?"

I looked. Past Fortress I saw another picture of a swordsman wielding the great Sword, slicing through darkness and error. The Sword swung around him, slicing through monsters around him, and then with no less force slicing through the monsters inside him. I could see—what? It hurt him to cut at errors inside him, but he wielded the Sword against the darkness without and within. I looked entranced.

"Stand up." Fortress was looking at me. "You've seen enough for now; I normally only look into one picture, and you have looked into two after finding the entrance into the Galleria. We will see more of the city later; now, you are tired."

It wasn't until I began walking home that I realized how exhausted I was. I ate my meal in silence, lay in my bed, and sunk into sleep. I awoke, still tired, and was relieved when Fortress told me that he had one proper lesson for me but he would need several days' mundane work for me after that, and it would be a while before anything else exciting happened.

There was one workroom, one that had a forge, an unstable stack of cups with gears and levers, and a box of silt for drawing. There were several mechanical devices in various states of disassembly; Fortress picked up one of them, and turned a crank. I could see gears turning, but the white bird on top moved very erratically.

Fortress looked at me. "Does it work?"

"Not very well."

"What part is causing the problem?"

I turned the device over in my hands, pushed and pulled at one axle, and turned the crank. After some time, I said, "This gear here isn't connecting. It's worn and small."

"So if I replace that gear, it will work better?"

I hesitated and said, "No."

"Then what is the problem?"

"The entire device is loose. The teeth aren't really close enough anywhere; there's room for slipping."

"Then is that one gear the problem?"

"No. It is only the easiest thing to blame."

"Then you did not help yourself or me by telling me that it was that one gear."

I opened my mouth to protest, but he held up his hand and said, "People will often ask you treacherous questions like that, and they usually won't know what it is that they're doing. A Teacher, such as you seem to want to be—"

"How did you know I wanted to be a Teacher?"

"How could I not know you wanted to be a Teacher? A Teacher, such as you seem to want to be—" he continued, "gives an answer that will help the other person, even if that answer is not expected, even if the other person doesn't want to hear it."

Fortress shook the clockwork and said, "What would make it work?"

I said, "You could replace all the gear heads with something larger?"

He said, "What if you couldn't do that? What if the gear heads were made of delicately crafted gold?"

I hesitated, and said, "I can't think of anything that would help."

"Anything at all?"

I hesitated again, and said, "If you made the casing smaller, it would work. But how would you—"

He reached down and pulled two metal plates, plus some other hardware and tools, setting them before me. I took the tools, disassembled the original device, and reassembled the new device with a slightly smaller frame.

It worked perfectly.

He asked, "Is there any way for the bird to bob up and down, as well as turn?"

I tried to think of how to answer him, but this time I really could think of nothing. My sense of mental balance, my sense that my understanding was big enough to encompass his Lesson, was wavery. I was unsure.

He took a metal rule, and smoothed the surface of the silt inside the box. He then began drawing with a stylus.

"What if the rod were not solid, but had a cam and inner workings like this? Wouldn't that work?"

I looked at him, slightly dazed. "You must be a great metalworker. Can you do that?"

He paused a moment and said, "I might be a great metalworker, and I might be able to do that, but that is not why I am asking. Would it work?"

"Yes."

"Could you make it roll?"

"Yes. Put it in a hollow round casing and then it would roll as part of the casing."

He laughed and said, "Could you have the front move forward and the back stay in place—without it breaking?"

I cleared the silt's surface, and began to work diagrams—rejecting several as they failed, working one almost to completion—and then saying, "But that would require a shell that

is both strong and elastic, and I have not heard of any who can make a shell like that."

He seemed unconcerned. "But would it work?"

"If I had such a shell, yes, it would work."

"Then you have created it. Could you make one that gives birth to another like itself?"

I sketched a descending abyss of machines within machines, each one smaller than its parent.

"Could you make one that gives birth to another machine, just like itself?"

"Yes, if they were all constantly expanding. By the time a child gave birth, it would be the size of its parent when the child gave birth."

He seemed impressed, not only at what I said, but at how quickly. He closed his eyes, and said, "I will only ask you one more question. How would you design a machine that could design machines like itself?"

I looked at him, at the disassembled machines, at the silt, and then to a place inside myself. "I can't, and I can't learn now."

He looked at me, opened his mouth, and closed it. He said, "We can move to another Lesson. For now, I want you to look at the gears, separating the worn ones from the ones that are new, so that I can melt down the worn ones. You've got a meticulous day ahead of you."

He left, and I began to work through the gears. The work began to grow monotonous. He returned with a leather sack over his shoulder. "I just acquired a number of broken clockwork devices which I want you to disassemble and separate into parts that are usable and parts that need to be melted down. I'll be back shortly with some metal to melt down and forge new gears out of." He set down the sack, and I looked in disbelief at the

intricate machines with innumerable small parts. I had a bleak sense of how long a stretch of dullness was ahead of me. I started to lay them out so I could disassemble them.

He returned, holding a pike in his hands. "You seem strong, and you've had some time to recover. Come with me. Thunder has spotted a bear."

---

Fortress stood, armed with a sword, a crossbow, and several quarrels. He had given the pike to me; we followed several other men and spread out into the woods. Fortress told me, "I want you just to search, and cry out if you see the bear—we'll come. Don't attack the bear; just set the pike if it charges, and run once it's hit. I think you have a good chance of noticing the bear. Don't take any unnecessary risks."

We spread out, and I moved along, my feet slipping noiselessly on the forest soil. It was more of an effort than it should have been; my body seemed to move with all the fluidity of sludge.

The forest looked more rugged than usual; the storm which almost killed me had torn through the forest, and the storm's mark was far heavier on the forest than the city. I thought of the saying that a storm is liquid fire.

I looked at a tree that had fallen. The dead tree had broken a branch on another tree, and left an unpleasant wound. I cut the hanging branch with my pike, to leave better wound. Then I placed my hand on the tree to bless it, and left it to heal.

I thought of how the hunt would go. Someone would see it, then the men would gather. Those the bear faced away from would fire a volley of arrows. Those it chased would run while others taunted it. When the hunters left the city, there was an edge of excitement; I don't think it would be the same if it were not risky.

I continued to move along noiselessly, and looked for a creek. I was thirsty. I blessed another tree, hoping it would heal: the storm had left some rather impressive wreckage. It was dead silent, and when I cut a damaged branch from a third tree, two things happened. First, I heard a babbling brook, and realized how parched I was. Second, part of my pike caught on the tree,

and I couldn't wrest it free.

Leaving the pike for a moment, I stole away from the tree and refreshed myself at the brook. I sat for a moment and rested, breathing in simple joy. Then I heard a stick snap on the other side of a rocky outcropping. I realised I could hear some very loud pawprints.

I slithered up the rock, and looked around. I saw nothing. Then I looked down, and saw the biggest bear of my life.

It looked around.

It smelled.

I held tight against the rock.

Something under my right hand moved noiselessly. My fingers wrapped around a large stone, the size of a man's skull.

Fear flowed through me. And excitement. I lifted the rock, slowly, noiselessly, and brought my legs in. I lifted the rock. I felt with my left hand, and found a rock the thickness of my wrist. A flick of my wrist, and it crashed thirty cubits away.

The bear turned its head, and began to run.

As it ran, I jumped.

I began to fall.

I could see the forest moving as if it had almost stopped. Between every beat of my heart, a thousand things happened. I landed on the bear's back, astride it as if I were riding it.

Immediately the bear tensed, and began to turn.

The rock, still in my hand, crushed the bear's skull.

I could hear a crunch, and the bear's body suddenly went limp.

My hand released the stone.

The stone began to fall, about to roll over on my leg and crush me.

My hand caught a thin branch from a tree.

I pulled my legs up and pulled the branch as hard as I could.  
I tore it off.

The bear's body turned.

Something slapped my other palm.

I pulled with all my strength, and my body lifted from the  
bear.

The bear hit the ground.

I looked around.

Most hunting parties killed a bear every few years.

I had heard of a warrior who had killed a bear alone.

I had never heard of someone kill a bear with only the  
weapons the forest provided.

I lowered myself to the ground.

I watched the bear breathe its last.

I shouted with a roar like a storm's fury.

Other men began to arrive. Their jaws dropped when they saw  
me standing over the bear's carcass—empty-handed.

Fortress walked up to me.

I smiled, with a smile of exhilaration such as I had never  
smiled before.

He looked into me, looked at all the other men, then curled up  
his hand and slapped me.

The slap resounded.

I touched my face in disbelief. I could feel hot blood where  
his nails had struck me.

"You disobeyed," he said.

He looked into me.

"Next time you do that," he continued, "it will be a bear's  
claw that slaps you. I don't know what the bear will look like, but  
it certainly will be a bear's claw that slaps you."

---

I feigned happiness as I walked back. I tried not to stomp. It seemed an age before I came back to the house; I climbed up the wall and into my room and sat on my bed, furious. The sounds of jubilation around me did not help.

He came up, and said, "We've been invited to visit someone while people are building a fire."

A man was at the entryway; I followed him, and my hosts, through some streets into a room. There was something odd, it seemed; I could not have thought of this at the time, but while the other people paid no heed to my anger, but all of the people with me subdued their joy. Suddenly we walked in a door, and I saw a beautiful girl, holding a clay tablet and a stylus. The whole world seemed brighter.

Fortress said, "How is our lovely ventriloquist?"

She looked at him as if her face were melting. I looked at Fortress, and he raised his hand slightly. He would tell me the story later.

The man exchanged reverences with me and said, "Welcome, bear slayer. My name is Vessel. My daughter is Silver, and my wife is Shadow. Find a place to sit. Will you have a glass of wine?" His wife unstopped a bottle.

The girl said, "Father Dear, will you tell us a story? You tell us the best stories."

I said, "Please. I miss listening to a good storyteller."

Vessel said, "In another world, there was a big forest on an enormous mountain. There were plants that grew gems as their flowers, only they were so rare it would be easier to take the gems from a mine—and people didn't harvest them, because the plants were so beautiful. It would have been a sacrilege.

"There was a dark stone hut, round as a leaf, and in it a

Teacher as old as the mountains, with wisdom deep as its mines. He had a gravelly voice, like a dull and rusty iron dagger slowly scraped across granite. He—"

Silver interrupted. "Bear slayer, some time you must listen to my father sing."

The man continued as if nothing had been said. "The forest was rich and verdant, and every morning it was watered by a soft rain."

At the sound of the word "rain," I suddenly felt homesick. It rained frequently on my island, but here—I had not seen rain at all.

Silver said, "Rain is a natural wonder that happens when a great ball of grey wool, lined with cotton of the purest white, sails in the Abyss and drops packets of water. Apparently this wonder has been seen in this city, though not within the time it would take a mountain to be ground to dust. This did not stop my father from making a tub on the top of our roof, putting sealed pipes down, so that he could pour water from a pipe in our room if Wind were ever silly enough to blow some of that grey wool over this city."

Vessel placed a hand over his daughter's mouth and continued. "He was a many-sided sage, learned in arts and wisdom. Among the things he crafted were a ferret, so lifelike you could believe it was real. If you forcefully squeezed both sides, it would walk along in its own beautiful motion."

Silver pulled her Father's hand down and said, "I think I saw one of those wonders from a travelling street vendor. I looked at some of the craftsmanship and heard some of the gears turning. It must have been made by someone very competent, probably not someone from this city. That didn't stop Father Dear from

—"

The man stood up swiftly, flipping his daughter over his shoulder, and walked into the hallway. Shadow said, "That story didn't last long, even for our family. May I serve you some more wine?"

Vessel walked out, holding a key. "Please excuse the disturbance. I have locked Silver in her room. As I was—"

Silver slid through the doorway, stretching like a cat waking from its sleep, and ostentatiously slid two metal tools into a pouch in her sleeve. "I'm disappointed, Father Dear. Normally when we have guests, you at least put something heavy in front of the door."

Some time later, I saw Vessel and Silver sitting together. Pool, Silver, and Shadow had left, and I could hear the warm rhythm of women's talk and laughter from a nearby room. Fortress said, "We were waiting for you. The other hunters have pulled the bear in. Come to the roast!"

I wanted to ask them something, but there were more footfalls outside. I could already hear the drummers beginning to beat out a dance, the singers with their lyres, the priests with their merry blessings, the game players, and the orators with their fascinating lectures. It was not long before we were at the city center.

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A young man pulled me off to the side; I saw, on a cloth on the ground, what looked like several pieces of a puzzle. "And now," another man said, "you push the pellet in, and fit the pieces together." He moved his fingers deftly, and I could see what looked like an ordinary crossbow bolt.

"What is that?" I said.

"Let me show you," he said, handing me a cocked crossbow.

"Do you see that bag of sand on the roof?"

"Yes."

"Shoot it."

I slowed down, took aim, waited for the target to come to the right place, then fired the crossbow. There was an explosion, and I felt something sting my face. When I realized what was happening, I could feel sand falling in my hair.

I looked at him, confused, and he said, "It's an explosive quarrel. The head contains a strong explosive."

"Why was the shaft made of puzzle pieces? I don't see what that added to the explosion."

He laughed. "The pieces fly out to the sides, instead of straight back at you. It's quite a powerful explosion—you might find it a safer way to kill a bear."

I made a face at him, but I was glowing. So these people knew already that I had killed the bear.

I spoke to one person, then another, then heard people clapping their hearts and calling out, "Speech! We want a speech from the bear-slayer!"

I stood, at a loss for words, then listened for the Wind blowing—but I heard only my name. I listened more, but heard nothing. Then I said, "I am Unspoken," and then the Wind blew through me.

"I am Unspoken," I continued, "and I love to peer into unspoken knowledge and make it known, give it form, or rather make its form concretely visible. Each concrete being, each person, each tree, each divine messenger, is the visible expression of an idea the Light holds in his heart, and which the Light wants to make more real. And his presence operates in us; he is making us more real, more like him, giving us a more concrete form. You know how a creator, making art or tool or book, listens to what a creation wants to see, wrestles with it and at the same time bows low before it, sees how to make it real; that is how the Light shines in us. And when we listen to the Unspoken and give it voice, we are doing what a craftsman does, what the Light does with us. How do we give voice to an unspoken idea, an unspoken expression? We can't completely do so; what we can say is always a small token of what we cannot say. But if the Wind is blowing through us, we may make things more visible." I continued at length, turning over in my spirit the ideas of tacit knowledge and invisible realities, visible, and the divine act of creation reproduced in miniature in us. I traced an outline, then explored one part in great detail, then tied things together. When my words ended, I realised that the Wind had been blowing through me, and I felt a pleasant exhaustion. The festivities continued until we greeted the dawn, and I slept through most of the next day.

All this excitement made my chores in the workshop an almost welcome relief. It began to wear thin, though, after perhaps the third or fourth consecutive day of dismantling tiny devices and then staring at tiny gear teeth to see if they were too worn to use. I began to grow tired of being called 'bear-slayer'—was there nothing else to know about me?—and there was an uneasy silence between Fortress and me about what I had done. He did

not mention it; why not? I was afraid to ask.

I worked through each day, and had an hour to my own leisure after the songs at vespers. Mostly I walked around the city, exploring its twists and passageways. It was on one of these visits that I heard a whisper from the shadows, beckoning. It sounded familiar.

"Who is it?" I said.

The voice said, "You know me. Come closer."

I waited for the voice to speak. It, or rather she, was alluring.

I stepped forward, and sensed another body close to my own.

A hand rested lightly on my shoulder.

"Meet me here tomorrow. But now, go home."

As I walked home, I realized whose voice it was, and why I didn't recognize it. It was someone memorable, but she had changed somehow, and something made me wary of the change. Yet I wondered. There was something alluring about her, and not just about her.

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The following morning, Fortress looked into me and said, "No."

Then he left me in the workshop, and I was torn as I sifted through the day's parts. I was trying to understand my intuitions—or at least that's what I told myself. What I didn't tell myself was that I understood my intuitions better than I wanted to, and I was trying to find some way of making what I understood go away. I touched my cheek, and felt the healing wounds. Then I made up my mind to stay in the building that night.

Evening came, and I realised how long I'd been sitting one place. So I got out, and began walking the other way—just a short distance, to stretch my legs. Then I remembered a beautiful building in the other direction, and I walked and walked. Then I remembered something I had overheard—Fortress's first rebuke had not been everything it seemed. And I found myself in the same place, and felt a soft hand around my wrist. As we walked, and as I could feel my heart beating harder, the ground itself seemed to be more intense. I followed her through twisted passageways, then climbed down several rungs to a place barely lit by candlelight. A strange scent hung around the air. There was something odd, but I could not analyse what. I saw a man in a midnight blue robe bow deeply before me.

"Welcome, Bear Slayer. You did right to kill the bear."

"How did you know—" I began.

"Never mind that. You did the right thing. Fortress is a fine man and a pillar of the community, and we all need him picking apart devices, day after day—or has he asked you to take that task so he can do something interesting? Never mind. Fortress is a fine man, but you are called to something higher. Something deeper."

My heart pounded. I looked. He looked at me with a gesture

of profound respect, a respect that—something about that respect was different, but whenever I tried to grasp what the difference was, it slipped out of my fingers.

"Your name is indeed Unspoken, and it is truer than even he knows. You were touching an unspoken truth when you left your pike and attacked the bear."

I couldn't remember any unspoken Wind, or any sense of good, when I disobeyed, and I was excited to learn that what I wanted to remember was true.

"And I have many things to teach you, many lessons. You were not meant to be staring at gear after gear, but—"

It seemed too good to be true, and I asked him, "When will I be able to begin lessons?"

He said, "You misunderstand me. I will teach you. But go back to him; you have learned enough for tonight. My lessons will find you, and show you something far greater than sorting gear after gear, a power that—but I say too much. Go. I will send for you later."

My stomach was tight. I was fascinated, and trying not to realise that something wanted to make me retch. "But please," I said. My voice cracked.

The man shook his head.

I said, "At least tell me your name."

"Why do you ask my name?"

I heard a sound of a blade being drawn, and a crowd parted to reveal a man holding an unsheathed sword. "Clamp! Do not send him out yet!"

The man who had spoken to me drew a dagger, his face burning red. "Poison! How dare you!"

"How dare I? You should not have held the place of glory to begin with. You—"

"Do you challenge me?"

"I do."

What happened next I am not completely sure of. Part of it I could not even see. But what I did see was that Poison was great enough a swordsman to make a mighty swing in a tight room.

I saw him swing.

Then I saw Clamp raise his dagger to parry.

Then I heard a high pitched shattering sound.

Then there was a flurry of motion, and Clamp fell over, dead.

In his hand was a sword hilt, and nothing more.

Clamp turned to me, and said with surprising sweetness, "Do come back, my child. Fortress is a fine man, and no doubt he will teach you many important things. We will see each other later."

I was almost dumbfounded. I stammered, "How did you—

What kind of power lets you—"

He bowed again, very deeply. "Farewell to you. We will meet again."

"Please."

"You need sleep. You have a long day ahead of you."

I stood in place, then slowly walked out. I was elated when I heard his voice call after me, "If you really must know something... Everything you have been told, everything you believe, is wrong. Illusion. You just began to cut through the Illusion when you killed the bear. 'Wisdom is justified by her children.' But don't try to understand the Illusion—it is a slippery thing, profoundly unspoken, and we will see each other soon enough. I'll find you; my classroom is everywhere. Do sleep well. Fortress is a fine man, worthy of respect and worthy to teach you, and I do not doubt he will teach you many exciting and important things."

I walked back, my heart full of recent happenings. I got into

bed, and pretended to sleep.

That morning, I felt like my body was made of frosty sludge. I got up, and when Fortress looked at me, I forced myself to bow to him.

That was the last time I bowed to him in a long while, or indeed showed him reverence of any sort. I resented it even then.

I resented the day's sweeping and cleaning, but some of my thoughts congealed. Some of my unspoken thoughts began to take solid form. The respect I had been shown—it was different from the respect I was used to. It meant something different, something fundamentally different. It said, "From one noble soul to another." And the place of meeting was devoid of any adornment, any outer beauty. It had the sense of a place of worship, but as a place it was empty, almost as if it were irrelevant to—there was another thought in the back of my mind, but I could not grasp it.

That night, I thought I heard the sound of Fortress crying. I smiled and slept soundly.

---

The next morning, Fortress said, "Unspoken, you've seen a lot of gears, but I don't think I've shown you how to make a cam. Cams are terrifically interesting, both in terms of making them and what you can make with them. I'd like to show you how to make cams, then some intriguing devices that use cams. Thank you for the sorting you've done; we should be able to pull exactly the parts we need. Let me heat up the fire, and then we can both work together." He looked at me, and seemed surprised at the boredom in my face. We did exactly what he said, and I made several new types of cam, one of which he really liked. There was wind blowing in my ear, but I couldn't open up and listen to it—I merely wondered that this new activity was even duller than sorting broken parts.

At the end of the day, I said, "When are we going to have a Lesson? I mean a real one?"

He looked at me, held his breath, and said, "I can only think of one Lesson for now. It is not one that you would like."

I said, "Please?"

He said, "Humility is the hinge to joy and the portal to wonder. Humility is looking at other things and appreciating them, instead of trying to lift yourself up by pushing them down. If you push things down, that is the road to misery. Pride pushes things down, and it cuts it off the one thing that could bring joy.

"You are seeking joy where joy is not to be found. Seek it elsewhere, and it will find you."

I hastened out to the street.

Once on the street, I went where I had gone before, but no one reached out to me. I explored, and found several people talking, gardens, statues, and a bookstore I'd not seen before, but there was nothing that interested me. Where was Clamp?

I went back home, and Fortress said, "Have you heard of the Book of Questions?"

I feigned interest. "I've heard about it, and it sounded fascinating," I said, truthfully. "I'd like to hear what you can tell me," I lied.

"I was just thinking about one of the questions, 'What is reverence?'"

"There are three things that we do when we reverence each other. We make on ourselves the great sign, and we bow before each other, and we kiss each other.

"The Sign of the Cross is the frame that sets the display of reverence in place. We embrace each other in the Cross's mighty shadow.

"Bowling is the foundation of all civilized discourse. When we bow, we lower ourselves before another; we acknowledge another's greatness. That is the beating heart of politeness; that is the one reason why politeness is immeasurably more than a list of social rules.

"A kiss is everything that a bow is and more. A kiss is a display of reverence, and of love. Do you know why we kiss on the mouth?"

I looked at him, not seeing his point. "What do you mean? Where else would one kiss?"

"I have travelled among the barbarian lands, and there are tribes where a kiss on the mouth is the sort of thing that should be saved for one's wife, or at most one's family." He must have seen the look on my face; he continued, "No, they are not distant from each other, and yes, they live together in genuine community. It is altogether fitting and proper, and our embrace would be out of place in that land. Just because you or I would find it strange to pull back from our brethren this way, as if we

were talking to someone through a wall, does not change the fact that it is woven into a beautiful tapestry in their community.

"But let us return to our lands. Kissing on the mouth is significant because it is by our mouth that we drink from the Fountain of Immortality. We reverence the Temple when we enter it, kissing the door and entrance; we ourselves are the Temple, and our mouths are the very door and entrance by which the King of Glory enters when we Commune. Our mouths are honored in a very special way, and it is this very place that we show our reverence.

"But there is another reason. It is by our mouths that we breathe the wind, that we spirit; it is the very spirit that is present in the mouth, and our spirits are knitted together. So the kiss is everything the bow is, and more, and it is the fitting conclusion when we reverence each other. It is communion."

I listened with interest. His words almost pulled me out of my misery.

He closed his eyes, and then said, "Do you know how long it is since you have kissed me?"

I began to approach him.

He pushed me away. "Stop. Go and learn to bow, truly bow. When you have learned to bow, then you may kiss me."

I walked out of the room, pretending to conceal my fury.

---

Dull, empty day passed after dull, empty day. Fortress tried to teach me things, and I really had no doubts that he was a fine man, but... whatever the great Illusion was, he not only believed it; he couldn't think to question it. I found Silver from time to time, and had comfort by her, but... I didn't understand why she wouldn't take me in to the group. And the rest of the world grew bleaker and bleaker.

Then it happened.

I snuck behind her one day, never giving a hint of my presence, until I found myself led into the chamber, the meeting place. They were chanting; there was something elusive about the chant, and I remained hidden in the shadows. Then Clamp himself saw me in the dark, and said, "Welcome. You have made it." There was a wicked grin on his face.

"Why did you not call me back? Why did Silver not lead me here? Was I not worthy?"

"You were not. Or, I should say, you were not worthy then. We were testing you, to see when you would make your own way in—then you were worthy. That you have come is proof that you are worthy—or at least might be. It does not speak well of you that you took so long. Look at me. Your very face tells me you have been drained by things unworthy of you—dull people, trivial lessons, a warhorse being taught the work of a mule.

"Or at least that's what I could say being generous. I think you are still enmeshed in the Illusion—it is still quite strong in you. So strong that it can probably affect what you see, make what is before your eyes appear to be what it is not.

"There is another test before you. Take this dagger."

He placed in my hand a stone dagger with a serpentine curve to it. It was cold; a coldness seemed to seep through my body

and my heart began to pump the icy chaos of a sea at storm. I  
felt sick.

"There is a clay dummy in the next room, exquisitely  
fashioned. Place this dagger where its heart would be. You will  
cut through the illusion, and be ready to drink of the Well of  
Secrets."

I walked. Aeons passed each footstep; each footfall seemed  
like a mountain falling and beginning to crumble. And yet it  
seemed only an instant before I was in the next room.

My stomach tightened. I could not say what, but something  
was wrong. There was something like a body that was deathly  
still.

I could see the feet only; the face was covered. Some Wind  
blew in the recesses of my heart, and I tried to close it out.

I walked over, my stomach tighter. The Wind inside me was  
blowing louder, leaking, beginning to roar. And then I smelled a  
familiar smell. How could they make clay smell like—

I twisted the dagger and tore the cloth off the dummy's  
face. It looked like Fortress. Then Wind tearing through me met  
with the breath of his nostrils.

I gasped.

I threw up.

There was a sound of laughter around me—or laughing; I could  
never call it mirth. It was cruel and joyless, and tore into me.

And still I retched.

"Do you need help? Or are you really so weak as that?"

"Maybe you didn't belong here; not all who merely force their  
way in are truly worthy."

I looked around on the ground, and saw Fortress's staff.  
In a moment I snatched the staff, and cast away the dagger.

I stood, reeling.

"I am not worthy. I am not worthy to be here, still less to be with Fortress. And I'd like to take a heroic last stand, and say that if you're going to kill him—if whatever black poison you've used won't already do so—you'll have to kill me first, but I would be surprised if I could achieve any such thing against you. I cannot call myself Fortress's disciple; that illusion is broken to me. But if I may choose between reigning with you and being slaughtered with Fortress, I can only consider being slaughtered with Fortress an honor that is above my worth and reigning with you to be unspeakable disgrace!"

Clamp looked at me with a sneer. "I don't know why I ever let you in, disciple of Fortress." He grabbed a sword, and made one quick slice.

I felt hot blood trickling down my chest.

"Go on, to your fascinating gears and your deep, deep lessons. Carry your Teacher. We'll meet again. Now I don't think you're worth killing. I don't know what I'll think then."

The blood flowing down my chest, I picked up my unconscious Teacher and his staff.

"The path out is that way. Never mind the drops of blood; you won't reach us this way again."

As I carried his heavy body towards the marketplace and then his home, I panted and sweated. Fortress seemed to be regaining consciousness. I staggered across the threshold and then laid him on the bed.

Pool looked ashen. "Are you all right, Salt?"

Fortress looked at her. "Never mind me; the poison they used is short-lived. I'll simply need more sleep for a few days, and life will go on. Look at Unspoken. I have not been that stunned by a man's behavior in many years."

I collapsed on the floor, then rose to my knees. "Fortress. I

have sinned against Heaven and before you. If you have any mercy, show one more mercy that I do not deserve. Give me money that I may return to my island, and no more inquire into things too wonderful for me."

Fortress turned to Pool. "Get one gold sovereign, a needle, and thread."

I looked at him. "One gold sovereign? But that would buy more than—"

"Bite this," he said. "I'll try to make the stitches small."

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"I still do not understand," I said.

"Never mind. Tell me what our robes mean."

"Your robe is blue, the color of starry Heaven. Your gift is the one thing needful, to be focused on the Light himself. My robe is green, the color of earth. My gift is to attend to many things on earth. I have wanted to gain the higher—"

"The green robe, and all that it symbolises, is needed, and I do not think you appreciate your gift. And not only because both of us look to the Light and attend to the Creation it illuminates.

Place the two colors on the Cross."

"That is a child's exercise."

"Place the two colors on the Cross."

"The blue robe is the color of the vertical arm of the cross, the great tree whose roots delve fathoms down into earth and whose top reaches to Heaven. It is our connection with the Light.

The green robe is the color of the cross's horizontal arm, connecting us with other creations. Is there a reason you ask me this?"

He placed his finger at the top of my chest, at the very center—at the top of my wound.

Then he ran his finger down the freshly stitched skin.

I winced in pain.

"It seems you are not a stranger to the blue robe."

My jaw dropped when his words unfolded in my mind.

"Fortress, I cannot believe you. Before, you were being generous. Now you are being silly. This wound is not the arm of the cross reaching from Heaven down to earth. I earned this by my own wickedness, and you would destroy me if you knew what evil I had done."

"Are you sure?"

"Fortress, this evil is far worse than lust. It lures you with excitement, then drains the wonder out of every living thing. What are you doing?" I stared in horror as he removed his robe.

"Look at me."

I closed my eyes.

"Trust me."

I opened my eyes, and looked upon his body. Then I looked again. There was a great, ugly, white scar across the top of his chest. He made the sign of the cross on himself, and when his fingers traced out the horizontal arm of the cross, the green arm, I saw his fingers run over the scar.

"I know that pain better than you think."

I was unable to speak.

"Pool is getting you something to eat. You've had quite a difficult time, and your pain will continue. Let's spend tomorrow at the Temple, and then we can get to tinkering."

I was weak, and my wound pained me, but there was a different quality to the pain.

---

I felt weak. Still, as I entered the Temple, it didn't matter. Once inside the doors, I was in Heaven, and Heaven shone through earth more clearly than it had for long. I smelled the fragrant incense, the incense that ascends before the divine Throne day and night and will ascend for ever.

I walked into the middle part of the Temple, and lay down on the cool, unhewn stone floor, drinking in the glory. I looked through the ceiling at the Heavens: the ceiling was beautiful because it was painted with the blood of sapphires, and more beautiful because it was not sealed. It had chinks and holes, through which the Heaven's light shone, through which the incense continued to rise, and through which Wind blew. I could hear it howl and whisper, and I looked at the Constellations, all seven of which blazed with glory.

I saw the Starburst, a constellation in which one single Glory shot out many rays, and then these many rays coalesced into the one Glory. I let it resonate. I thought of the Creator, from whom all things come and to whom all things return. I thought of learning one thing, then learning many things, then finding the one interconnected whole behind them all.

I looked at the Window of Heaven: a saint shining through a picture. What was it of symbol that was captured so well? In the Constellation one could see the present connection between the saint and the Icon he shone through, indeed itself a window into how the divine Glory shines in a man.

I saw the threefold Tower: on the ground level was body, and then the lower of the upper floors was that which reasons and assembles thinking together, and the higher of the upper level was that which sees in a flash of insight precisely because it is connected, indeed the place one meets the Glory. What were

some of the other nuances of these levels?

Then I looked at the Sword, the Great Sword in the War that has been fought since before ever star shone on dew-bejewelled field and will be fought until stars themselves are thrown down, trampled under those who laughed as children among the dew. It sweeps wherever there is Wind, larger than a mountain, smaller than a gem-collecting aphid, stronger than the roaring thunder, so sharp that it sunders bone and marrow. Why, indeed, was it given to men?

The Chalice, the great and Sacred Chalice itself, that held the fluid more precious than ichor, the fount of incorruptibility, a fount that will never be quenched though the mountains should turn to dust and dust turn to mountains. The Chalice from which we drink, the Chalice we kiss when we kiss the—why again should men be so highly exalted?

The Rod and Staff, as ever, were crossed against each other. "Your Rod and Staff comfort me," rise in the chant. The Staff's curves offered comfort to a straying sheep, I knew. And the Rod that went with it—a club with metal spikes, ready to greet predators. A shepherd was a hardened man, an armed guard ready to fight with his life when wolves came to destroy his sheep.

And last, the Steel Orb—a ball, rolling all around an animal hide as the hands at its edge moved up and down, making a slope now here, now there, now a valley, now a shifting plain. The Steel Orb indeed moved throughout the two levels—or was it really one?—of the threefold Tower, now here, now there, now met by complex construction, now silence, now a flash of inspiration. The Steel Orb is the inner motion that is inseparably connected with the world of invisible truths. It is the ear that listens when the Wind blows. It is the placid pool that reflects all that is around

it.

I closed my eyes. Then I looked at the Eighth Constellation, the whole starry roof. The *Greatest Feast*, when death itself began to move backwards, must have come early that year, about as early as possible; the Constellations stood fixed as they had appeared the year the Temple had begun, just after the day began, and the great Vigil began. There couldn't really be a more representative night to represent the year, nor a better time of that day to stand in.

My breath was still; I stood up, revered Fortress and the other Icons, then found the waiting priest and cast off my sins in penitent confession. I do not even remember feeling relieved from that, which is strange: I stood in the stillness as it became song, as voices rose in chant, and the morning was greeted and the divine liturgy began.

I do not remember the liturgy; I do not remember even when the liturgy ended and the priest held a healing service and anointed me with the oil of restoration. What I remember was when it ended, and there were people all around me, their faces alight. It was like waking from a dream, a dream of which one remembers nothing save that there was an inexpressible beauty one cannot remember.

I walked home in Fortress's shadow, and only then remembered something that didn't fit. I remembered—or thought I remembered—the priest's strange advice after my confession: "Be careful. You have a difficult journey ahead of you."

---

Fortress sat down in front of the work bench. He picked up one gear, then set it down, then rooted through some axles, and sat back.

"Unspoken, I've asked you to sort gears, take machines apart, put machines together, melt gears down, and forge new gears from the molten metal. I've asked you to repair machines, and tell me when gears were made of too soft of a metal. What I haven't asked you to do is tinker. So we'll have a race. Today you can think, and I'll make a mechanical cart. Then you can make a mechanical cart tomorrow. And we'll see, not whose cart can go fastest, but whose cart can go farthest in the smooth part cloister. This will be part ideas and part choosing the best parts. Why don't you go up to your room? You'll have the range of this workshop tomorrow."

I paced up and down my room. I thought. There were several coiled springs in the workshop; having seen some of his previous designs, I was almost sure he would make something spring-powered that would go the distance the spring kept. And how was I to outdo that? He would probably know what spring was best, and he would almost certainly know how to choose parts that moved with each other.

A faint whisper of Wind blew in my mind. I turned over different designs of springs—could I make something more powerful with two springs? The Wind grew, slightly more forceful, and I tried to make it tell me how to best use springs. It became more and more forceful, but I was afraid to drop everything and listen. I began to see, not springs at all, but a burning—

Then I sensed something.

There was something that radiated beauty and fascination. I

could not see it. But I sensed it.

"Who are you?" I said.

"I am your Guardian," came the answer. "I was sent to you."  
I looked. I still could not see anything, but the beauty is  
overwhelming.

"What is the idea that is slipping? It has fire, and I hot  
steam, and—"

"Pay no mind to that. It is nothing."

"How can I build a better spring?"

"Don't. Build a simple, spring-driven cart out of good parts.  
Then take a knife, and nick the axle on your Teacher's wagon.  
That is all. It will bind slightly, and your cart will go further. Or  
it should."

"But—is that fair?"

"Is that fair? He took the first choice of everything, and you  
know you lack his year's practice. Come. He wants you to surprise  
him. He wants you to show ingenuity. This is something he  
wouldn't expect of you."

I thought I could see colors glowing, shifting, sparkling.  
Somewhere, in the recesses of my being, it was as if a man  
jumping up and down and shouting. It was almost enough to draw  
me away.

"But how can I find his cart? Surely he will hide it, so it will  
not be a temptation to me."

"Never mind that. I will show you. Just watch me. I was sent  
here to draw you into Heaven's beauty."

Entranced, I watched the colors shift. It tasted—I tasted  
the same excitement, the icy brilliance of lightning and the  
tantalizing heat of lust. I never knew that Heaven could be so  
much like my former craft.

The next day I built a craft, but no pleasure came from it. It

was drained of pleasure, but I was looking for that enticing presence. It seemed to have gone.

Where was Fortress's cart? I couldn't see it. I looked in nooks and crannies. Something seemed wrong. Then... I was aware of the bad intuition first. But I heard a shimmer. "Look right in front of you."

Ahead of me, on top of a pile of disassembled devices, was a cart.

I took a blade, and nicked one of the axles.

The shimmer spoke. "One more thing.

"Look at me."

I looked, and the beauty seemed at once more intense and hollow—and I could not look away.

"Sing an incantation over it."

"What?"

It seemed as if a dark hand was pushing me forward.

I chanted, and watched in horrid fascination. Something seemed to shimmer about my cart. Whenever I looked at it, it seemed the same, but whenever I turned away, it seemed as if there was some beautiful incense rising from it.

The next day, it easily won.

Fortress looked at his cart crossly, with consternation and puzzlement. He seemed to be looking through it.

---

The next thing I remember was retching, on the workbench. Fortress and a priest were standing over me, although I did not notice them at the time. All I could notice for the time being was an overpowering stench. I wanted to keep retching forever. My spirit was sapped.

"That was not a *Guardian*," the priest said. "You have listened to a *Destroyer*."

"If you meet that presence again, make the Sign of the Cross and say, 'Lord, have mercy.'"

I looked at him weakly. "What can I do? I thought I had repented."

"You have repented, and you need to repent again. Pray and fast this week, then make your confession, and come to the Table. Don't go anywhere near that shimmer, no matter how attractive it is. Run, and invoke the Holy Name. And talk with Fortress and me. And if you fall again, repent again. The saints are all praying for you."

I tried to take it in. His words stung me—not because of what he said, but because of why it would be appropriate to say them.

He revered me, bowing low. I felt something in his reverence.

---

With Fortress's leave and the priest's, I went to the monastery to spend my time in prayer and fasting. I took a lump of dry bread each day, and some water.

As the hours and prayers passed, my head seemed to clear.

Foul desires raged, but I just resisted them.

The third day after I was at the temple, I ate nothing, and sang songs, and my body seemed lighter. I remembered the secret learnings I'd made, and they seemed vile, paltry. As the sun set, I suddenly thought of Silver. I was off here, selfishly caring for myself, while she was in the vile grip that squeezed me! I stole out of the monastery, and found her almost immediately.

She placed an arm around my waist. I pulled back, but she held me and said, "I'm just placing an arm around your waist. What is it?" I spoke with urgency and concern, and she 'just' ... I do not wish to recall the full shame, but when it was over, Clamp stood over me and threw a hemp belt. "Bind his hands."

---

As I was walking, captive, I thought of the advice the priest had given me. But how was I to make the sign of the cross? I could try. I tried to move my hands, hoping something miraculous might happen.

Clamp struck my face, and said, "Don't try to wriggle out." My face stung. I held my tongue, and then let out a rebel yell:

"LORD, HAVE MERCY!"

The world seemed to move like melting ice.

Drip.

Drip.

Drip.

I watched every detail of rage flare in Clamp's face.

I heard a shift of cloth and bodies moving.

I saw his hand raised, to strike a crushing blow to my face...

...and descend...

...and caught in the talons of an iron grip.

I did not turn my head. I was too bewildered to look and see why my face was not stinging.

I had somewhere heard that voice before. It seemed familiar.

And it was speaking quietly.

I had heard this voice speak quietly in contentment. I had heard it speak quietly to tell a secret. I had heard this voice speaking quietly in banter. What I had not heard was this voice speaking quietly because it was beyond rage, a rage that had gone beyond burning fire to be cold enough to shatter ice.

"Let him go," the voice hissed.

I recognized the voice of my Teacher.

"Let him go," Fortress glared.

Clamp laughed, and let go of me. "Fortress! How wonderful to see you! May I get you a glass of wine?"

Fortress began working on my bands. He said nothing.  
Clamp said, "A great Teacher like you has much to offer,  
could probe much secret wisdom. You seemed to have a knack for  
—"

I felt my stomach quiver.  
A crowd was beginning to form around us: no one was right by  
us, but many were looking.

Fortress said, "No."  
My stomach knotted. I had an overwhelming sense that I  
should move.

I obeyed it.  
Clamp looked at Fortress.  
Fortress looked at Clamp.

The anger in Fortress's face began to vanish.  
Clamp seemed to be leaving fear and entering terror.  
I backed off further.

I saw a faint ripple of muscles across Clamp's body.  
I began to scream.

Metal sang as a sword jumped from its sheath.  
I saw, moment after horrid moment, the greatsword swing  
into the side of Fortress's head.  
Then I heard a shattering sound, and when I realised what  
was happening, Clamp had been thrown up against the far wall,  
while Fortress was in the same place.

The sherds of a sword hilt dropped from Clamp's hand.  
The anger vanished from Fortress's face. He looked, and said,  
"Come back, Clamp. We need you."

I could hear the sadness in his voice.  
Clamp ran away in abject terror.  
I had been fasting. Even if I had not been fasting, I would  
have...

I fainted.

---

My head slowly began to clear—much more slowly because  
Fortress was carrying me again.

"I'll sleep at your doorway at the monastery," Fortress said,  
"and fast with you."

I closed my eyes. "I'm sorry. I don't deserve to—"

"Not as punishment, Unspoken. You've endured punishment  
enough; harsh fasting and vigils are a much lighter load than—but  
you are weak and vulnerable now. You need the support. And I  
would like to share this with you."

The fasting passed quickly. Or more properly, it moved very  
slowly, and it was hard, but there was cleansing pain. The Wind  
moved through me, and gave me respite from my burdensome toil  
of evil.

When it was the eighth day, Fortress and I returned to the  
Temple. A mighty wind was blowing all around, and its song and  
its breath moved inside. Wind blew through every jewel of the  
liturgy. And there was—I couldn't say.

After the end of the liturgy, when I was anointed for healing,  
Fortress said, "Let's go home and get to work. Pool has some  
money to buy a chicken, and—why are you hesitating?"

"Could I return to the monastery and fast for another week?"

"Why? You have done what the priest asked. You needn't do  
more. There is no need to engage in warfare above your strength.

Remember, the Destroyers always fast."

"That's not why."

"Why, then?"

"That's what I am trying to find out."

---

I prayed and fasted, and my head seemed to clear. I succeeded that week from returning to my vomit; I think it was because Fortress spent the week with me, and he was generous to spend that long without seeing Pool. He prayed with me, and at the end, my mind took on a new keenness. I still did not know what it was the Wind was trying to tell me.

But I no longer resisted it. Fortress gently said, "You have fasted further, and I will trust you that it was the right thing to do. But why not let this fast meet its summit in a feast? I can buy a chicken, and we can sit down at table."

"But the—"

"Do not worry about that. If the Wind holds a message for you, the Wind will make that clear enough. Let's return."

Once home, I asked him a simple question. I think the question was, "Why are you so concerned for me?" Or it might have been, "What is your experience with the poison I tasted?" Or something else. And he gave a long and interesting answer to me.

I don't remember a word he said.

---

My stomach was full of roast chicken, dried lemon, and all the bread I wanted. Pool was generous with wine. Fortress's voice was humming with the answer to whatever question I asked, and I could hear the chatter and laughter of small children in the background. It concentrated my thoughts tremendously.

What was your error?, the Wind whistled in my ear.

In a moment, I searched through the evils I committed and drew in a breath. Pride, I said in my heart. The primeval poison that turned the Light-Bearer into the Great Dragon. The one evil that is beyond petty sins like lust.

You embraced that evil, but what was your error?

I drew in another breadth. Everything. Lust. Magic. Scorning the beauty of the Light. Seeking to order the world around myself. As I think over the great evils that exist, I do not see that I am innocent of any one of them, nor free of their disease.

Those wrongs have been obliterated forever. They are no more. You are innocent of them. You are being healed. The vilest of these, your pride itself, is a smouldering coal thrown into the infinite Ocean. What was your error?

I do not understand. I have hardly made errors greater than these—if 'error' is even the word. Do you mean something small by 'error'?

No, something great and terrible. What was your error?

I do not understand.

What was your error?

With my inner eye, I saw the pelt and the Steel Orb, only frozen. The Steel Orb needed to move, but it was locked in place. Those words haunted me, chased me, yelled at me. I long lie awake that night, searching to see what was being asked. At last, as the pale light of the dawn began its approach, I drifted

into sleep.

I saw, in vivid detail, the moments of my descent. Only it was different in my dream. When I had actually lived it, I saw things through a veil, through an Illusion. I suffered empty pain, and thought I was gaining wholeness. Now the illusion was stripped away, and I saw every moment how I had thrown away gold to fill my hands with excrement. And every time, the Glorious Man looked at me and asked what the Wind had asked, "What was your error?"

I saw a time when I listened eagerly. I was being told secrets, hidden truths beyond the ken of the ordinary faithful. I was, I had thought, being drawn into the uppermost room and tasting with delight its forbidden fruit. The Glorious Man looked into me, looked through me, and asked, "What was your error?" I was awake, bolt upright in my bed. My body was rigid. In the window I saw that the dawn had almost come. "Fortress!" I called.

In an instant, Fortress was by my side. "What is it?"

"You have felt the pain I felt."

"Every evil by which you have poisoned yourself, I have done, and worse."

"What was your error?"

He paused a moment, and said, "Pride."

"No. What was your error?"

"More evil than I can remember."

"When you descended into that living Hell, did you embrace evil alone, or did you embrace evil and error?"

He drew in a breath. "Climb up to the roof with me."

---

The dawn was breaking; stream after stream of golden, many-hued light poured over the edge of the city. We both sat in silence.

Fortress seemed completely relaxed.

I was not.

"Fortress, I did not win our race."

Fortress's eyes greeted the sun.

"I know."

He drank in more of the light, and said, "Would you like to have another race?"

Time passed.

"You can choose who makes his wagon first."

"You make your wagon first."

I drew a breath.

"It must be painful for a Teacher to watch his pupil descend into filth and have to rescue him and carry him back."

"To me, that is a very good day."

I looked at his face, trying to find sarcasm or irony.

I found none.

"Why?"

"Clamp was my pupil."

I didn't know what to say. I fumbled for words. I tried to meet his pain.

"You seem very happy for a man with no children."

I saw tears welling up in his eyes.

I began to stammer.

He said, "Let's go and build our cars. If you want, you can take the silt board so you can design your wagon while I'm building mine. A fair match would be balm to my soul."

---

I looked at the board. Something was ticking in the back of my mind—fire on the spring, was it? But why? I set to work on the board, trying to reconcile something burning with a spring and gear box. Something was knocking in the back of my mind, but I couldn't listen to it. In the end I told myself I'd make a spring driven wagon with a lamp on top: a large one, that would burn brightly.

The next day, I set about smithing the lamp. I enjoyed it, and it was a thing of beauty. Almost at the end of the day my eye fell on something, and I saw that Fortress had left the best spring for me.

The next day we raced, and I lit my lamp. It burned brightly. It finished two laps, while Fortress's cart made fully twenty laps round the cloister, but he liked the lamp; its flame was a point of beauty. "Keep trying," he said, "although I'm not going to ask why you put a lamp on. I'll be in the workshop sorting gears; could you care for customers?"

---

At the evening meal Fortress seemed preoccupied; it looked  
as if he was listening.

We sat in silence.

He moved, as with a jolt. "Unspoken, what were you saying to  
me when we greeted the coming of the dawn?"

My face turned red.

"No, sorry. I mean, before then."

"I don't know. My sense was that it was something important,  
but I doubt if—"

Fortress dropped his bread and moved to give Pool a deep  
kiss. "Come with me, Unspoken."

---

As we walked, he turned to me and said, "The Great Fast is approaching, and we all need to purify ourselves. You especially."

"But I am working on—"

"That is why you especially need to be purified. Forget that completely."

I recognized the route to the monastery.

"There are some things I can give you, but you need to be at the monastery. As much as you are able, submit discipline as if you were a monk. Draw on their strength. Afflict yourself. Gaze on the glory of the Light."

"But—"

"Trust me."

Not long after, we arrived at the monastery. He spoke briefly with the head monk, Father Mirror, and revered me. "The Mother who held the Glory in her arms now holds you in her heart and in her prayers." Then he left.

---

The rhythm of the calendar, of the week, of the day, became clearer. My head itself became clearer. With the discipline I became hazier and the Glory became clearer.

I was praying in my cell, and suddenly it was illuminated with beauty and light, so that the flame of my lamp could not be seen.

I was dazzled, and at the same time uneasy.

I looked, and I saw the form of the Glorious Man. He looked at me and said, "You have done well."

I felt as if there was something jumping up and down, shouting for attention, inside me.

"I will tell you what you are to write about your error."

I was fascinated. Or almost fascinated. I turned my ear to the man jumping up and down. And wrenched myself away.

I bowed my head, and said, "Glorious One, I am not worthy."

Immediately I reeled. A stench, that felt as if I was touching fetid—I do not want to say what it smelled like. I fell backwards, reeling and gasping for breath.

I heard a shuffle of cloth, and then footprints. The chief monk stepped in. He looked displeased, although I wasn't sure he was displeased at me. He bid the other monks leave, and said to me, "My son, tell me everything."

I hesitated. "You need to sleep so you can greet the morning in chant."

"My son, another of my brother monks can lead that greeting even if you are still talking when it comes."

I opened my mouth, and talked, and talked, and talked. He seemed surprised at times, but looked on me with kindness. At the end he said, "I will take the cell next to you and pray with you. The whole monastery will pray over you."

"I am not worthy—"

"And I am not worthy to serve you and give you what strength I can. If it were a question of being worthy—" he shuddered.

"Sleep, and rise for the morning chant if you can."

That night I was riven by my dreams.

---

Evils in me that I thought were dead rose up with new life. I interrupted Father Mirror often, and he told me to pray, "Heavenly Glory, if you want me to fight these impulses, that I will do." And I did. Gradually the fight became easier. I began to count the days, and contemplate the Glory.

As time passed, I lived to join the monks, the stars and the rocks, beings of light, in contemplation above everything else. I looked into the Glorious Light when—

I felt a hand shaking me. I opened my eyes, and collected my presence. Then I closed my eyes and looked away.

"What is it?"

His face was radiant. "I was looking on the Glorious Light, and —"

Silence.

"I am not worthy to look on you. That light is shining through your face. Leave me alone."

"My brother."

I said nothing.

"Look at me."

I turned to face him, keeping my eyes down.

"You would not see this light coming from my face unless it were coming from your face as well."

"You mock me. My face? I am not a monk, nor have I gone through years of discipline. And I have—"

"The Wind blows where it will. You could not see this light at all unless your face were radiant."

I said nothing.

"I have come to call you. It is time for the Great Vigil."

"Time for the Great Vigil? The Great Feast tonight? But it is scarcely a day that has passed since—"

"I know. I am not ready either. But the Feast is here. And those prepared and unprepared are alike compelled by the joy."

I went through the *Great Vigil* at the monastery, revered each of the monks. Then Father Mirror accompanied me home, the dark streets lit by the brilliance of his face. I joined Fortress and Pool in the revelry; I danced with Pool. Then Fortress walked home, one arm over Pool's shoulder and one arm around mine. When we stepped across the threshold, Fortress said, "It is time for a race."

---

I let Fortress build his wagon first, and insisted that he take the best spring. Then I sat down with the silt tablet.

My intuition had been to mix fire and water. Or something like that. Or burn water. Or—I sketched one design after another, trying to see how they would help a spring, or gears for that matter. Towards the end of the day, I sat down, perplexed, and wiped the slate clean. I had given up.

That night, I prayed my giving up. Then—it took me a long time to get to sleep.

In the morning, I left the springs alone entirely. I pulled out the metal lamp and made a nearly-sealed water tank to go above it. I put the water tank above the flame, and fitted something special to its mouth. By the end of the day, I was exhausted, and my fingers were sore.

The next day, Fortress wound the spring, and I took a tinderbox and lit the flame. He looked at me slightly oddly, and when he turned his cart around at the end of the first lap, looked at me gently.

My cart hadn't moved.

At the end of the second lap, he asked me, "Did your cart move?"

I said nothing.

At the end of the fourth lap, he said, "Your cart is moving." And it was. Steam from the heated tank was moving one part, which turned gears, to the effect that it was moving very slowly. And it continued moving slowly for the rest of the day, finally stopping after it had run a full seventy-two laps.

Fortress walked away from me with a look of amazement.

"Unspoken, I've got to tell my friends about you."

---

As I was drifting off to sleep, the Wind whistled in my ear:  
What was your error?

The Steel Orb broke free from one spot, and began to roll, first one way, then another. It seemed to be exploring its strength, moving just a little this way, just a little that way.

I wrestled in my thoughts, like a man trying to lift a greased boulder. I was not trying to lift it yet; my fingers slid over the surface, seeking purchase.

Thoughts flowed through my mind, wordless thoughts that slid away whenever I tried to capture them in worded form. I grasped after them with patient, eager expectation.

I did not notice when I descended into the depths of slumber.

I was staring into a dark, deep, colorless, shapeless pool, and trying to see its color and shape. There was light behind me, but for the longest time I did not look into it. Then I looked into the light, and turned, and—

A voice said, "Awaken!" and I was shaken awake.

Fortress and Father Mirror were both crouching over me. I sat up, nervously.

"What is it?" I said, flinching against a rebuke.

"Last night, I was speaking with the bishop," Father Mirror said, "when a messenger arrived, limping. He had been severely delayed. A Holy Council has been summoned, and the bishop requests that Fortress, you, and I join him on his travels."

"Me? I would just be a burden."

"Never mind that. He did not tell me his reasons, but he specifically requested that you join him immediately."

"What about—"

"No 'what about'. Will you obey?"

I turned to Fortress. "May I use your crossbow?"

"A crossbow has been packed on your horse."

"On the way out, may I visit a friend?"

"Quickly."

Still in a daze, I revered Pool and bade her farewell. Then Fortress gave his farewell, and we found the horses.

I knocked on a door—I thought it was the right door—and said, "I've been summoned on a journey by the bishop, and I do not understand why. But may I buy all of your explosive quarrels?"

I have some money I could offer."

"Bear slayer, you may have them. Without money. Just let me get them." He stepped in, and seemed to be taking a long time. I heard more and more rummaging, and Father Mirror sounded impatient. Then he came out, looking sheepish. "I'm sorry. I can't find them. I've looked all around. I wish I—"

"Don't worry about it," I said. "Just remember me."

Before the sun was above the mountains, we were on the Road.

---

We rode along at a cantor. The horses were sleek and strong,  
and I placed myself opposite the bishop.

He placed himself next to me.

"My son, I offer my apologies, but I wish to talk with you."

"Why?"

"Tell me about what you did wrong. And what you've done  
since."

I told him, and he said, "There is something more. What more  
is there?"

"I don't know how to say. It's just that... something about it  
seems different from struggling with sin. Like there's something  
different involved, that is error."

"All sin is error. Pride especially is illusion."

"But... Would you say we believe the same things? Perhaps you  
understand them better than I, but would you say we believe the  
same things?"

"Yes, certainly. But they do not believe the same thing. It is  
not a single mistaken belief."

"What would you say if I said it wasn't just an error in the  
specific thing one believes, but an error so deep that... an error  
whose wake said, 'What you believe is private?'"

The bishop turned towards me.

His eyes narrowed.

"The highest part of the inner person is mind, but it is not  
private. In an immeasurably greater way than the five senses, it  
connects with and wrestles with and apprehends and conquers  
and contemplates the spiritual realities themselves. Those who  
choose error grapple with these realities in the wrong way like—  
like a man trying to climb a mountain upside down. The mountain  
is there, and the hands and feet are there, but they're not

connected the right way."

The bishop was silent.

"But... When I stepped into that vortex, I had something of a sense that I was breaking away from the mountain, like it was an illusion, and creating my own private hill, and forging the limbs of my body that I could use to connect with it. I—"

The bishop remained silent.

I fumbled. A flash of insight struck. "I was stepping into a secret, hidden reality, rejecting ordinary people's reality. That is pride. But normally when we say 'pride', we mean an evil of which one part is illusion. Here there it is more like the Illusion is the spiritual reality, and bitter pride is its handmaiden. No; that's not quite right. The relationship is—"

He looked at me. "That's enough for now. Let us chant psalms together. I want to hear more, but please, my son, don't believe I'm only concerned with getting that out of you." He paused a moment, long enough for me to realize how tense my body was.

"Now Fortress told me you're quite a tinker?"

---

"He glared," the bishop said, "and said, 'and I will not speak with anyone lower than a bishop!'"

"What did you say," I asked.

"I looked at him wearily, and said, 'Believe and trust me, good man, when I say that no one here is lower than a bishop.'"

He paused a moment and continued, "Unspoken—"

A flood of memories came back. It was not what he said, but how he said it. He had spoken in my island's dialect. His accent was flawless.

"How do you know my island's dialect?" I asked. "I come from an insignificant and faroff island. Nothing important has ever come from that island, and nothing ever will."

"That's easy enough," he said, "I was born there.

"Unspoken, I am a man like you." He paused, and continued, "There is a place I was born. I have a father and mother, and brothers and sisters. I remember the first time I skipped a stone, the thrill when I reinvented the pipe organ. I contemplate and pray, hunger and—"

"Your Grace, how did your father introduce you to the art of memory?"

"When I was a boy, I loved to swim. I swam as much as I was allowed, and some that I wasn't. There was a lagoon, with a network of underwater caves, and some of them I was allowed to explore. My uncle chipped and ground a mica disc enclosed in a ring of copper, and showed me how to close my eye around it. I could see under the water, and I watched the play of light inside the one largest cave. My uncle also gave me a bent spear, with the head pointing sideways, and I speared many meals with it.

"One day my father looked at me and said, 'Fire, if you could decorate the cavern in the big pool, what would you put there?'"

"I thought and said, 'Blankets along the wall so I could feel something soft.'

"He said, 'What else?'

"I said, 'Nothing else.'

"What might you imagine?'

"There's nothing else that would work.'

"And things that wouldn't work?'

"I hesitated, and said, 'A candle to see by, and something to write with.'

"What else?'

"Come. You are wilder than that.'

"Color, as when the leaves of the forest go green.'

"And what if there were passageways branching off? What would you like to see there?'

"He led me to imagine this vast network of rooms and passageways, each one different, each one holding something different, each one different to be in. It was a wonderful game, and swimming was almost as enjoyable as this activity.

"One day, my father added another dimension. He walked up to me with a rope and said, 'Do you see this rope?'

"Yes,' I said.

"What is the strangest thing that could happen to it in the antechamber to your labyrinth?'

"If it were not soaked, for it to fall down to the floor.'

"My father was silent.

"Or it would be peculiar for it to fall, not up or down, but to the side.'

"I expected a smile. My father looked at me and said, 'Surely you have imagined things stranger than that.'

"I said, 'It could coil and uncoil, slithering around the walls before coming together to a bundle—and then coming together

and vanishing.'

"My father smiled and said, 'And what of that plate there? What could happen to it in the room under?'

"I laughed at the things I imagined; such strange things happened to the things in my rooms, and I invented things on my own. Then I began to be bored, and my father saw my boredom.

'This game bores you. Let's move on to something else.

"'Look up. Note what position the stars are in. After ten nights' span, I will open the cover of a box and you will behold forty things you've not seen before. Then I will leave you with the box and eat a large loaf of bread. When I have returned, I will return and we will climb that peak, and when we reach the top, you will tell me everything you saw in the box.'

"I jumped slightly, and waited for him to explain himself.

"When no explanation came, I said, 'I can't carry a wax tablet when I'm climbing the peak.'

"He said, 'Nor would I allow it if you could.'

"I said, 'Then how will I do it?'

"He said, 'I've already told you.'

"I was angry. Never had he been so irrational as this. For seven days I searched my heart in wrath, searching. On the eighth day I rested from my wrath and said, 'He will say what he will say. I renounce anger at his request.'

"He had begun his odd request by releasing me from my labyrinth; I delved into it. I imagined the first room, but I couldn't banish the rope coiling and uncoiling. I swam to another room, only to have something else greet me. I swam around, frustrated again and again when—

"My face filled with shame.

"I spent the next two days playing, resting, swimming. I moved through the imaginary labyrinth. When my father pulled

the cover off the box, I placed everything in my imaginary labyrinth, one in each room, exactly as he had taught me. It took him a while to eat the bread, so I stared at the box's rough leather lining. We walked, and talked, and the conversation was... different. I enjoyed it.

"He asked me, 'What was in the box?'"

"I said, 'A key, a stylus, a pebble, a glazed bead, a potsherd, a gear, an axle, a knife, a pouch, a circle cord, some strange weed, a stone glistening smooth by the river's soft hands, a statuette, a crystalline phial, a coil of leather cord, a card, a chisel, a mirror, a pinch of silt, a candle, a firecord, a badly broken forceps, a saltball, a leaf of thyme, an iron coin, some lead dregs, a bite of cured fish, a small loaf of spiced bread, some sponge of wine, a needle, a many-colored strand of parchment, an engraved pendant—hmm, I'm having trouble remembering this one—a piece of tin wire, a copper sheet, a pumice, a razor, a wooden shim, a pliers, and a measuring ribbon.'"

"'I count thirty-nine,' he said. 'Where's the fortieth?'"

"I ran through my rooms and hesitated. 'I memorized thirty-nine things, then stared at the rough leather inside the box. I didn't see another; I don't even have the trace of memory like when there's another one that I can't quite spring and catch.'"

"When I said, 'rough leather inside the box,' he seemed pleasantly surprised. I didn't catch it at the time, but I understood later.

"And that was how my father let me taste the art of memory.

How did your father teach you the art of memory?"

"I don't have as good a story to tell. He introduced me to the more abstract side—searching for isomorphisms, making multiple connections, encapsulating subtle things in a crystalline symbol."

"Oh, so you've worked with the abstract side from a young

age. Then I have something to ask of you."

"Yes?"

"I want to speak with you further. I'd like if you could inscribe in your heart the things you tell me. When we return—pardon, if we return, if we are shown mercy—I may send you to the monastery and ask you to transcribe it so it can be copied."

My heart jumped.

---

His Grace Fire asked me, "If you were to crystallize your dark journey in one act you did, what would it be?"

I slid my mind through my sins. I watched with a strange mixture of loathing, shame, and haunting desire as I—  
"Stop," he said. "I shouldn't have asked that. I tempted you."

I looked at him and blinked. "None of the actions I did encapsulates the journey."

He cocked one eyebrow.

"Or rather, all of them did, but the entire dark path is captured by one action he didn't do. I neither gave nor received reverence."

"That doesn't seem surprising," he nodded. "Pride is—"

"That's also true," I said.

He looked at me.

"In our reverence, we greet one another with a holy kiss. That is hard to appreciate until you have tried to step outside of it. We try to be spiritual people, but however hard we try, matter is always included. Every one of the Mysteries includes matter. We worship with our bodies. Fasting does us good because we are creatures of body—all of the Destroyers fast, all of the time, and never does any of them profit by it. Our great hope is that we will be raised in transformed, glorified and indestructible bodies to gaze on the Light bodily for ever.

"More to the point, the holy kiss is the one act in the entire Sacred Scriptures that is ever called holy."

He blinked. "I hadn't thought about it that way, but you are right."

"And... there was licentiousness; we could do wrong with our bodies, but this is only for the reason that the holy kiss was not possible. The spiritual embrace draws and works through body,

because body is part of spirit. Their asceticism and libertinism alike exist because of a wedge between spirit and body."

"How can they do that? That is like driving a wedge between fire and heat."

"Of course you can't," I said, "but they think they can."

"My son," he said, "you are placing things upside down. We fast to subdue our bodies, which have become unruly; spirit and matter are not equal partners, nor is matter the center of things. In this world or the next."

"You're wrong," I said. "You only say that because your approach to spirit has always assumed matter. If you had genuinely lived the life and practice of believing that matter was evil, was not our true selves, not illusion, you would understand and not say that."

I winced when I realized what he'd just said. I waited for his rebuke. Or a slap.

"Go on," he said. "I'm listening."

"Or maybe that was too bold. Spirit is supreme; the *Glory* is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. But... struggling to subdue matter, and impregnate it with spirit, does not let you realize what place matter has. Returning from despairing in matter as evil is very different."

"Despair?"

"Despair..." I thought. "Matter is evil, probably the evil creation of an evil god. If that is true, you cannot relate to the cosmos with joy, not even abstemious joy. You must despair in it. And—I think this is connected, it's all connected—if the entire cosmos is an illusion which we must escape, then no less is its creator the same sort of thing. There's a perverse acknowledgment, I think, that the cosmos must reflect its Creator and radiate its glory. Because if they believe this

horrible thing about the cosmos, they believe the same about its Creator, and as they transgress the cosmos as an obstacle they get past, so they transgress its Creator as an obstacle to get past. From what I've heard, their pictures of subordinate gods vary, but one of the few common features is that since this cosmos is evil or illusory, and this cosmos must reflect its Creator, the Creator himself must be something we need to get past if we are to find real good."

"You are describing an error that is really more than one error."

"Yes. Things are... private. They consider themselves more spiritual, more of the spiritual power we use to touch spiritual realities, yet somehow they have a hydra's different pictures of what those spiritual realities themselves. In some of them it almost sounds as if that spiritual apprehension is private."

"I won't ask you to inventory everything that was private. Did you see any of the Scriptures?"

"Not many. And those I read were... odd."

"Odd?"

"The Gospels are wondrous documents indeed."

"Indeed."

"But they never pander. Never does a writer say, 'I tell these things that you may be titillated.' However amazing or miraculous the events are, the miracles are always secondary, signs that bear witness to a greater good.

"And I appreciated this after the few occasions I was able to read their Gospels. Those books do not tell the story of when Heaven and Earth met; the ones I read don't tell a story at all; they are collections of vignettes or stories, that suck you in with the appearance of hidden wisdom. They appeal to someone despairing of this cosmos and seeking what is hidden behind it.

Your Grace, only when I had tried to dive into those crystallized vortices had I realized how pedestrian the Gospels are: the Glorious Man shines with the uncreated Light and we blandly read that his clothes are white as no fuller on earth could reach them."

"Hmm," he said. "That's like—a bit like the difference between marriage and prostitution. In many ways."

"And... if you understand this basic despair, a despair that forges the entire shape of their relationship to Creation and Creator, you will understand not only their excessive asceticism and their license, their belief that the Light is not good, but also their magic. The incantations and scrolls are in one sense the outermost layer of a belief: if this Creation is evil and illusion, if one must transgress it to find truth, then of course one does not interact with it by eating and drinking, ploughing and sewing. One must interact in hidden, occult ways, and gain powers."

"I see. But don't get into that; I'd rather not have you remember that poison. And I assume you could say much more, but I'm beginning to get the picture, and I want to pray and contemplate the Glory before meeting any more of it.

"How would you summarize it, in a word?"

"There are many ways our Scriptures can be summarized in a word: 'Love the Glory with all of your inmost being and your soul and your might, and love your neighbor as yourself.' 'He has shown you, O man, what is good, and what does the Glory require of you, but to do justice, and love mercy, and walk humbly in the Light.' 'The Glory became a Man and the Glorious Man that men might become Glorious Men and Glories.' And this error could be summarized in many ways..."

"Your spirit too pure for this unworthy cosmos."

"Take a rest," he said. "I think you've said enough for now."

Let's pray."

"Oh, and one other thing. When your heart is set on pushing past the *One Glory*, there seem to many gods offering their protection and guidance."

"Pray, child. You've said enough."

---

We reached another city, and Fortress said, "We have a decision to make. The city we want to reach is due East. The road turns, and heads almost directly south."

I said, "Why?"

"Because East of the city is the dark forest."

The bishop looked at him. "I think we can enter the city and buy a good meal. But we lack the time to take the Southern route."

Less than two hours later, we were re-supplied and heading East. It was weeks before we met anything worse than stepping in poison ivy.

At night, I was awoken by the sound of a foot shuffling. I looked around; it was still Fortress's watch, and Bishop Fire and Father Mirror were already getting up. The campfire was burning low, and in the flickering torchlight I saw a ring of many eyes.

"Black wolves," Fortress whispered. "Stand up and mount your horse slowly."

I reached across my bedroll. Fortress hissed, "No. We can't afford that. I don't know what—"

I slid up on my horse and slowly reached for my crossbow. Fortress hissed, "Are you crazy? There are more wolves than quarrels, and they'd be on us by your third shot." Then he cocked his head and said, "Whisper soothing in your horse's ear. And be ready to gallop."

The wolves had become visibly closer in this scant time; one started to run towards Fortress's horse. Then Fortress reared and parted his lips, and bellowed.

I have never heard a man roar that loudly. Not before, not after. It hurts my ears to think about it. He roared like thunder, like waterfall, like an explosion. The wolf was stunned, and

immediately he was galloping forward, the wolves running from him in abject terror. It was all I could do to control my horse, and it took some tracking before Fortress found Father Mirror.

We sat in our saddles; every sound, every smell, seemed crisper. Then I realized that tendrils of dawn were reaching around, and as we rode on, we descended into a clearing and His Grace said, "Look! The great city itself: Peace."

---

It seemed but an hour and we were inside the great city itself. Having taken time to drink our fill of water, but not eat, we came into the great chamber where the holy bishops and the other attendees were gathered.

I could hear Wind blowing. I tried to listen.

"And I know," an archbishop said, "that not everyone can scale the hidden peaks. But you misunderstand us gravely if you think we are doing a poorer job of what you do."

Several heads had turned when we entered. An archbishop said, "Your Grace Fire! May the Glory grant you many years. Have you any thoughts?"

The Wind whispered in my ear, and quite suddenly I climbed on top of a table in an empty part of the chamber. I ignored the shock of those around me, so intently was I listening to the Wind's whisper.

"If that is anything," I shouted, "but a lie from Outer Darkness, may the Glory strike me down!"

I heard a click, and then several things happened at once. I was thrown violently forward, and I heard an explosion. I felt an unfamiliar sensation in my back, and I tasted blood.

A deathly silence filled the room. I began to move, and slowly picked myself up. "I repeat," I said. "If that is anything but a lie from Outer Darkness, may the Glory strike me down."

There was another explosion, and I felt fire on my back. I stood unmoved.

"I repeat. If that is anything but a lie from Outer Darkness, may the Glory strike me down!"

The Wind whispered, "Duck!"

I ducked, and a crossbow quarrel lodged itself in the wall.

Time oozed forward.

There was a scuffle, and four soldiers entered. One of them was holding a crossbow. Three of them were holding Clamp.

"Fathers and brothers, most reverend bishops and priests, deacons and subdeacons, readers and singers, monks and ascetics, and fellow members of the faithful, may the *Glory* reside in Heaven forever! I speak from painful awareness that what that son of darkness says is false. That is how it presents itself: a deeper awareness, a higher truth.

"This Council was summoned because you know that there is a problem. There are sins that have been spreading, and when you encourage people to penitence, something doesn't work. It is as if the disease of sin separated us from our natural union with the Light, and when the chasm was deep, the *Glorious Man* became Man, the *Great Bridge* that could restore the union... and something strange happened. Men are sliding off the Bridge.

"Fathers and brothers, the problem we are dealing with is not only a chasm that needs to be bridged. The problem is a false path that leads people to slip into the chasm.

"This error is formless; to capture it in words is to behead the great Hydra. It will never be understood until it is understood as error, as deadly as believing that poison is food.

"It is tied to pride; far from enjoying *Creation*, visible and invisible, however ascetically, it scorns that which we share, and the path of salvation open to mere commoners. It's the most seductive path to despair I've seen. I know. I've been there. The teaching that we are spirit and not body, that there is a sharp cleavage between spirit and body... I don't know how to distinguish this from proper asceticism, but it's very different.

When we fast, it is always a fast from a good, which we acknowledge as good when we give it back to the Light from whom every good and perfect gift shines. This is a scorn that

rejects evil; I don't know all the mythologies, but they do not see the world as the shining of the Light. The true Light himself would never stain his hands with it; it is the evil creation of a lesser god.

"And it is despair. It tingles, it titillates, it excites at first, and all this is whitewash to cover over the face of despair. Everything that common men delight in is empty to them, illusory joy. The great Chalice, that holds the meat of the Glorious Man's own flesh and holds the fluid more precious than ichor, his own true blood, the fluid that is the divine life—that all who partake see what they believe and become what they behold, younger brothers to the Glorious Man, sons of Light, sustained by the food of incorruption, servants in the Eternal Mansion who are living now the wonder we all await—I will not say what exciting thing they propose to replace it by. Some manage, I know not how, to find greater wonder in saying the Man was not the Glory and the Chalice as we know it is nothing. But it is in the beginning as sweet as honey, and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword. In a word, it says, 'Your spirit is too pure for this unworthy cosmos.'

"It is not healthy to dwell long on such things; I will not tell how its broken asceticism turns to people believing they can do whatever they wish with their bodies. (If the body is evil, not our true self...) He who long gazes into darkness may find his eyes darkened very soon or very slowly. In either case it is not good. But I will say this: Gaze on the Light, be strengthened by the Glorious Man, and listen to the Wind, and the better you know it, the less Darkness will look like Light. And we can rise against this error as error."

The archbishop who spoke when I entered said, "Would His Grace Fire please speak? I believe he has been rudely

interrupted."

His Grace Fire looked at him levelly. "I have already spoken," he said, "and I have nothing further to say."

Then His Grace turned to me. "Unspoken. Your robe is damaged beyond repair. Would you like a green or blue robe to replace it?"

My voice quivered. "A green robe was chosen for me. I need to—"

"That isn't what I asked of you. Would you like a green or blue robe to replace it?"

I looked at Fortress.

He fell on his face prostrate before me and said, "Dear Unspoken, you have surpassed my humble tutelage for ever. I release you."

I turned back to His Grace Fire. "A blue robe."

Then I turned to Father Mirror. "To gaze on the glory as a member of your monastery."

A flask of oil was in the bishop's hands. "Unspoken, I give you a new name. You have spoken the unspoken. You have delved into the unspoken, searched it out, drawn forth jewels. I anoint you Miner."

All was still as he anointed my forehead, my eyes, my mouth, the powers of my body.

The Council's decision was swift. My words had opened a door; insight congealed in the hearts of those present. It moved forward from discussion to decrees, and decrees in turn gave way to the divine liturgy.

I had never been at a Meal like that, and have never been at one since. The uncreated Light shone through every face. I saw a thousand lesser copies of the Glorious Man. The Wind blew and blew. The Glory remained with us as we rode home.

We rode in to the city, and I saw Pool. She—she looked different. But I couldn't say why. Was I seeing a new beauty because of the Light? I sat silently and watched as Fortress dismounted. She walked up to him, and slowly placed one arm over one of his shoulders, and then the other arm over the other of his shoulders, and looked at him and said, "There is life inside me."

His eyes opened very wide, and then he closed them very tightly, and then he gave Pool the longest kiss I have ever seen.

---

"Wait," Father Mirror said. "First discharge your duty to our bishop. You will have this life and the next to gaze on the *Glory*.

My guest room is free to you for as long as you need."

I looked at him wistfully.

"The highest oath a monk takes is obedience. That oath is the crystallization of manhood, and when you kneel before me as your father, your spirit will fall in absolute prostration before the Father of Lights for whom every fatherhood in Heaven and on earth is named. And if you are to be in obedience to me, you can begin by waiting to take that oath."

I waited.

The days passed swiftly. Quills and scrolls were given to me, and I inscribed three books. I wrote *The Way of Death*, in which I wrote about the error as a path, an encompassing way of living death, in which error, evil, and sin were woven together. I contemplated, prayed, and spoke with Fortress and others. Then I wrote *The Way of Healing*, in which I answered the question, "If that is the path we should avoid, what path should we walk instead?" Then I wrote *The Way of Life*, in which I left the way of death behind altogether, and sought to draw my reader before the throne of the *Glory* himself. I wrote:

But what can I say? The Light is projected down through every creature, everything we know, yes, even the Destroyers themselves. But if we try to project upwards and grasp the Light, or even the hope that awaits us, it must, it must, it must fail. "In my Father's house there are many rooms." These rooms are nothing other than us ourselves—the habitations and places into which we invite friend and stranger when we show our loves, and the clay that is being

shaped into our glory, the vessels we will abide in forever.

The Tree from which we were once banished, has borne  
Fruit without peer, and we will eat its twelve fruits in the  
twelve seasons. Yet a tree is smaller than a man, and a man is  
smaller than—

The temple where we worship, where Heaven and earth  
meet, is now but the shadow cast when the Light shines  
through the Temple that awaits us. The Light is everywhere,  
but we capture him nowhere. He is everything and nothing; if  
we say even that he Exists, our words and ideas crumble to  
dust, and if we say that he does not Exist, our words and  
ideas crumble beyond dust. If we look at the Symbols he  
shines through, everything crumbles, and if we say that  
everything crumbles, those words themselves crumble.

I end this book here. Leave these words behind, and gaze  
on the Glory.

I dropped my pen and sat transfigured in awe. I was  
interrupted by shaking. "It's time for the Vigil?"

I began to collect myself. "Vigil?"

"The Vigil of when Heaven and earth met, and the Word  
became flesh."

I opened my eyes. I realized the end of a fast had arrived.

"The books are finished."

"Finished?"

"Finished."

I do not remember the Vigil; I saw through it, and was  
mindful only of the Glory. The head monk learned I had finished,  
and the bishop was called.

Then came the feast. Pool held a son at her breast, and  
looked dishevelled, tired, radiant. Fortress beamed. His Grace  
Five spoke on the three gifts given the Glorious Mary: Gold

Fire spoke on the three gifts given the Glorious Man. Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. Gold was a reverent recognition of his kingship, Myrrh a reverent recognition of his suffering, and Frankincense a reverent recognition of his divinity. He turned these three over and over again, blending them, now one showing, and now another. His words burned when he said that in the person of the Glorious Man, these gifts were given to the entire community of Glorious Men.

The feast was merry, and when it wound down, Father Mirror welcomed me into the community. It was a solemn ceremony, and deeply joyful. I swore poverty, chastity, and obedience. I found what I had been seeking when I fled my island. Then I was clothed—I was given the shroud, the cocoon of metamorphosis by which I was to be transfigured during the rest of my life.

After I retired to my room, I heard a knock at my door, followed by quick footsteps. I looked around, but saw no one.

Then I looked down, and saw a gift box. It was empty. Or was it?

Inside was a single grain of Frankincense.

# Stephanos

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

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

Where to go?

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

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

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

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

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

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

She was very gaunt, and yet that gauntness held fierce power. When he had looked into the Icon—or through it, as one looks through a window—he kissed her hand and looked at the royal doors, light doors with a kind of wooden mesh (it was beautiful) and a tower of three Icons each. The royal doors were at the

center of the low, open wall that guarded the holy of holies within the temple, a special place crowned by the altar. The top two Icons told the place, not of the Annunciation to the Mother of God, but the Annunciation of the Mother of God. He looked into the pictures and saw the Annunciation of the Mother of God: not when the Archangel said, "Hail, O favored One! The Lord is with you," but when the Virgin listened and replied, "Behold the handmaiden of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word."

The spine of Eve's sin was snapped.

Death and Hell had already begun to crumble.

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

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

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

The flame made him think of the God Who Cannot Be Pushed Around. This God sent his Son, who was also the One Who Cannot

Be Pushed Around. In his teaching, in his friendship, in his healing the sick and raising the dead, every step he made was a step closer to this, the Cross. And yet he did this willingly.

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

Stephan was looking for the beginning of triumph...

...and that was right there in the Icon the color of sunrise.

The Cross in itself was the victory of the God Who Cannot Be Pushed Around. However much it cost him, he never let go of his plan or his grace. Christ knew he could call for more than twelve legions of angels—but he never did. He walked the path the

Father set before him to the very end.

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

When he did look away, it was in the Light of that God.

Everything now bore that Light. He went over to the relics of the patron saints of his land, and though they were much newer than the relics of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint John

Chrysostom, and Saint Basil the Great, that didn't seem to matter. It was like dust from another world—precious grains of sand from Heaven—and the Icon of Saint Herman of Alaska and

Saint Innocent holding up a tiny building was richly colorful—"like a rainbow that has grown up," he heard one of the grown-ups say.

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

Stephan said, "I want to be a martyr just like you, Saint Ignatius. Pray for me."

Then he walked over to an Icon that was much smaller, but showed a man standing besides a rustic settlement with an outer wall and turrets and doors and buildings inside. It looked medieval to him, and he wished he could enter that world. It was darkened and yellowed and had a gold leaf sky, and something was written at the top, but he couldn't read it because it was in a very old language: Old Slavonic.

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

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

Then Stephan stood in front of the main Icon of the Mother of God holding God the Son, though he stood some distance back.

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

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

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

What were those chilling, terrifying words of Christ? "Depart from me, you who are damned, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me

nothing to eat, thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, sick and in prison and you did not visit me, lacking clothes and you did not give me the dignity of having clothes to wear." Then the condemned will say, "Where did we see you hungry and not feed you, or thirsty or sick or in prison and not take care of you?" And the King and Lord and Judge will say, "I most solemnly tell you, as much as you did not do it for the least of these brothers and sisters, you did not do it for me."

Stephan looked at the Icon and said, "I wish Dad would let me give money to beggars when I see..." Then his voice trailed off. The words didn't feel right in his mouth. He looked at the solemn love in the Icon, and then his mind was filled with the memory of his sister in tears.

He slowly backed down from the Icon, feeling the gaze of the King and Lord and Judge. He turned to almost run—he was in too holy of a place to run, and...

Something stopped him from leaving. After struggling inside, he looked around, and his eyes came to rest on the Icon of the Crucifixion that was the color of sunrise. Now he had not noticed them earlier this time, but he saw the Mother of God on one side and the beloved disciple on the earth. What had he just heard in church on Sunday? "Christ said to the beloved disciple, who is not here named because he is the image of every disciple, 'Behold your Mother,' and to his Mother, 'Behold your Son.' Listen to me very carefully. He did not say, 'Behold another man who is also your son,' but something much stranger and more powerful: 'Behold your Son,' because to be Orthodox is to become Christ." Stephan started to think, "Gold for kingship, incense for divinity, myrrh for suffering—these are Christ's gifts but he shares them with the Church, doesn't he?" He looked up, and then looked down.

"But I need to go and apologize for hurting my sister."  
Then Christ's icon walked out the door.

# A Strange Archaeological Find

To my most excellent friend and pupil:

Yes, you are correct about the letter's origins, and you are right to be somewhat confused. This one's going to take a more than a few words.

Literature from almost any place can be timeless. This people had an epic poem that appeared to be about cat and mouse, but was really about much more: the struggle between good and evil, and the vindication of the oppressed. We do not have a complete manuscript, but we know their children would listen to these poems for hours. I know the criticisms of that literature, and they are all true—but the literature is universal and timeless. I read some of it to my youngest, and he was laughing.

However, not everything they made is that universal. You asked if the document you'd found showed unusual local color.

I'd rather call it a slagheap of discarded local paints and pigments. Making sense is going to take some explaining, but keep your cheer. By the time you're done, you may find some other things less difficult to think about.

Remember the lecture illustration of the potato. At one end is the potatoes of France, somewhat universally known, at the other

is the entirety of man, or what is universally human; at the other end, the full specificity of one man. Understanding man, or understanding one man, means in part moving in an infinitely differentiated space full of nuance. I don't need to remind you that the actual lesson has other dimensions as well, in part because we aren't getting that far with this letter.

Now think about those things that are corporate to a people. Take a thin slice of the potato, and throw the rest away—yes, I know, that's most of the potato. Now there's... I'll explain what the other slice is in a bit, but imagine another, even thinner slice of the slice, so what's left is a line—a line that looks like a point if you view it the wrong way.

What is that second slice? Step into a friend's field, and leave a rock to remember your place. Now walk to his house, counting the steps. Then walk back, and walk to some other landmark—a tree, perhaps, and count your steps. Now forget the earth beneath your feet, the grass you see, the children smiling, and the birds overhead—not quite 'forget', that's too strong, but push them back as secondary. What counts, what makes that place uniquely itself, is the number of steps you counted in going to the house and the tree. Of course the steps can be used to find that place, but imagine further that the number of steps make that place what it is—and it would be quite different if the house had been built ten paces further.

They do this with the number of winters that have passed. That is the second slice, and it is viewed end-on, so as to only be a point—but the strange thing is they do not think this is part of the picture, but that it is the picture. In a strange way, that line, viewed end-on, is much bigger than the potato we think of; it's not just a teacher's illustration, even one that is repeated very often, but an idea so basic and foundational that most of them

aren't aware they believe it. They might perhaps be shocked, and think the other person is irrational, if someone were to deny the significance of one of the mantras that encapsulates this view, but... I'm trying to think of an example... I'll have to get back to you on that.

That is one major piece of background. Another that I'll mention—and this is not universal to the people, but something that tends to infect the more intelligent... ok, a bit of background.

We have, and use, one basic kind of candle. Once I was able to visit an archaist who had been able to revive one of the candles they were using. He invited several of us in, pulled a lever...

The candle was encased in a goblet, and it had a dazzling brilliance—as if there was a bonfire burning, and yet its flame was no larger than a small candle's, and it did not flicker at all, nor did it make smoke. The light was not red nor orange, not even yellow, but purest white like the sun—and when I broke my gaze and looked away, the other things in the room looked as if there were a little sun in the room. It was one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen.

As I was saying, they had several kinds of candle, but one thing they had in common was not only that they produced light, but that when they ran out, the wick turned black. One of their jokers, in an inspired moment, produced a theory that what were called 'light sources' were instead things that sucked dark: darkness was heavy, which is why if you swim down in a lake you will find more and more dark. It was absolutely brilliant humor, all the moreso if you know what sort of thing it parodied.

There are multiple theories like that, and there was... well, this will require a bit of background as well. Any magical system of merit doesn't just try to get things done; it has a theory

about why the magic works, and underneath there is a story. One of their magical theories essentially said there was a nonexistent spirit which, despite its nonexistence, hovered over the earth and made more of organisms that were excellent and fewer of organisms that were poor. This theory was woven into a narrative about great mounds of rock and fire, then earth, then lightning striking a lake and bringing something to life, then the spirit working that one living thing into a symphony of diversity, organisms coming and going, until at last mortal gods walked the earth... and then, in the truly greatest speaking, all returns to elemental chaos. It is a truly great myth, and I am saddened that our storytellers do not recount anything like it.

There is an idea of a 'meme', which is an idea, story, or joke, construed as a living thing that this sort of spirit is operating on. I was interested when I encountered the idea, and read with even more interest when the Principia Cybernetica described memes in explicitly more anthropomorphic terms than people. Here, I was certain, was a masterpiece of comedic genius...

...and then one of my colleagues explained that it wasn't. It was deadly serious. I thought it parodied dirty sleight-of-hand in anti-Christian polemics... but it didn't. It couched terms in heavily prejudicial language, like their example question of, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" but somehow even very bright Christians accepted what far less intelligent ones intuited to be unfair and insulting.

Now I remember one of the catch-phrases, in terms of how important the number of passed winters was for them. I'd have to look at their literature for more, but one of them was, "We're entering the third millenium." As spoken, it was not simply the answer to a trivial question, but a statement of great metaphysical import. From what little I can tell, if someone

contradicted this association, it was to them as if he had contradicted that the sun was white.

I think I've given enough of a preface to look at the letter—rather than writing a full letter of preliminaries. Here's the opening:

Several things relate here. Trying to 'see' what happened in history, particularly where we are looking at the origins of Christianity, is to me somewhat akin to being in a river trying to look back through all the moving water and intuiting what the source looked like when the water you are in now started to flow. 'Tis murky indeed... Those historians and theologians, who might have us believe they are not looking back through the murky river as we are but rather hovering over the source in a helicopter somehow transported back through time, are slipping in a priestly function in so doing.

I'd like to say a few things. As regards your main questions on this passage, you got one right and one wrong. The Helicopter was a giant mechanical bird capable of carrying men—oh, about that question, these things were produced by magic, but it was not occult practice to use them; this is not an occult reference, and I don't want to delve into why not. You were right about that.

What you were wrong about is your reading that the people being criticized are looking downstream while the letter's author is in the priveleged Helicopter able to look down on the ancient Christians and the people he was criticizing. That isn't what he was saying at all... wait, I know why you would think that. You might be right in that that is what he was really saying. Kind of like the koan I'll adapt:

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An ancient Christian looked troubled.  
One later Christian said, "He is troubled."  
Another Christian said, "How do you know whether or  
not he's troubled? You're not him!"  
The other replied, "How do you know whether or not I  
know whether or not he's troubled? You're not me!"

The tone and spirit of the letter indeed suggests that the ancient Christians, and the author's conservative contemporaries, are trapped in a river, while the author is hovering about freely in the Helicopter. However, that is not the intent. The intent was to accuse the conservatives of doing something that would appear strange given the assumptions of a metaphor that runs counter to their thought, as for that matter it did for ancient Christian thought.

Further complicating our task is our respective cultural memes and our personal ongoing process of regeneration. The former contains all the turbidity thrown up by all previous good thinking and confused thinking. The latter usually contains some unrecognized proclivities.

The reference to 'cultural memes' carries quite a lot more freight than the already substantial freight they associate with cultures. I'm trying to think of something to use as a metaphor to convey what is meant here, and I am failing. It's a bit like saying "two people are uniquely themselves and cannot converse otherwise", except that what it plays out as is not a celebration of God's gift of humanity, where God made each man unique and catholic, but being uniquely themselves is construed as an impediment to catholicity: Gregory's skill in choosing nautical

metaphors is an impediment to talking with Jane, because most people don't work that way. It's not exactly the doctrine of the Fall, either, saying that there are dark marks on each person and society, and that that hinders communication. It's more... the central dogma of their magic is that there is no magic, and there is an essentially amoral and even material conception of human culture: culture is a spiritually inert weight which slows and weighs people down, except that's not right either. My head is spinning now, and you probably understand less about them than you did at the beginning of this paragraph.

The last sentence seems to stem from individualism, in that corporate personality, the spirit of a society, is a source of turgidity, but God does work with people, and he sometimes gives them special abilities despite his difficulties in blessing communal knowledge.

Hence my insistence that we know what we are thinking with as well as what we are thinking about.

No, this sentence is not corrupt. I checked.

Perhaps the best way to put it stems from a friend's comment that if he takes a strong and immediate dislike to someone, it is quite often because the other person exemplifies one of his vices. There's some resonance with Confucius's words, "When I see a virtuous man, I try to be like him. When I see an evil man, I reflect on my own behavior."

I understand your suggestion that the reading be emended, "Hence my insistence that conservatives know what we think they are thinking with, as well as what we are thinking about," but you have to understand that the statement as read, literally, can be made in perfectly good faith. Some people talked about the importance of knowing what they were thinking with; the

people they criticized often did so.

Regarding what is called feminism, our very use of the term indicates the influence of our cultural meme and our submission to someone else's cultural agenda.

You were right on this time. He's not an etymologist. However, there are reasons besides individual carelessness that this would be presented as serious analysis.

You know that the New Testament writers tended to read any ambiguity for all it was worth, in their favor. The considered people tended to be much more tightly rigorous in treating Biblical texts, but relaxed rigor and made "Just-So" stories about words in their own time: "family man" was taken by their feminist dictionary to be a mark of sexism (because that quality is assumed in a woman so much that we don't have a specific term for a family woman), but you can rest assured that, had the language had a term "family woman" but not "family man", the dictionary entry would have talked about how sexist it was to have a word used to talk about a woman as a "family woman", but not even have a word to refer to a "family man".

If you ask a historian or an etymologist, their very use of the term feminism indicates something very prosaic: a movement started, calling itself feminism, and the name has stayed the same across time. This is a run-of-the-mill linguistic occurrence, closely related to the growth of dead metaphor, and has the same political significance as the fact that the gesture they use to greet a friend originated as a gesture of mistrust used to keep a stranger from drawing a weapon: none.

However, this sort of folk analysis is innately valuable for historians. You need to keep your eyes open for passages like this: some sentences can tell more than a page of

THIS; some sentences can tell more than a page of straightforward explanation.

In the context of biblical discussion, much progress has been made on 'gender passages' such as 1 Timothy 2.

In their conception, that one thin slice of potato is magnified in part by a conception of progress, a conception that ideas, like machines, grow rust and need to be replaced for no other reason than being old. As such, their use of the term 'progress' means something different from our understanding of a student acquiring the expertise of his master. It means that people are becoming better, wiser, and nobler than the people who came before.

Given that I am writing to you and not speaking publicly, I'm not going to traipse through and analyze the texts referred to. I can say, without bothering to look them up, that they are using their immense scholarly resources to make themselves stupider than they actually are, dredging up some pretext to reverse a conclusion that is obvious to a child of twelve. You and I do this for humor; they were quite serious.

The starting point for learning this is via Christians for Biblical Equality. See the link to their website on the links page of [www.intelligentchristian.org](http://www.intelligentchristian.org). I am convinced they are right.

Yes, there is a reason for the use of the term 'Biblical equality'. Specifically, the name functions as whitewash when even backwoods farmers have caught on that there are problems with feminism. As far as accuracy goes, one in two isn't bad for these things; it isn't Biblical (note that the Bible doesn't qualify as a suggested starting point for Biblical equality) but the

choice of term makes up, if one may follow their linguistics: they seek e-quality, the absence of qualitative or distinctive traits such as God created every person to exhibit. Their way of leveling the ground also levels the people who are standing on that ground. A cue to this is found in their use of the term 'gender' where previous thinkers had referred to 'sexuality'.

The older term, 'sexuality', evokes a man and a woman on a couch, but that moment is the visible shoot atop a network of roots. The deep root stated, in essence, that different physical characteristics are not the end of different personhood, but the very beginning: that masculinity and femininity are attributes of the spirit, and that differences of spirit run deeper than differences of body. The feminist movement's search for equality discarded this, believing there are only physical differences, and if there's any differences in people's minds, they must be arbitrary social constructions, namely 'gender'.

The surface issue most commonly discussed—the only issue, to many listeners—is the issue of whether women should be ordained. In this regard, the people who were for women's ordination couldn't see why it shouldn't be that way, and the people against couldn't explain. If there's no essential difference, if as the feminists said we are one type of soul that happens to be encased in two types of body, then it is an unambiguous consequence that women should be ordained.

I trust you will see that something important has slipped into that nice-looking statement. If not—think closely about "one type of soul that happens to be encased in two types of body."

What is being said? This doesn't just impact sexuality. The teaching that we are soul encased in body is ancient, and it lies at the root of that great Hydra, Gnosticism. Gnosticism starts

out very rigidly ascetic, trying to be spiritual by shunning anything bodily—because we're spirits and not bodies. Then it shifts, and ascetics are shocked when their spiritual children engage in every form of bodily vice—because we're spirits and not bodies, so it doesn't matter what we do with our bodies. I've studied it, and it happens every time.

I would recall to you an early lecture, where I distinguished a philosophical conclusion from a practical conclusion: there's a deeper resemblance than philosophy being practical, but I wish to talk about them as distinct ideas. A philosophical conclusion is what a philosopher will develop from an idea with an hour's thought, and it does not much concern me here. A practical conclusion is what will happen over time if you start a community believing an idea and come back to it later. Gnostic libertinism is the practical conclusion of Gnostic asceticism.

Does the Biblical egalitarian perspective have a practical conclusion? It does, and it is something even that Biblical egalitarian could have seen—could have seen without engaging in the execrated practice of opening a history book. The perspective did not originate with him; it happened before, and the late forms were around for him to see.

The claim bandied about is that women should be ordained. Well... it appears that women had been ordained before and after the Biblical egalitarians, and so far as I read, God's blessing was on it. However, that's really just a glint on the surface. What lies deeper, and the reason people were so bent on having half the priests be priestesses, is the idea that there is no fundamental difference between men and women beyond what impacts the mechanics of reproduction—because if there isn't, then of course it's ridiculous to only ordain men. That assumption was not given critical examination.

What happened after that is what had happened every other time, and what he could have verified by opening his eyes. If the teachings about masculinity and femininity are erased from Christian doctrine, a few proof texts about women's roles won't last long... very few years pass before people explain them away, as appears "progress" in misinterpreting the Timothy passage above. The Bible is an interlocking whole, a great sculpture in perfect balance—and if you pull away one part you don't like, others will not stay in place. So we celebrate the ordination of women, or—in more honest terms—celebrate the annihilation of belief that sexuality could inform how people contribute to the body of Christ.

After that, why be so unenlightened as to maintain sex roles anywhere else? Why not gay marriage? By that time, it was difficult to have anything besides a gay marriage, even with a man and a woman both involved: it was some legal contract involving sex, but disconnected with any expectation of loyalty or openness to children, so why not a marriage between two men?

Sure, the Bible has a couple of proof texts about that, but they're not really any harder to "explain" and "investigate" than those that suggest human sexuality contributes to the Church...

It wasn't an accident, by the way, that feminism specifically celebrated lesbianism. There were of course other factors, but part of it was the dismantling of an older teaching that celebrated sex as the interaction between two very opposite poles.

By this time, a sculpture that had been hanging precariously slid further down. Somewhere along the line any revelation of God as masculine and not feminine was dismantled—because "we need to keep an open mind and not confine God to traditional canons of gender", meaning in practice "we need to confine God

to our anti-traditional abhorrence of sexuality." You'll remember the Re-Imagining conference which there was that big hubbub about—celebrating the goddess and more fundamentally believing that all the Biblical images their movement didn't like were arbitrary imaginations put in by unenlightened men. I frankly don't see why anyone, conservative or liberal, made such a stink about that. It wasn't any worse than what was happening elsewhere; it just dropped the usual mask.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump. Where people raised the axe and chopped away one troublesome root of the Ancient Tree, what invariably happened was that that wasn't the one troublesome root; now that it was gone, their vision cleared to see that there was another one of equal trouble... and another... and another... and by the time the Tree fell, people were glad for the death of an ancient menace. The phenomenon is a bit like a fire—the more it has, the more it wants.

I am leery of the unrecognized use of logical systems which were developed outside scripture.

I understand your point, but I really don't think he's trying to be ironic. "A meme is not a social construct like a syllogism; it reflects the terrain of which the syllogism is a very imperfect map." Agreed, this is a bad way of putting it, but... the best I can explain it is that he is brilliant, knows many of the facets of knowing how to think, but doesn't understand how to think. Reminds me of when I had a student trained in memory but not our thought, who answered perfectly my questions until I stumbled on the fact that he didn't understand what was being talked about—he memorized words, and did so far better than I ever will, but didn't grasp the ideas the words were meant to hold. This is different: the author knows large chunks of the

...Irenaeus wrote how false teachings were as if someone had taken a jewel statue of the king, and reassembled it to an imperfectly executed statue of a fox, and said the fox were the king. There are real jewels there, but the statue isn't right.

As we now know through complexity studies, the old Aristotelian view that A and non-A were mutually exclusive is suspect.

In response to your question, I'm more hesitant to say that he's gone from believing in infallible logic to believing infallible complexity study has debunked fallible logic. It comes closer to say that logic is old and favored by many traditional theologians, and therefore in double jeopardy—complexity studies provide a good platform to attack it. If Aristotle had developed complexity studies and more recent endeavors had found logic, I believe this statement would show how logical inquiry reveals inherent problems in complexity studies.

At any rate, after tasting old wine, he has tasted the new, and said, "The new is better."

There is one reason to be particularly cautious in your use of logic.

He's not saying what you think he's saying. He's not describing logic as being like an array of tools, where you should use a file rather than a hammer to smooth a piece of wood. The direction he's going is more, after having seen that different tools perform different tasks, to say that you need to be careful in using a saw to cut wood, because there are so many things a saw isn't good at. It might be like an oral person with a well-

trained memory discovering the power of writing, and doubting the justification of memorizing the stories he tells.

That is the instinctive, post-fall, unregenerative, inclination of males to engineer.

In another context, you would be right; the long string of words would convey something wonderful and poetic that one word will not tell. Here, it is there to achieve a quite different effect that one word wouldn't:

#### Instinctive

I know that instincts are good: the instincts to preserve oneself, or seek company, or procreate are part of the goodness of man. You have to keep in mind who is using the word, though. Remember what the feminist position implies for a theology of body: it is a husk, an exterior, and therefore to say someone is acting on instinct, is to say he is living by something base and exterior, and is less than a man.

He is not building up to a panegyric on the glory of intelligent creation; he's using what is meant to be a very pejorative term.

#### Post-fall

I've seen this usage before, and I don't know what to make of it. What I can tell you is that it serves as a kind of loaded language to dismiss a feminist's opponent; the opponent is "locked into a post-fall mode of thinking", quite often without a proper explanation of why he is wrong. It's a sort of irrefutable trump.

The propositional content of this epithet is debatable; it states that the Fall created an urge which has just been

declared part of our created instinct. It's rather confusing if you try to reason it out, and much better if you don't reason it out, and just let the words flow over you and show that whatever's being discussed is bad.

### Unregenerative

This word may be read as saying that something is not itself part of the regeneration process; unless of the whole of a Christian's life (barring sin) is part of the regenerative process, this could just be part of a holy life that is not concerned with the facet called regeneration. However, in poetic context, this is part of the buildup saying that whatever follows is bad.

### Males

Here we do not even see 'men', which in use by a feminist refers to less than one-half of men, but 'males'... the term reminds me of a related language, where it is considered to use the terms 'male' and 'female' of a human: they are used in biology, but of humans it is quite vulgar.

One other nuance, present if not obvious, is not simply as you or I would make a such a statement: you or I would refer to women half of the time when we were saying something sexually specific. They wouldn't. This statement says something very insulting about 'males', not because this sample happens to refer to us, but because no male feminist would dare to make such statements about women. A female feminist may say more abrasive things about traditional women, but a male feminist will nearly never do so. This provides a very interesting glimpse into their view of equality.

### Engineer

Literally speaking, the term refers to part of how man

participates in culture and the glory of God: that marvelous candle I described earlier was engineered. However, it is used in a metaphorical sense here, and is highly pejorative. The implication is that the accused is engineering something that was never meant to be engineered.

The interesting thing, especially with the last one, is... traditional theology is something organic that has been passed down from generation to generation, tended with the utmost of care by thinkers far too humble to try to engineer it, and is now being rejected in favor of something that has been engineered. That's why the spiritual climate produced the ill-starred Re-Imagining conference, something that wouldn't occur to the traditional theologians who're accused of engineering. This irony plays out in the next line:

Disguised in much theological discussion is the 'what should Christianity be like if I designed it?' agenda.

It is painfully obvious to you and me that making "much progress" on Pauline passages is seeing what Christianity would be like if they designed it, but the irony is apparently not evident there.

The list of indictments brought against traditional theology can be interesting. Looking closely may reveal things the accusers perceive because it is part and parcel of their world.

I don't think Christianity, or any generic god-conscious theology, was designed or engineered by the living God in an anthropomorphically satisfying way.

An astute observation; there is probably fertile ground for your research into why a person making this claim would do so in

your research into why a person making this claim would do so in the context of criticizing traditional theology for not being anthropomorphically satisfying to people sharing his agenda.

It matters not whether the logic we use comes from Aristotle, Plato or Alfred E Newman, let's spell it out when we use it and justify why we use it.

Regarding your question, about why he neither spells out his logic nor justifies it: I honestly don't know. Perhaps he was rushed (an unusually common emotion for them), and he decided this was a poorer use of a small perceived available time than points of greater perceived substance, such as the subsequent list of opponents using personal attacks.

One of the tip-offs of the male dominator Christian theologians

Thinking about your intuition, I decided to check the archives.

An earlier note among the group had understood and responded in depth: specifically, that domination is what a feminist would expect of tradition because of his stereotype, and it is something read in, but is present neither in the Bible, nor in the theologians being represented. The 'misogynist' Paul is among few ancient writers who didn't tell husbands to keep women in line; he addresses women as moral agents, placing submission in their hearts, and then tells the men to love the women, naming as their example the most costly love of all—much more costly than submission. The group member responding had said, in so many words, that the sigil of male headship and authority is not a crown of gold but a crown of thorns. Man will occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of the

time he will pick himself up and continue on. The feminist position needs the traditional position to be abrasive to women—and if the Bible or traditionalists clarify, never mind; the abuse will be made up in the feminist's mind so he can still vilify the benighted.

Is their use of personal attack on egalitarian theologians.

I've done some reading of them. Once I was privileged to visit an arcane library that had nearly half the issues to [First Things](#) and [Touchstone](#), and I don't remember an article where one of them personally attacked an opposing theologian. There was quite a lot of polemic, and one devastating satire in *The Other Face of Gaia*, but... they show a remarkable amount of restraint, and I'm getting sidetracked.

What I was going to say is that these people viewed being nice and love as the same thing, so that talking about being loving but not nice is equivalent to Plato talking about being eudaimonic and being evil—a perceived contradiction in terms. In this case...

I can see how some Biblical passages would lose some of their force. They had a concept of being 'unsanitary', kind of an amoral sense that you could get sick from something, and they knew disgust, but they didn't have a sense of being polluted and defiled... so few nonscholars would read Jesus' comparison of pillars of community to whitewashed tombs as being not merely an insult but a metaphor of their being so unholy that a person whose shadow fell on them would be defiled for a whole week. Likewise... they usually thought cannibalism was wrong, and knew the plot of *Oedipus Rex*, but they would still read 'brood of vipers' as simply comparing people to snakes and not with the full realization that Jesus compared them to creatures thought to

kill their mothers and eat their way out—cannibalism and matricide being two of the most revolting things an ancient listener could think of. I can see how they might miss much of the abrasiveness, but there are so many other passages: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in the last times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron." You've read the Bible more than once; you could supply your own examples.

Somehow they were able to read these passages and not question the belief that the limits of niceness are the limits of love. I don't know how to explain why; that's just how it is. And so apparently the theologians mentioned are dismissed because they fail to meet a standard the Bible itself rejects.

Wayne Grudem, for example, has vilified Cathie Kroeger. He did this in print some time ago and it still hurts Cathie. I saw her, her husband Dick along with Elaine Storkey at Cathie's home a few weeks ago and it is obvious the personal attacks have done damage.

I talked with a colleague, and I believe Arius also sustained emotional damage from what happened at Nicaea.

J I Packer has written some nasty things, using vocabulary stemming from secular conflict.

In reference to 'vocabulary stemming from secular conflict'... I understand your asking where the article author gets his vocabulary from, but I'd prefer to abstain from judgment. I don't know that we have the background to evaluate this.

James Dobson, who is a psychologist of non-biblical

James Dobson, who is a psychologist of non-biblical foundations, has led the fight against the publication of more gender equal translations.

I've done some research, and I think he's referring to the obvious James Dobson... I wanted to do further research, because it's not at all obvious to me why he's categorized as a theologian... a sharp popularizer, to be granted, and a shade of demagogue; his psychological expertise is held in light esteem by psychologists now and was apparently held in light esteem then...

perhaps the author was using the term 'theologian' as a convenient designation for "anyone prominent who disagrees with him." I don't mean that as a joke; if I had to choose between asking a brilliant theologian or a demagogue like Dobson to lead a fight, I'd pick the demagogue hands-down. (Perhaps the author wasn't familiar with very many real theologians' defense of sexuality.)

The idea of gender equal translations is interesting. Assuming a more modest objective of correcting gender bias without reading asexuality into God, the argument is made that the original languages used terms that were effectively asexual, so faithfully rendering them were asexual... and the terms in the original language were grammatically masculine which were understood to include the feminine. What's interesting here is that the terms in English were grammatically masculine and understood to include the feminine, universally and without question until feminists decided them to have gender bias.

It's kind of like someone going into a room where you enjoy seeing by candlelight, and then someone comes and brings in a blinding torch—and you get irritated and ask why, so he explains that you need the extra light because your eyes are dazzled.

Dobson's wife writes that the foundation of Christian marriage is the submission of the wife to the husband.

I don't share her perspective, but it is not clear to me why this statement is particularly significant. A more rigorous, if also more vivid, statement is found in Martin Luther's statement that if your theology is perfect except for what the world, the flesh, and the Devil are at that moment attacking, then you are preaching nothing.

Many people pick one or more specializations or areas of emphasis; it's an understandable temptation to think that your specialization is the center of the universe. If you're smiling at this, you might take a moment to remember the many times you have viewed history as the foundation to all scholarly inquiry. It's not; it has a place among the Disciplines, and I am glad to study it, but history is not the foundation to Discipline.

It doesn't surprise me that a woman allied with Dobson would think submission was the foundation of Christian marriage; it has the dual qualities of being important and under attack. What I fail to see is why her statement should be that significant.

I favour and encourage the popularization and democratization of bible study and take the view that if a theologian can understand then so can I. And if I can understand it then it can be produced in a popularly understandable form.

Part of this passage is very confusing; before and after, he is frustrated by popularized and democratized Bible study which leads people to contradict his conclusion. I'm not going to sort through that, but I wish to summarize one element: There's a kind of proverb, very common, where someone

meeting a specialist would say, "In a sentence, explain what it is that you know." What is interesting is that this was not perceived as a riddle of heroic proportions, or even a ridiculous question; they believed instead that the burden of effort was on the specialist, and if he could not convey what knowledge he had obtained by years of excellent study, then he didn't know what he was talking about. The attitude in this challenge is apparently present in what is proposed.

On one level, there is confusion; given that the Bible is beyond any one person's understanding, the Bible was available, not merely in one or two translations, but so many translations we don't have a count. Many of these were simplified. What appears to be said is not a Wycliffe call to make the Bible available to the common man, but a call for propaganda that will obscure what is presently obvious to the lay reader.

Instead we get more structure from these men who design and engineer. As I say, structure can speak louder than words. Structure can speak louder than the word of God. And for some, structure can become the word of God.

You have seen an article demonstrating how structure can speak louder than the word of God, an article that seeks and begs that the structure become the word of God. Read it closely. The allegation is made that structure and engineering are the realm of the tradition with no consideration made for how they might belong to the re-imaginers. Go to the [First Things](#) archive and read *The Skimpole Syndrome: never mind if you dislike it*, but is that the writing of an engineer? Then read materials from [Re-Imagining 2000](#) and ask if you see a reverent and trusting preservation of a transcendent and divine gift.

I don't know what, if anything, will come of it, but I took the opportunity to suggest once again to Cathie, Dick and Elaine that they begin producing their own translations of the gender passages along with an outline of the reasons for their differing translation and links for further study.

Why are they making a translation? Well, stop and think. I've made translations for the following reasons:

- To take a text not available in a given language, and make an understandable rendering.
- To take a text available only available in an arcane dialect of a given language, and make it understandable.
- To produce something that is close on a word-to-word level.
- To produce a text that renders thought-for-thought.
- Some careful balance of the previous two goals.
- To document linguistic ambiguity.

What is interesting here is that they aren't making a translation for any of those reasons. There's one reason you or I might not normally think of: to obscure a text's meaning.

You know that translations then tended to gut the Song of Songs, but there's really more going on here. The one I think was called the Now Indispensible Version was one where the scholars wanted to render the cruder passages accurately, but their elders said that part of God's word wasn't fit for public consumption. Translation bugaboos we will always have with us, but for some translations it is the *raison d'être*. The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures opens the Great Beginning with, "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." The original for that verse says, literally, "And God was the Word;" Greek did not give John a

more emphatic way to say, "And the Word was God." So why this translation? It is a translation made by heretics for the express purpose of being able to say, "Flip, flip, flip. The Bible doesn't really say that. See! My translation doesn't say so right here!"

That is exactly the kind of translation that is being requested here.

Clearly, from the discussion within our own intelligent group, the egalitarian information is not getting out.

I examined the archives: we know that egalitarian information was getting out in the group, and we know that because some very wise people rejected it, and stated that they had done so. The remark here is reminiscent of people who believe that, if you don't share their perspective, it can only be because you don't understand what they're saying. The mentioned article was actually a response sparked by someone who had weighed egalitarianism in the balance, and found it wanting.

Graham

One last note, because I know what you chose not to write.

He was not dead in mind.

He was absolutely brilliant—brighter than you. Graham Clinton was a leader of the International Christian Mensa. Mensa is a society that allows people who have a certain quantified wisdom such as is found with one man among fifty, and their leaders are often even sharper. Graham Clinton was someone who worked through struggle, held a great deal of compassion for his neighbor, and did many good works—and I have intentionally shown you his writing so that you may see someone brilliant and a leader among Christians. He also spent some time at a very good

seminary. He did not hold ecclesiastical title, but he was concerned (and talented) for a Christian life of the mind.

Satan will attack us wherever he can, and may be far more powerful on our strengths than our weakness. The letter I cite, and the movement from which it came, was not a movement of half-wits; it held many sharp people. It takes quite a lot of wits to make yourself that stupid. Compassion doesn't hurt; Graham could never have fallen for this poison did he not hold a great deal of compassion.

You do well enough in gawking at foreigners. That's commendable; it's good amusement. I might suggest there is more you could learn from your gawking—in particular, that their foibles are all too often our foibles dressed up in other clothes. All of the darkness in that letter is darkness I find in my own heart.

Would you come over here for a season? I miss you, and the discussions seemed to be livelier when they had your questions.

Cordially yours,  
Sutodoreh  
The year of our Lord 2504.

# A Strange Picture

As I walked through the gallery, I immediately stopped when I saw one painting. As I stopped and looked at it, I became more and more deeply puzzled. I'm not sure how to describe the picture.

It was a picture of a city, viewed from a high vantage point. It was a very beautiful city, with houses and towers and streets and parks. As I stood there, I thought for a moment that I heard the sound of children playing—and I looked, but I was the only one present.

This made all the more puzzling the fact that it was a disturbing picture—chilling even. It was not disturbing in the sense that a picture of the Crucifixion is disturbing, where the very beauty is what makes it disturbing. I tried to see what part might be causing it, and met frustration. It seemed that the beauty was itself what was wrong—but that couldn't be right, because when I looked more closely I saw that the city was even more beautiful than I had imagined. The best way I could explain it to myself was that the ugliness of the picture could not exist except for an inestimable beauty. It was like an unflattering picture of an attractive friend—you can see your friend's good looks, but the picture shows your friend in an ugly way. You have to fight the picture to really see your friend's beauty—and I realized that I was fighting the picture to see the city's real

... because that I was fighting the pressure to see the only, or best, beauty. It was a shallow picture of something profound, and it was perverse. An artist who paints a picture helps you to see through his eyes—most help you to see a beauty that you could not see if you were standing in the same spot and looking. This was like looking at a mountaintop through a pair of eyes that were blind, with a blindness far more terrible, far more crippling, than any blindness that is merely physical. I stepped back in  
nausea.

I leaned against a pillar for support, and my eyes fell to the bottom of the frame. I glanced on the picture's title: Porn.

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# **The Swiss Army Knife and God**

## **The great Swiss Army Knife and its kin**

It has become fashionable to say a bit of nuance when something is compared to a Swiss Army Knife: a Swiss Army Knife is a collection of second-rate tools: the can opener may be better than nothing, but it is a surrogate for a real can opener. At least it seems to be sophisticated nuance, but I write after having opened a can with my Swiss Army Knife when a "real" can opener was right in the drawer in front of me.

A spider's web is small, flimsy, easy to overlook, and in houses something people sweep away as a nuisance. Yet none of these faults are brought to mind when something is compared to the world wide web, or someone discussing history compares the 19th century establishment of nationwide railways crossing the U.S. to the establishment of the web. For that matter, there is a positive connotation to the spider's web that we do not evoke: a spider's web is what provides spiders something to eat, and some of us (including yours truly) are privileged to make a living from the web. The web is an intricate mesh of cross-linking, and the

idea of one node connected to the other is the prime metaphor evoked when we speak of the "web."

I carry four Swiss Army Knives, or at least material Swiss Army Knives, besides my wallet.

The first is [a Swisschamp my parents got for me in England](#) when we traveled when I was a teen, and I've made a couple of custom modifications to it: I filed away at part of the metal saw/nail file/metal file to make a harder-than-steel blade for cutting at screens, and I also narrowed the end of the tweezers to try and make it work better as a splinter tweezers. I've stopped carrying it once or twice, but so far at least I have gotten back to carrying it again. I know its features by heart: large blade, small blade, metal saw, metal file, nail file, nail cleaner, added harder-than-steel blade, wood saw, scissors, magnifying glass, Phillips screwdriver, pliers, large slotted screwdriver, can opener, wire stripper, small slotted screwdriver, can opener, corkscrew, jeweler's screwdriver, pin, wood chisel, additional slotted screwdriver, hook, reamer, pen, toothpick, tweezers (sadly replaced with a regular tweezers when I sent it in for repairs—I'm sure they meant it well).

The second Swiss Army Knife I carry is one that I purchased in a moment of "sacramental shopping" against my best judgment: my watch was having problems, but I already had a perfectly useful way to tell time. I had quite vulgarly agreed with the contents of my spam folder to believe that I needed an extra special watch and it would make me special. And so I purchased a [Casio Pathfinder watch](#), water resistant to 100 meters, and besides the normal time, five alarms, stopwatch, and timer one might expect of a digital watch, it has a compass, barometer/altimeter, a surprisingly useless thermometer, tells time in other time zones, is set each night by a signal from an

atomic clock and is probably within a second of the "official" absolute time without my ever setting it, and recharges by solar power even when I do nothing to make sure it gets light. It has never been below the highest level of charge. Oh, and its color is a military olive green with black highlight, so it fits in with my green and earth tone wardrobe. I have, as it turns out, used the compass, and I do hope it lasts me a while, but I regard the purchase as an ersatz sacrament, vulgar as a "replica luxury watch" hawked in spam.

[The third Swiss Army Knife I carry is an iPhone](#); I upgraded in the recent past from my iPhone 1 to an iPhone 4 because AT&T's rate limiting was getting to be a quite practical limitation; sending a thank-you note after a job interview was like breathing through a straw. I have not upgraded to the 4 S; it sounds impressive, but my present iPhone 4 works as nicely today as when I got it, good enough that the fact that something better is out there does not concern me.

(No, not Android; I've tried Android and didn't like it. I've wished I knew enough video editing to take one of the initial commercials, which said things like "iDon't have a real keyboard", to say all but the last "iDon't", and then edit in, "iDon't have a second-rate user interface," and then let the commercial give its final, "Droid does!")

My fourth Swiss Army Knife, which I use rarely, is/was (it is lost now) [an Ubuntu USB key](#): it can store files and it can boot (or install) Ubuntu Linux. While I use thend as someone answered a forum question, "I've installed Linux, now where I can get some games," and answered, "Linux is the game!" other three Swiss Army Knives all the time, this one is there but there are not too many situations to use it. I did install Linux at a friend's house when he requested it and there was no question of going

somewhere else to get media, but the way life moves today I spend little time using it; there may be students storing all their homework on a USB key, but I don't find myself using it often.

Part of the reasons people compare things to Swiss Army Knives (and call Perl "Unix's Swiss Army Chainsaw", Python being a lightsabre that cuts like a hot knife through butter), is that there is a mystique to this one bit of Swiss machinecraft that can do so many things. As a relatively young boy, I believe after addictively watching *MacGyver*, I was asked what I wanted for Christmas and said I wanted a Swiss Army Knife, and my Mom, who would not have been making the choice out of financial constraint, purchased me a wooden-handled pocketknife with two (literal) blades, and said, "See, I got you a Swiss Army Knife!" I tried to contain my disappointment; it was as if I had asked for a bacon cheeseburger, and imagined a good sit-down restaurant bacon cheeseburger piled high with toppings, and was told in perfect sincerity, "Here's the hamburger you asked for," and been given a tiny White Castle burger.

It was perhaps out of this experience that I made a purchase for a boy at church: his parents had told him, perhaps not strangely, that he could own a

The good thing about a Swiss Army knife or especially iPhone is that it somewhat allows you to carry your own world around with you—or is it? That carrying your own world and being somewhat independent of your surroundings bears an uncanny resemblance to the demon that is called pride. A Swiss Army Knife might not be as good as the mystique would have it: we have the opposite of the monastic maxim, "Your cell [and surroundings] will teach you everything you need to know."

pocketknife (I believe he owns a couple), but he could not carry anything dangerous. I think sometime back I had given him a vaguely Swiss Army-like folding tool, but more recently I found out there was [a Leatherman expressly designed to be able to be taken through airport security](#), having been cleared approval with the TSA and 315 airports, and they had rather ingeniously made a mechanical folding pliers that was a bit small, but folded out to a pliers, scissors, nail file, carabiner, and (I believe) a screwdriver designed to work with either slotted or Phillips screws, and a tweezers, but all of this without being like a weapon. And he thanked me for it, once initially as one would expect from politeness, and once a week later (and he showed me its features!). The gift had scored home with him, and I believe my actions were conditioned (though I did not think of it at the time) by my disappointment when my parents admittedly entrusted me with a blade, but did not give the abounding mechanical clockwork-like coolness that motivated my request for a Swiss Army Knife.

## Is Orthodoxy a Swiss Army Knife? (Is God?)

The liturgical flow of day and year is intricate, with its ebb and flow and nooks and crannies, and the exact combination of songs, musical tones, readings, and so on for a Divine Liturgy are something that may not be exactly repeated for hundreds of years. And a certain sense you can say that God is a Swiss Army Knife, and the saints are his blades—or, really, the whole race of mankind.

But on a deeper level the image does not fit, and here we run into a basic difficulty in theology. There are two basic modes of theology in talking about God, and they are opposite. One mode, the cataphatic, is to say that God is described by the images of his Creation, that he is King and Father, and so on. And there is some element of truth even in comparing HE WHO IS to solid stone: "[Blessed be my rock](#)," the Psalmist bard proclaims. But in a deeper sense these images all ultimately fail, as loudly proclaims apophatic theology. The image of God as stone fails more quickly, but ultimately even the images of a Father and King run dry.

And HE WHO IS, one God in Trinity, is utterly and completely simple, and simple beyond any created simplicity. The beauty of a Swiss Army Knife is that it is many things folded into its handle; it is a beauty of multiplicity that falls infinitely short of God. God may be seen in many saints, but they are all brought to his

oneness. And this oneness reflects down: the virtues may look like a Swiss Army Knife of the soul, and they indeed are in a certain sense, but on a more profound level there is a unity to the virtues (and the vices). The deepest virtue is only one virtue, and indeed *Christ names one virtue as the foundation of all Scripture:*

Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

The spiritual life is one of simplicity, praying the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," and the Swiss-like clockwork of the liturgy is paradoxically an entryway into this simplicity.

The most interesting way a Swiss Army Knife illumines God is not in its similarity, but precisely how its *fundamental beauty* differs from God's *fundamental beauty*.

# **Take Your Shoes Off Your Feet**

*For the place where you  
stand is holy ground*

**A Meditation for Lent**

**Take your shoes off of  
your feet:  
*For the place where you  
stand is holy ground***

And an angel of the Lord appeared to him in flaming fire out of the bush, and he sees that the bush burns with fire,— but the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will go near and see this great sight, why the bush is not consumed. And when the Lord saw that he drew nigh to see, the Lord called him out of the bush, saying, Moses, Moses, and he said, What is it? And he said, Draw not high hither: **loose thy sandals from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.** And he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraam, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and Moses turned away his face, for he was afraid to gaze at God...

And Moses said to God, Behold, I shall go forth to the children of Israel, and shall say to them, The God of our fathers has sent me to you; and they will ask me, What is his name? What shall I say to them? And God spoke to Moses, saying, I am THE BEING, and he said, Thus shall ye say to the children of Israel, THE BEING has sent me unto you.

(Exodus 3:2-5, 13-14, Sir Lancelot Brenton's translation of the LXX)

(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.)

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ: And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

[I Corinthians 10:4-6, KJV](#)

The Fathers bid us, in approaching holiness, to take away the dead thoughts of the passions. In their day, and in Righteous Abraham's day, and for that matter often in ours, shoes are made of leather, the dead skin of animals, and the Fathers bid us cast away the dead thoughts of the passions as we approach God.

I would like to look at this further, but first pause to look at two distractions and say, "That is understandable, but it is fundamentally inadequate."

The term 'passion' is used here as the Orthodox use the term, which differs from mainstream English. If you are not familiar with it, you might think of a passion as a sinful habit that has become and is becoming morally/spiritually a disease/handicap.

**The first distraction:**  
*Tinkering to straighten out  
our worldview*

On reading "bringing into captivity every thought", a natural reading today is "bring into captivity our worldview and every part of it," and steadily working on our worldview to make it Christian.

But the idea of thinking worldviewishly, and classifying religions (with philosophies and political ideologies) as worldviews is of recent vintage in the history of religions; it would have been as alien to Calvin and Luther as to St. Athanasios or St. John Chrysostom. A worldview appears to stand on its own, but entirely neglected is the thought that a worldview may come into existence as almost a by-product of the Way one walks.

I spoke with one person and quoted G.K. Chesterton saying, "Buddhism is not a creed. It is a doubt." I pronounced the final 't' rather silently, and he asked me if I had said, "Buddhism is not a creed. It is a Tao," meaning a Way that one walks. The conversation included his mention of a book written by a Christian missionary to Japan, [Zen Way, Jesus Way](#), and while my intended point was something else, that Buddhism is skeptical and perhaps in stronger form than most Western skepticism, the point he anticipated is also true: Buddhism is not about what you believe but the Way that you walk. And on this point we may

saliently point out that the oldest name for Christianity, the name used in the New Testament itself, is not "the Creed," but "the Way."

My godfather knew rather astutely what kinds of temptations I would face, and when I asked him a question about building an Orthodox worldview, he pointedly insisted that I had not been invited to work out an Orthodox worldview, but to walk the Orthodox Way. There may be an Orthodox worldview, but it emerges out of walking the Orthodox Way, and the suggestion that it takes seven to ten years to become Orthodox, this does not mean that it takes seven to ten years of worldview tinkering to develop the right worldview, but it takes seven to ten years for a whole person's transformation to occur. And even then, a number of Orthodox saints, described as being baptized in their own blood because they were martyred before they could manage to get baptized at all, are canonized saints who had pagan worldviews while they lived on earth, and canonized saints who did not spend their brief time confessing Christ on straightening out their worldviews.

There is something seductive about seeing things in terms of worldview; it is a hammer that soon makes everything appear to be a nail, so that "taking every thought captive" seems to mean "installing a piece of your worldview" and not, for instance, taking a lustful thought captive, and breaking it apart. But leave that for later. For now, I would note that the idea of thinking worldviewishly is of recent vintage, and mention that in Islam the term for 'heresy' is 'innovation.' Not that I am endorsing Islam; but [What the West Doesn't Get About Islam](#) is largely about the Muslim Way and only to a lesser degree about delving into the Islamic worldview.

## **The second distraction:** *The refinement of desire*

Show me what a person desires, and I will show you his heart.

To the right is a pair of antique opera glasses; I mention it partly to show my temptations. They are a valued gift from a valued friend, but in a way they are also like [the Dr. Who sonic screwdriver a team lead got for Christmas](#): they seem like a touch of another world here: [the realms of the Urvanovestilli](#), or [The Steel Orb](#). And what seems to be a piece of an unreal world brings real pleasure, but on a deeper, spiritual level, is something of a non sequitur: I should only value the opera glasses, not as a token of worlds I have as an author imagined, but as a valued gift from a valued friend.

Reading the saints' lives has something to do with this. It may be said that the saints' lives, "biography as theology", are an important spiritual staple food for neophytes and an important spiritual staple sought out by the more advanced. My own desires have been sought out and something I wanted fulfilled: first of all by my favorite children's book, Madeleine l'Engle's [A Wind in the Door](#), which left me desiring kything, Teachers, and giftedness, and much later writing [Within the Steel Orb](#): I went to mail Madeleine l'Engle a copy but found out that she had just passed away. After a different spiritual struggle I made [The Minstrel's Song](#) with [its cultures](#), and I pined for that world.

Then later I read medieval sources for the Arthurian legends, and I pined for knighthood and the Holy Grail and wrote [The Sign of the Grail](#). And the same, I believe, holds for Star Wars, Star Trek, Harry Potter, romance novels of being swept off one's feet, and quite a lot of TV, literature, and movies.

We are made to desire, and there is nothing wrong with that. But our desires often point in the wrong directions, and the saints' lives in particular help reorient and refine our desires so that we heed the Apostle's precept, [Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things](#). We are to desire things that are real—and good.

This, however, is limited in scope; it is one point among others, and I have not read worldviewish-style attempts to tinker with one's desires in the Fathers. The verse I cited is beautiful enough, but I have not read any of the Fathers make it a leitmotif. I don't want to downplay the saints' lives, but there is more benefit to reading them than just the shaping and reshaping of our desires. But there is something of our thoughts that the Fathers make central. But let us pause for one moment before moving on.

When the ink was still drying on the medieval versions of the Arthurian legends, they told of a Never-Never Land that was long ago and far away. Such things as commerce and peasant's work never intrude on the scene; the pseudohistory in the "Brut" which first captivated the hearts and minds of Europe outside of Celtic circles, already placed King Arthur at six centuries in its past, in a past that never existed. There is a common thread in these desires for the unreal; we are better off desiring what is

real (see [Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony With Nature: Anatomy of a Passion](#) for further discussion), and at least one saint has found happiness and said, "Whatever happens to you, desire it." Again, we are to desire what is real and desire what is good.

**Not a distraction:**  
*Taking the shoes of  
passionate thoughts off our  
feet*

It has been said, "Nothing but a metaphysic ever replaces a metaphysic." Nothing Western, at least. But a true metaphysic can be replaced by an ersatz metaphysic; unlike 'weak agnosticism', which says in essence "I do not yet know whether God, or gods, or angels exist," 'strong agnosticism' says "We can never know if God, or gods, or angels exist," and that rules out any deity capable of decisive revelation, ruling out the Christian God quickly. And that provides an ersatz metaphysic in continuity with the ersatz metaphysics implied by continental epistemology.

However, it is possible to have a metaphysic replaced by something else: Zen replaces a metaphysic with silence, and Orthodox Christianity, which has a metaphysic, also has silence, and beyond Buddhism having been influenced by Christianity and Zen resembling Orthodox hesychasm, the silence of Orthodox hesychasm is on par with the silence that replaces a metaphysic.

"You have more power than you think," an alcoholic or addict is told. Once temptation is in full swing, it's a difficult and often losing fight for the upper hand. But there is a brief, easy-to-look moment, when the temptation comes, very small.

If your house is burning down, it may take fire hoses to stop; when the fire is in a room, pouring out a bucket and running for another may stop it; easiest of all is to smush out a smouldering spark as it hits the curtains. If you blot out the spark, with it you blot out all the remaining process of damage. In a monastic setting, men were warned that if a mental image of a man's face appears, temptation to anger is close at hand, and if a woman's face appears, temptation to lust is close at hand, and they say "[In Christ there is no male nor female](#)": neither temptation need have dominion over us.

In its beginning, the temptation is not yet a temptation. A passionate image, what the Fathers saw in the dead leather shoes Moses was commanded to remove, is not the very first part of temptation. The very first part of temptation is a simple image not mixed with passion: perhaps not a face, but an image of gold, which will soon be mixed with a temptation to covet.

Then if we dally with the thought, it becomes mixed with passion, and the longer you go the harder the fight becomes. Confession is always available and it is a second baptism and a clean slate, but the Orthodox filled with hesychastic silence does not have or develop thick, strong arms from dousing buckets of water onto burning furniture, but attentiveness and quick reflexes from putting out sparks. Now this needs to be put alongside the monk who was asked, "What do you do?" and said, "We fall and get up; fall and get up; fall and get up." But hesychasm is mindful, mindful of one's thoughts, observing and mentally separating thoughts and mental images from the passions mixed in them.

**Lent, the central season of  
the Church year:  
*A Lenten Psalm***

Great Lent is hard, but it is the central season in the Church calendar. During Great Lent, the choir chants what may be the most politically incorrect part of Scripture:

For David, a Psalm of Jeremias  
By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat;  
And wept when we remembered Sion.

We hung our harps on the willows in the midst of it.  
For there they that had taken us captive asked of us the  
words of a song;

And they that had carried us away asked a hymn, saying,  
Sing us one of the songs of Sion.

How should we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?  
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its  
skill.

May my tongue cleave to my throat, if I do not remember  
thee;

If I do not prefer Jerusalem as the chief of my joy.  
Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of  
Jerusalem;

Who said, Rase it, rase it, even to its foundations.

Wretched daughter of babylon!  
Blessed shall he be who shall reward thee as thou hast  
rewarded us.  
Blessed shall he be who shall sieze and dash thine infants  
against the rock.  
(Psalm 136/137, Sir Lancelot Brenton's translation of the  
LXX)

"Blessed shall what?!@!?! This is sung in church in Lent?"  
Yes: the entire Psalm speaks to our spiritual condition. We  
were made for Jerusalem, the city of peace, which is ultimately  
Heaven, but we have allowed ourselves, every one, to be taken  
captive to the foreign land of sin and passion. How can we sing  
the Lord's song when we are exiled to the land of passion? As to  
the last words, the Fathers say that the rock is Christ: infant  
Babylonians grow into adult Babylonians, and tiny and seemingly  
insignificant passions, tiny sparks, grow into full-grown passions,  
a fire burning up our house. And it is against Christ that we must  
extinguish sparks. The vilest of sins is a smouldering ember  
thrown into the ocean of God's love, but still, the earlier we dash  
passions against Christ, the better. If we have allowed to a spark  
to set a chair on fire, douse it with Christ. And in all things  
remember the holy city, the city of peace which is ultimately  
Heaven. And strive for it.

**An unwelcome, unsought  
blessing:  
*"Ask better!"***

Lent seems to be the sort of thing one would not want. We are to cut back on pleasures, and give more to others. And it is supposed to be a struggle; if we're cruising through Lent and having no worries, something is wrong, and we need to work with our priest to make it a better struggle. But monks say, "Have a good struggle."

But this much is a blessing in disguise, and is part of why devout, seasoned Orthodox often look forward to the challenge.

The rules forbidding things in the Orthodox life all tell a pet, "[Don't drink out of the toilet](#)," which really means, "Ask better."

Lent is about letting go of things we believe will satisfy us and accepting the things which really will satisfy us.

In my repentance implied in "[The refinement of desire](#)" above, every thing I let go of was so I could grasp something better. Perhaps my growth is more stunted than most; perhaps it is less. No matter; God has summoned me to ask better and [open my hand wide to receive blessings](#). And I mention this not to make a big deal of my own struggle, but because these are one form of the struggles we all face, because (I hope) they could serve as Everyman's struggles, and I could concretely name something we all must face to ask better.

Ask better. And have a good struggle.

# Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Asceticism

1. Many people are concerned today with harmony with nature. And indeed there is quite a lot to living according to nature.
2. But you will not find something that is missing by looking twice as hard in the wrong place, and it matters where one seeks harmony with nature. In monasticism, the man of virtue is the quintessential natural man. And there is something in monasticism that is behind stories of the monk who can approach boar or bear.
3. Being out of harmony with nature is not predominantly a lack of time in forests. There is a deeper root.
4. Exercising is better than living a life without exercise. But there is something missing in a sedentary life with artificially added exercise, after, for centuries, we have worked to avoid the strenuous labor that most people have had to do.
5. It is as if people had worked for centuries to make the perfect picnic and finally found a way to have perfectly green grass at an even height, a climate controlled environment with sunlight and just the right amount of

cloud, and many other things. Then people find that something is missing in the perfect picnic, and say that there might be wisdom in the saying, "No picnic is complete without ants." So they carefully engineer a colony of ants to add to the picnic.

6. An exercise program may be sought in terms of harmony with nature: by walking, running, or biking out of doors. Or it may be pursued for physical health for people who do not connect exercise with harmony of nature. But and without concern for "asceticism" (spiritual discipline) or harmony with nature, many people know that complete deliverance from physical effort has some very bad physical effects. Vigorous exercise is part and parcel to the natural condition of man.
7. Here are two different ways of seeking harmony with nature. The second might never consciously ask if life without physical toil is natural, nor whether our natural condition is how we should live, but still recognizes a problem—a little like a child who knows nothing of the medical theory of how burns are bad, but quickly withdraws his hand from a hot stove.
8. But there is a third kind of approach to harmony with nature, besides a sense that we are incomplete without a better connection to the natural world, and a knowledge that our bodies are less healthy if we live sedentary lives, lives without reintroducing physical exertion because the perfectly engineered picnic is more satisfying if a colony of ants is engineered in.
9. This third way is asceticism, and asceticism, which is spiritual discipline or spiritual exercise, moral struggle, and mystical toil, is the natural condition of man.
10. The disciples were joyous because the demons submitted to

them in Christ's name, and Christ's answer was: "Do not rejoice that the demons submit to you in my name. Rejoice instead that your names are written in Heaven." The reality of the disciples' names being written in Heaven dwarfed the reality of their power over demons, and in like manner the reality that monks can be so much in harmony with nature that they can safely approach wild bears is dwarfed by the reality that the royal road of asceticism can bring so much harmony with nature that by God's grace people work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

11. The list of spiritual disciplines is open-ended, much like the list of sacraments, but one such list of spiritual disciplines might be prayer, worship, sacrament, service, silence, living simply, fasting, and the spiritual use of hardship. If these do not seem exotic enough for what we expect of spiritual discipline, we might learn that the spiritual disciplines can free us from seeking the exotic in too shallow of a fashion.
12. The Bible was written in an age before our newest technologies, but it says much to the human use of technology, because it says much to the human use of property. If the Sermon on the Mount says, "No man can serve two masters... you cannot serve both God and money," it is strange at best to assume that these words applied when money could buy food, clothing, and livestock but have no relevance to an age when money can also buy the computers and consumer electronics we are infatuated with. If anything, our interest in technology makes the timeless words, "No man can serve two masters" all the more needed in our day.
13. Money can buy everything money can buy and nothing money cannot buy. To seek true glory, or community, or control over

all risk from money is a fundamental error, like trying to make a marble statue so lifelike that it actually comes to life. What is so often sought in money is something living, while money itself is something dead, a stone that can appear deceptively lifelike but can never hold the breath of life.

14. In the end, those who look to money to be their servant make it their master. "No man can serve two masters" is much the same truth as one Calvin and Hobbes strip:

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

**Hobbes:** That must have been scary!

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

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

15. There was great excitement in the past millenium when, it was believed, the Age of Pisces would draw to a close, and the Age of Aquarius would begin, and this New Age would be an exciting dawn when all we find dreary about the here and now would melt away. Then the Age of Aquarius started, at least officially, but the New Age failed to rescue us from finding the here and now to be dreary. Then there was great excitement as something like 97% of children born after a certain date were born indigo children: children whose auras

are indigo rather than a more mundane color. But, unfortunately, this celebrated watershed did not stop the here and now from being miserable. Now there is great hope that in 2012, according to the Mayan "astrological" calendar, another momentous event will take place, perhaps finally delivering us from the here and now. And, presumably, when December 21, 2012 fails to satisfy us, subsequent momentous events will promise to deliver us from a here and now we find unbearable.

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

practical way to circumvent asceticism. Technological "progress" often means that up until now, people have lived with a difficult struggle—a struggle that ultimately amounts to asceticism—but now we can simply do without the struggle.

20. Through the wonders of modern technology, we can eat and eat and eat candy all day and not have the candy show up on our waistline: but this does not make us any better, nobler, or wiser than if we could turn the oceans to lemonade. This is an invention from a Utopia of spoiled children.
21. Sweetness is a gift from God, and the sweeter fruit and honey taste, the better the nourishment they give. But there is something amiss in tearing the sweetness away from healthy food, and, not being content with this, to say, "We think that eating is a good thing, and we wish to celebrate everything that is good about it. But, unfortunately, there is biological survival, a holdover from other days: food acts as a nutrient whether you want it or not. But through the wonders of modern science, we can celebrate the goodness of eating while making any effect on the body strictly optional. This is progress!"
22. Statistically, people who switch to artificial sweeteners gain more weight. Splenda accomplishes two things: it makes things sweeter without adding calories, and it offers people a way to sever the cord between enjoying sweet taste, and calories entering the body. On spiritual grounds, this is a disturbing idea of how to "support" weight loss. It is like trying to stop people from getting hurt in traffic accidents by adding special "safety" features to some roads so people can drive however they please with impunity, even if they develop habits that will get them killed on any other road. What is spiritually unhealthy overflows into poorer health

for the body. People gain more weight eating Splenda, and there are more ways than one that Splenda is unfit for human consumption.

23. The ascesis of fasting is not intended as an ultimate extreme measure for weight loss. That may follow—or may not—but there is something fundamentally deeper going on: Man does not live by bread alone, and if we let go of certain foods or other pleasures for a time, we are in a better position to grasp what more man lives on than mere food. When we rein in the nourishing food of the body and its delights, we may find ourselves in a better position to take in the nourishing food of the spirit and much deeper spiritual delights.

Fasting pursued wrongly can do us no good, and it is the wisdom of the Orthodox Church to undergo such ascesis under the direction of one's priest or spiritual father. But the core issue in fasting is one that matters some for the body and much more for the spirit.

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

25. Today, "everybody knows" that the Orthodox Church, not exactly like the Catholic Church allowing contraceptive timing, allows contraception under certain guidelines, and the Orthodox Church has never defined a formal position on contraception above the level of one's spiritual father. This

is due, among other factors, to some influential scholarly spin-doctoring, the academic equivalent of the NBC Dateline episode that "proved" that a certain truck had a fire hazard in a 20mph collision by filming a 30mph collision (presented as a 20mph collision) and making sure there was a fiery spectacle by also detonating explosives planted above the truck's gas tank ([see analysis](#)).

26. St. John Chrysostom wrote,

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

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

about forbidding marriage:

Now, the Spirit expressly says that in the last days some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences have been seared with a hot iron: for they forbid marriage and demand avoidance of foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

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

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

earthly possessions.

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

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

in which people live the grace and beauty of the Sermon on the Mount, and are freed from the prison chamber of seeking control and the dank dungeon of living for themselves.

34. "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, nor about your body, what you will wear. Isn't there more to life than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than them? And why do you worry about the lilies of the field: how they grow. They neither toil nor spin;" they have joy and peace. The height of technological progress in having pleasure without losing control—in artificial sweeteners, contraceptives and anything else—utterly pales in comparison.
35. Technology is not evil. Many technologies have a right use, but that use is a use to pursue maturity and asceticism, not an aid to living childishly.
36. Wine was created by God as good, and it has a right use. But the man who seeks in wine a way to be happy or a way to drive away his problems has already lost.
37. One classic attitude to wine was not "We forbid drinking wine," or even "It would be better not to drink wine at all, but a little bit does not do too much damage," but goes beyond saying, "The pleasure of wine was given by God as good" to saying: "Wine is an important training ground to learn the asceticism of moderation, and learn a lesson that cannot be escaped: we are not obligated to learn moderation in wine, but if we do not drink wine, we still need moderation in work, play, eating, and everything else, and many of us would do well to grow up in asceticism in the training arena of

enjoying wine and be better prepared for other areas of life where the need for the asceticism of moderation, of saying 'when' and drawing limits, is not only something we should not dodge: it is something we can never escape."

38. The ascetical use of technology is like the ascetical use of wine. It is pursued out of maturity, and as a support to maturity. It is not pursued out of childishness, nor as a support to childishness. And it should never be the center of gravity in our lives. (Drinking becomes a problem more or less when it becomes the focus of a person's life and pursuits.)
39. The Harvard business study behind [Good to Great](#) found that the most effective companies often made pioneering use of technology, but technology was never the center of the picture: however many news stories might be printed about how they used technologies, few of the CEOs mentioned technology at all when they discussed their company's success, and none of them ascribed all that much importance to even their best technology. Transformed companies—companies selected in a study of all publicly traded U.S. companies whose astonishing stock history began to improve and then outperformed the market by something like a factor of three, sustained for fifteen years straight—didn't think technology was all that important, not even technologies their people pioneered. They focused on something more significant.
40. [Good to Great](#) leadership saw their companies' success in terms of people.
41. There were other finds, including that the most effective CEOs were not celebrity rockstars in the limelight, but humble servant leaders living for something beyond

- themselves. In a study about what best achieves what greed wants, not even one of the top executives followed a mercenary creed of ruthless greed and self-advancement.
42. If people, not technology, make businesses tremendously profitable, then perhaps people who want more than profit also need something beyond technology in order to reach the spiritual riches and treasures in Heaven that we were made for.
  43. The right use of technology comes out of asceticism and is therefore according to nature.
  44. In Robert Heinlein's science fiction classic [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), a "man" with human genes who starts with an entirely Martian heritage as his culture and tradition, comes to say, "Happiness is a matter of functioning the way a human being was organized to function... but the words in English are a mere tautology, empty. In Martian they are a complete set of working instructions." The insight is true, but takes shape in a way that completely cuts against the grain of [Stranger in a Strange Land](#).
  45. One most immediate example is that the science fiction vision is of an ideal of a community of "water brothers" who painstakingly root out natural jealousy and modesty, and establish free love within their circle: such, the story would have it, provides optimal human happiness. As compellingly as it may be written into the story, one may bring up studies which sought to find out which of the sexualities they wished to promote provided the greatest pleasure and satisfaction, and found to their astonishment and chagrin that the greatest satisfaction comes, not from any creative quest for the ultimate thrill, but from something they despised as a completely unacceptable perversion: a husband

and wife, chaste before the wedding and faithful after, working to become one for as long as they both shall live, and perhaps even grateful for the fruitfulness of their love. Perhaps such an arrangement offers greater satisfaction than trying to "push the envelope" of adventuresome arrangements precisely because it is "functioning the way a human being was organized to function."

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

restaurant. But SecondWife draws people with an alternative to the here and now they feel stuck in.

48. It is one thing to get drunk to blot out the misery of another's death. It is another altogether to keep getting drunk to blot out the misery of one's own life.
49. An old story from African-American lore tells of how a master and one of his slaves would compete by telling dreams they claimed they had. One time, the master said that he had a dream of African-American people's Heaven, and everything was dingy and broken—and there were lots of dirty African-Americans everywhere. His slave answered that he had dreamed of white people's Heaven, and everything was silver and gold, beautiful and in perfect order—but there wasn't a soul in the place!
50. Much of what technology seems to offer is to let people of all races enter a Heaven where there are luxuries the witty slave could never dream of, but in the end there is nothing much better than a Heaven full of gold and empty of people.
51. "Social networking" is indeed about people, but there is something about social networking's promise that is like an ambitious program to provide a tofu "virtual chicken" in every pot: there is something unambiguously social about social media, but there is also something as different from what "social" has meant for well over 99% of people as a chunk of tofu is from real chicken's meat.
52. There is a timeless way of relating to other people, and this timeless way is a large part of asceticism. This is a way of relating to people in which one learns to relate primarily to people one did not choose, in friendship had more permanency than many today now give marriage, in which one was dependent on others (that is, interdependent with others),

in which people did not by choice say goodbye to everyone they knew at once, as one does by moving in America, and a social interaction was largely through giving one's immediate presence.

53. "Social networking" is a very different beast. You choose whom to relate to, and you can set the terms; it is both easy and common to block users, nor is this considered a drastic measure. Anonymity is possible and largely encouraged; relationships can be transactional, which is one step beyond disposable, and many people never meet others they communicate with face-to-face, and for that matter arranging such a meeting is special because of its exceptional character.
54. Social networking can have a place. Tofu can have a place. However, we would do well to take a cue to attend to cultures that have found a proper traditional place for tofu. Asian cuisines may be unashamed about using tofu, but they consume it in moderation—and never use it to replace meat.
55. We need traditional social "meat." The members of the youngest generation who have the most tofu in their diet may need meat the most.
56. Today the older generation seems to grouse about our younger generation. Some years ago, someone in the AARP magazine quipped about young people, "Those tight pants! Those frilly hairdos! And you should see what the girls are wearing!" Less witty complaints about the younger generation's immodest style of dress, and their rude disrespect for their elders can just as well be found from the time of Mozart, for instance, or Socrates; and it seems that today's older generation is as apt to criticize the younger generation as their elders presumably were. But

here something really is to be said about the younger generation.

57. The older generation kvetching about how the younger generation today has it so easy with toys their elders never dreamed of, never seem to connect their sardonic remarks with how they went to school with discipline problems like spitwads and the spoiled younger generation faced easily available street drugs, or how a well-behaved boy with an e-mail address may receive X-rated spam. "The youth these days" have luxuries their parents never even dreamed of—and temptations and dangers their parents never conceived, not in their worst nightmares.
58. Elders have traditionally complained about the young people being rude, much of which amounts to mental inattention. Part of politeless is being present in body and mind to others, and when the older generation was young, their elders assuredly corrected them from not paying attention in the presence of other people and themselves.
59. When they were young, the older generation's ways of being rude included zoning out and daydreaming, making faces when adults turned their back, and in class throwing paper airplanes and passing notes—and growing up meant, in part, learning to turn their back on that arsenal of temptations, much like previous generations. And many of the older generation genuinely turned their backs on those temptations, and would genuinely like to help the younger generation learn to honor those around with more of their physical and mental presence.
60. Consumer electronics like the smartphone, aimed to offer something to youth, often advertise to the younger generation precisely a far better way to avoid a spiritual

lesson that was hard enough for previous generations to learn without nearly the same degree of temptation. Few explains to them that a smartphone is not only very useful, but it is designed and sold as an enticing ultra-portable temptation.

61. Literature can be used to escape. But the dividing line between great and not-so-great literature is less a matter of theme, talent, or style than the question of whether the story serves to help the reader escape the world, or engage it.
62. In technology, the question of the virtuous use of technology is less a matter of how fancy the technology is, or how recent, than whether it is used to escape the world or engage it. Two friends who use cell phones to help them meet face-to-face are using technology to support, in some form, the timeless way of relating to other people. Family members who IM to ask prayer for someone who is sick also incorporate technology into the timeless way of relating to other people. This use of technology is quiet and unobtrusive, and supports a focus on something greater than technology: the life God gave us.
63. Was technology made for man, or man for technology?
64. Much of the economy holds the premise that a culture should be optimized to produce wealth: man was made for the economy. The discipline of advertising is a discipline of influencing people without respecting them as people: the customer, apparently, exists for the benefit of the business.
65. Advertising encourages us to take shopping as a sacrament, and the best response we can give is not activism as such, but a refusal of consent.
66. Shopping is permissible, but not sacramental shopping,

because sacramental shopping is an ersatz sacrament and identifying with brands an ersatz spiritual discipline. At best sacramental shopping is a distraction; more likely it is a lure and the bait for a spiritual trap.

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

something of a line-item veto on the limits of our embodied state: if they do not change our bodies directly, they make our embodied limitations less relevant.

73. A technology can conquer how the body takes nourishment from food, for instance, and therefore be body-conquering without being space-conquering. But whether celebrated or taken for granted, space-conquering technologies are called space-conquering because they make part of the limitations of our embodied nature less relevant.
74. There is almost a parody of asceticism in space-conquering technologies. Asceticism works to transcend the limited body, and space-conquering technologies seem a way to do the same. But they are opposites.
75. "The demons always fast:" such people are told to instill that fasting has a place and a genuine use, but anyone who focuses too much on fasting, or fasts too rigidly, is well-advised to remember that every single demon outfasts every single saint. But there is something human about fasting: only a being made to eat can benefit from refraining from eating. Fasting is useful because, unlike the angels and demons, a man is not created purely a spirit, but created both spirit and body, and they are linked together. Asceticism knows better, and is more deeply attuned to nature, to attempt to work on the spirit with the body detached and ignored.
76. Even as asceticism subdues the comforts and the body, the work is not only to transfigure the spirit, and transform the body.
77. In a saint the transfiguration means that when the person has died, the body is not what horror movies see in dead bodies: it is glorified into relics.

78. This is a fundamentally different matter from circumventing the body's limitations. There may be good, ascetical uses for space-conquering technologies: but the good part of it comes from the ascesis shining through the technology.
79. The limitations of our embodied existence—aging, bodily aches and pains, betrayal, having doors closed in our face—have been recognized as spiritual stepping stones, and the mature wonder, not whether they have too many spiritual stepping stones, but whether they might need more. Many impoverished saints were concerned, not with whether their life was too hard, but whether it was too easy. Some saints have been tremendously wealthy, but they used their wealth for other purposes than simply pandering to themselves.
80. Some might ask today, for instance, whether there might be something symbolic to the burning bush that remained unconsumed which St. Moses the Lawgiver saw. And there are many layers of spiritual meaning to the miracle—an emblem of the Theotokos's virgin birthgiving—but it is not the proper use of symbolic layers to avoid the literal layer, without which the symbolic layers do not stand. If the question is, "Isn't there something symbolic about the story of the miracle of the burning bush?", the answer is, "Yes, but it is a fundamental error to use the symbolic layers to dodge the difficulty of literally believing the miracle." In like fashion, there are many virtuous uses of technology, but it is a fundamental error to expect those uses to include using technology to avoid the difficult lessons of spiritual ascesis.
81. Living according to nature is not a luxury we add once we have taken care of necessities: part of harmony with nature is built into necessities. Our ancestors gathered from the

natural world, not to seek harmony with nature, but to meet their basic needs—often with far fewer luxuries than we have—and part of living according to nature has usually meant few, if any, luxuries. Perhaps there is more harmony with nature today in driving around a city to run errands for other people, than a luxurious day out in the countryside.

82. Some of the promise the Internet seems to offer is the dream a mind-based society: a world of the human spirit where there is no distraction of external appearance because you have no appearance save that of a handle or avatar, for instance, or a world where people need not appear male or female except as they choose. But the important question is not whether technology through the internet can deliver such a dream, but whether the dream is a dream or a nightmare.
83. To say that the Internet is much more mind-based than face-to-face interactions is partly true. But to say that a mind-based society is more fit for the human spirit than the timeless way of relating, in old-fashioned [meatspace](#), is to correct the Creator on His mistaken notions regarding His creatures' best interests.
84. People still use the internet all the time as an adjunct to the timeless way of relating. Harmony with nature is not disrupted by technology's use as an adjunct nearly so much as when it serves as a replacement. Pushing for a mind-based society, and harmony with nature, may appeal to the same people, especially when they are considered as mystiques. But pushing for a mind-based society is pushing for a greater breach of living according to nature, widening the gulf between modern society and the ancient human of human life. There is a contradiction in pushing for our life to

be both more and less according to nature.

85. There is an indirect concern for asceticism in companies and bosses that disapprove of clock watching. The concern is not an aversion to technology, or that periodically glancing at one's watch takes away all that much time from real work. The practical concern is of a spiritual state that hinders work: the employee's attention and interest are divided, and a bad spiritual state overflows into bad work.
86. In terms of asceticism, the scattered state that cannot enjoy the present is the opposite of a spiritual condition called nepsis or, loosely, "watchfulness."
87. The problem that manifests itself in needing to keep getting drunk, with New Age and its hopes for, at the moment, 2012 delivering us from a miserable here and now, or needing a more and more exotic drugged-up sexual thrill, or fleeing to SecondWife, is essentially a lack of nepsis.
88. To be delivered by such misery is not a matter of a more radical escape. In a room filled with eye-stinging smoke, what is needed is not a more heroic way to push away the smoke, but a way of quenching the fire. Once the fire is quenched, the smoke dissipates, and with it the problem of escaping the smoke.
89. Nepsis is a watchfulness over one's heart, including the mind.
90. Nepsis is both like and unlike metacognition. It observes oneself, but it is not thinking about one's thinking, or taking analysis to the next level: analysis of normal analysis. It is more like coming to one's senses, getting back on course, and then trying to stay on course. It starts with a mindfulness of how one has not been mindful, which then flows to other areas of life.

91. The man who steps back and observes that he is seeking ways to escape the here and now, has an edge. The same goes with worrying or other passions by which the soul is disturbed: for many of the things that trouble our soul, seduce us to answer the wrong question. This is almost invariably more pedestrian than brilliant metacognition, and does not look comfortable.
92. Metanoia, or repentance, is both unconditional surrender and waking up and smelling the coffee. It is among the most terrifying of experiences, but afterwards, one realizes, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!"
93. Once one is past that uncomfortable recognition, one is free to grasp something better.
94. That "something better" is ultimately Christ, and there is a big difference between a mind filled with Christ and a mind filled with material things as one is trying to flee malaise.
95. The attempt to escape a miserable here and now is doomed. We cannot escape into Eden. But we can find the joy of Eden, and the joy of Heaven, precisely in the here and now we are seduced to seek to escape.
96. Living the divine life in Christ, is a spiritual well out of which many treasures pour forth: harmony with nature, the joy of Eden and all the other things that we are given if we seek first the Kingdom of God and His perfect righteousness.
97. It was a real achievement when people pushing the envelope of technology and, with national effort and billions of dollars of resources, NASA succeeded in lifting a man to the moon.
98. But, as a monk pointed out, the Orthodox Church has known for aeons how to use no resources beyond a little bread and water, and succeed in lifting a man up to God.

99. And we miss the greatest treasures if we think that asceticism or its fruits are only for monks.
100. And there is something that lies beyond even asceticism: contemplation of [the glory of God](#).

# That Beautiful Strength

## That Hideous Strength

The Shadow of that hideous strength  
Six miles and more it is of length.  
The shadow of that hideous strength  
Six miles and more it is of length.

Opening quotation to C.S. Lewis, [That Hideous Strength](#)

[That Hideous Strength](#) is the third book in C.S. Lewis's space trilogy, the other two being [Out of the Silent Planet](#) and [Perelandra](#). [Out of the Silent Planet](#) is the first science fiction book that featured aliens in which the aliens were not a vile monstrosity, but I am not concerned with the science fiction here. [That Hideous Strength](#) has an important Arthurian element, and [while I've written my own take on the Arthurian legends](#), I am not concerned with that here either. And there are other things about [That Hideous Strength](#) that I am also not

concerned with.

Then what am I concerned with?

Among programmers there is a slang term "hhos", an abbreviation for "Ha ha, only serious!" It describes, not exactly jokes that aren't really funny, but jokes that aren't really jokes at their core: three of my own examples might be [Pope Makes Historic Ecumenical Bid to Woo Eastern Rite Catholics](#), [Devotees of Fr. Cherubim \(Thorn\) Demand his Immediate Canonization and Full Recognition as "Equal to the Heirophants"](#), and [Unvera Announces New Kool-Aid Line](#). These pieces fall on to the more "serious" end of "Ha ha, only serious!" And something like "Ha ha, only serious!" is found in [That Hideous Strength](#).

[That Hideous Strength](#) is darker and harder to appreciate than [Out of the Silent Planet](#) or [Perelandra](#), but I've heard people say they appreciate it most of all when they have got into it. The book, as Lewis clearly introduces it in some editions, is "a fairy-tale for grown-ups", and he makes an opening pre-emptive move to explain that the traditional fairy tale begins with once-common themes before moving to the magical: "We do not always notice [the traditional fairy-tale's] method, because the cottages, castles, woodcutters, and petty kings with which a fairy-tale opens have become for us as remote as the witches and ogres to which it progresses." But the traditional fairy-tale begins with the pedestrian John Q. Public and only then moves on to the magical. And Lewis's book begins with "such hum-drum scenes and persons" before moving on to "magicians, devils, pantomime animals, and planetary angels."

But C.S. Lewis's tale is, if not exactly "ha ha, only serious," a prime example of "**ha ha, only realistic.**" I do not mean exactly that the figure of Merlin or a Pendragon who has visited other planets is realism; what I do mean is that [That Hideous Strength](#)

is a tale of a hideous strength and **that hideous strength is realistic and real in our world today.**

Today that hideous strength has bared its power, and I would be very wary of saying the worst is past.

The poem Lewis quotes, "The shadow of that hideous strength / Six miles and more it is of length," is about the Tower of Babel ([Genesis 11:1-13, RSV](#)):

Now the whole earth had one language and few words.

And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."

So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.

Therefore its name was called Ba'bel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

I spent a long time trying to think of how to put this, and perhaps this is one way of explaining. Those of us who [used to play Dungeons & Dragons](#) heard of, and perhaps wanted to play, a race of elves called Drow. The earliest AD&D sources denied or were ambiguous about whether Drow even existed, and then more and more became known about them. They were a Machiavellian society living deep in caverns beneath the earth; they kept fearsome "mind flayers" (Illithid) as slaves; they possessed weapons and armor of adamantite alloy that was on par with some of the most powerful magical items those on the surface of the earth could have. And these enchanted adamantite armaments were dependent on the magical energies of the Underdark; they needed to spend one week in four immersed in the magical energies flowing around the Underdark, and their enchanted properties would be destroyed completely if they saw the light of the sun. I believe this adamantite gear was what military buffs would call a "capture-proof weapon": weapons and armor that would soon cease to be useful if captured by enemy forces.

I am one of many who succumbed to the temptation to have a really cool watch; the watch I have is a dark green [Casio Pathfinder by Casio](#) and features a barometer/altimeter and compass, and I've used it to navigate. And it features "tough solar" power; I should never need to replace its batteries because it draws power from the sun, making it the opposite of Drow gear... or maybe not. I purchased it after a botched battery replacement broke the waterproof seal on an earlier model Pathfinder; I wanted something cooler, so I chose a forest green watch rather than a blue watch, and one that was "atomic", meaning not exactly that it contained a super-exact atomic clock, but that its time would be set to well under one second accuracy

by a nightly radio signal in various parts of the world. But my point is not exactly about this magical attunement to energies of the Underdark, but that my watch is a capture-proof weapon. I purchased it to replace a watch I was annoyed at having broke down, and the company that gave me an earlier watch that broke down also gave me a newer watch that will also break down. It would probably take a few years to break down, but I do not imagine I have purchased a watch that I can wear for the rest of a long life.

My newly upgraded iPhone 4 is also capture-proof, dependent on the energies of the Underdark in more ways than one. It needs to be kept charged, and will quickly become useless without a source of power. But 90% of its functionality is lost immediately if it loses network functionality. People can and do make iPhone apps that work without network access, but the overall current is to fetch things fresh from the network in a way that is completely useless if network access is not available. And, as a Popular Mechanics cover article stated, "Your gadgets spy on you;" my iPhone's GPS is what older science fiction referred to as a tracking device, if it were not enough to have the NSA monitoring phone calls and network usage.

This is just the tip of an iceberg, the outer ornament of a Tower of Babel that is at its heart not about technology any more than astronomy is about telescopes or love letters or about ink. This Tower of Babel permeates life and culture. A political ideology is by definition a Tower of Babel. But something is odd even in the technology. Advances of technology in practice mean technologies that are more dependent on Underdark energy, and ultimately more fragile, than "obsolete" technologies they replace. This fragility, this vulnerability is the outer shell in shifts in life and culture that are at the essence of [that hideous](#)

[strength](#). Only I'm not sure how to untangle the whole of it. Perhaps I don't need to. Perhaps it is enough to say that trouble has been brewing for centuries and it takes a global political and economic meltdown for people to see how hideous it is.

I'm uneasy about some of the things that seem to come with Fr. Seraphim (Rose)'s followers. However, [interest in Taoism and the Tao Te Ching](#) was also part of how I found my way to Holy Orthodoxy, and a very brief look at [Christ the Eternal Tao](#) made it clear that Fr. Seraphim (as a monastic, he does not need to have 'Rose' repeated) grasped Taoism and the Tao Te Ching at a deeper level than I did, and in a more organic way. And one of the points I believe Fr. Seraphim nailed is that people were less tangled in Lao Tzu's world than ours, that in some sense Lao Tzu can be placed with Plato as (anonymous) Christians before Christ, and that however fallen Lao Tzu's China may have been, we have fallen further. One head of this hydra is marketing, cognate to manipulation, propaganda, and porn, that basically relates to people as things to be manipulated and not related to as human. One American visited (our day's) China and wondered how the Chinese could stand to be bombarded by such ludicrous propaganda: and then came home with fresh eyes to messages informing her that she would be cooler if she drank Pepsi. Some people have said that branding has taken the place of spiritual discipline in today's world—a professor asked students a question, "Imagine your successful future self," and continued, "With what brands do you imagine yourself associating?" And he received no puzzled stares or social cues that anybody found this a strange question. Branding is powerful; I've mentioned a couple of brands and regard my name-dropping of Casio Pathfinder and the iPhone 4 as ultimately shameful. And this is one tentacle among a thousand; I could elsewhere review some of [Exotic](#)

[Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony with Nature: Anatomy of a Passion](#), or make a deeper cut and say, "Feminism is anti-woman.

No, really. Never mind the marketing image; if you really want to see sparks fly, ask a good, devoted feminist if feminism and gender studies give us human flourishing, and then smile and say,

'You know, I think Phyllis Schlafly is a beautiful example of human flourishing.'" And when you're done ducking for cover, look at another of the many tentacles of today's Tower of Babel (or perhaps many Towers of Babel). Perhaps look at the premise that relationships are a disposable commodity and marriages fall apart at the drop of a hat next to not-particularly-close friendships in bygone ages: and if that is not enough, the next installment is that relationships are not disposable if someone wants out, but transactional, intended to be dropped fairly quickly even if there is nothing like a falling-out.

Perhaps we do not need to spend too much more time looking into that abyss.

## That Beautiful Strength

Fyodor Dostoevsky's [The Brothers Karamazov](#) answers C.S. Lewis's [That Hideous Strength](#).

[The Brothers Karamazov](#) does not discuss anything apocalyptic and predicts no Russian Revolution, but it is eminently concerned with the problem of evil, and two chapters provide two of the most powerful statements of the problem of evil in literature. But after evil has full reign, something good follows in its wake. There is a superficial happy ending when an escape is planned for a man who wounded but did not kill his father, and is convicted of parricide. But that is almost superficial. On a deeper level there is something good that follows the Christlike Alyosha, and evil at the death of a young boy does not have the last word. The book as a whole is painful to read, or I found it such. But its ending is fragrant. It has the fragrance of the resurrection.

The mystery of the resurrection is not only for the consummation of time in the Last Judgment. Heaven is for now, and the mystery of the resurrection is for now.

This year, on Holy Saturday, I finally got something that I hadn't gotten before, thick as I am. I had begun studying theology and against what seemed insurmountable odds (including studying during treatment for cancer), I earned a master's degree in theology. Then I entered a Ph.D. program at another

school to be able to teach at a seminary. I did not complete the program; [you can read my author bio if you want to see what I've accomplished in other settings](#), but I washed out of this program in a very painful way. (As in, it was so rough that I found chemotherapy an easier experience.)

What I realized this Sunday was that what prevented me from getting a Ph.D. did not stop God's purposes; it may well enough have thwarted what I thought was God's intent, but right now I have a great many blessings to count and am profoundly grateful to God that I am not still working on a Ph.D. program that would have on the average taken eight years to complete and would still not have gotten me a Ph.D. by now. My regrets now are the right and proper regrets that I was angry and I failed to use hardship in an ascetical, spiritually disciplined manner. And I recognize God's wonderful, severe mercy in all of this: I failed to recognize the words of Christ the True Vine: [Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.](#) God's hand was powerful enough when several good things that never happen fell into place for me to go a certain distance into academic theology. And it was even more powerful in several bad things that never happen fell into place to keep me from completing my program.

Most of the theology covered was queer, or gender studies, or Marxist, or what have you; but on this point I would recall the words of one flaming liberal theologian who said that Christ's resurrection was not on the same level as his death; it wasn't simply reversing his death so that with Lazarus he was alive in the same way as before. Instead Christ remained, in a certain sense, dead; the marks of death remained with him, but God had the last word. The East does not really have a tradition of saints

bearing the stigmata but instead saints who shine with the radiant uncreated Light of Heaven, but even in the East it is clear that the marks of the crucifixion on St. Francis of Assisi are a treasure beyond pearls. Christ was crucified, but this did not annihilate Christ: instead it annihilated crucifixion. Christ would become the firstborn of the dead: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death!" And others have pointed out that Christ did not return to the level of things in his passion and have a petty triumph: he did not return to Pilate and say, "You said, 'What is truth?'" , nor return to the Sanhedrin and say, "Are you sure that I am a mere man who blasphemed when you asked me if I was the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" It's not just that Christ wasn't being petty; he was working on another level. The only exception seems to be St. Thomas, who said, "[Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.](#)" and when Christ took him up on his claim, St. Thomas answered, "[My Lord and my God!](#)", confessing infinitely more than Christ's resurrection. Christ triumphed in his fruitful unbelief.

[That Hideous Strength](#) describes something that is real and active, but for all the hideous strength of Hell, [when evil triumphs, God the changes the game.](#)

**That beautiful strength** has the last word. The resurrection is not a fundamental exception to how God works; it is the supreme example of a law that plays out on a much smaller scale. An unintended pregnancy can be the gateway for two people to move past living for themselves, and live for something bigger than an egotism of two. And in some ways that is like how, despite all my best efforts to become an official theologian, God has introduced me to theology—the real kind. Not that he

doesn't mean others to be a scholar, but to Orthodox scholar and nonscholar alike theology is life; it is for all Orthodox Christians; it is a Heaven that begins on earth, a practice of the virtues and a spiritual walk, and something much bigger than an academic discipline. Even if some Orthodox can and should be practitioners in academic theology. And even if I'm thick enough that it took me years to see this.

**That beautiful strength** is unconstrained no matter how many cards **that hideous strength** plays off the side of the deck. **That beautiful strength** brings Heaven wherever God's saints may be, even in a concentration camp. **That beautiful strength** thrives in losses we consider catastrophic, losses of things we think we need. **That beautiful strength** takes tragedy as the canvas for a masterpiece of beauty, glory, and wonder. **That beautiful strength** fixes the root problems despite all our efforts to fix things ourselves. **That beautiful strength**, however deep the magic of that hideous strength may be, is of a deeper magic from beyond the bounds of time. **That beautiful strength** took the marks of the lowest death, the crucifixion of a disobedient slave, and made them more precious than rubies and pearls. **That beautiful strength** takes sinners and makes them saints. **That beautiful strength** will someday hear the praises of the mute, be heard by the deaf, and be seen by the blind, but it is a strength that is alive and well and works its power and wonder today.

**That Hideous Strength** is alive and powerful, but it need never be the last word.

# Theology of Play

Most of Christianity that I've come into contact with has a well developed theology of work; sometimes called the Protestant Work Ethic, it is summarized in the verse, "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as if unto the Lord." (Col. 3:23). A mature Christian is characterized by hard work, and I do not wish to detract from that, but there is a counterpart to theology of work: theology of play.

It would probably be easier to defend a point of doctrine involving great self sacrifice - that a Christian should be so loyal to Christ that the prospect of being tortured and killed for this devotion is regarded as an honor, that a Christian should be willing to serve in boring and humiliating ways, that a Christian should resist temptation that takes the form of an apparent opportunity for great pleasure - but I will still state and explain this point: a Christian should be joyful, and furthermore that this joy should express itself in play and celebration.

When Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit, the first word he uses is love. Love will certainly apply itself by hard work. He goes on to describe it as patience, faithfulness, self-control. Patience, faithfulness, and self-control all have important application to hard work. But the second word is joy. If the fruit of the Spirit will yield hard work, it will also yield expressions of joy.

C.S. Lewis said that the greatest thing that the Psalms did

for him was express the joy that made David dance. Doctrinal development is one of the reasons that God gave us the Bible, but it is not the sole reason. I would not by any means suggest that omitting Paul's epistles would improve the Bible, but there is a lot of the Bible that I read for the sheer joy and beauty as much as anything else. Psalm 148, one of my favorite, beautifully embellishes the word, "Halleluyah!" That alone is reason sufficient to merit its placement in the Bible. When the Psalms tell us that we should sing unto Yahweh, it is not telling us of a dreadful and terrible duty that we must endure because God says so. By contrast, it is encouraging an expression of joy. I try to show myself to the world primarily as a person of love, but I have also had a strong witness among the unbelievers as a person of joy; one of the stereotypes of a Christian that I have been glad to shatter is that of a repressed and repressive person. The stereotype says that a person who tries to live by the Bible's moral standards will have a somber life devoid of joy; I thus try to let the deep and inner joy "I've got a river of life flowing out of me..." that the Holy Spirit has placed in my heart show itself to them. Satan likes to take and twist pleasure into enticement for his evils; that does not make pleasure an evil thing. Yahweh made pleasure - the idea that Satan could imagine such a thing on his own is risible (for Satan cannot create; he can only mock) - and pleasure is intended for Christians to partake.

Celebration is something that can certainly come from things going well, but it is not a grave evil that is justified only by exceptional cause; it is a way of life. Some of celebration, some expressions of joy and thanksgiving, are in response to an event we are pleased at and thankful for, and rightly so, but celebration is not something to be reserved for rare occasions. I may be celebratina an event. but Christ is reason well sufficient

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for celebration; consequently, it is appropriate to celebrate, even when you can't point to an exceptional event. There is a time to mourn, but a Christian does not need extenuating circumstances as reason to celebrate.

I am not going to attempt to provide an exhaustive list of expressions of joy, and most definitely do not wish to provide commands which must be successively fulfilled to the letter and verified in triplicate, but I think that a few suggested variants of "stop and smell the roses" are in order:

Call a friend you haven't talked to in a while.

Read a children's book.

When it's warm, take off your shoes, close your eyes, and feel the grass under your feet.

Stop and remember five things you are glad for; thank God for them.

Drink a mug of hot cocoa. Slowly.

Go to a local art museum.

Hug a friend.

Climb a tree.

Close your eyes and imagine yourself somewhere else.

Sneak up behind a friend who is ticklish...

In addition to these that I've pulled off the top of my head, I'd like to look at three recurring, decidedly Biblical expressions of joy, and how many Christians have reacted to them.

- Singing. The Christian understanding of music is summed up in the words, "Make a joyful noise unto Yahweh." While it can also be solemn, music was created as a beautiful expression of joy. When Paul encourages the believers to sing to one another, he is not really appealing to a sense of duty, but rather encouraging a celebratory and joyful

pleasure in this good gift of God. The jail warden was astounded to find that Paul was happily singing when he was imprisoned; this joy expressed itself in so powerful of a manner that it opened the warden's ears so that he, too, would gain this welling up of life, flowing into joy. Most Christians sing (even if some of the music has room for improvement); this is good. believe that Yahweh is pleased when he listens. This is Biblical.

- Dance. One of the expressions of celebration recorded in the Bible, as well as song, is dance.

In Exodus, after Israel passed through the red sea and Egypt didn't, Moses's song is followed after a couple of verses with the words, "Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after with tambourines and with dancing." In Samuel, it is asked, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, 'Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'" and recorded, "David danced before Yahweh with all his might." The psalms jubilantly sing, "Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre." and "Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!" In Ecclesiastes, dancing is identified with joy: "...a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance..." Jeremiah issues words of comfort, saying, "Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of merrymakers." In Lamentation he also identifies dancing with joy, saying, "The joy of our hearts has ceased; our dancing has been turned to mourning." It is not without reason that dance is a part of the worship

services of Messianic Jews. It is not without reason that a song that has come to us from Africa states, "If the Spirit of the Lord moves in my soul, like David the victor I dance."

The shaker hymn very beautifully states, "Dance, then, wherever you may be, for I am the Lord of the Dance, said he." Throughout, the hymn describes the walk of faith as a dance. Dancing is a good thing, an act of joy, that has been given to us by Yahweh himself for our good.

There are a few forms of dance that are essentially sex with clothes in the way, and should be avoided outside of a marital context. Because of the existence of these dances, some Christians have attacked dance as demonic; "Dance before Yahweh" necessitates an interpretation of "Dance alone before Yahweh."

This is silly. Celebration is meant to be enjoyed in community; its nature is not a selfish "I like this and I'm going to keep it all to myself," but a generous, "This is so good that I have to share it with you as well." This is the mark of a child fully enjoying a lollipop. When holidays and other times of celebration come, people want to be with friends and family, and it would be only a slight exaggeration to say that this is the whole reason that believers come together for worship services.

Dance, also, should be enjoyed in community.

- Proper use of wine.

In Judges, the vine refuses an offer to be the king over all trees, saying, "Shall I stop producing my wine that cheers gods and mortals, and go to sway over the trees?" The Psalms likewise describe material blessings by saying, "You cause grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden

the human heart, oil to make the face shine, and bread to strengthen the human heart.", and Ecclesiastes, "Feasts are made for laughter; wine gladdens life..." The Song of Songs, in its description of the erotic, says, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine..."

How sweet is your love, my sister, my bride! how much better is your love than wine..." , comparisons that would mean little if wine were not understood to be a good thing. Isaiah accuses Israel of apostasy in the words, "Your silver has become dross, your wine is mixed with water." He Israel to a vineyard created so its master may enjoy its wine; elsewhere appear the words, "On this mountain Yahweh Sabaoth will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear." Jeremiah contains Psalmlike words of celebration: "They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of Yahweh, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again."

Hosea, in sadness at apostasy, makes it clear that wine is a gift from above: "She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold that they used for Baal."

Going from the Old Testament to the New, it is seen that Jesus was accused of being a drunkard; for his first miracle, he turned water to wine, thus permitting a celebration to continue.

Now, it should be mentioned that alcohol is something that merits an appropriate respect and caution; consumed in excess, it is a deadly poison. It has been said that we should

thank God for beer and burgundy by not drinking too much of them. Our culture has largely cast aside the virtue of moderation and the belief that a sin could be sin because it takes a good thing to excess (gluttony is not mentioned as a sin very often, and a great many people would be healthier to lose some weight). Not everybody thought this way. The ancient Greeks accorded moderation a place as one of the four cardinal virtues, and Paul named temperance and self-control as the final of the virtues listed as the fruit of the Spirit. Liquor, like most good things, should be consumed in a temperate, controlled, and balanced manner. And, like most good things, it becomes a bane if it is taken out of proper context. It was not without reason that Solomon wrote that wine is a mocker and beer a brawler. This country has age related laws pertaining to alcohol, and they should not be violated. Granted that those laws be obeyed, it would be wise to consider to the advice to Jesus ben Sirach, who in his writing said, "Do not try to prove your strength by wine drinking, for wine has destroyed many. As the furnace tests the work of the smith, so wine tests hearts when the insolent quarrel. Wine is very life to human beings if taken in moderation. What is life to one who is without wine? It has been created to make people happy. Wine drunk at the proper time and in moderation is rejoicing of heart and gladness of soul." Elsewhere comparing wine to music, he regards wine as a good part of celebration.

There are many things that should be made manifest in the life of Christians; community, freedom, and celebration are important. Paul writes in Galatians, "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." In Galatians "Therefore do not let anyone condemn

OT slavery.", in Colossians, "Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink... If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch'?", and in I Timothy, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to the teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron. They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer."

So let us enjoy the gifts that God has bestowed.

(scripture quotations generally NRSV)

# **Theory of Alien Minds: A UX Copernican Shift (and Gifted!)**

There was one moment of brilliance, I was told, when a North American missionary visiting in Latin America was asked if clothing and sheets lasted longer in her first-world home. The question was not surprising and it reflected cross-cultural understanding: bedsheets and clothing in the U.S. can last for quite some time, while bedsheets and clothing in the host country wear out quickly, perhaps in a few weeks, and it is nickle-and-dime drain on none-too-deep pockets to keep replacing them. The question, perceptive enough, was a question about privilege and easy living.

The missionary's response was astute. She thought for a minute, and then said that yes, sheets in her home area lasted much longer than several weeks if properly cared for... and continued to explain, in addition, what people wore when they were all bundled up for bitter cold. Winter clothing is not mainly for modesty, and gloves, hats, and scarves (or, today, ninja masks) exist because on the very worst days every square inch

of exposed skin will be brutally assaulted. The conversation ended with a slight degree of pity from people who only wore clothes for modesty realized that yes, as they had heard, bedsheets and normal clothing lasted much longer than several weeks, but there were some other price tags to pay. The missionary's communication was in all sympathetic, human, and graceful.

Something similar may be said of the degree of IQ where you learn firsthand that being making other people envious is not a good thing, and where it happens more than once that you need to involve authorities or send a C&D letter for harassment to stop, and where others' insecurities leave you socially skating on thin ice surprisingly often. Nonetheless, what may be the most interesting social lesson may have every relevance to "UX," or **User eXperience**, and it has to do with what is called "**theory of other minds**". The normal conditions for developing "theory of other minds" can run into difficulties, but there is something very valuable that can happen.

**Theory of other minds,  
Split into “theory of like  
minds”, and:  
“theory of alien minds”:  
A Copernican shift**

One classic developmental step in communication is developing a “theory of other minds”, meaning that you relate to people as also having minds, rather than as some sort of thing that emits what may be inexplicable behaviors instead of acting out of human motives and beliefs.

Part of how the normal “theory of minds” develops is that children tend to give adults gifts they would like to receive themselves, such as colorful toys rather than books. At a greater stage of maturity, people can go from giving gifts they would themselves like to receive, to giving gifts they would not want as much themselves, but another person would. However, in normal development this is an advanced lesson. For most people, the baseline is assuming that most people think like them most of the time.

For outliers in some dimensions, this simple picture does not work. People start with the same simple assumption: that you can relate to people as basically thinking like you. But if you’re different enough, you’ll break your shins with this approach. Perhaps outliers communicate markedly better if they know one.

Perhaps we're communicating that really better if they know one person who starts on the same page, but communication is harder.

The crucial distinction I would draw is between **theory of like minds** and **theory of alien minds**. Both theory of like minds and theory of alien minds relate to others as having minds. But theory of like minds is based on the assumption that other people think as you do. Theory of alien minds also really and truly relates to others as having minds, but it is based on a realization that you are not the center of the universe, others often do not think like you, and you need to build bridges.

"Theory of like minds" says, "Other people have minds that are basically just like mine."

**"Theory of alien minds" takes a step back, saying, "Other people have minds, and they have minds whether or not they're basically just like mine.**

This Copernican shift has every relevance to "Let's not forget the user" disciplines in UX.

## **So what does a “theory of alien minds” really look like?**

Let me provide several examples, before getting into what it has to do with UX:

Hayward has worked long and hard to communicate well.

Many people might guess that the features of his [giftedness] would bring benefits...

...but few guess how much.

The same kind of thing goes with excellent communication. When a friend came from out of town to live in a local apartment, quite a few friends gathered to help unload the moving van.

Hayward, asked for an assignment, expecting to be asked to carry something. Instead, for reasons that are still not clear, she handed him a leash and asked him to look after a dog she has introduced as not at all comfortable around men.

And the dog very quickly moved as far away as his leash would allow. But Hayward worked his magic... and half an hour later, he was petting the dog's head in his lap, and when he stood up, the dog bounded over to meet the other men in the group.

In another setting, Hayward was waiting for labwork at a

convenient care center, when a mother came in, with a four-year-old daughter in tow. The girl was crying bitterly, with a face showing that she was in more pain than she knew how to cope with, and an ugly bulging purple bloodblister under her thumbnail. Hayward understood very well what was going on; his own experience as a child who smashed a thumbnail badly enough to get a bloodblister underneath, was the most pain he had experienced yet in his life.

When the convenient care staff threw the mother a wad of paper to fill out before treatment (as opposed, for instance, to first just administering anaesthesia and only after that detain the mother with paperwork), she left the child crying alone in a chair. Hayward walked over, wanting to engage the girl in conversation in the hopes of lessening her pain. He crouched down to be at eye level, and began to slowly, gently, and calmly speak to the child.

Some time later, Hayward realized two things.

First of all, his attempt to get the girl to talk were a near-total failure. He had started by asking her favorite color, and she was able to answer that question. But essentially every other age-appropriate prompt was met with silence: "Q: What kind of instrument does a dog play?" "A: A trom-bone." (But maybe her pain was too great to allow regular conversation.)

Second of all, she had stopped crying. Completely. And her face no longer showed pain. He had, partly by his nonverbal communication, entirely absorbed her attention, and she was unaware of pain that had her bawling her eyes out some minutes before. Hayward realized this with a start, and tried to keep up the conversation such as it was, regardless of whether he had anything to say. A rather

startled Hayward did his best not to break the illusion, and did so smoothly enough that she seemed not to notice.

Some time later, Hayward was called for his blood draw. He returned to find the mother comforting her daughter, as she had not done before. The little girl was crying again, but it was a comforted crying, a world of difference from when she was alone with really quite vile pain. The mother seemed awestruck, and kept saying, "You have a very gentle way about you."

Another time, Hayward was asked to substitute-teach a class for parents of English as a Second Language students. He was provided an interpreter who spoke Spanish and English, and the class met all objectives...

And Hayward didn't really use the interpreter. He adapted to language and culture to bring an enjoyable class for everyone.

When studying abroad, Hayward was quite pleasantly surprised (and very much surprised) when a Ghanain housemate said Hayward had challenged some assumptions, saying Hayward was "like a white American, and like a black African, closer than an African brother..." and from that point on he enjoyed insider status among Ghanian friends. He has perhaps never received a greater compliment.

Hayward thinks at a fundamentally different level, and he needs to build bridges. But the good news is that he has been working on bridge-building for years and built bridges that span great differences. Being in a situation where he has to orient himself and bridge a chasm doesn't really slow him down that much.

In addition, these "super powers" can have every relevance to business work. No employer particularly cares if

he can read ancient and medieval languages: but one employer cared that he could easily read bureaucratic documentation that was incomprehensible to everyone else. No employer really cares that at the age of 13 Hayward crafted [crafted a four-dimensional maze](#), worked on visualizing a 4-cube passing through 3-space, and looked at a data visualization in his calculus book and (re)invented iterated integration...

But some employers care a great deal that he can take a visualization project, start work along the lines suggested by Tufte's corpus of written work, and start to take steps beyond Tufte.

No employer really seems to care that he has studied at the Sorbonne, UIUC, and Cambridge (England) in three very different fields: but co-workers have been puzzled enough that he so effortlessly shifts his communication and cultural behavior to have a colleague and immigrant ask him why he relates to Little Russia's culture so well.

But some employers appreciate his efforts to listen and understand corporate culture. In serving like a consultant for a travel subsidiary, Hayward's contacts within the organization that picked up he was trying to understand their language on their terms, and the Director of Sales and Marketing half-jokingly asked, "Do you want to be a travel agent?" Hayward perhaps would not be an obvious fit for personality factors, but she picked up a crystal-clear metamessage: "I want to understand what you are saying, and I want to understand it on your terms."

Furthermore, while no employer has yet to care about Hayward's interest in writing, one employer cared a great deal that he took a high-value document concerning disaster

recovery and business continuity, valuable enough that it would be significant for the employer to file with e.g. their bank, and took it from being precise but awkward and puzzling to read, to being precise, accessible, simple, and clear.

What does this communication across barriers have to do with UX?

**Everything.**

I've had postgraduate training in anthropology, cognitive science, computer science, philosophy, and psychology, and I consider "theory of other minds" communication to be out-and-out the central skill in UX. Perhaps the most structural of these disciplines is anthropology, and a training in anthropology is a training in understanding across differences.

Once anthropologists found difference by crossing the Pacific and finding aboriginal people untainted by modern technology. **Now anthropologists find difference by crossing the street.**

But the theory of alien minds is almost **unchanged**.

Jakob Nielsen has been beating for essentially forever the drum of "You are not a user". Perhaps his most persistent beating of his drum is:

One of usability's most hard-earned lessons is that '**you are not the user.**' If you work on a development project, you're atypical by definition. Design to optimize the experience for outsiders, not insiders.

What this means, in competency, is "Communicate out of a theory of alien minds." Or, if you prefer, a theory of "outsiders", but don't assume that deep down inside "outsiders" are really just like "insides." **Exercise a theory of alien minds.**

What Nielsen is telling people not to do is coast on a "theory of like minds," and assume that if a user interface is intuitive and makes sense to the people who built it, it will just as much make sense to the audience it was built for. It won't. You have to think a bit differently to build technology, and that means you need a theory of alien minds. Assuming that you are the center of the universe, even if it's unintentional, is a recipe for failed UX. We all want better than that.

# Tinkering with Perl

## Table of Contents

Most books you will find on Perl or any other programming language, are books intended to be a one-size-fits-all — or, at least, that's how they're advertised. This book does not attempt or pretend to be appropriate to most users; instead, I am trying to do one thing well.

Well, what am I trying to do? Let me first tell what I am not trying to do:

- I am not trying to make a book that will be helpful to experienced programmers who want to pick up Perl.
- I am not trying to make a book that will treat Perl in depth, or for that matter even touch many of the language's strongest points.
- I am not trying to make a book that will make a novice programmer into an expert programmer overnight.
- I am not trying to introduce most principles of good software engineering.
- I am not trying to make a book that promises quick results

overnight; I am not trying to make a book that will quickly tell you how to get such-and-such done.

Well, if I am not trying to do all of that, then what am I trying to do?

I wrote this because trying to do this: create a book that would help my brothers learn to tinker.

I first tried to start my brothers straight off with Java. And Java is a good language — it might have been better for them to know than Perl, and I think it would be a good second language to teach, when they are ready to mature, so that they can produce high quality software. But to learn all of those principles all at once is a heavy load, and one which can be confusing. I was telling them very good things, but I was boring them.

Then I began to think about how I first began to program. I first began to tinker in middle school with BASIC, on Apple II series computers. I wrote spaghetti code laced with gotos and all sorts of other things I would shudder to do now. I did not then learn to be a good programmer — at all. But I did learn to be a tinkerer, to play around and explore and put things together. It has been said that education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire. That experience lit my fire; it started the curiosity and enjoyment that later caused me to become a more serious programmer.

This book is not an attempt to immediately achieve the end result of a good programmer. It has a goal which might be called more modest, but which might be called much more ambitious: lighting a fire. Once the fire is lit, it can be tended and carefully pruned; there will be plenty of time for the channeling and discipline necessary to let the fire achieve truly great things. I am not trying to do everything; I am trying, for now, to do just

one thing. And do it reasonably well.

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## Preface

This book has two prefaces: one for a [guiding adult](#), and one for a [sharp child](#) who will be exploring the language.

## Preface (for children)

When you were younger — perhaps even now — you played or play with Legos, or some other similar building toy. When I was a boy, I played with Legos a lot, and I was very sad when my elaborate collection was destroyed.

Growing up means changing in some ways, but there are also ways in which an adult remains forever a child. It is a truly sad thing when the child inside of a grown-up dies; something important has gone out.

I am a grown-up now, and I still play with Legos. Only now, I play with them in a different form. Instead of using Legos that you can see, I use Legos that you can only see with your mind — I have to use my imagination. I play with these Legos when I program.

When you are holding Legos in your hand, you have in your head an idea of what you want to build. And you start putting the little bricks together, piece by piece, until you have built the thing you've imagined in your head. One little brick is very small and very simple — but there are ways to put them together, and if you put things together the right way, you can do some amazing things.

It is the same way with programming. This book will show you some of the little bricks we have, and then look at ways to put them together. It is my hope that you will begin to tinker — see

how you can put things together, see what works, what doesn't work. Then maybe you will imagine things, and see if you can build them out of these programming bricks.

There are many things to learn in programming, and this is only a beginning. But I hope that I may be able to help you begin to explore, and discover what it can be like to program.

## Preface (for adults)

Most books you will find on Perl or any other programming language, are books intended to be a one-size-fits-all — or, at least, that's how they're advertised. This book does not attempt or pretend to be appropriate to most users; instead, I am trying to do one thing well.

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Well, if I am not trying to do all of that, then what am I trying to do?

I am trying to do this: create a book that will help my twelve

year old twin brothers learn to tinker.

I first tried to start my little brothers straight off with Java. And Java is a good language — it will probably be better for them to know than Perl, and I think it would be a good second language to teach, when they are ready to mature, so that they can produce high quality software. But to learn all of those principles all at once is a heavy load, and one which can be confusing. I was telling them very good things, but I was boring them.

Then I began to think about how I first began to program. I first began to tinker in middle school with BASIC, on Apple ][ series computers. I wrote spaghetti code laced with gotos and all sorts of other things I would shudder to do now. I did not then learn to be a good programmer — at all. But I did learn to be a tinkerer, to play around and explore and put things together. It has been said that education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire. That experience lit my fire; it started the curiosity and enjoyment that later caused me to become a real programmer.

This book is not an attempt to immediately achieve the end result of a good programmer in all regards. It has a goal which might be called more modest, but which I believe is ultimately more important: that of lighting the child's fire. Once the fire is lit, it can be tended and carefully pruned; there will be plenty of time for the channeling and discipline necessary to let the fire achieve truly great things. I am not trying to do everything; I am trying, for now, to do one thing well.

Jonathan Hayward, 7-16-98

P.S. There are some intentional inaccuracies. This is because a fully technical treatment of the issues involved would, I believe, needlessly confuse children. Some parts are oversimplified; I

intend them to be overridden by more nuanced treatments when an appropriate level of intellectual maturity is reached.

## Some preliminaries

Here, we aren't (for the most part) really talking about Perl; we're talking about some basics that need to be done in order to use Perl. I will restrict my attention to [unix](#) machines. If you use another machine, you will have to read the documentation on your machine.

**See also:**

[Unix preliminaries](#)

# Unix preliminaries

Here we will discuss [directories](#), [files](#), [editors](#), [permissions](#), and the famous [shebang notation](#).

## **See also:**

[Preliminaries in general](#) - [Directories](#) - [Files](#) - [Editors](#) -  
[Shebang](#) - [Permissions](#)

# Directories

Directories in Unix are the same as folders on other machines. They're a place to keep [files](#).

There are four basic commands you need to know about directories: [pwd](#), [cd](#), [mkdir](#), and [ls](#).

Directories are stored hierarchically. This means that there's a top level directory, which contains some directories, and each of those directories may contain some files and some directories, and so on. The full name of a directory is something like this:

```
/home/jhayward/perl_guide/text/chapter_0/unix
```

The slashes ('/') tell where we are. The beginning slash indicates the root directory, the top directory of all; home indicates that I'm in the home directory in the root directory, jhayward indicates that I am in the directory called jhayward in the home directory (which is my directory to do stuff in), and so on and so forth.

You may refer to a file or directory by its absolute or relative pathname. If you specify its absolute pathname, you give the full path, all the way from the root directory down to where you are now. If you give a relative path, you tell where it is relative to where you are now. The file I am now editing has absolute pathname:

`/home/jhayward/perl_guide/text/chapter_0/unix/directories.html`

**and relative pathname:**

`directories.html`

**from where I am now.**

**The directory `..`, in a given directory, is the directory one level up. So the directory**

`/home/jhayward/perl_guide/text/chapter_0/unix/..`

**is the same as the directory**

`/home/jhayward/perl_guide/text/chapter_0/`

## **See also:**

[pwd](#) - [cd](#) - [mkdir](#) - [ls](#) - [Files](#)

## **pwd**

pwd is a Unix command that means **print working directory**. It prints the directory you're in now. If you're logged in to a Unix machine, why don't you type pwd (and hit return) to see what happens?

You can use pwd to see where you are; make sure you're in the right directory.

## **See also:**

[Unix preliminaries - Directories - cd - mkdir](#)

## cd

cd is a Unix command which means **change directory**. It changes the directory you are in to another one.

In general, you can type:

```
cd pathname
```

where *pathname* is the absolute or relative pathname (as discussed [before](#)) of the directory. For example, to go to the parent directory (the directory one level above) for your current working directory, you can type:

```
cd ..
```

What do you think will be the result of typing in the following commands:

```
pwd  
cd ..  
pwd
```

Why don't you type them in, and see what happens?

Finally, as a special case, if you type

```
cd
```

without anything else after it, it will take you to your home directory. Your home directory is the directory you are given on the computer to do things in.

## **See also:**

[Unix preliminaries](#) - [Directories](#) - [pwd](#) - [mkdir](#)

## **mkdir**

mkdir is the command to make a directory. We will probably be making files as we tinker; let's create a directory for those files.

First, go to your home directory:

```
cd
```

Then make a directory — say, one called tinkering.

```
mkdir tinkering
```

Now, we should go into that directory before doing most of the other things suggested in this book. So go into that directory:

```
cd tinkering
```

Remember to go to that directory before each time you start reading this book. If you're not sure what directory you're in, you can always type

```
pwd
```

to find out what directory you're in. From any place in the system, you can type in the following to go to your tinkering directory:

```
cd  
cd tinkering
```

Now we're ready to talk about files and editors.

## **See also:**

[Unix preliminaries](#) - [Directories](#) - [pwd](#) - [cd](#) - [ls](#)

## **ls**

ls is the Unix command to list the files in a directory. To see what files and directories are in your current directory, type:

```
ls
```

You may not see anything — if you are following this book in order, you should be in an empty directory. Keep this command in mind, though; it should come in handy in the future.

## **See also:**

[Unix preliminaries](#) - [Directories](#) - [pwd](#) - [cd](#) - [mkdir](#) - [Files](#) -  
[Editors](#)

# Files

A [directory](#) is a place to keep things on a computer; a file is what sort of thing you actually keep. We are going to be interested in creating, and modifying, Perl programs.

A file should have a name consisting of letters, numbers, and/or underscores. Perl programs should end by having ".pl" added to the end. Here are some examples of good filenames:

```
hello_world.pl  
test.pl  
list_pets.pl
```

Each file (of the sort we're working with) will hold one program, and (for now) each program will be stored in one file.

So a file is where you store a program. You will create these programs with [editors](#), and then make them usable by setting the [permissions](#).

## **See also:**

[Unix preliminaries](#) - [Directories](#) - [ls](#) - [Editors](#) - [Permissions](#)

## Editors

Editors are programs that can be used to create and change files. In our case, we are interested in text editors, which are specifically for editing files that contain text.

There are a number of different editors, each of which has its own strengths and weaknesses. For now, I will have you use an easy-to-use editor called [joe](#).

## **See also:**

[Unix preliminaries - Files - joe](#)

## joe

joe is the name of an easy to use [editor](#) for Unix systems. To use joe to create a file called hello\_world.pl, type:

```
joe hello_world.pl
```

You will now see a screen that is mostly blank. Type control-K and then 'H' to get a help screen. That will bring up on the screen most of the commands you need to know to edit files.

We are going to create our very own program. Type in the following, exactly as you see it on the screen:

```
#!/usr/local/bin/perl  
  
print "Hello world!\n";
```

Then type control-K and X to save the file. It will ask you what file to save it as; type:

```
hello_world.pl
```

Keep reading to find out how to run the program.

## **See also:**

[Unix preliminaries](#) - [Files](#) - [Editors](#) - [Shebang](#) - [Permissions](#)

# Shebang

In Unix, the characters "#!" at the beginning of a file tell the computer what program to use to figure out what to do with it.

This is referred to as the shebang notation.

In order to tell the computer that your files are Perl programs, you should put the following line at the beginning of every Perl program, exactly as it is typed here:

```
#!/usr/local/bin/perl -w
```

or

```
#!/usr/bin/perl -w
```

(Which one should you use? One of them will work, and the other won't. Try it.)

If you don't do that, the computer will be very confused when you tell it to run your programs.

## **See also:**

[Unix preliminaries](#) - [Files](#) - [Editors](#) - [Permissions](#)

## Permissions

When you create a text file, Unix doesn't normally expect that you're going to run it like a program. So, you have to tell it that you're giving yourself and perhaps others permission to run them as programs.

This is accomplished with the `chmod` command.

## **See also:**

[Unix preliminaries - Files - chmod](#)

## chmod

chmod is the Unix command used to set [permissions](#), including telling the computer that a file can be run as a program.

To make it so that everybody can use a program, type:

```
chmod 755 filename
```

where filename is the name of the file, which should be something like "hello\_world.pl".

Alternately, to make it so that only you can use the program, type:

```
chmod 700 filename
```

You must do this before you can run a program. If you've been following along this book in order, please type:

```
chmod 755 hello_world.pl
```

And now, you're ready to [run it!](#)

**See also:**

[Preliminaries - Files - Permissions](#)

## Running your programs

If you've been following along the text in order, you have **created** a program, and **made it executable** (runnable). Now, you can run it:

```
hello_world.pl
```

What happened? Did it print out, "Hello, world?" If so, great! If not, you probably made a little mistake somewhere — as has every programmer, great or small — and you need to go back and see what happened.

## **See also:**

[Unix preliminaries](#) - [Files](#) - [Shebang](#) - [Permissions](#)

# **Fundamentals**

This chapter introduces the basic building blocks you will combine and fit together to make programs.

## Comments

When you are writing a program, you are writing for people as well as computers. Most of the time, after a program is written, you or someone else will want to make changes — to add new **features**, or to fix **bugs**. There is a joke which my father likes to tell:

A construction worker, at lunch break, opens his lunchbox, and says, "Salami again! I hate bologna!"

Then, the next day, he says, "I wonder what I have today." He opens his lunchbox, and says, "Bologna again? I hate bologna!"

This continues for a week. Finally, one of his coworkers says, "Why don't you ask your wife to give you something else for lunch? That way, you wouldn't have to have bologna all the time."

The construction worker says, "Oh, I don't have a wife. I make my own lunches!"

In this joke, the construction worker eats the sandwiches he hates because that's what he made earlier. This joke is a lot like programming. The construction worker is like a programmer, and the yucky bologna sandwiches are programs that don't have very many little notes, in English, to explain things. It can be very difficult, even for experienced programmers, to figure out or remember what a program is doing if it doesn't have notes to explain things. These little notes are called comments, and you can say anything you like in a comment. (But we generally use

comments to explain programs.)

Comments are done differently in different **computer languages**, but there is some feature that tells the computer what is a comment and what is the rest of the program. In perl, a comment begins with a **hash mark ('#')**, and continues to the end of the line. If you want to make a comment that uses more than one line, put a hash mark on a second line. Here are some examples of what is and is not a comment:

```
# This is a comment.
```

```
# This is a comment, which  
# uses more than one line.
```

```
                                #  
# This is a comment, too.  It uses blank lines to make  
# things better to look at.  
                                #
```

```
# This is a comment which begins in the  
# middle of a line.  You can put a  
# comment to the right of something  
# else, to explain what it does.
```

```
This is not a comment.
```

```
The comment begins #here.
```

**See also:**

[Statements](#)

## Variables

In school, you may have used variables to refer to different numbers. The variables  $x$  could be 3, or 4, or 0, or -9.5. One variable can mean any of several different numbers. (But it can only mean one thing at a time.)

In computer programming, we use variables to represent all sorts of different things. In Perl, there are three different types of variables we will use: [scalars](#), [lists](#), and [hashes](#). The names sound a little funny, but don't let that scare you.

## **See also:**

[Scalars](#) - [Lists](#) - [Hashes](#) - [Assignment of variables in general](#)

## Scalars

A scalar is a variable that can either refer to a number, or some text, which is called a **string**. A string is usually enclosed in quotes, like this:

```
"This is a string."
```

Note that the quotes are not actually part of the string; they are put around the string to tell when the string begins and ends.

You can give a variable almost any name that you can make from letters, numbers, and **underscores** ('\_'). Furthermore, you must put a **dollar sign** ('\$') before a scalar to tell Perl that it is a scalar.

In general, it is a good idea to have a variable name consist of a few words that describe what the variable tells you. There are a couple of ways people have of putting words together. (You have to do something to tell when one word ends and the next begins, because it is hard to read when you can't separate words.) One way is to capitalize the first letter of each word; another is to separate words using **underscores** ('\_'). It doesn't matter which way you do it, but you should pick one way and stick with it. It is very important that you spell a variable exactly the same way every time you use it; otherwise, the computer will think you are using different variables. Here are some examples of good variable names:

```
$NumberOfTrucks  
$AverageHeight  
$PlayerName
```

Or, if you prefer underscores, then you can do it this way:

```
$number_of_trucks  
$average_height  
$player_name
```

In this book, I will always do it the first way.

## **See also:**

[Variables](#) - [Lists](#) - [Hashes](#) - [Assignment of variables in general](#)  
- [Assignment of scalars](#) - [Arithmetic](#)

## Lists

A list is a variable that lets you keep track of several things. If you were shopping for groceries, you'd keep a list: apples, ketchup, bread, sausage, and so on. A list is a variable that keeps track of several things, instead of just one. A list is named like a [scalar](#), but instead of having a [dollar sign \('\\$'\)](#) in front of the name, we place an [atgry \('@'\)](#). A good name for a list would be something like:

```
@GroceriesToBuy
```

## **See also:**

[Variables in general](#) - [Scalars](#) - [Hashes](#) - [Assignment of variables in general](#) - [Assignment of lists](#)

## Hashes

Hashes are a little more complicated than either lists or scalars, but they are very useful.

Let's say that you know some people, and you want to keep track of what kind of pets they have. Suppose that you know John, Sue, and Mary. Let's also suppose that John has a dog, Sue has a cat, and Mary has a goldfish. What would be good would be a single variable, called `Pet`: if you plugged in John, you would get dog; if you plugged in Sue, you would get cat; if you plugged in Mary, you would get goldfish.

A hash is a variable that can do that. We refer to a hash in slightly different ways, depending on what you want to do. If you refer to the whole hash, you put a **percent sign** (`'%'`) in front of the hash. So the hash with the pets might be:

```
%pet
```

But if you want to refer to a specific pet — say, you want to find out what pet Mary has — you would do it like this:

```
$pet{"Mary"}
```

(We put the "Mary" in quotes, because it is a **string**, and the computer will get confused if it sees the letters M, a, r, and y all by themselves.)

The expression

```
$pet{"Mary"}
```

```
$pet{"Mary" }
```

should be read as, "Mary's pet".

## **See also:**

[Variables in general](#) - [Scalars](#) - [Lists](#) - [Assignment of variables](#) - [Assignment of hashes](#)

## Statements

Let's say that you are going to play at a friend's house. What you might do, could be explained as a list of activities:

Ask your parents for permission to visit your friend.

Call your friend's house, and ask permission to come over.

Finish getting dressed.

Walk over to your friend's house.

Take chewing gum off of your shoe.

Greet your friend.

Play with your friend.

Eat a snack.

Play some more.

Say goodbye.

Walk home.

Take off your shoes.

What we have done here, is to break one bigger activity (visiting your activity) into a sequence of smaller activities. Another way of putting it is that we are explaining how to visit your friend by saying what smaller things are necessary to visit your friend.

When you are programming a computer, you do the same thing. The little commands are called statements. A statement is

a command that tells a computer to do something small, as a part of doing something larger. (Saying to walk to your friend's house, when you are explaining how to visit your friend, is like a statement.)

As we work further, we will learn more about different kinds of statements. But first, let's make sure that we understand what a statement is: a statement is an individual command you give to the computer, as part of telling it how to do something. In the description of how to visit a friend's house, each line, like "Greet your friend," or "Remove chewing gum from your shoe," is like a statement. The whole list, all together, is like a program.

One final note about statements: In English, you usually end a sentence with a period ( '. ' ). In Perl and many other computer languages, you end most statements with a **semicolon ( ' ; ' )**. For example:

```
This sentence ends like a statement;
```

## **See also:**

[Assignment of variables](#) - [Input and output](#) - [Blocks](#) - [If-then](#)  
- [Loops](#) - [Subroutines](#)

# Assignment of variables

In math class, with a story problem, your teacher might have said something like this: "Suppose we have five cats..." What is going on here is that we have some number of cats, and we are saying that the number of cats is specifically equal to five.

Another way of saying what the teacher said is,

Let the number of cats be five.

We can use a variable for the number of cats. Let's put a variable in there:

Let NumberOfCats be five.

Or, to say it a little differently,

Let NumberOfCats equal five.

With computers, we drop the 'let', even though it's understood.

NumberOfCats equals five.

(Now, we are not simply claiming that the number of cats equals five. We are commanding that it be so.)

Finally, in Perl, we use an **equals sign ('=')** when we mean "equals", and we use numerals: we write '5' instead of "five". And remember — most statements end with a semicolon, and we put a **dollar sign ('\$')** in front of **scalars**. So let's change the period into a semicolon, and put a dollar sign in front of the variable:

```
$NumberOfCats = 5;
```

And that's how we do it in Perl. We have just assigned the variable `NumberOfCats` a [value](#) of five.

We can also assign a variable to other things. For example, if we know the number of cats, and we know the total number of cats and dogs, we can find out the number of dogs by subtracting. If we have thirteen cats and dogs total, and five cats, then here is how we can get the number of dogs:

```
$NumberOfCats = 5;  
$NumberOfCatsAndDogs = 13;  
$NumberOfDogs = $NumberOfCatsAndDogs - $NumberOfCats;
```

The computer has done the subtracting for you, and figured out the answer.

Note: In an assignment, there is one variable on the left side of the equals sign, which is changed. Nothing on the right side (unless it is also on the left side, which will be discussed [later](#)) is changed.

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Assignment of scalars](#) - [Assignment of lists](#) -  
[Arithmetic](#) - [Functions](#)

## Assignment of scalars

There are a few ways to **assign** a **scalar**. You can assign a scalar to a given **value**:

```
$NumberOfCats = 5;  
$MyCatsName = "Zappy";
```

Or you can assign one variable using another:

```
$NumberOfNoses = $NumberOfPeople;
```

This tells the computer that the number of noses is the same as the number of people. Or, to put it another way, it takes the **value** stored in the variable `NumberOfPeople`, and stores a copy of it in `$NumberOfNoses`.

There are several things that you can do with a **string**. One useful thing you can do is **concatenate** two strings. For example, if you concatenate the strings "My cat's name" and " is Zappy.", you get, "My cat's name is Zappy."

Did you notice the space between the quotation mark and the "is"? That space is important. Computers don't know when you should add a space to separate words. If you concatenate "My cat's name" and "is Zappy." without the extra space, it would come out, "My cat's nameis Zappy."

In Perl, you can concatenate two strings by putting a period ('.') between them. For example, you could get the whole sentence like so:

```
$WholeSentence = "My cat's name" . " is Zappy.";
```

Or, to do it differently,

```
$FirstPartOfSentence = "My cat's name";  
$SecondPartOfSentence = "is Zappy.";  
$WholeSentence = $FirstPartOfSentence . " " . $SecondPartOfSentence;
```

Do you see what I did here? I didn't have a space before "is" in `SecondPartOfSentence`, but I put another space in between the two parts. There were three strings here: `$FirstPartOfSentence`, " " (a string consisting of only a space), and `$SecondPartOfSentence`. I concatenated all of them together, just as you add  $3 + 1 + 2$  to get 6. Putting in an extra space can come in handy, when you want to make text look good. There are other ways to assign scalars, and they will be covered when we discuss [arithmetic](#) and [functions](#).

## **See also:**

[Variables in general](#) - [Scalars](#) - [Statements](#) - [Assignment of variables in general](#) - [Arithmetic](#) - [Assignment of lists](#) - [Assignment of hashes](#) - [Functions](#)

## Arithmetic

Perl, like many languages, lets you do arithmetic with numbers.  
You can have a statement like

```
$Average = ($FirstNumber + $SecondNumber + $ThirdNumber) / 3;
```

and the computer will do the arithmetic for you. It will add the three numbers, and divide the result by three. The result is stored in *Average*.

You may have noticed that I had parentheses — why are they necessary? This has to do with something called order of operations. Let's say we want to figure out what  $3 * 4 + 5$  equals. Well, what do you do first — multiply 3 by four, or add 4 and 5? If you multiply first, then  $3 * 4 = 12$ , so you have  $12 + 5$ , or 17. So the expression equals 17. But what if you add first? Then  $4 + 5 = 9$ , and  $3 * 9 = 27$ , so we have 27. The number you get depends what you do first.

Parentheses are a way to tell the computer what to do first. Everything inside a pair of parentheses is calculated before everything outside of the pair of parentheses. Everything on an inside pair of parentheses is calculated before things on an outside pair of parentheses. So, for example, if we have  $((3 * 4) + 6) / 9$ , that means that we first multiply  $3 * 4 = 12$ , to get  $(12 + 6) / 9$ ; then we add  $12 + 6 = 18$ , so we get  $(18 / 9)$ , and then we divide  $18 / 9 = 2$ , so we get a result of 2.

At least for now, you should always use parentheses to tell

At least for now, you should always use parentheses to tell the computer what it should do first. Use parentheses, so that the computer knows exactly what order you want it to do things in.

Two notes:

First, if you ask it to do something that's going to give a fraction (like "What is five divided by three?"), it will give a decimal for an answer. Usually, if there is a decimal involved in a calculation, the result will be a decimal. (With decimals, an answer will usually be a little more or a little less than it should be. That is a kind of error that happens with computers.)

Second, you can't divide by zero. If you try to divide by zero, your program will stop running. It is good practice, before dividing by a variable, to make sure that it is not zero (see [if-then](#)).

It is generally good, when doing arithmetic calculations, to break them into as many small steps as possible. It is better to have several simple calculations than one really long and confusing one.

## **See also:**

[Scalars](#) - [Assignment of scalars](#) - [Conditional clauses](#) - [If-then](#)

## Assignment of lists

There are a few ways to **assign** a **list**. One way is like this:

```
@MyFriends = ("John", "Susan", "Mary");
```

The list is assigned to something described by a **left parenthesis** ('('), some **scalars** separated by **commas** (','), a **right parenthesis** (')'), and then the **semicolon** (;). You can use variables and numbers as well as just strings, like this:

```
@Numbers = ($LastNumber, 9);
```

You can also put everything that's in one list, into another list. For example, you might write:

```
@PeopleIKnow = (@MyFamily, @MyFriends, "Jane", "Bob");
```

Then the list of people you know includes everybody in the lists of your family and friends, plus Jane and Bob.

One thing you will do often is to add one element to a list. Suppose you have a new friend named Fred, and you want to add him to your list of friends. You could do it this way:

```
@MyFriends = (@MyFriends, "Fred");
```

Now, I would like to answer a question you may have == how can MyFriends be equal to itself plus "Fred" added on to the end? That is like saying that a number equals itself plus one.

The answer is that the statement should be read like this:

"Let the new value of MyFriends equal the old value of MyFriends, with "Fred" added at the end. It is possible, and useful at times, to use one variable on both sides of the equals sign ('=') in this way.

## **See also:**

[Variables in general](#) - [Lists](#) - [Statements](#) - [Assignment of variables in general](#) - [Assignment of scalars](#) - [Assignment of hashes](#) - [Functions](#)

## Assignment of hashes

**Hashes** may be **assigned** one of two ways: one of which resembles a scalar, and the other of which is like the assignment of a list.

Recall the **earlier example** where John, Sue, and Mary have a dog, a cat, and a goldfish respectively. The easiest way, and the one you should probably use most of the time (until you've outgrown this book), is to say, "John's pet is a dog. Sue's pet is a cat. Mary's pet is a goldfish." In Perl, we write it this way:

```
$Pet{"John"} = "dog";  
$Pet{"Sue"} = "cat";  
$Pet{"Mary"} = "goldfish";
```

Remember that `$Pet{"John"}` should be read as "John's pet."

This means that the whole statement should be read, "Let John's pet be a dog." Even though the computer statement looks rather funny, it really says something that is fairly close to English.

The second way makes a bunch of assignments at once — it is useful when you want to create a hash from scratch. Creating the same hash this way would look like this:

```
%Pet = ("John" => "dog",  
        "Sue"   => "cat",  
        "Mary"  => "goldfish");
```

Now, did you notice that the statement was broken over a

few lines? It's OK to split a statement over several lines and put spaces in to format it; indeed, it is good to do so. It makes the `code` more readable. This is called spacing.

## **See also:**

[Variables in general](#) - [Hashes](#) - [Statements](#) - [Assignment of variables in general](#) - [Assignment of scalars](#) - [Assignment of lists](#)  
- [Functions](#)

## **Input and output**

One important thing for programs to be able to do, is to be able to pay attention to what people say to them, and say things to people.

There are varying ways that programs do this; here, I will address a couple of the simpler ways. They both involve the keyboard. One reads a line in from the keyboard to a variable — that is, it reads in everything the user types, until he hits return — and the other prints out some specific text.

**See also:**

[Statements - Input - Output](#)

# Input

The way I'm going to teach to do input, is as follows: Say that you want to input some line of text from the user, and store the result in the variable `$UserResponse`. The following two lines will accomplish that:

```
$UserResponse = <>;  
chomp $UserResponse;
```

The first line reads a line into `$UserResponse`. But that includes the return character at the end of the line, which we generally don't need. The second line takes the extra character off.

In general, you should use something like these two lines when you want to input a line from the user.

**See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Scalars](#) - [Input and Output](#) - [Output](#)

# Output

The print statement is useful for output. Let me give an example of a very famous program:

```
#!/usr/local/bin/perl  
print "Hello, world!\n";
```

The first line is a line you should put at the beginning of every Perl program you write. The second line prints, "Hello, world!" It is the second line we are studying.

What's that funny "\n"? What does it mean? Well, Perl doesn't know by itself when a line should end. So, we put "\n" at the end of each line, to tell it to go to the next line.

Here is another example of some [code](#) using print:

```
print "The average is " . $Average . ".\n";
```

Now, what does that all mean?

Remember that, earlier, when we talked about [scalars](#), we could [concatenate](#) two [strings](#) by putting a period ('.') between them. This takes three strings: "The average is ", \$Average, and ".\n", and sticks them all together. Let's say that \$Average is 4.5. Then the result will look like:

```
The average is 4.5.
```

The "." in ".\n" is just a period for the end of the sentence, and "\n" means the end of line.

**See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Scalars](#) - [Input and output](#) - [Input](#)

## Flow control

In many programming languages, there is a very powerful kind of statement called the goto statement. Quite often in programming, you are at one part of your code, the list of instructions, and you need to be somewhere else. So programmers would just put a goto in, and voila! you were at that other part of the program.

Well, gotos are very powerful, but they have a bit of a problem with them. If you just use gotos in the way that comes most naturally, the result is something called spaghetti code: the program just goes in and out in one tangled mess that's impossible to understand, just like spaghetti. This results in code that's full of [bugs](#), that's impossible to fix.

Therefore, it is in most cases strongly discouraged to use gotos. Gotos are considered hazardous to your health, and many programmers consider 'goto' to almost be a dirty word.

But wait. A goto is very powerful. If we're going to say "no gotos", shouldn't there be something else to replace them?

And the answer, fortunately, is "Yes." There are other ways to do almost anything that you would do with a goto — but do it better, and more cleanly. These ways make things much easier to understand, and have less bugs. The bugs that do get in are easier to fix.

There are two basic kinds of structures, that can do almost

all of the work done with gotos — but do it much better. These two structures are called **conditionals** and **loops**, and we will explore them. There are also **subroutines** and **functions**, which will be covered later, and are also very powerful.

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Blocks](#) - [If-then](#) - [If-then-else](#) - [If-then-else chains](#) - [Loops](#) - [Foreach loops](#) - [While loops](#) - [For loops](#)

# Blocks

For both [conditionals](#) and [loops](#), it is useful to think of a cluster of [statements](#) taken together. A block of code begins with a [left curly brace](#) ('{'), and ends with a [right curly brace](#) ('}). It should also be indented (have a margin on the left) by two to four spaces. It doesn't matter how far you indent, but you should indent to the same depth most of the time. Here are a few statements by themselves:

```
print "Type something in: "; # The lack of a \n is intentional, so
                           # cursor stays on the same line.
    $UserInput = <>;
    chomp $UserInput;
    print "You typed in " . $UserInput . ".\n";
```

Here is that same group of statements in a block:

```
    {
print "Type something in: "; # The lack of a \n is intentional
                           # the cursor stays on the same li
    $UserInput = <>;
    chomp $UserInput;
    print "You typed in " . $UserInput . ".\n";
    }
```

In short, to make a block, you put a left curly brace before it, type in the statements in the block, and close with a right curly brace. The whole thing should be indented four spaces.

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Flow control](#) - [If-then](#) - [If-then-else](#) - [If-then-else chains](#) - [Loops](#) - [Foreach loops](#) - [While loops](#) - [For loops](#) - [Functions](#)

## Conditional clauses

A conditional clause is something that is either true or false. The computer needs to be able to decide if something is true or false.

There are a number of different types of conditional clauses. The one which I will cover here, to get started with, is equals. An expression like:

```
($UserResponse == "y")
```

is an example of a conditional clause.

You can build up conditional clauses by using and, or, and not, as well as parentheses. Here is an example of a more complicated clause:

```
(( $MyPet == "dog" ) || ( $MyPet == "cat" ))
```

You should always use lots of parentheses with conditionals, just like you should use parentheses in [arithmetic](#). Furthermore, the parentheses have more or less the same meaning.

Now, I can see a question. Why did I use two equals signs instead of one? The answer is that Perl uses one equals sign for [assignment](#), and two equals signs for conditionals. If you use one equals sign, Perl will think you are doing an assignment. For example, if you type:

```
($UserResponse = "y")
```

what that will do is assign `$UserResponse` the **value** "y", instead of checking to see if `$UserResponse` is already "y". This is a very easy mistake to make; check for this when your program seems not to work.

If-then clauses, and loops, do different things depending on whether something is true. A conditional clause is something that can be true or false, which Perl can use to decide if something is true, and therefore run **if-thens** and **loops**.

**Scalars** can also serve as conditional clauses. A scalar that has a value of 0, or that is an empty **string** (i.e. a string that doesn't contain any characters, not even spaces — it would be represented as ""), is considered false. Any other scalar is considered true. In general, we use a 1 to represent true, and a 0 to represent false.

Note: Conditional clauses don't have semicolons after them.

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Arithmetic](#) - [Flow control](#) - [Blocks](#) - [If-then](#) -  
[If-then-else](#) - [If-then-else chains](#)

## If-then

Remember, back when we introduced **statements**, how we talked about going to a friend's house? Let me reproduce the list of what to do:

Ask your parents for permission to visit your friend.  
Call your friend's house, and ask permission to come over.  
Finish getting dressed.  
Walk over to your friend's house.  
Take chewing gumm off of your shoe.  
Greet your friend.  
Play with your friend.  
Eat a snack.  
Play some more.  
Say goodbye.  
Walk home.  
Take off your shoes.

Well, this list didn't involve any decisions — and there are decisions involved. For example, you only continue over to your friend's house if you get permission, right?

Let's rewrite the list using if-then logic:

```
Ask your parents for permission to visit your friend.  
If your parents give permission to visit your friend:  
    {  
Call your friend's house and ask permission to come over
```

```

call your friend's house, and ask permission to come over.
  If your friend's parents give permission to come over:
    {
      Finish getting dressed.
      Walk over to your friend's house.
      If you stepped on some chewing gum:
        {
          Take chewing gumm off of your shoe.
        }
      Greet your friend.
      Play with your friend.
      Eat a snack.
      Play some more.
      Say goodbye.
      Walk home.
      Take off your shoes.
    }
  }

```

What we have here is a modified list of how to visit your friend, that only does things if they are appropriate — for example, it only goes over to your friend's house if you have permission to go over.

The **syntax** in Perl for this sort of thing is as follows:

```

    if (condition)
    {
      code to execute if condition is true
    }

```

"if" must be spelled exactly that way, with a lowercase 'i', and the curly braces put around the code to be executed. What Perl will do when it sees that, is see if the **conditional clause** is true, and if so, execute the **block** that's inside the braces.

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Flow control](#) - [Blocks](#) - [Conditional clauses](#) - [If-then-else](#) - [If-then-else chains](#)

# If-then-else

Suppose that I want to do something in a programming language. Some pseudocode might be as follows:

```
if (I know how to do it)
    {
    do it;
    }
else
    {
    try to find out how to do it;
    }
```

There is one thing I want to do if the **conditional clause** is true, and another thing to do if the conditional clause is false.

And that is done with this exact syntax:

```
if (conditional clause)
    {
    block of code to execute if the conditional clause is true
    }
else
    {
    block of code to execute if the conditional clause is false
    }
```

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Arithmetic](#) - [Flow control](#) - [Blocks](#) - [Conditional clauses](#) - [If-then](#) - [If-then-else chains](#)

# If-then-else chains

There is one more step to be taken with if-then-else. That is demonstrated by the following segment of code:

```
if ($Pet == "dog")
{
    print "Arf, arf!\n";
}
elseif ($Pet == "cat")
{
    print "Purr, purr!\n";
}
elseif ($Pet == "goldfish")
{
    print "Splish, splash!\n";
}
else
{
    print "I don't know what sound the pet makes.\n";
}
```

Sometimes, you have more than two choices to deal with — there are more than two (or three) possibilities for a pet. An if-then-else chain is ideal for the following; the program checks if the first condition is true, and if the first condition is false, it checks if the second condition is true, and so on and so forth.

The general **syntax** is:

```
if (first conditional clause)
{
    code to be executed
}
if first conditional clause is true
```

```
    }  
elseif (second conditional clause)  
    {  
        code to be executed if first  
        conditional clause is false, but  
        second conditional clause is true  
    }  
    ...  
elseif (last conditional clause)  
    {  
        code to be executed if all but the  
        last conditional clauses are false, but  
        the last conditional clause is true  
    }  
    else  
    {  
        code to be executed if none of the  
        conditional clauses are true.  
    }
```

The final else is optional, but recommended.

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Arithmetic](#) - [Flow control](#) - [Blocks](#) - [Conditional clauses](#) - [If-then](#) - [If-then-else](#)

# Loops

A loop is what is executed when you want to run the same code for several different things. For example, here is some pseudocode to get bundled up in the winter:

```
while (there is more clothing to put on)
{
  Select another item of clothing to put on.
  Pick it up.
  Put it on.
}
```

There are different types of loops for different purposes.

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Flow control](#) - [Conditional clauses](#) - [Foreach loops](#) - [While loops](#) - [For loops](#)

## Foreach loops

One useful kind of loop, does something to each element of a list. For example, here is how might might code getting bundled up to go outside in the winter to go sledding:

```
@WinterClothing = ("coat", "snowpants", "boots", "gloves", "scarf")
  foreach $ArticleOfClothing (@WinterClothing)
  {
    print "I'm putting on my $ArticleOfClothing.\n";
  }
```

Before dissecting exactly how this loop works, let me show you what it does. It prints out:

```
I'm putting on my coat.
I'm putting on my snowpants.
I'm putting on my boots.
I'm putting on my gloves.
I'm putting on my scarf.
I'm putting on my hat.
```

There are a couple of things going on here.

First, we [assign a list](#).

Then we go through the loop several times — each time, the variable `$ArticleOfClothing` is set to equal a different element of `@WinterClothing`, and the block of code is executed.

In that code, when Perl sees `$ArticleOfClothing`, it substitutes the [value](#) of `$ArticleOfClothing` (which may be "coat", "snowpants", etc.) for the name of the variable. So, the

first time through, "I'm putting on my \$ArticleOfClothing.\n" becomes "I'm putting on my coat.\n", where "\n" tells Perl that that's the end of the line.

Foreach loops should be used when you want to do something with every element of a list.

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Lists](#) - [Flow control](#) - [Blocks](#) - [Loops](#) - [While loops](#) - [For loops](#)

# While loops

A while loop is a loop used to run a block of code while a condition is true. For example:

```
$ShouldContinue = "y";
$NumberOfTimesThroughLoop = 0;
while (not($ShouldContinue == "n"))
{
    ++$NumberOfTimesThroughLoop;
    if ($NumberOfTimesThroughLoop == 1)
    {
        print "This loop has been executed $NumberOfTimesThroughLo
    }
    else
    {
        print "This loop has been executed $NumberOfTimesThroughLo
    }
    print "Go through the loop again(y/n)? ";
    $ShouldContinue = <>;
    chomp $ShouldContinue;
}
```

Now, let's look at what this code does.

`$ShouldContinue` tells if the loop should continue. "n", for no, means to stop; anything else means to continue. So the loop says, "While we should continue".

The variable `$NumberOfTimesThroughLoop` is initialized to 0 (set up to be equal to 0) before the loop begins. Then the first thing inside the loop, "`++$NumberOfTimesThroughLoop;`", means to increase the **value** of `$NumberOfTimesThroughLoop` by one.

In general, the expression:

```
++$variable name;
```

where variable name is the name of a "scalar" variable, means "Increase the value of variable name by one."

Then we have a conditional. This conditional sees if it's the first time through the loop. Why do we do that?

The statements inside the if clause (the **block** immediately following the if) and the else clause are almost identical — but there is an 's' after "time" in the else clause. This is so that, on the first time through, the program will print out:

```
This loop has been executed 1 time.
```

but on the second (third, fourth, etc.) time through, it will say something like:

```
This loop has been executed 2 times.
```

Then, after that, it asks the user if he wants to run through the loop again. After doing that, it reads a line of input into the variable `$ShouldContinue` — if the user types "y", `$ShouldContinue` will contain a "y", and if the user types "n", `$ShouldContinue` will contain a "n".

Then, after that, it checks if it should continue (the **conditional clause** right after the word "while"), and if it should, it executes the loop again.

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Flow control](#) - [Blocks](#) - [Conditional clauses](#) - [If-then-else](#) - [Loops](#) - [Foreach loops](#) - [For loops](#)

## For loops

A for loop is a special case of a [while loop](#), which is commonly used for doing something a certain number of times.

Let's suppose that I wanted to print "Hello, world!" ten times.

I could just have ten lines like so:

```
print "Hello, world!\n";
```

But what if I wanted to change the number — to five or to fifty? It would take a lot of editing.

There's a better way to do it, though. I could have the computer count up to ten, and each time print out "Hello, world!".

If I did that, then changing it to five or fifty would only mean changing the number I have to count to.

Let me give some code to do that, and explain what it does.

```
for($CurrentLine = 0; $CurrentLine 10; ++$CurrentLine)
{
    print "Hello, world!\n";
}
```

That's all the code that it takes. And what if I wanted to print "Hello, world!" a thousand times? A very easy change — only

change the 10 to 1000:

```
for($CurrentLine = 0; $CurrentLine 1000; ++$CurrentLine)
{
    print "Hello, world!\n";
}
```

Now, let me explain what it does. Let's look at the first line.  
It has the following format:

```
for(part one; part two; part three)
```

It has three parts, separated by **semicolons** (`;`). Each part does something different.

The first part is run exactly once. It is used to set things up — in this case, to **assign** the **scalar variable** the **value** of zero.

For reasons that you will understand later when you program, you should have computers start counting at 0. So, instead of counting from 1 to 10, this counts from 0 to 9 — and still does it ten times.

The second part is the **conditional clause** that is tested each time you run through the **loop**. In this case, it makes an **arithmetic** assertion: that `CurrentLine` is less than 10. After running through the loop, the computer checks to see if the second part is still true — if it's true, the computer runs through the loop one more time.

The third part is something the computer does each time, after running through the loop and before checking the conditional clause. In this case, it increments (adds one to) the value of `$CurrentLine`.

So, all together, we have the computer counting from 0 to 9, and each time printing out a "Hello world!" message.

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Scalars](#) - [Assignment of scalars](#) - [Arithmetic](#) - [Flow control](#) - [Blocks](#) - [Conditional clauses](#) - [Loops](#) - [Foreach loops](#) - [While loops](#)

## Subroutines and functions

When you learned to walk, it was a bit tough to learn — but once you had learned once, you learned a way of walking that would take you anywhere (within certain bounds), on any kind of surface (within other bounds). You had learned walking in general, and so you didn't need to learn to walk each time you met something new.

For computers, there are many things you'll want to do a number of different times, in a number of different places — but it's really only one thing. With **subroutines** and **functions**, you can write miniature programs that do one thing — and then you have a new command that is available to you, taking only one line, whenever you want to do something.

Subroutines are powerful. Subroutines are good. Whenever you find yourself doing the same thing in more than one place, it is probably good to put it in its own subroutine.

## **See also:**

[Variables](#) - [Statements](#) - [Flow control](#) - [Blocks](#) - [Arguments](#) -  
[Subroutines](#) - [Functions](#)

# Arguments

Some [subroutines](#) and [functions](#) need information to do their job. For example, you might have a subroutine to tell the price for so many apples, so many oranges, and so many bananas — but first you need to tell it how many apples, oranges, and bananas there are, so it can calculate them!

That is done by giving the subroutine or function some arguments. The way you use a subroutine/function is to give an ampersand ('&') before the name of the subroutine/function, then its name, and then a [list](#) of arguments. For example, if we used the subroutine I mentioned, you might invoke it like this:

```
&TellPrice($NumberOfApples, $NumberOfOranges, $NumberOfBananas);
```

We'll see exactly how to write such a subroutine [here](#).

## **See also:**

[Variables](#) - [Scalars](#) - [Lists](#) - [Flow control](#) - [Subroutines and functions](#) - [Subroutines](#) - [Functions](#)

## Subroutines

A subroutine is a miniature program that you can run from within your program. [Earlier](#), we talked about a procedure that would tell a price for an amount of fruit. Here is how we write such a procedure. Before the procedure is used, we assume that there is some code that tells the price of the different kinds of fruit:

```
$PricePerApple = .25;  
$PricePerOrange = .30;  
$PricePerBanana = .20;
```

And here is the subroutine itself:

```
sub TellPrice()  
{  
    $NumberOfApples = shift(@_);  
    $NumberOfOranges = shift(@_);  
    $NumberOfBananas = shift(@_);  
    @RemainingArguments = @_;  
    $PriceForApples = $NumberOfApples * $PricePerApple;  
    $PriceForOranges = $NumberOfOranges * $PricePerOrange;  
    $PriceForBananas = $NumberOfBananas * $PricePerBanana;  
    $TotalPrice = $PriceForApples + $PriceForOranges + $PriceForBananas;  
    print "The total price for the fruit is $TotalPrice.\n";  
}
```

Well, let's look at it piece by piece:

```
$NumberOfApples = shift(@_);  
$NumberOfOranges = shift(@_);  
$NumberOfBananas = shift(@_);  
@RemainingArguments = @_;
```

This part finds out what the **arguments** to the procedure are, and stores them in the appropriate variables. This should go at the beginning of the subroutine; the **syntax** for using the subroutine is:

```
&TellPrice($NumberOfApples, $NumberOfOranges, $NumberOfBananas);
```

The part of the subroutine that gets the arguments should be of the following form:

```
$first argument = shift(@_);  
$second argument = shift(@_);  
$third argument = shift(@_);  
    .  
    .  
    .  
@RemainingArguments = @_;
```

where *first argument*, *second argument*, and so on are the names of the arguments in order.

After figuring out what the arguments are, the subroutine then does some **arithmetic** to figure out the total price, and **prints it out**.

One more thing... At the beginning of the program, you need to declare your subroutine, by having a line like this:

```
sub &TellPrice();
```

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Flow control](#) - [Blocks](#) - [Subroutines and functions](#) - [Arguments](#) - [Functions](#)

# Functions

One kind of useful subroutine is one that does some calculations, or something like that, and gives a value as an answer. For example, suppose we wanted to be able to assign the total price to a variable in our [fruit market](#) example. This is what functions are for.

To use a function, we would do something like this:

```
$TotalPrice = &CalculatePrice($NumberOfApples, $NumberOfOranges,  
                             $NumberOfBananas);
```

And the `CalculatePrice` function is almost exactly the same as the `TellPrice` procedure. Here is its listing, with all of the changes in **bold**:

```
sub CalculatePrice()  
  {  
    $NumberOfApples = shift(@_);  
    $NumberOfOranges = shift(@_);  
    $NumberOfBananas = shift(@_);  
    @RemainingArguments = @_;  
    $PriceForApples = $NumberOfApples * $PricePerApple;  
    $PriceForOranges = $NumberOfOranges * $PricePerOrange;  
    $PriceForBananas = $NumberOfBananas * $PricePerBanana;  
    $TotalPrice = $PriceForApples + $PriceForOranges + $PriceForBa  
    return $TotalPrice;  
  }
```

Now, instead of printing out the result, the subroutine returns it. Now the part of the program that called it (above)

will have the result plugged in where it was given.

Another very useful function can be used to get a yes or no answer from the user. This subroutine doesn't itself tell the user what he's supposed to answer yes or no about; that would be done just before calling this subroutine.

```
sub confirm()
{
    $UserAnswer = <>; # Read in the user's answer.
    chomp $UserAnswer;
    if ((not($UserAnswer eq "n")) and # If it's not a yes or a no,
        (not($UserAnswer eq "y")) and
        (not($UserAnswer eq "N")) and
        (not($UserAnswer eq "Y")))
    {
        while ((not($UserAnswer eq "n")) and # Keep going until we
            (not($UserAnswer eq "y")) and # or a no.
            (not($UserAnswer eq "N")) and
            (not($UserAnswer eq "Y")))
        {
            print "Please answer \"y\", for yes, or \"n\", for no.
                $UserAnswer = <>;
                chomp $UserAnswer;
            }
        }
    # If we've gotten here, the user has given a yes or a no answer
    return (($UserAnswer eq "Y") or ($UserAnswer eq "y"));
}
```

This procedure makes sure that the user types a y or n, then returns a conditional that says that the user said yes. So, for example, one could have the following segment of code:

```
print "Do you wish to continue (y/n)? ";
if (&confirm())
{
    print "Continuing...\n";
}
else
{
    print "Bye!\n";
    exit 0;
}
```

That segment of code asks the user if he wants to continue. If he says yes, then the program says "Continuing...", and continues. If he says no, the program says "Bye!", and exits.

That's all of the bare bones rudiments of programming. Now we can move [onward](#) to looking at a few sample programs, and then begin tinkering!

## **See also:**

[Statements](#) - [Variables](#) - [Flow control](#) - [Blocks](#) - [Subroutines and functions](#) - [Arguments](#) - [Subroutines](#)

## Sample programs

Here, we will look at a couple of sample programs, to get an idea of how they tick — how one might put the pieces together to make something. What I have done is a lot like showing you a number of Lego blocks all by themselves — here is a hint on how you might put them together.

We will look at two programs — **one** that keeps track of your friends and their pets, and **another** that keeps a running average of numbers it is given.

I would like for you to read over them, see the explanations, understand them — and then see what you can do with them. Can you modify them? Can you build something else from scratch?

Try it!

## **See also:**

[Friends and pets - Running average](#)

## Friends and pets

Here, we will have a program that asks you about your friends and pets, and remembers them for as long as it's running. Let me give a listing. I am trying to document it well by putting in [comments](#). Can you tell what it does? If you can't, look up the parts you can't understand.

```
#!/usr/bin/perl -w
#
# Friends and pets – a program to keep track of your friends and t
#
# Last modified 12-29-01, by Jonathan Hayward
#
# While you say you want to continue, it asks you for another frie
# and then asks for the pet's name. Then, it tells you all of the
# been told, and what their pets are.
#
# This is done with a while loop.
# The friends are stored in a list, and
# the pets are stored in a hash.
#
# We also use a couple of functions.
#
#
# The stuff it does in the beginning, called initialization.
#
# List the subroutines and functions.
sub Confirm();
#
# Confirm is a function that gets a yes or no answer from the user
#
```

```
# Note that this function uses another function – ReadLine. It is
# possible, and indeed very useful, to have one subroutine or func
# other subroutines or functions.
```

```
#
```

```
sub Confirm()
```

```
{
```

```
    $UserAnswer = &ReadLine();
```

```
    if ((not($UserAnswer eq "n")) and # If it's not a yes or a no,
        (not($UserAnswer eq "y")) and
        (not($UserAnswer eq "N")) and
        (not($UserAnswer eq "Y")))
```

```
    {
```

```
        while ((not($UserAnswer eq "n")) and # Keep going until we
            (not($UserAnswer eq "y")) and # or a no.
            (not($UserAnswer eq "N")) and
            (not($UserAnswer eq "Y")))
```

```
        {
```

```
            print "Please answer \"y\", for yes, or \"n\", for no.
                $UserAnswer = &ReadLine();
```

```
        }
```

```
    }
```

```
    # If we've gotten here, the user has given a yes or a no answe
    return (($UserAnswer eq "Y") or ($UserAnswer eq "y"));
```

```
}
```

```
# Make the list of friends and hash of pets empty, so that they do
# anything.
```

```
@Friends = ();
```

```
%Pets = ();
```

```
# Have scalars that we can use for true and false conditional clau
```

```
$True = 1;
```

```
$False = 0;
```

```
    # Welcome the user to the program.
```

```
    print "Welcome to the friends and pets program.\n";
```

```
        $ShouldContinue = $True;
```

```
        #
```

```
# The main loop. This is where the meat of the program is.
```

```
#
```

```
        while ($ShouldContinue)
```

```
        {
```

```
            # Read in the friend's name
```

```

        # Read in the friend's name.
print "Please enter the name of your friend:\n";
    $NewFriend = &ReadLine();

    # Add the new friend to the list.
    @Friends = (@Friends, $NewFriend);

    # Read in the friend's pet.
print "Please enter the kind of pet $NewFriend has:\n";
    $NewPet = &ReadLine();

    # Add the new friend's pet to the list of hashes.
    $Pets{$NewFriend} = $NewPet;

# Print a blank line, so that the output doesn't look too crow
    print "\n";

    # Now, recite the friends and their pets.
    foreach $CurrentFriend (@Friends)
        {
            $CurrentPet = $Pets{$CurrentFriend};
print $CurrentFriend "'s pet is a $CurrentPet.\n";
        }

# Finally, ask the user if he wants to continue.
    print "Do you want to continue (y/n)?\n";
    $ShouldContinue = &Confirm();

    # And we reach the end of the loop.
    }

# If we get here in the program, the user does not want to continu
    # So, we say "Bye!", and leave.

        print "Bye!\n";
        exit 0;

        #

# The program will never get here by itself, because it is after t
# statement. But we can still put procedures and functions here.
    # two functions here:
    #

    #

# ReadLine is a function that reads a line in, and gets rid of the
    # newline. This does input exactly as specified earlier.
    #

```

```
sub ReadLine()  
    {  
        $UserInput = >;  
        chomp $Userinput;  
        return $Userinput;  
    }
```

**A sample output for this program might be:**

Welcome to the friends and pets program.

Please enter the name of your friend:

Fred

Please enter the kind of pet Fred has:

furball

Fred's pet is a furball.

Do you want to continue (y/n)?

y

Please enter the name of your friend:

David

Please enter the kind of pet David has:

dog

Fred's pet is a furball.

David's pet is a dog.

Do you want to continue (y/n)?

n

Bye!

**See also:**

[Sample programs - Running average](#)

## Running average

This program reads numbers and tells their running average:

```
#!/usr/bin/perl -w
    $total = 0;
    $number_of_items = 0;
    $result = 0;
while(1) # 1 is always true.
    {
    print "Next item: ";
    $input_line = <>;
    chomp $input_line;
    $total = $total + $input_line;
    ++$number_of_items;
    $result = $total / $number_of_items;
print "The average so far is " + $result + ".\n";
    }
```

## **See also:**

[Sample programs - Friends and pets](#)

## Debugging

Do you have a little brother or sister? If you don't, pretend you do—a brother, Fred, who's just barely old enough to walk.

Imagine that your mother tells your brother to go to the bathroom. So your brother walks to the bathroom, stands there a while, and then asks why he was sent there. Or imagine that you have a potted plant in the house, and your parents come home and find that your brother dug out dirt from the tree and is playing in the dirt. They clean up the mess and explain, very plainly, that he is not to play in dirt. So your brother tries to find something better, and pulls all the leaves off the plant and plays in the leaves.

Computers are like that. They don't understand what you mean—only the literal sense of what you said. If you say almost exactly what you mean, the computer will almost do what you mean, and the 'almost' can be very annoying. In this chapter, I'll explain how to fix common bugs, and close with how science can help you debug.

# Common Bugs

Many common bugs come from one of two sources:

1. Accidentally typing the wrong thing.
2. Logical errors.

Logical and mathematical errors are things like being off by one. Subsequent sections will tell you something about typing errors.

## Syntax errors

If a programming book tells you to write something a certain way, you should do exactly what you're told. If you're told to write:

```
@a=(1,2);
foreach $b (@a)
{
    print $b;
}
```

and you write:

```
@a=(1,2);
foreach b (@a)
{
    print $b;
}
```

What will happen?

Something different, and not what you want.

One **dollar sign** is missing, so the computer will do something different, and not what you want.

Can't the computer just do what you mean?

No. Knowing what you mean shows human intelligence, and the computer can't do it.

What happens quite often is that you write something a little different than what you thought—something a person wouldn't notice—but the computer can't correct. If you're having trouble,

read your code closely to see that you typed exactly what you thought you typed.

## Misspelling

What happens if you type:

```
$pizzas = 12;  
print "$pizzzas\n";
```

What you'd like to happen is that it prints out the number 12. However, I put an extra 'z' in, so it prints out 0. Why? The variable \$pizzas may be 12, but \$pizzzas is a different variable, and it is not twelve.

If you're having trouble, make sure that every variable and function is spelled exactly the same way every time it appears.

## Forgotten semicolon

What happens if you type the following line of code:

```
print "Hello, world!\n"
```

What you'd like is for it to print "Hello, world!". However, the program will crash. It's waiting for a semicolon, and if it's not there it'll get confused. Make sure that every line, unless you've been told it doesn't need a semicolon, has a semicolon.

## Single and Double Equals

What happens if you run the following code:

```
$a = 1;
$b = 2;
if ($a = $b)
{
    print "They're equal!";
}
else
{
    print "They're not equal.";
}
```

What would you like to happen? It compares 1 and 2 and says that they're not equal. However, if you run this, it says that they're equal. Why? ( $\$a = \$b$ ) says to make a equal to b. What we wanted was ( $\$a == \$b$ ), which would compare them. Use '=' to assign a value and '==' to compare. It's easy to use the wrong one and introduce bugs to your program.

## Scientific Debugging

How does the scientific method work?

In a nutshell, there's something a scientist doesn't understand, so he makes a guess, and then makes a way to show if the guess is wrong. After a lot of testing, a guess that hasn't been shown wrong may become part of science.

When you don't understand something, making guesses and then testing them ("If my program's miscalculating, then the variables before this part will have the right values, but the variables after will have wrong values. I know! I'll put print statements before and after to tell me the variables' values") can help you see why your program's not functioning.

If you have a science teacher who programs computers, it would be very helpful to approach him sometime when he's not busy and ask, "How can the scientific method help me debug computer programs?"

## Conclusion

I hope this has helped you to begin to tinker and play, exploring what your computer can do when you speak one of its languages. When you're ready to learn more, read good programming books, continue asking questions, and by all means, keep tinkering!

Would you like another book that will tell you more? [O'Reilly](#) publishes excellent titles. [Learning Perl](#) is an excellent next step. When you've outgrown that, [Programming Perl](#), affectionately named [the camel book](#) by Perl programmers, will take you far. And if you enjoyed this, would you like to see some of [what else I've written](#)? You might find some of it interesting.

-Jonathan

# Glossary

Argument

Assignment

Atgry

Block

Bug

Code

Comma

Comment

Concatenate

Conditional clause

Dollar sign

Equals sign

Feature

Flow control

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Hash

Input

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Left curly brace

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Output

Percent sign  
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Right curly brace  
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Scalar  
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Statement  
String  
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Value  
Variable

[Certain terms are defined in the text; those remaining are:]

## **Definition: Atgry**

An atgry (the plural of atgry is atgrynge) looks like this:

*@*

Atgrynge are used before **variables** that are **lists**. They are also known as 'at signs'.

## Definition: Bug

A bug is a mistake in a program that makes the program act differently than it was supposed to.

Bugs are one of the facts of life in computer programming; we all make mistakes, and figuring out and fixing bugs is an important part of creating programs.

The term 'bug' comes a story that, way back in the middle bronze age when computers were made with physical relays, a computer wasn't doing something properly, and (after investigation) the people discovered that there was an insect which had gotten into the computer and was making it malfunction: the computer had a bug in it. Since then, we use the word 'bug' to refer to malfunctions that are caused by human mistakes as well as funny things like insects crawling into a computer.

Even when it seems like you've done everything right, sometimes the computer still won't do what you want it to. One of the points of maturity for a programmer is not to blame other things, but to realize that it's probably a mistake you've made, and to see what you need to do to fix it.

## Definition: Code

Code is a word we use to refer to the "stuff" a program is made out of, just as 'wood' is a word we use to refer to the "stuff" a board is made out of. Here is an example of code:

```
#!/usr/local/bin/perl
#
# Print out the phrase "Hello, world!"
#
print "Hello, world!\n";
```

In this case, this code is all of a program; code can also be some of a program.

Can you identify the different parts of this program?

## **Definition: Comma**

A comma looks like this:

,

## Definition: Concatenate

When you concatenate two **strings**, you stick them both together, one after the other. For example:

If you concatenate:

"Old MacDonald had a farm. "

and

"On that farm, there was a cat. "

the result is,

"Old MacDonald had a farm. On that farm, there was a cat."

In Perl, you can concatenate strings by placing a period ('.') in between them. The following code assigns `$first_part` the value "Old MacDonald had a farm.", `$second_part` the value "On that farm, there was a cat. " before assigning the concatenated value to `$combined`:

```
$first_part = "Old MacDonald had a farm. ";  
$second_part = "On that farm, there was a cat. ";  
$combined = $first_part . $second_part;
```

## **Definition: Dollar sign**

A dollar sign looks like this:

\$

It is used before the names of some [variables](#) — specifically, [scalars](#), and (in some cases) [hashes](#).

## **Definition: Equals sign**

*An equals sign looks like this:*

=

It is used for [assignment](#).

## Definition: Feature

A feature is some capability of a program, something that it can do. For example, most word processors can have **bold** or italic text, and print things out. Some time spent working on programs is adding new features.

There is a running joke among computer people, that when there's a **bug** that a customer discovers, the technical support people say, "Oh, you've discovered our new feature!" — they pretend the bug is really a special feature.

## **Definition: Hash**

A hash looks like this:

#

Hashes are used in Perl to begin [comments](#), and are also known as pound signs.

## Definition: Language

There are different languages that humans use to communicate with each other — English, French, German, Italian, and so on. There are also languages for humans to tell computers to do things. Perl is one of many such languages.

Different computer languages have different strengths and weaknesses. Each one has a slightly different function — just like the tools in a tool chest (hammer, pliers, screwdriver, etc.) have different functions.

There is a difference between computer and human languages, which is this: Human languages are difficult to learn, at least for adults. Even if you can communicate well in English, you will have to work hard to be able to communicate even badly in French or German (if you have not already had experience with them). But with computer languages, once you have really learned to program, learning a new language is fairly easy.

This is part of why I am using Perl as the language for this book, instead of using the language I know best (C). Perl is a good, easy language to begin with, and I hope both that you can learn Perl, and move on to other languages that will teach you other things that Perl doesn't teach you very well. I think, for example, that Java is a good second language. After Perl and Java, you should be able to use almost any language.

## **Definition: Left curly brace**

A left curly brace looks like this:

{

Left and [right curly braces](#) are used to enclose [blocks](#) of code, as well as designate an element of a [hash](#).

## Definition: Left Parenthesis

A left parenthesis (the plural of parenthesis is parentheses)  
looks like this:

(

Left and **right parentheses** are used to clarify what you mean  
in certain **arithmetic** expressions, as well as telling where the  
members of a **list** and the **arguments** to a **function** begin and end.

## **Definition: Percent sign**

A percent sign looks like this:

**%**

Percent signs, among other things, are used to refer to [hashes](#).

## **Definition: Period**

A period looks like this:

.

Periods are used, among other things, to [concatenate](#) two [strings](#), as explained in the [section of the text on scalars](#).

## **Definition: Right curly brace**

A right curly brace looks like this:

}

Right and [left curly braces](#) are used to enclose [blocks](#) of code, as well as designate an element of a [hash](#).

## Definition: Right parenthesis

A right parenthesis (the plural of parenthesis is parentheses) looks like this:

)

Right and **left parentheses** are used to clarify what you mean in certain **arithmetic** expressions, as well as telling where the members of a **list** and the **arguments** to a **function** begin and end.

## **Definition: Semicolon**

A semicolon looks like this:

;

Semicolons are used at the end of most [statements](#).

## Definition: String

A string is some amount of text. Examples of strings are:

"My left foot"

"436"

"A man without eyes,  
saw plums in a tree.  
He neither ate them nor left them;  
now, how could this be?"

We enclose a string in quotation marks, to indicate where the string begins and ends. The quotation marks are not actually part of the string. (Strings can contain almost anything, including line breaks and even quotation marks — although you have to be careful with quotation marks so you don't confuse the computer.)

# **Definition: Underscore**

An underscore looks like this:

—

Note that it is lower than a hyphen: here is a hyphen,  
followed by an underscore: -\_.  
Underscores, as well as letters and numbers, may be used in  
the names of **variables** and **functions**.

## Definition: Value

A value is a specific meaning that a [variable](#) may have at once. For example, the [scalar](#) `$NumberOfCats` could have the value 1, 2, or 5. A variable may only have one value at a time; when it is given a new value, the new value replaces the old value. Here are some examples of values that a scalar may have:

"five of spades"

1

-2.5

[Tinkering with Perl](#) is a free book that provides an introduction to programming in Perl, as well as a basic reference for things like [foreach in Perl](#), [if-then](#), and [if-then-else](#), in addition to providing a [glossary](#) where you can find definitions for [concatenate](#) and other terms.

[Tinkering with Perl](#) may be one of the most popular offerings on this site, but it's not the only attraction. You can read a tongue-in-cheek [Game Review: Meatspace](#), read an even more offbeat [customer service survey](#) (whether or not you actually fill it out), and spend a few minutes wishing your boss would read, [The Administrator Who Cried, "Important!"](#) (Not to mention that there are [other things you can read here besides tech stuff](#), from [Janra Ball: The Headache](#) to [The Spectacles](#).)

**Tong Fioi  
Blackbelt: The  
Martial Art of  
Joyous Conflict**

## One brief comment

I was not happy with this when it was new, and think that something in it still isn't quite right. However, I still think there is much in it that's worth reading.

As a child of perhaps ten, I told friends that I was going to make a martial art, made up a name that sounded Asian to me ("Tong Fior"), and got into an argument about it with a classmate (nowhere near physical blows). The preferred term for this in the academy is the highly abrasive term "Orientalism," although the better tempered anthropologists would regard it as the normal and natural contact when any one culture starts to meet another, and is really the same Orientalism by which the nationalistic Independence Day movie enjoyed tremendous popularity well outside of U.S. political borders. In the one kind of Orientalism, there are people in the West who want to be some romanticized image of the East; in the other there are people in the East who want to be some romanticized image of the West. I have difficulty finding much of any real difference between these instances of "diffusion" as the term is understood in an anthropology department.

And as is illustrated below, as Proverbs says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart" is mysteriously tied to the Lord granting the desires of your heart, and sometimes in the oddest ways.

## Obligatory quotation from G.K. Chesterton

G.K. Chesterton, in a passage that is politically incorrect enough today, wrote,

I am told that the Japanese method of wrestling consists not suddenly of pressing, but of suddenly giving way. This consists not of suddenly pressing, but that of suddenly giving way. This is one of my many reasons for disliking the Japanese civilization. To use surrender as a weapon is in the very worst spirit of the East. But there is no force so hard to defeat as the force which is easy enough for conquer; the force that always yields and then returns.

But hold that thought for a second, and I speak as a fan of the Land of the Rising Sun for ages. (And not just for that one single Google AdWords ad impression that changed eBay's AdWords presence forever: "Buy Japanese sushi on eBay! New and Used.")

Someone said, in response to a Quora question about whether anyone had regretted getting a PhD, and one of few PhD's to say "yes" said basically that you don't get a doctorate to get a superhuman high social status and be addressed as "Doctor"; he said "a PhD is just a paper that comes along the way as you are doing something you love."

being something, for ever.

## The personalities of martial arts

Something very much like that related to what what we now understand as a belt system. A martial artist wouldn't be awarded a blackbelt (or anything else besides a white belt) on the grounds of a formalized test. When you started, you got a white belt that would be slowly blackened by the practice involved in developing expertise for years and years and years.

And I believe that most of the better martial artists today would say that the older approach is still foundational in better practices today; it's just obscured and harder to discern, and certain entirely justified concessions to societal needs have been made.

I remember being offended when I saw how parts of Aikido in Aiki Ninjutsu work; it brought up memories of very frustrating matters of conversation, where a friend (and I do really mean friend) gave infuriating claims of agreement where he would say "I agree with you that [fill in the blank]", and the beginning, middle, and end of every such "agreement" was to wrench some belief of my mine out of context, placing himself as someone in a position to understand, interpret and explain my beliefs far better than I could, and use it as a sledgehammer against something else that were just as foundational to those beliefs. During those years, he never claimed agreement except as the

presentation of an attack. And that is specifically what I saw in physical form in how to respond to an opponent's punch. You grabbed your opponent's arm, and so to speak "corrected" the direction it was moving, and add exaggerated force to what your revision of the punch has become. This was disappointing enough to be offensive after reading the tale of a martial art founded by a legendary, great O Sensei who stood unarmed and kept dodging a master swordsman until the attacking swordsman collapsed from fatigue.

I'd be a little cautious about glibly identifying this as "Aikido," which etymology means something close to "Way with harmony and energy," as Aiki Ninjutsu represents a new fusion that draws on several older sources and has modern elements. The fusion may not particularly Western elements, but it has a Creed (with an apparently deliberate uppercase 'C' as in "Craptastic"), with the Creed beginning with "I believe in myself. I am confident. I can accomplish my goals," and when I started to give a thinking Christian's objections to believing in oneself (see Chesterton's take below), I saw in verbal form the foundational lesson of "Become the center." What I never heard was so much as lip service to "harmony between opponents" that is a leitmotif in so many genuine martial arts. The technique associated with "Become the center" forces all else to resolve around oneself, and the teacher seemed a bit "become the center" in that he spoke with decisive authority and I was not allowed to even contribute anything to the conversation beyond accepting decisive authority.

G.K. Chesterton incidentally has something to say about "become the center" or rather just believing in yourself. The sting with which he opens [chapter 2 of his book Heretics](#) make the stinging remarks of Sumo wrestling quoted above almost

sound like praise:

THOROUGHLY worldly people never understand even the world; they rely altogether on a few cynical maxims which are not true. Once I remember walking with a prosperous publisher, who made a remark which I had often heard before; it is, indeed, almost a motto of the modern world. Yet I had heard it once too often, and I saw suddenly that there was nothing in it. The publisher said of somebody, "That man will get on; he believes in himself." And I remember that as I lifted my head to listen, my eye caught an omnibus on which was written [the name of the lunatic asylum] "Hanwell." I said to him, "Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know where flames the fixed star of certainty and success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Super-men. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums." He said mildly that there were a good many men after all who believed in themselves and who were not in lunatic asylums. "Yes, there are," I retorted, "and you of all men ought to know them. That drunken poet from whom you would not take a dreary tragedy, he believed in himself. That elderly minister with an epic from whom you were hiding in a back room, he believed in himself. If you consulted your business experience instead of your ugly individualistic philosophy, you would know that believing in himself is one of the commonest signs of a rotter. Actors who can't act believe in themselves; and debtors who won't pay. It would be much truer to say that a man will certainly fail,

because he believes in himself. Complete self-confidence is not merely a sin; complete self-confidence is a weakness.

Believing utterly in one's self is a hysterical and superstitious belief like believing in Joanna Southcote: the man who has it has "Hanwell" written on his face as plain as it is written on that omnibus. And to all this my friend the publisher made this very deep and effective reply, "Well, if a man is not to believe in himself, in what is he to believe?" After a long pause I replied, "I will go home and write a book in answer to that question." This is the book that I have written in answer to it.

Enough of Chesterton; like The Onion, he has something to offend every palate. (He was beyond being dismissive of the thought of his joining the Orthodox Church.

Some people might be surprised by remarks above; my memberships in 3-4 martial arts lasted for a few months, and while I have had some successes (Kuk Sool Won and the local Shokotan paired me with blackbelts or blackbelt candidates by the end, and one fellow Karate student was getting very infuriated when I responded to him about a quarter second earlier than expected; I moved to meet him as he was moving, not after, without the faintest interval between the two), I found that spirituality was very dry until I repented of it as sin (a mistake I should have made once, if even that). And just to be clear, everyone I've heard of in any martial art at all says that you improve after a couple of months, but real mastery takes years and years and years. (I think my case was simply not how things work normally.)

## **God practices Ju-Jutsu, and we should too, as an act of submission**

Perhaps the single greatest illustration of Jiu-Jutsu in the Bible is where a Saul burning with wrath and destruction, trying in overweening pride to annihilate the Church, was stopped cold by the uncreated Light of Heaven, the Light who strikes terror in those not indwelt by It, and provides what may be the only place in the Bible where the Lord quotes a pagan Greek source:

**"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? ... It hurts you to kick against the goads."** The action of an Orthodox Christian is not, on the balance, to invade another's mind and straighten it out. It

is not, on the balance, either our place to really defend ourselves. It is to, in the words of a Protestant hymn, "Keep your eyes on Jesus / Look full in his wonderful face / And the things of this world will grow strangely dim / In the light of his glory and grace," and remember that you too are a sinner and try to be merciful and forgiving as others join you as you continue kicking against the goads.

Furthermore, the more you are in trouble, the more stress you are in, the more conflict or worse, the more more essential that you grow beyond any abilities you know in deiform love to forgive, to have mercy, to pray, to turn the other cheek. The [Sermon on the Mount](#) is not an ornament for the beings of some

mythical world more perfect than Star Trash. It is a battleplan for those of us who live in a world of conflict and violence.

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

## De-mythologizing done right

Bultmann is a foundational character in the academy, enough so to have provoked C.S. Lewis to write [The Elephant and the Fern-Seed](#). Bultmann came up with a new way of moving beyond mythological trappings found in the Bible and theology. Or at least that is how his progressive circles understood their stance;

I'm not completely sure how an Orthodox might best respond, whether "You have a valid enough point, but why does it loom so suffocatingly large to you?" or, "Um, you ARE aware that your fresh and new discovery is a recycled version of a topic that an Orthodox Christian worked out with power, well over a millennium earlier than you, and by a canonized saint at that, and the saint did a profoundly better job than you?", or extending an invitation for the distinguished scholar to simply become a catechumen!

However, I would like to take up Bultmann's point, or rather that of the canonized saint of over a thousand years before (Pseudo-Dionysius), or rather God's point. A standard illustration is, as [we repeatedly read in Exodus](#), "God hardened Pharoah's heart." This claim should not be taken literally; I've yet to read even someone very wrong read the text as meaning that God stiffened Pharoah's cardiac muscle (heart) the same way an arm or leg or back muscle stiffens with a cramp. But it goes deeper. The claim that God changed Pharoah at all is too crude. Pharoah

hardened his own heart with Satan's help. God (and the image of Jiu-jitsu must eventually be dropped as well) exercised Jiu-jitsu and let Pharaoh reach destruction by the only way that Hell can ever be reached: by his own steam.

I now remember once feeling particularly squeamish about a mailing list conversation where one Orthodox sympathizer clarified, in perfect sincerity, that where Genesis 1 repeats, "And God said," that was such a human way of speaking that it meant that God spoke, in her words, "with lips and a tongue" as one would expect of mortal man. And I made no effort to assume command of the situation and straighten out her mind for a couple of reasons. First of all, even if her assertion was analytically wrong enough to fill me with squeamishness, unless she is troubling others (in which case someone well above my pay grade should be laying down the law), it is not my place to use my book-learning to take away the little that is held by someone who is not even a member of the Orthodox Church. But that is just for practice. The beam in my eye has to do with believing I need to have my way, that I should be in power or in control, or anything else. She might have thought it helpful to give Pharaoh an intake appointment at a cardiologist's. I do much worse.

### **How?**

Perhaps one way of putting that is this: we are inclined to believe that God violated the free will of Satan and Judas, because they killed the Son of Man and He came back to life triumphant. But a slightly closer image is that he was on higher ground, he let their free will be as sordid as they chose, and in a way beyond Jiu-jitsu the God who is beyond motion met them fully and attentively, with a heart full of love, and the evil that

cannot grasp love tried to give its strongest and most venomous strike, they struck where the everywhere-present God is not and the full force of their blow slammed into a brick wall and their sting was inflicted only on themselves.

But be careful:

One subtle note to those who find alluring the image of Satan slamming his horns full force into an adamant wall next to which diamond is as as a crumbling dust: if you find the image attractive, **beware of adopting Satan's ever-seductive, ever-destructive pride.**

One joke good or bad that I heard many, many times as a child ran:

There were two morons working in a hot pit enduring the heat while their boss sat in a cool air-conditioned building outside of the pit on the ground above, not doing much of anything.

One day the morons got to talking and said, "How come we do all the work and our boss gets to sit in an air conditioned building? So the first moron got up from the pit and asked, "How come we work in a hot messy pit all day, and you're in this office getting nearly all the money?"

The boss said, "Because I'm smarter than you."

The moron asked, "Why?"

The boss walked over to a thick tree and held his hand in front of the trunk. "Hit my hand as hard as you can!"

The moron swung his best, and the boss deftly pulled his hand away, leaving the moron to slam the full force of his punch into the rugged trunk of the tree.

After he had stopped crying, the first moron climbed back into the pit.

The second moron said, "What did you find out?"

The first moron said, "I'm smarter than you."

The second moron said, "Why?"

The first moron put his hand in front of his face and said,

"Hit my hand as hard as you can!"

There are two, and no more than two, essential options to us. One is to join hands in the Church and dance with the Lord not only of men but of angels and eagles, cultures and corporate worlds, a vast universe held in the heart of a God so small as to be without parts, and join in the unfolding mystery of the Lord of the Dance in whom alone the Divine Providence unfurls. The other option is to help Satan rearrange your face. There is no inconsistent option which lets you remain impenitent in pride and yet remain impossibly free from Satan's clutches. And more could be said than that: as Fr. Thomas Hopko famously crystallized, [Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted until your last breath.](#)

This is also the point expressed in what may be the most piercingly beautiful of St. Nicolas' [Prayers by the Lake](#) in which, as I would offer images Hope is praised, the Hope Who is eternal, the Hope which glimmers in young children who race out of bed on Christmas morning in all the pageantry of the Great Dance and can't wait to open the first present but hasn't the faintest idea of what the first present may be. But there also hopes, with an 's' as in "Shit", hopes that have certainly plagued me enough hopes really that God will obey the plan that you have worked out to him, and set expectations that God is to jump to your plan, and in the event of any problems, he should contact you immediately for further orders or instructions. It is, on reflection, an act of mercy that God sometimes says, "No" to

people who give the most meticulously drafted orders, and perhaps work with people who order him around for decades to teach them, just a little, how to live a life that is dancing the Great Dance.

## Gandhi and *satyagraha*

Having tried to underscore the absolute necessity of humility, I would like to move on to the next order of business and compare myself to Gandhi.

Gandhi was a Hindu, in one of three world religions that took its genesis in India. It is my considered judgment that Gandhi's achievements could have been made solely within resources directly provided by his native Hinduism. However, that sounds like an outsider's guess to anyone who understands this figure in history; however rich Hinduism may be, Gandhi through whatever reason chose to draw on outside sources.

The most shame I have ever felt about being a Christian was when a pastor in church explained that Gandhi wanted with his whole heart to become a Christian, and when he sought out a Christian evangelist, the racist evangelist rejected him for the color of his skin alone. That experience soured Gandhi enough that he was never again open to being a Christian, but please look at this closely.

I would draw out four decisive influences on Gandhi:

1. **Gandhi's native Hinduism** about which I will now only say that it is deep as an ocean.
2. **The "purer than the pure" Jainism** from which he took profound inspiration without also membership (we

proverbially say that someone "wouldn't hurt a fly", while to this day Jain monastics sweep the ground in front of them with peacock feathers to avoid accidentally stepping on a bug, as Jainism is also a world religion that came from India.

3. **Christianity:** this was the religion of the British colonists, and Gandhi spoke and acted warmly towards his sharpest critics. Gandhi also said things that would astonish people for a speaker who wasn't Christian: "Jesus, a man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act." He elsewhere states that his three heroes are Jesus, Daniel, and Socrates, all of whom saw their lives as nothing next to the salvation of their souls. And finally:
4. **Western-style political activism:** (Well, I suppose we all have to be wrong about something.)

I do not know how to explain Gandhi's spatula stature in actively trying to adopt the strengths of Christianity and activism. True, he was soured by personally rejected by a Christian evangelist who was beyond moronic, but what I would ordinarily expect is for Gandhi to grind an axe against the English and Christians for the rest of his life, with an anger transparently visible to everyone else besides him, all the way icily insisting, "I am not angry!" As it was, he kept reaching out in love to English and other people who met him with total hatred, and by what is called "satyagraha" purchased the freedom of the one nation in history that achieved its from colonial domination by nonviolence rather than war, and remains the one nation in the

world that I am aware of where rah-rah nationalism express itself by the study of nonviolence rather than by celebrating victory through warriors' killing of others. And this is in a religion where the crowning jewel, the [Sermon on the Mount](#), is a tale of epic heroism where God appears in human semblance and encourages and exhorts a prince who is so devoid of laziness that perhaps he doesn't even sleep, to rise up in full power and annihilate all those marked for destruction. And Gandhi does nothing to downplay the text; he instead contributed yet one more commentary to the vast collection (and the Hindu preference, at least today, seems to be never give this crowning jewel without opening it up by commentary). And now we are in a position to drill down slightly.

Gandhi said very emphatically, "Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills." And I would take this as entirely without sloppiness or guile. However, I would like to delve into a word he used. For the purpose of this section, I will treat Gandhi's use of "nonviolence" and "satyagraha" as two sides of the same coin, or even closer. The term "satyagraha" is not taken from Hindi (which is, along with English, India's modern national language), but from the classical Sanskrit, classical in India as Latin and Greek are European classical languages. My best understanding both as a historian and also as an author is that Gandhi went on a word hunt, searching to find the perfect word to crystallize the consuming quest, as Madeleine l'Engle found a word "kythe", a Scottish word if I remember correctly, that originally meant something like "to truly come to be", and became the central term in her classic [A Wind in the Door](#). Madeleine l'Engle did not use the word as anyone before her did, and Gandhi seized on a word that had previously not been a term about violence or its absence, a term that meant something like "steadfastly holding

on to the Truth no matter what."

And there is no either-or between Gandhi's embarking on a quest that ended with a deep term from classical Sanskrit, and his full and direct assertion that truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills. The key to this is found in Christ's words:

"Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." A study of Gandhi's use of the term "satyagraha" is a study of bringing forth out of a treasure things new and old which are one on the same.

I freely enough compare myself to Gandhi as an author. I do not feel the need to compare myself to Gandhi on forgiveness or anything else truly important besides that we are both made in the image of God, and both sinners.

## What is pain? What is yielding?

Here I will not discuss what the image of God is at length, nor dissect that the highest command is to love God with one's whole being and the second which is like it is to love your neighbor as yourself. However, I will say that the God who defines health is the model for healthily function and life, and Jujutsu is not just how God acts, it's how we act if we're doing right. It means that even in the most intense conflict or combat one is looking up for light. The U.S. in World War II referred to the Japanese Jiu-jutsu as "chop-socky", and for all their following the universal wartime rules of due diligence in demonizing the enemy, the most patriotic U.S. foot soldiers learned very, very quickly that their Western boxing completely fell to pieces when it ran into "chop-socky."

It is said by at least some martial artists and athletes that "Pain is weakness exiting the body." It should equally be said by Orthodox Christians not only that repentance is sin exiting the soul, but that repentance is misery exiting the soul, if there is any difference at all: [repentance is Heaven's best-kept secret](#). And the struggle with anger that is called forgiveness, when we reach victory, is also misery exiting the soul.

Jiu-jutsu is a word meaning "yielding", and comparisons with Jiu-jutsu should not be pushed too far, as may be admitted. It is

one image among others and one not present in Scripture. But there is a distinction in Asian martial arts (and perhaps Capoeira, for instance), between "-jutsu" and "-do" that is well understood.

"Jutsu" means a technique or skill, like woodworking, and "do" means a philosophical or spiritual path. The Western tradition (apart from when Asian martial arts came to be a substantial influence) is entirely "-jutsu". This is true with a couple of bumps, as Jiu-jutsu is of an ancient provenance, the art of Samurai who had not even their weapons, while Judo may be seen as a modern attempt to simplify and cleanse Jiu-Jutsu into a simpler art that would be effective self-defense while eliminating locks and other destructive features. And all of the martial arts have their own personalities and characteristics, some better than others, but none yet let the stillness of Orthodox hesychasm or silence eclipse the meditation that is structural to internal martial arts.

## Dojos

So when am I going to start opening dojos? The answer I am hoping for is, "Never." The one possible exception I see is that if the Church is really, really scraping the bottom of the barrel and makes me some kind of bishop, or even worse a **real** bishop charged with fully competent administration, love, and care of a diocese, instead of the nominal formality, the "How do you solve a problem like Maria?" concession of being honored on paper as the more-than-a-bishop of some long-lost city without a second living representative. If I bear the heavy cross and heavy crown of thorns of a real bishop, **then I would have the right to start opening dojos**, except that wouldn't be the right way of thinking of it at all: most people would call it "the responsibility to continue opening parishes."

## Color

I winced when I heard Exodus International was closing its doors... until I found out why, and it was a concern that I held since I first heard of it, no matter how much I respected its mission. Exodus International was trying alone to shoulder a responsibility that belonged to the entire ecosystem of the Church. And one question I had already been asking before I saw the Gay Nineties taking over was why on earth that class of sin was its own world, a separate detached from the rainbow fragments forgiven by Christ at Sinners Anonymous, or as it is more often called, the Church. The reason for the coming of the Son of God was to destroy the Devil's work, and then to keep on pushing for bonus points well past when people can go Heaven: but for starters, let us to say to take each broken fragment of a fractured rainbow, whether pride or envy or the occult or drunkenness or any shard of lust whether gay or straight, and take these broken fragments and restore them to the to the pure, whole, white, bright, radiant, scintillating Light beyond beauty of the uncreated Son.

## The Void

The martial arts classic *A Book of Five Rings*, in a brevity comparable to the [Sermon on the Mount](#), covers five elements: earth, air, fire, water, and the void. The chapter about the void is by far the most terse: all else is summarized and transcended.

I have come to nearly the end of writing what I wanted to write, and I have covered almost everything on topic to cover except one thing: the original, central point that motivated the construction of the work. It would not be strange to call the topic "œsatyagraha:â€ I do not complain that others may do so, but I would rather look at hagiography.

The canonized saints trample on the rules of nature again, and again, and again. Saints walk on water; one monk, the only one on a monastic coast worthy to retrieve an icon miraculously floating on water, when he absolutely **had** to do so, crawled on top of the surface of the water on all fours like a dog, because in his great humility he considered himself utterly unworthy to stand up normally and walk on top of the water like Christ did. Saints pass through fire unharmed, although not every time. Many saints have been burned to death as martyrs, but it seems to happen that when the fire went out the martyrs looked as if they were merely sleeping, with a smile on their faces, and without a thread of their clothes or a hair on their heads singed or the faintest scent of smoke. In the lives, it seems that the only way that

persecutors can get certain saints to die and stay dead is to behead them (hello, ISIS?), and even then, the saints occasionally pick up their heads, walk over to their preferred resting place, and there set down their severed heads and only then give their consent to really die.

Furthermore the God who works in the heart of hearts to giants among the saints is also works in the hearts of the faithful. Monastic giants trample on scorpions with bare feet; many more faithful trample on pride. Majestic saints open the eyes of the blind; and men reject lust and find their sight truly opened. St. Paul the Apostle raised the dead more than once, and innumerable more among the faithful, across many centuries, have fed the hungry; and furthermore, in a point that many, many officially canonized saints have driven home across the centuries, feeding the hungry is greater work than raising the dead. The term "saint" referred originally to every member of the Church without exception, and one and the same God works in every stripe of saint to ultimately transcend the chasm between what is created, and what is uncreated. The wall between God and we who are merely created is there so that we may rise above it.

And in all this, the inner struggle of the [Philokalia](#) is vibrant in its nature. Its watchfulness or inner "nipsis" acts in moral and ascetical character like an author searching from just the perfect word, ever attentive, never hurrying, never impatient, always expecting. It is like the great Noah, who followed God's command to build a huge boat in the middle of the desert, and was then the sole survivor from a deluge. It is like a diligent martial artist, who lives by the words, "The more you bleed in the dojo, the less you will bleed in the street." It claims no exemption from suffering, nor entitlement to wishes

fulfilled: if the Measure by whom all saints are measured was the great King who only wore a crown once, and then only a crown of twisted thorns, then we are advised to properly take up our crosses in this earthly vale while we can still repent, because once our life has gone, the opportunity to repent will vanish forevermore. But sometimes there is an inner struggle of building a boat in the desert, and trusting the Lord of the Dance to know that he knows what is the right order and that if your next step is to leap before you look and only find out why after you have leapt. For those of us who are children at least, God shows us the reason why just after we have leapt because he knows that out of our weakness we will not exercise faith if he presents us with the reason beforehand, and identically knows that out of our weakness we will not maintain faith if too great a delay comes between the obedience and reward: in all things he meets our weakness that we might meet his strength. And all of this has every connection to how we can be entangled in our world's conflicts, get hurt again and again, and meet a joy that is beyond any of the conflicts and hurts.

Robert Pirsig's Zen and the Art of Destroying Asian Philosophy talks about "ægo-reading"; reading to push through a text, or as the problem appears among hiking, rushing to get to a point as forcefully and as quickly as possible. He points out that paradoxically those who rush to just get something done tend to not arrive at the intended destination at all. People who make progress in one activity or the other are, although I do not recall if they are stated in these terms, are people who have something in mind other than forcing their way to an external goal. Had the book been written later, it might have used the term "æauto-telic", which describes an activity that is its own goal. Where martial arts like Aikido are

called "goalless" by practitioners, it would be more literal, at some loss of striking contrast, to use a presently preferred term of auto-telic and say that an Aikidoko is not worrying about if he as a student will reach black belt, or on a much lower scale how interminably long it will take to master what should be a simple technique, or whether there will be enough progress in managing anger or weight, or anything else. A proper practitioner of Aikido's attention is fixed on Aikido itself, rather than paralysis by analysis over whether Aikido can be successfully used as a bridge to something external. You practice Aikido in order to practice Aikido.

The [Philokalia](#) offers something that seems much less but ends by being much more. The basic framing of work is different, and quite at odds with today's conception of interesting work. The usual physical craft of self-supporting monks in the ancient world was basket weaving, cynically understood by some in academia today as a legal fiction to let high-value football players keep the alumni without needing to perform proper academic work. The most common craft of self-supporting monasteries today is crafting incense, which at least supplies something elevated to Orthodox parishes. But this way of thinking misses the point for both the ancient and the modern arrangement, which I personally only understood when watching my brother's Mythbusters show and hear Adam gush at how "meditative" the repeated monotonous physical action of weaving a braided kangaroo leather bullwhip was. The chief merit of basket weaving and incense making alike is that they are repetitive motions that occupy the hands, and it is not clear to me that it is particularly helpful to think of incense as a high-status thing. The ancient and modern monasticism alike the preferred obedience is something that engages the hands while

the heart pursues purity. That is the center of gravity. And in modern monasteries, there may be some non-meditative work that needs to be done, but the general pattern is to have most monks heavily engaged in meditative labors for the benefit of the monks themselves in a setting where people do not distinguish sacred from secular or work from prayer. The work is there to help prayer reach perfection. And really, cleaning toilets is more often mentioned as the standard example of honorable obediences than making incense.

But the same center of gravity applies outside of the monastery; it can just be frustratingly more difficult. One monk commented to a cleaning lady that she had a more fortunate position, and I as a programmer and knowledge worker had a less fortunate position, because it is entirely possible to be engaged in prayer while scrubbing tables, but significantly harder to be absorbed in prayer while your mind is chasing bugs in a computer program. And no, this was not a matter of the monk being gracious to someone with lower status and knowing that I would not be hurt or offended by the suggestion. It was unvarnished candor.

What is necessary for people is the same in or outside of the monastery; it's just that with all the modern inconveniences and interesting and entertaining work the near-identical needs are not met to the same degree. Monks say to each other, "Have a good struggle," and struggle is expected and normal; people who approach monasteries to loaf around or have some romanticized image of their life may succeed, but not without considerable growth. And to the point of struggle, it is the norm and it is necessary for salvation in or out of Heaven.

Those scientifically minded know that when physicists have examined how different the physical constants could and support

life as we know it, the invariable conclusion is that life as we know it could not be possible unless the universe were tuned, not to put too fine a point on it, but with mind-boggling precision as if there were a God creating a universe universe that was incredibly fine-tuned, just to support life. And with a similar question among those who have any idea of the dimensions of the earth and the incomparable dimensions of the universe, "Why is the universe so vast, and the earth smaller than a grain of sand when held next to its grandeur? How much legroom does the human race need?" the answer is, "A universe's worth: no less!" And if we ask, "How much legroom does the Church require for salvation, that the saved may have eternal joy and shine with the uncreated Light in Heaven?" the answer is to me my least favorite part of this book and one that brings me to tears. The answer is, "Hell," or possibly more strongly and chillingly, **Every single soul from among the innumerable multitude of those who will be eternally damned to Hell!**

One pastor tried to say this without a laugh, and failed, that he was one place in the American South during a heat wave, and just before elevator doors closed, a jogger stepped in, sweating bullets, and said, "It's hotter than Hell out there!" The pastor said, slowly, "No. It isn't," and crept out everyone else in the elevator. But the damned exist, there is always at least possibility of salvation, God does ever better than they observe, and the damned do one thing that is essential. They provide other people with conflicts that can be part of a saving struggle. And when the Crack of Doom comes those who treat you abusively you will partly answer for your sins in your place. This is first a cause to feel relieved, then giddy, then at least for a moment when the full implications begin to unfold,

pure terror. **Christ** died **for your sins**, and so did Judas, Arius, Marx, Jung, and Hitler.

But God has ordained things, and monastic and non-monastic alike need struggle, which often takes the form of conflicts, of things that we don't think belong in our lives but God knows they do. And joy does not consist in being exempt from struggle. It consists of growing in struggle. It consists of having a good struggle. And if you earnestly engage your struggle you may experience the power in the final crescendo of Fr. Thomas's crystallization:

Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.

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

Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.

When you fall, get up immediately and start over.

Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

In all these things and more, the [Sermon on the Mount](#) as it unfolds including the [Philokalia](#), like as the Mishnah and Talmud, acts as a stone from Heaven of inexhaustible wealth:

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

These things slip through our fingers. They are simple, simpler than breathing, and we in our weakened state need some

great systematic theology with slippery concepts we can pin down to grasp. So God meets in our weakness and gives the [Philokalia](#) to meticulously assess every detail of internal struggle and the eight demons that became the seven deadly sins in the West.

“Do not store up treasures on earth” is a simple commandment; it does not only tell us we do not need Rolls-Royces to experience true blessedness, nor do we need our health (saints have lived to great spiritual heights amidst great illness, and not just because they were extraordinarily good), nor do we need our thoughts, or plans for our future in days or minutes, or an identity such as we try to have in the West, or “My Opinions”. We are to chase instead of the treasures that we can eat from today and forever, and come to that place where every drop of blood we bleed in the dojo eclipses a galaxy of diamond in its worth on the streets of Heaven.

## Cooldown: *The Alchemist*

The *Alchemist*, like many favorite picks on Oprah, is the sort of thing that makes me nostalgic for when my brother still had a beautiful tropical bird as a pet, and moreover makes me positively yearn for the days the house still had a birdcage that still needed lining. None the less, there is a vignette that I would like to draw out.

The teacher-figure in the course is the towering alchemical figure of Melchizedek, who is immortal, can turn lead into gold, can already turn himself into wind, and presumably has numerous and extraordinary other cosmic powers not explored in the text, and teaches the student-figure after making a sweeping dismissal of all the other traditions in all the world's other religions, and even a Western scholar whose heart was in the wrong place along with alchemy being dismissed for rhetorical weight.

The student figure never becomes immortal, never gains abilities to change metals personally, has no idea how to turn himself into wind (at least to start off with; the quest where he learns to make this self-transformation is core to the book's plot), and ends up after a long heroic journey to and back finds out that there had been an enormous quantity of gold lying buried under his back yard right where he started.

But a major point is this: both Master and student are equally

alchemists, or at very least at the end. The student does not have all the master's cosmic powers, and even after he has turned himself to wind it is debatable whether he has any cosmic powers, but the question of whether they have identical arsenals of cosmic powers matters no more than whether their eyes are of the same color. Both are equally alchemists; the student follows his teacher in delving deeper into a pride that destroys all capacity for any joy, and an occult mindset that destroys the sanity of all those who practice it in the real world. They are both alchemists, master and pupil, and both participate fully in the tradition, on their own paths. That the teacher's path includes having the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life, and the student does not, and the teacher can transmute lead to gold and the student cannot, is neither here nor there. Teacher and student both follow their personal paths within alchemy.

Perhaps it would have been fundamentally humbler for the student to keep on asking that the teacher give him a sole drop of the Elixir of Life and induct him into turning lead to gold.

(By the way, did I mention that [there is a way to obtain gold that is purer than 24 karats, such as alchemists did not reach high enough to quest for?](#))

With all of the above efforts to rip *The Alchemist* to shreds, and others I've held my tongue on, I still wish to make one point clear: The book's way of looking at difference is less than you think. The further you reach the Kingdom of Heaven, the less it matters that you have precious little money or gold. In fact wealth properly understood is a liability and a handicap more than really being much of any asset that puts you in a better position. Peter Kreeft, a Catholic philosopher and apologist who helped me along the way to Orthodoxy, found one great spiritual advantage to money: it doesn't make you happy. If you are

perennially struggling financially, and you see Break My Window around you on the street when your beater breaks down frequently, it's awfully, awfully hard to avoid thinking that so many things would be better if you had a good bit of money. If, on the other hand, you have a top-notch chauffeur for a Rolls-Royce, and you're still miserable, a great deal of the sting has been taken away from the temptation that just having more money is all you need. You can still be greedy and covet things, but it becomes a far weaker temptation to think that your spiritual emptiness actually comes from the fact that you are not in a position to have Michelangelo's David in your garden and the Mona Lisa in your living room.

The martial artist I respect most was asked in class how many times he had had to use his martial arts skills. And he slowly, gently, humbly said, that he had really been fortunate and hadn't needed to use his his martial art, even though there were a couple of awfully close calls [during years and years of study].

And I submit that his answer, as stated, is wrong, or at least his wording was deceptive and misleading.

He was at the time a third-degree blackbelt. I don't know what he is now. For non-martial artists, as far as sparring goes, a first-degree blackbelt is a third-degree blackbelt's chewtoy. He is past the point where people are said to be able to kill a tiger with their bare hands. I am all but certain that in every one of those close calls, he could have killed the other person immediately. His teacher, at a martial arts show, stood holding two beautiful, ornamental-looking fans, looking quaint, and picturesque, and exotic, and then the teacher was simultaneously attacked by five blackbelts with swords, and an instant later the teacher stood holding two beautiful, ornamental-looking fans, looking quaint, and picturesque, and exotic, and all around him

were five blackbelts, on the ground, crying.

The martial artist I most respect said, humbly, gently, modestly, that even in the close calls, he had said, "You're the tough guy," and backed down, or run away, or almost anything possible (whatever it took), coming out the loser in every social confrontation, and he went on to say, "Most people who think they want to fight don't really want to fight." And I submit that the proof of his profound mastery of his art was this: he has passed through minefield after minefield after minefield such as I almost certainly could not, without stepping on a mine even once. The point is not that he happened to be carrying a first aid kit in case he did step on a mine. The point is not that he was carrying a very, very good first aid kit in case he did step on a mine. The proof of his mastery is that, as of my last knowledge, he had never needed to open his first aid kit, not even once. And indeed martial artists often defuse a potential fight before most outsiders would recognize there was anything going out of the ordinary going on.

Incidentally, though there was no question of my ever wanting to give a physical attack when I was in his class, I was quite the jackass and quite the belligerent student, and he only ever answered me with humility and gentleness. In the end, his gentleness conquered me.

What about what I have somewhat whimsically called "Tong Fior"? In my own opinion, my credentials make for an pretty impressive parody of martial arts, unless you want to go through the *ha, ha, only serious* route. I've lifted weights (and lifted weight machines, and broken weight machines by applying too much force), climbed with devotion, in riflery went from no rank to Sharpshooter, Bar VIII in one week, punched at bags, dipped a finger in a few martial arts, made my own approximation of

ninjutsu stealth (and unintentionally got a stunned "Whaaaaa?" when these skills came out in campers' response to games in nature with me as their camp counselor, asking, "Did you go to some special Daniel Boone school [to be able to move so silently and be sensitive to sounds that were apparently around 0 dB]?"), and am gifted to the degree that professionals say "You're smarter than most geniuses" or "The average Harvard Ph.D. has never met someone as talented as you" (the gifts are not magic powers but for some purposes they might as well be), and other things which should be preferably viewed as ornamental at best. One question outsiders ask of martial artists is how well they'd do in a real fight; the question comes perhaps with hope at a training that would make the asker all but invincible, the basic response to that question is "HTTP Error 404: Missing Page": if you're not already the one and only Miyamoto Musashi, Japan's "sword-saint", no martial art can change that at all. I would show respect for Kuk Sool Won by saying that one second degree black belt said, "I would give myself one chance in two. But the more chances you give yourself, the less you have." I've had experienced the martial arts practicality, as one martial artist's parody ad said, "Get beat up by people twice your age and half your size!" There is one point where I expect victory would come, and that is if the Spirit of the Lord comes on me. Orthodox priests should not employ physical violence, and in the profound story of [Father Arseny: Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father](#), people are flabbergasted when the weakened and aged monk Fr. Arseny steps where a fight has broken out and strikes a forceful blow. Possibly if the Spirit of the Lord falls on me, I might blast through a 9th kyu, or possibly for that matter a 9th dan. In all other cases it is not my concern.

[The Orthodox martial art is living the Sermon on the Mount,](#)

and the struggles I now wrestle with are not flesh and blood, though they have brought me through mortal danger more than once. Kuk Sool Won in every school but one says, "We need more practice!" The Kuk Sa Bo Nim (Grandmaster)'s headquarters school says, "You need more practice!" I'll go with "We need more practice!", please, or better "I need more practice!", or if I can bring it even closer to my true needs, "Lord, give me more time to repent."

(And a true monk leaves us both in the dust. Though extraordinarily many married Orthodox perfectly well without any of the structure by which God condescends to meet monks.)

(This article is dedicated to [the great warrior-martyr St. Mercurius](#), who destroyed the impious emperor Julian the Apostate from beyond the grave.)

# The Transcendent God Who Approaches Us Through Our Neighbor

The temperature of Heaven can be rather accurately computed from available data. Our authority is the Bible: Isaiah 30:26 reads, Moreover the light of the Moon shall be as the light of the Sun and the light of the Sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days. Thus Heaven receives from the Moon as much radiation as we do from the Sun and in addition seven times seven (forty-nine) times as much as the Earth does from the Sun, or fifty times in all. The light we receive from the Moon is a ten-thousandth of the light we receive from the sun, so we can ignore that. With these data we can compute the temperature of Heaven. The radiation falling on Heaven will heat it to the point where the heat lost by radiation is just equal to the heat lost by radiation. Using the Stefan-Boltzmann fourth power law for radiation and where  $H$  is the temperature of Heaven,  $E$  that of the Earth - 300 K - we have

$$(H/E)^4 = 50.$$

This gives H as 798 K or 525°C.

The exact temperature of Hell cannot be computed but it must be less than 444.6°C, the temperature at which brimstone or sulphur changes from a liquid to a gas.

Revelations 21:8: But the fearful, and unbelieving . . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. A lake of molten brimstone means that its temperature must be below the boiling point, which is 444.6°C.

We have, then, temperature of Heaven, 525°C.  
Temperature of Hell, less than 445°C. Therefore, Heaven is hotter than Hell.

Applied Optics, 11, A14 (1972)

One brief remark before continuing: one man I knew was in an elevator on a sweltering hot day, when a profusely sweating jogger stepped into the elevator and said, "It's hotter 'n Hell out there!" and he replied, slowly, "No, it isn't." There is something amiss with the humorous quote above, and Mark Twain, the great humorist, wrote, "The secret source of humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in Heaven." There is a sense in Orthodoxy that humor does not belong in the holiest places, and devout Orthodox I know have a deep joy but laugh little. The connotations of "humorless" do not describe them; they are not sour, nor joyless, nor rigid, nor quick to take offense, but they are luminous with the Light of a Heaven that needs no humor.

But the physicist quoted above underscores something: words are inadequate to capture Heaven. There are situations in life where words fail us: people say, "Words cannot express how

where words fail us. people say, "words cannot express how grateful I am." And if words fail us for expressing gratitude, for instance, or romantic love, they fail all the more in describing Heaven and God. "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, heart has not conceived, what God has prepared for them that love him:" words cannot express Heaven, nor God.

In classical theology this is spoken of as God's transcendence: God is infinitely far beyond any created thing. He is reflected in a million ways in our created world, but the hidden transcendent God is beyond all of them. In a book of profound influence but only a few pages long, *The Mystical Theology*, St. Dionysius writes of ascending towards God:

The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more our words are confined to the ideas we are capable of forming; so that now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing...

So this is what we say. The Cause of all is above all and is not inexistent, lifeless, speechless, mindless. He is not a material body, and hence has neither shape nor form, quality, quantity, or weight. He is not in any place and can neither be seen nor be touched. He is neither perceived nor is he perceptible. He suffers neither disorder nor disturbance and is overwhelmed by no earthly passion. He is not powerless and subject to the disturbances caused by sense perception. He endures no deprivation of light. He passes through no change, decay, division, loss, no ebb and flow, nothing of which the senses may be aware. None of all this can either be identified with it nor attributed to it.

Again, as we climb higher we say this. He is not soul or

mind, nor does he possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is he speech per se, understanding per se. He cannot be spoken of and he cannot be grasped by understanding. He is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. He is not immovable, moving, or at rest. He has no power, he is not power, nor is he light. He does not live nor is he life. He is not a substance, nor is he eternity or time. He cannot be grasped by the understanding since he is neither knowledge nor truth. He is not kingship. He is not wisdom. He is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is he a spirit, in the sense in which we understand that term. He is not sonship or fatherhood and he is nothing known to us or to any other being. He falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being. Existing beings do not know him as he actually is and he does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of him, nor name nor knowledge of him. Darkness and light, error and truth—he is none of these. He is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to him, but never of him, for he is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of his preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; he is also beyond every denial.

Over a millenium before a Bultmann would go on a program of saying that the images we have in Scripture are inadequate, the Orthodox Church would do one better. Her saints would tell of the hidden transcendent God who transcends everything we might say of him. And better than this can be said. God transcends his own transcendence, and transcends

transcendence itself. And here we must leave Bultmann completely behind as not having gone far enough.

God transcends his own transcendence, and the transcendent God so far transcends his own transcendence that not only is he infinitesimally close to the Creation, immanent to all Creation, but he entered his Creation: God became man. And the reason God became man is that man might become divine. And there is never a sharp separation between Christ coming to save mankind and Christ coming to save the whole Creation: the transcendent God so far transcends his own incomparable transcendence that he is at work to deify men, and ultimately the whole Creation. In Christ there is no male nor female, paradise nor inhabited world, heaven nor earth, spiritual nor material, uncreated nor created, but Christ is all, and in all, and transcends all, and in him all these differences are to be transcended. The transcendent Christ God transcends his Creation and transcends his own transcendence, and he returns to his Father in victory, bearing deified men and Creation as trophies who share in his transcendent victory. There is no distinction between male and female, paradise and the inhabited world, heaven and earth, spiritual and material, uncreated God and created creation, for the same transcendent Lord is Lord of all and bestows riches upon all who call him, and makes all one in Christ Jesus.

And this Lord who infinitely transcends his creation shouts through it. He shouts through icons, through every human love, through music, through storm and star. He is a God who so far transcends his Creation that he can enter into it, and a failure to love our neighbor is a failure to love God. Consider [the parable of the sheep and the goats](#):

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the

angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.

Then the King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?"

And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

Then he will say to those at his left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me."

Then they also will answer, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?"

Then he will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me."

.....

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

This transcendent God transcends his own Creation and transcends his own transcendence that his image is imprinted in every man, woman, and child, and we cannot fail to love our neighbor without failing to love Christ God; we cannot mistreat our neighbor without mistreating Christ God. Christ so far transcends his own transcendence that there is not the faintest gap between our treatment of our least neighbors and our treatment of Christ God himself. The Pope is not Christ's vicar on earth; our neighbor is Christ's vicar on earth, and how we treat our neighbor is vicariously how we treat the Christ we will answer to on Judgment Day.

And who is our neighbor? Let's have a slightly updated answer with disturbing clarity:

A certain religious scholar stood up and tested Jesus, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal Life?"

He said to him, "What is written in the heart of the Bible? How do you read it?"

He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your inward being, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

He said to him, "You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live."

But he, desiring to justify himself, asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answered, "A certain man, an American, went into the worst part of town at night and was held up by thugs who took not only took his valuables but beat him and left him for dead, throwing him deep into a dark alley.

"By chance a police officer was walking down that way. When he saw the man, he gave the alley a wide berth and ran along.

"In the same way a boy scout passed through the place and gave the alley a wide berth.

"But when it got to the wee hours of the morning, he heard footsteps and a terrorist came along, and the man called out 'Help me!' from the dark alley in the worst part of town. And the terrorist was viscerally moved with compassion, came to him, and bandaged his wounds, using some of his clothing, and carried him to an emergency room.

"When the terrorist left, he took all of the money that he had with him, and gave it to the hospital, and said, 'Take care of him. Whatever you spend beyond what I have given you, I will repay.'

"Now which of these three do you think seemed to be a neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?"

He said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Do you believe God is transcendent? Go and do likewise to the transcendent Christ who approaches you in you neighbor.

# Treasure

## Treasure is not measured in dollars

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

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

crying.

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

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

By contrast, I would tell a joke:

I was trying to help a friend's son look into colleges, and yesterday he handed me the phone, really excited, and said, "You have got to speak with these guys." I fumbled the phone, picked it up, and heard, "—online. We offer perhaps the best-rounded of degrees, and from day one our students are equipped with a top-of-the-line Dell running up-to-the-minute Vista. We address back-end issues, giving students a grounding in Visual Basic .NET, striking the right balance between 'reach' and 'rich,' and a thorough groundings in Flash-based design and web design optimized for the latest

version of Internet Explorer. Throw in an MCSE, and marketing-based communication instruction that harnesses the full power of PowerPoint and covers the most effective ways to make use of animated pop-ups, opt-in subscriber lists, and—"

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

"The Aristocrats."

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

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

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

## Living for treasure

I live to create treasure. Actually I live to contemplate God, and worship his glory, but there are a million concrete ways one can contemplate God, and one of them is creating treasure. [My website at cjshayward.com](http://cjshayward.com) is created to be a treasure, or a treasurehouse of treasures, and while there are pieces you could look at and say, "You botched this and that," my intent is still to create a treasure. There are other areas where I try to create treasure (a picturebook of loved ones for a hospitalized child), but the greatest success I receive is to finish something and find it has been a treasure to the person who has received it.

In [Doxology](#), God the Father is called,

The Treasure for whom all treasures are named,

And if ever there is treasure, he is God. Mankind and angels are treasures; there is a discussion in the Gospel where Christ is asked if it is lawful to pay a tax or not, asks to see the coin used to pay the tax, and asked whose image and superscription it was. "Give what is Caesar's to Caesar, and what is God's to God;" thus

Jesus Christ appealed to a principle that whoever coins money has the authority to tax that money. Augustine picks up on this:

["Caesar seeketh his image; render it; God seeketh his image; render it. Let not Caesar lose from you his coin: let not God lose](#)

in you His coin." He explores it, and there is the suggestion at least that we are God's coins: first and foremost by being struck with his image, but it cannot be too far from mind that coins could be struck on precious metal, that a coin is treasure. Augustine attends to the minor point, that the mere earthly coin with Caesar's image is due to Caesar, but all the much more the coin imprinted in the image of God and nothing less, is due to God: a parish of faithful followers is much more a treasury than a room with chests of silver coins.

The Lord God Almighty and the Uncreated Light reigns over all; the Uncreated Light illumines the cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominions, powers, authorities, principalities, archangels, and angels: the glory and treasure of the Lord thunder through rank on rank of angel host. The Mother of God bore God in her womb and exchanged with her Son: she gave him his humanity, and he gave to her from his divinity, leaving her as a treasure eclipsing all the angels. The treasure unfurls and unfolds on earth: the sacramental priesthood and the spiritual priesthood, songs, liturgy, angels, and ten thousand other treasures. And treasure is close to the heart of the treasure of the Church: a Church saying says, "If you have two small coins, you use one to buy bread for the altar, and the other to buy flowers for the icons."

## Hard treasure

There are some hard lessons in [The Best Things In Life Are Free](#), and hard lessons in [Maximum Christ](#), [Maximum Ambition](#), [Maximum Repentance](#). But both of these give up false treasure for true treasure, true treasure for greater treasure. Christ commanded something great: "[Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.](#)" Some of us are to hold earthly treasure with detachment; others are to get rid of it altogether, but in any case we are called to reach far beyond earthly treasure for treasures in Heaven, such as good works, virtues, and graces. The call is a Narnian [Further up and further in!](#)

We live in a time where treasures seem to be evaporating, or at least money. Once a rising standard of living was taken for granted; now employment is not taken for granted. We are urged to sell gold for cash. But treasure is still here. [The best things in life are free](#), even now, [even if we are in an arena, a cosmic coliseum](#). False treasures abound; for treacherous technology, see [the Technomicon](#). And there is a great deal in technologies that can be treacherous, [with a right grievous backswing](#). But

that is not all.

The authors John Calvin and Thomas Hobbes were authors with a very pessimistic view of mankind. But in the comic strip named after them, *Calvin and Hobbes*, we meet a claim well worth heeding:

There's treasure everywhere!

# A Treatise on Touch

Touch is something deep which is lightly explored in my culture. I wish to explore it here.

It is characteristic of Western thought, probably in a tradition reaching back to the Greeks, to pay a strong degree of attention to sight when studying perception, to the exclusion of the other five senses. (The sixth sense is not ESP; it is the internal, kinesthetic sense, commonly called the sense of balance, which enables us to tell up from down; when this sense fails (after, for example, spinning around or drinking too much alcohol), we feel dizzy and become disoriented as to how to keep from falling over.) For example, in the Myers [Psychology](#) text, the vast majority of the space devoted to perception studied how we extract information from what our eyes report, so much so that ESP (which the authors did not believe in) received more attention and space than hearing, smell, taste, touch, and balance put together!

(I might incidentally comment that psychology, for all but the most recent times, has been explored as a part of philosophy, and in some ways has suffered more than any of the hard sciences from the separation. A lot of what goes on in psychology is truly bad philosophy, and would improve greatly if its theories

were grounded in good philosophy. Behaviorism is a prime example of this.)

In speaking about touch, I intend not to generally talk about sex, for a couple of reasons. The first is that sexual technique, along with massage, is perhaps the one (two) narrow and restricted area of touch that people are taking seriously; manuals on sexual technique exist in droves. And I might incidentally mention that I do not know sexual technique — that will come if and when I get married. But even to if I were expert in sexual technique, and were writing to an audience of married couples, I do not think that I would write about sex. It is not because I despise sex — I believe it right and good that an entire book of Scripture, the *Greatest of Songs*, is pure erotica.

It is for another reason, a reason that lies deeper.

The conception of romance and relationships in American thought is not nearly so universal as might be thought by someone who is from our time. At this point, I might shock the reader to drawing attention to how, in a great many cultures across much of time, people were happily married, sexually satisfied, and enjoying life, without ever having occur to them what modern America understands by romance. Romantic love was one of the great discoveries of the middle ages — a genuine discovery, because it was not really known.

If we exclude the supernatural love of agape, and the love-beyond-love of worship that is due to Jesus Christ, then we are left with four natural loves between human beings. There is the love of all other human beings, which applies even to strangers and even to enemies. Then there is the love of friends — a friend is both to be loved as a human being, and in a special way as a friend. There is next the love of one's own family — family are to be loved as human beings, in a special way as friends, and in a

more special way as family. Finally, there is the last love, a love which is romantic and sexual. A spouse is to be loved as a human being, in a special way as a friend, in a more special way as kin, and finally in the most special way as a lover, a lifelong partner and mate.

This fourth love does not stand on its own, and was never meant to in the first place. If we look in the Song of Songs, we see that the lover calls the beloved a woman, that the two are addressed as friends, and in particular he calls her his sister and then his bride. Even in a book all about sex, we see not sexual love in isolation, but sexual love as the crowning jewel, united with the other loves to make a rich and full marriage.

Romance, its delightful intoxication, is a wonderful and God-given thing. But it is transient, and when it wanes, there is (or at least should be) something far deeper than sex alone; that deeper, companionate love is what God intended as the basis for marriage, as thrilling as romance may be.

God created us as his image, and the particular way he in his goodness chose to do so was as a unity of spirit, soul, and body. The spirit, with its ability to love, is the greatest part, and love is greater than even rationality. But it is not the only part, or the only good. And even the word 'part' is deceptive; it suggests a collection of compartmental modules, when in fact there is a unity.

And in that unity, there is a spiritual way of drawing near and embracing by love; this is what Aquinas (for example) described as the will, seen not in the modern Nietzschean sense of iron determination, but rather as a recognition of good that inclines towards something. And in the spirit-soul-body unity by which God has blessed us, there is a physical way of drawing near and embracing by love. It is called touch.

If nothing else, by analogy at least, we should be able to look and see that among human loves there is a highest and superlative form of love in marriage, and yet the romantic love does not and should not stand in isolation, then sexual touch may be the highest, holiest, and most exciting form of touch by which God has blessed our race, but it probably wasn't created in isolation to be the only touch — even in marriage.

And if I may push the analogy even further, I would say that that touch is absolutely wonderful while it lasts, but it is not the fundamental or foundational touch of physical love, even in marriage. Something else is.

What I am saying here may be more transparently obvious to women than to men. Women tend to feel more the need for physical affection, men the sexual drive. And many men, especially those who grew up in households with little physical affection, may not only not see the need for physical affection, but be uncomfortable with it. Even then, I would ask you to bear with me.

Our society has inherited the disastrous wake of Victorianism, and is a post-Victorian culture; I will include here an appendix an essay which I wrote on Victorianism as the death knell to sexual purity in Western culture. Apart from referring the reader to that, I will simply say that we've inherited a mess.

The essay:

**Victorianism**, n. The death knell to sexual purity in Western culture.

Victorianism held sexual purity to be extremely important. All well and good, but it did not stop there. Victorianism believed sexual purity to be best approached via a Pharisaic guard around the Law. And, like every other guard around the Law, it did a tremendous amount of

guard around the Law, it did a tremendous amount of damage to numerous other things before destroying the very object it was meant to preserve.

Touch and community are vital elements of human health. This is witnessed in Scriptures that tell of John reclining in Jesus's bosom and in the hands quickly extended to pets, one of the few situations where our society will allow an innocent touch to be an innocent touch. An infant who is not held will wither and die, and psychologists have a bluntly accurate term for the failure of parents to hold and cuddle their children a great deal: abuse. And of course the special kind of community that exists between a husband and wife is given a special kind of touch.

Victorianism looked at sex and did not quite see something which is fundamentally good within a certain context. It saw something which was essentially evil (but tolerable at best within a certain context). And, in progressively widening circles, encompassing different forms of touch further and further from what is necessarily foreplay, saw that there exists at least some possibility for that touch to be sexual (at least from the perspective of the younger monk), and placed on each one a label of "This is dirty. Avoid it." Word such as "Greet one another with a kiss of love." cease to be acknowledged as a divine command which was given for human good, and instead look like, um, an odd cultural thing which, um, shows, um, um, um...

The aim, it appears, was to end up with nothing that was sexual. The result was to make everything sexual, and create a major unanticipated problem.

God created people with certain needs, and when those needs are not met, Satan comes in with counterfeit substitutes. These things are hard enough to resist to

substitutes. These things are hard enough to resist to someone whose needs are met with the genuine article; when there is an immense sucking vacuum coming from unmet needs, pushing away the counterfeits acquires a difficulty which is unbelievable. A little girl who is deprived of a father's hugs and kisses will grow into a young woman who has a tremendously difficult time avoiding sexual promiscuity, unsuccessfully searching in a series of abusive boyfriends' embraces for enough love to fill the emptiness inside.

Fortunately, most of Victorianism did not quite leave a stain that dark and deep, but there is still a major problem with a culture that refuses to wholeheartedly say, "It's OK.

You may enjoy an innocent touch as an innocent touch."

There is still a failure to meet a need that God created people to have filled, and still an uphill battle to fight off the counterfeit substitutes.

In this century, Victorianism has crumbled, but, like every other evil, it fails to crumble in the ways that a sane person would want it to crumble. What disappeared was not the prohibition on friendly touch, but the belief that sexual sin is a deadly poison which should be fought tooth and nail.

What appeared and took the place meant to be filled by innocent touch is something which is not innocent. Thus, Victorianism did a perfect job of making room and clearing the way for a great deal of lewdness.

Current Western culture is saturated with sexual sin, not despite, but because of the fact that it is the continuation of Victorian culture.

(There is one note I should like to mention before I forget.

The careful reader may ask why I am undertaking to write about touch and have other people read it; the practice does not involve touch as thinking about logical reasoning involves reasoning. My response is threefold: (1) You have a point to an extent; reading or writing this is not an act of touch. (2) There is a place for thinking and theory in a way that is never intended to be complete or self-sufficient. Christian theology is not an insular system of ideas, but an integrated part of the walk of faith in which one loves and is loved by God. (3) Theory strengthens and furthers practice, as physics furthers engineering. The invention of devices is far older than any empirically accurate knowledge of physics — but that doesn't mean that physics didn't add a whole new dimension to engineering.)

Having talked about the philosophy and theology surrounding touch, the reader may well be wondering if I am going to say anything about touch itself. And the answer is 'yes'. What I have been doing, or attempting to do at any rate, is to establish a framework that will make it possible to do so.

The first thing I will say about touch (perhaps belaboring the obvious, but remember George Orwell's words, "It is the first duty of intellectuals to state the obvious."), is that it is an immediate, proximal mode of perception. Sight, hearing, and smell, all work at a distance; touch only works when you are right with someone or something. This has rich potential for analogy — for instance, as you can only feel something if you draw near to it, so also there are ways in which you can only know something if you love it.

The second thing is that it is a baby's primary sense — not sight. Only later does sight come to dominate. The baby is continually engaged in a tactile exploration of the world. He puts

things into his mouth, not because plastic, cloth, wood, and stone taste wonderful, but because the tongue is the most sensitive part of the human body to touch — more sensitive than even the fingertips. And, long before the words "I love you." have any meaning to a child, touch constitutes the baby's awareness of his mother's love. He is enfolded by her body for nine months as she carries him, and when born he is held, and hugged and kissed. He is fed, not in some abstract way, but by nursing — a very special and intimate touch. It is presumably not coincidental that the focus of a baby's eyes is not twenty feet to infinity as with an adult, but eighteen inches — the distance between a mother's breast and her nose.

The third thing I would like to say is that, though touching is a surface to surface contact, it is anything but superficial. This is why doctors touch their patients when they want to know what is happening inside the body. In a few cases, exploratory surgery is necessary — they need to cut a person open to find out what's inside. But most of the time, they can probe and find out what's happening just by touching.

And, medicine aside, touch can communicate a wealth of information about a person's emotions. Muscle tension, skin temperature, sweat, rate and quality of pulse — all have a story to tell about what's going on inside a person's heart.

The fourth thing is that touch is deep. I am not sure exactly how to convey this, as I am trying to express something greater than what I myself know. But, in the absence of perfect knowledge, I'll give an analogy.

I have some training in martial arts. I have just enough knowledge to begin to appreciate the wealth of knowledge I do not know. I have seen the basics of pressure points, joint locks, and hip throws. I have seen enough to recognize that there are

subtleties which elude me, and rich veins to explore. If I were to devote the rest of my life to the study of martial arts, I would not lament with Alexander, "Alas! I have no more worlds to conquer." There would always be more there, always be more to explore.

For two specific kinds of touch — sex, and massage — there has been considerable exploration, and (though everybody can do them at least minimally) there are great books from which most people have a lot to learn.

Given what I know about God and his creation, I would be very surprised to learn that the rest of touch is shallow — that you learn a certain amount, and then there is nothing left to explore.

The fifth thing, in relation to the fourth, consists of a couple of analogies concerning what we may find in exploring touch. I believe that we find something like a language, but a language, a communication, that is alogical and non-symbolic. (This may, indeed, be a lot like one of the things feminism is searching for. I'll have to run this by a women's studies professor.) I believe it also to be like art and music — in an act that is creative, and an expression of beauty. I believe it also to be qualitative rather than quantitative by nature — returning to the theme of an alogical language, this would communicate not the rule-based formal manipulations computers are capable of, but the qualities, the experience, of which computers are incapable.

I would now like to engage in a thought experiment. I will ask you to imagine three times that you put your hand into a dark hole in a wall, through which you cannot see.

The first time, you almost hurt yourself touching a sharp corner. As you feel inside, you recognize the shape of a box — a hard metal box. It is cold, unresponsive, and unyielding; it does not acknowledge your presence.

The second time, you meet no resistance; you have plunged your hand into a bucket of water. The water is too responsive and too yielding; there is nothing there but an acknowledgement of your presence. It has no shape but the shape of your hand; there is nothing there. So you pull your hand out and dry it off.

The third time you stick your hand in, you meet something that is yielding and yet solid, something that responds not out of what your hand is alone, but what it is. You meet something that is warm. You touch another human hand. As you touch, it wraps around, clasps, embraces your hand. You have finally found something very good.

Human touch is, or at least should be, like the third experience. It is not just a moderate between two extremes; it is something more. It is warm.

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In the Vietnam War, the Viet Cong understood very well that warfare is won, not by destroying soldiers, but by destroying soldiers' morale. That is why they had a very poor kill ratio, and were fighting a modern war against an enemy that vastly outranked them in resources, and still were never defeated.

One of the many weapons in that arsenal was called a 'ballbuster'. It was a non-lethal anti-personnel land mine with a three foot blast radius.

Of the U.S. soldiers hit by such mines, there were some that still had male hormones produced by their bodies afterwards. And investigations showed that they were the men who had been involved in real, intimate relationships beforehand. Not, presumably, the common soldier's visit to the brothel, or the rape of local women that has been a part of warfare since time immemorial. That is a dismal rule whose exceptions are few and far between. But real relationships. Those men still had testosterone.

The most sexual organ in the human body is not the genital organ, nor even the gonads. It is the brain.

Sex goes much further than just a physical act. It unites souls. It was created as such.

And again seeing as God has created us as spirit-soul-body unities, isn't there every reason to believe that this is not isolated to sex? That when we touch other people, it need not be only with our bodies, but can also be with spirit and soul?

Madeleine L'Engle wrote of kything in [A Wind in the Door](#). In one way, it is a colorful and fantastic picture of prayer, that shows its beauty. In another way, it seems to capture, not so much the literal fact, as the way of the best touching.

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Individualism is a very impoverished notion of personhood, and touch is not a thin bridge between two essential islands, nor an act that one person (subject) does to another person as to an inanimate object; the latter, if a picture of any kind of "touch", is a picture of rape.

Aquinas viewed teacher teaching and learner learning as part of the same activity; another helpful notion is that of intersubjectivity — it is not between isolated subject and object, but between two connected subjects. This doesn't mean that there is uniformity and absolute symmetry; nursing mother and child cannot simply swap places. But it is intersubjective.

This may be an interesting way to view what constitutes the difference between making love and rape. Physically, the two are not very different — they have much, much more in common than making love and nursing a baby do, or than rape and murder (or even two kinds of murder) do. But spiritually, they are leagues apart. Making love is between two connected subjects, and rape is done by a subject to an object; spiritually and philosophically, these are two very different things. And it might be that the way rape crushes a woman's psyche has much less to do with the physical event than the fact that a subject, an 'I', is reduced to an object, an 'it'.

(Of course, another aspect is that the greatest evils come from twisting the greatest goods; Hitler could not have done one tenth the damage he did unless he were the legendary leader that he was.)

Something like this is related to why the mystics refer to God as 'I' without blaspheming. If a person must be understood as a subject, as an 'I' and not an 'it', how much moreso the Lord

## God of Hosts?

I would like to now talk about different forms of touch. I will not attempt here to begin in a logical order, first things first, because I am taken by a whimsy, a quality. I will begin talking about one of my favorite touches, tickling.

In a lighthearted mood, I coined the following beatitude:

Blessed are the ticklish,

For the touch of a friend shall fill them with laughter.

Tickling is light. It is a tactile tease. It is carefree, spontaneous, and whimsical. It is trusting. It is the least solemn of all the touches; it is serious and intimate, but in a completely silly and nonsensical way — thank God! Its very seriousness and intimacy is ruined if it becomes heavy and what most people think of when they hear 'serious'. There is something special about it, something so special that both tickling and other things are ruined if, for example, someone tickles a person whose friend just died. Tickling can greatly enrich and deepen our understanding of what it means to be serious, if we let it.

There is an infinite difference between a friend's playful teasing, and a cynic's sneering. Neither is solemn or formal, but they lack solemnity and formality for very opposite reasons, just as a baby and an old man can lack hair, not because they are of the same age, but because they lie at opposite extremes.

A friend's teasing is infinitely respectful. It is a respect which lies far too deep to confine to being somber, a respect which must bubble up into exuberance and say, "I take you far too seriously not to take you lightly."

At this point, I will treat a certain aspect that may run the risk of offending feminists; I will ask for a suspended judgment until at least I have made my case. I am going to say this:

sometimes 'no' means 'no', and sometimes 'no' means 'yes'.

I am not here justifying the claim that "Her lips said 'no', but her eyes said 'yes'." That is stated chiefly by men who lack the honesty to admit, perhaps even to themselves, that "Her lips and her eyes said 'no', but my lust said 'yes'." I will damn that alongside any feminist.

What I am rather saying is that tickling exemplifies a pattern, a pattern of love and community that does not reduce to words. Consent is an important principle, but using explicit verbal words to inquire is a last resort, usually only necessary when two people do not know each other very well. And there is something deep enough about consent that it, and furthermore its recognition, are entirely compatible with saying 'no' or 'stop', or offering physical resistance.

As a paradigm example of this, I would point to a parent chasing around a little child in a back yard. The child is trying to escape, and in a sense doesn't want to be caught. But in a deeper sense, he does want to be caught. (I at this point remember one woman, who, disappointed that I had stopped tickling her when she pushed my hands away, told me, "I am blocking you because I want you to push past.") This is why it is good for a child's psyche to be chased by a parent, even (especially) if he is caught, and it is very bad for a woman's psyche to be chased by a rapist, even if she gets away.

Chasing, or tickling, is or at least should be an intersubjective act of love. What fundamentally distinguishes it from rape is not so much what lies on the surface as that deep below the surface, the one is done between two subjects, while the other is done by a subject to an object. The deep connection between two subjects is what enables 'no' to mean 'yes'.

And tickling is not so much for the tickling as for the other

person. It is not an act in isolation; it is a part of love. This provides another distinction between tickling and rape. The rapist does not truly desire the woman, even as just an object, an 'it'; he desires the rape, the action, an action that exists self-sufficient, by itself and without any need of a larger context. Perhaps the rapist is to be greatly pitied alongside the victim; it does not cause consciously realized unending torment as being raped does, but it is a single act within oneself, an act of masturbation that involves an unfortunate woman, rather than an intersubjective act of love that transcends self. Even if rape did not violate a woman's personhood and were not morally wrong, it would still be greatly be desired for his own sake that a rapist could let go of rape and give-receive a real hug.

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The next touch I'll mention is holding hands.

Someone once said, "If all other arguments failed, the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence." The hand is one of the most beautiful parts of the body; it contains the glory of the whole body in miniature. If you haven't done so already, at least once in your life, I would encourage you to notice hands, to look at someone's hands (yours or somebody else's) as you would an Impressionist nude. I don't think it is quite an accident that Michelangelo's David, the single greatest male nude in Western sculpture, has hands that are just a little bit larger than they are proportioned in real life. The David's hands are exquisite.

The hand is in a sense the most useful tool we have. It is amazing, strong, dextrous, sensitive, and versatile. It is uniquely adapted both to manipulate, and to feel and explore. And so it is not a surprise that one of the touches God has given us is holding hands — an equal touch between two sensitive areas of the body, which can last.

Our culture understands holding hands primarily in a romantic context — which it certainly can be, but need not be. At least a hint of this is seen in that parents hold little children's hands. I still hold my twelve year old brothers' hands, and I am happy to do so.

In many Islamic nations, men hold hands in public. This is not a sexual act (and, unfortunately, is not extended to women — even wives), and the fact that it may take some effort to really realize by many of us is reflective of a fundamental problem in how many of us view sex and morality.

Dorothy Sayers, in her essay, "The other six deadly sins," points out that a man could be a liar and a drunkard, greedy and

avaricious, wrathful, prideful, and dead to every noble instinct, and still we would not call him immoral, because we reserve the term 'immorality' to talk about — well, you know, immorality. Thus a term that was meant to cover the whole range of vices is reduced to referring to just one, because we are two embarrassed to call that one vice by its name, lust. Lust is one of the seven deadly sins; it is not the deadly sin. And the Church has always recognized that the cold-hearted sins, the sins of mind and spirit such as pride and greed, are infinitely worse than the disreputable sins of the flesh, such as lust. In the [Inferno](#), the incontinent occupy the very least and outermost circle of Hell proper; it is only far deeper that we find sins like pride, the sin by which the highest and holiest being in all creation became the Satan, the Accuser who stands before God accusing the saints day and night.

(One thing that I beg of you here — do not flatter me by saying that I am original in claiming this; do not credit me with this innovation. Christianity has taught this for ages; it has just become a bit obscured recently.)

Homosexual lust, in this scheme, is in a sense worse than heterosexual lust; it is a perversion of nature in a way that even adultery is not. But it is not the vice beyond all vices, and it does not compare even to pride. And it is really paid a far-reaching and very undue tribute when it is held in the fear that it is, in how (for example) many men in our culture fear touching each other. All sin is serious, but in most cases the possibility of homosexual lust is not that serious of a threat that men need to be afraid of each other. Therefore, the Islamic world has it right in the level of touchiness and contact that it has between men.

Holding hands is a touch that can be deepened by pressure,

variations in pressure, and responsiveness; one of the most common and basic letters in this alphabet is in giving a squeeze or answering a squeeze with another squeeze; it is a theme which has infinite variations. And this provides a lot of depth to a touch, making a touch more touchy, the very opposite of holding hands like a dead fish.

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I would like to make a brief interlude to talk about the question of what touches are sexual — and to refuse to give a Pharisaic catalogue.

The Pharisees attempted the doomed project of an exacting guard of rules, more specifically the wrong type of rules. By contrast, I would like to draw an analogy with what C.S. Lewis said in [Mere Christianity](#) about modesty in dress across cultures.

Different cultures vary greatly in what social rules they have concerning covering and showing different parts of the body. But having a principle of modesty does not, even in cultures that do not wear any clothing. It is like language; what sounds bear what meaning is highly variable. But having sounds that bear meaning, and parts of speech and grammar, is not. That is universal — and the deaf subculture is the exception that proves the rule; even when they can't hear to be able to naturally converse as everyone else does, they use their eyes and hands in a language of hand signs.

Another analogy might be found in comparing the U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico. Much (not all) of the Canadian border lies at a single latitude; there is a near-universal rule that tells, "One mile north of this latitude, you are in Canada; one mile south, you are in the U.S.A." But no such rule exists between the U.S. and Mexico; there are some latitudes that (given that one is on land in North America) tell you that you're in the U.S., and some latitudes that tell you that you are in Mexico, but a great many latitudes that could be either in the U.S. or Mexico.

However, the U.S.-Mexican border is just as sharply defined as that between the U.S. and Canada; the latitudinal rules fail in many cases, but there is still a razor sharp distinction to be

made.

That distinction is made in the Holy Spirit; it is the Spirit who is the structure of obedience revealed in the New Testament, and that gives the believer the power to obey. Any kind of touch can be sexual, and a good many can be non-sexual as well. And the power to be pure, the power to reserve sexual touch for its proper and special place, comes to the believer through the Holy Spirit.

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I would like to say something more about tickling: it is dependent, not only on body, but also on mind. I will not belabor the obvious point that certain touches tickle some people, but rather point out something else: whether something tickles, depends on how it is perceived. A thin cotton shirt touches very lightly — but it does not tickle. And conversely, some vivid use of language can tickle from far away.

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The kiss seems to receive the most attention in Scripture. The second verse of the Song of Songs says, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth." And half the New Testament epistles say, in their closing exhortations, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." In a sense, the kiss is a symbol of all contact in Scripture. And it is significant that the prophets record Elijah being told when he is desperate, "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Ba'al, nor have their mouths kissed him." It is so great of a touch that it cannot be bestowed on an idol.

To those who have seen it, I would recall the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The kisses in even a seriously flawed movie stand out; the emotional charge bristles, and the final kiss between Christ and Judas stands as a tribute to how even a non-sexual kiss can be intense and passionate. And the kisses recorded in *Genesis* stand as a hallmark of that book's sensitivity to emotion.

Someone writing about music talked about how, as a person's experience with music grows, the keys gain different and distinct emotional residues, different moods, different qualities. And the same is true of touch, only moreso. There are twelve major and twelve minor keys, and that is fixed; but with each of the basic touches, there are variants, and variants of variants. A kiss may be on the lips or not on the lips, just a peck or longer, and so on, and these allow not just discrete combinations, but a continuum. And this provides room for great subtleties in emotional significance.

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I just got back from my cognitive science class, and I believe that touch provides a good illustration of what is lacking in the classical model of cognition.

The classical model of cognition describes human thought as an essentially rule-based manipulation of symbols, ideally manifested in a formal game such as chess. Of one area where it is lacking — that of simulation, where people manipulate in their heads models or representations of things — I will not treat here. But there is another area which I *will* treat; I am not contesting that there are parts of the human mind that are well described in that manner, but rather that it is a description of a part, and not, by a long stretch of imagination, the whole. And so I will outline seven differences.

The first is that chess is manifestation-independent, while touch is fundamentally qualitative. Perhaps the best way I can put it is this. Humans happen to refer to chess pieces by poetic names, such as 'knight' and 'castle'. But that is entirely irrelevant to the game; Deep Blue beat Kasparov without having the faintest inkling of the romance we know, of knights in shining armor and fair maidens in distress. And chess would be the same if Bill Gates played it with helicopters on rooftops; that is, the real game of chess can be separated from the physical objects which happen to be used in its play.

But this is not true of touch — at all. Chess is still chess without a chessboard; and it happens in blindfolded masters' games. But a kiss would not still be a kiss without bodies, and I could not touch in anything remotely resembling the way I do now, if my soul were transplanted to the body of a steel robot.

There is a formal sense in which the numbers 1297 and 1348 are different, and in which we can recognize them as such, but

there is a much deeper way in which red and green affect us differently; there is a fundamental qualitative difference in looking at two objects of different colors that we cannot experience in simply thinking about two different numbers. This kind of quality, which occurs incidentally (if at all) in chess, is fundamental to touch.

And in some way, this touches on a problem in Western thought, an occurrence of the ancient Gnostic heresy which recognizes us as spirits and minds, but refuses to give any recognition to us as animals whom God created to be fundamentally physical as well as fundamentally spiritual. Our bodies are not a merely coincidental attachment to our minds; God created us to be a certain way physically as well as a certain way spiritually, and body is not to be dispensed with or altered as we please. Touching is an act of the body, involving mind and spirit as it may, and it is (God be praised) not something we can simply assign the way we assign a particular shirt to cover us. Seeing everything as chess makes us pure minds who have the misfortune to be encumbered by some (possibly mutable) matter; seeing some things as touch recognizes us as blessed with some particular bodies, which are a part of us as much as reason is a part of us. God has given us a very earthy spirituality.

The second difference is that chess is driven by a single objective in the future, to which any particular action is a mere instrument, while touch embraces now and recognizes things as intrinsically good. (Now the truth is not either alone but both, and if I do not talk much about our ultimate future goal, it will only be by a restriction of attention.) In chess, there is one objective — checkmating your opponent before he can checkmate you — and nothing else is done because it is good in and of itself, but only because it can function as a means to that

end. A checkmate is never made by a single move, except between two terrible players; it is carefully prepared in anticipation. Now goals, ends, and sacrifices are very important, probably more important than what I am concerned with here. But touch doesn't work that way. A touch is not given because of what it will enable at some later moment, as a mere means to an end; it is given as valuable in and of itself. And we do not touch in the future, but touch now; the now (as well as the future) is given by God's hand.

The third difference, which is probably more restricted to chess and other games than formal systems in general, but which I will mention, is that chess is oppositional, while touch is synergistic. What is good for your opponent in chess is bad for you, and vice versa. The success of one person necessitates the failure of another. Now there are principles of good sportsmanship, but these come because people are better than chess, and not from chess itself. Chess sets people at odds with each other, in and of itself. Touch, on the other hand, is of a cooperative and synergistic nature; for one person to benefit means in general the benefit and not the detriment of another. You will fare badly with someone who plays chess well; you will fare well with someone whose touch is good.

The fourth difference is that chess is digital and discrete, while touch is continuous. Touch moves not simply from black and white to a greyscale, but even further — to colors, where there are many different ways of being bright. I have talked about this before, so I will not treat it in detail here beyond saying that it ties into the qualitative aspect.

The fifth difference is that chess is abstract, while touch is concrete. Abstraction extracts certain key features, and then leaves the specific instances behind, which is a powerful thing to

do, and good, but not the only kind of thinking which people do, and not the kind of thinking that most people are best at. The concrete takes a specific instance and explores it in detail, in specific things that abstraction leaves out. Touch is concrete, and can push one specific contact much deeper than is possible abstractly with every contact at once. Touch has the depth of concreteness rather than that of abstraction.

The sixth difference is that chess is logical and rational, while touch is emotional and perceptive. The chess type of thinking is best done by someone who can retreat into himself, and carry out cool, logical operations without regard for the outside world. Emotions are irrelevant. Touch, on the other hand, is something which emotions and the external world matter a great deal for; touch should be moved and moving, and it depends far less on isolated calculation than a sensitivity to other people.

It is perceptive, connected, and interactive.

The seventh and final difference I will mention here is that chess is self-contained, while touch resonates of something greater. Once you know the rules of chess, you have no need to refer to anything outside of it, but touch is part of something far greater. It is a part of love, of the very highest potential of the *imago dei*. To understand the profound difference between making love and rape, you need to go past the touch alone and look at far greater things — to see how one is part of the sacred one-flesh union which God has given us, and the other is one of the most crushing and dehumanizing blows that one person can inflict on another.

Another facet of what something greater there is, may be found in the older and somewhat broader conception of Romance.

I am not only referring to the romance that goes on between a man and a woman, but a broader sense of — poetry. It is related

to the innocent and childlike wonder that looks and sees the real beauty in so many things, that is obscured so often by jaded eyes.

There is something haunting and elusive, something which we can chase but cannot catch, something beautiful. This something is why so many people have looked at woods and believed that there might be fairies dancing, or looked at a pool of water and seen that there might be a nymph. There is a sense of poetry, a sense of something beautiful. You cannot pin it down and hold a gun to its head, but it will surprise you.

This Romance is something which makes itself manifest in touch, or to put it another way, touch is laced with Romance; it is one of those beautiful things by which beauty surprises us.

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Having lived in France, I rather miss the custom of friends giving kisses on alternate cheeks when they meet; there is something about a kiss that is delicate and embodies a tiny beauty. We do not give each other kisses in consolation; hugs are more fitting to those times. Of all the different touches, I think that the kiss is (to me, at least — there is a good subjective element here) the one most laced with Romance.

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The handshake originated as a means of occupying someone's weapon hand so as to afford some protection when he was within striking range. That is, it was a gesture of mistrust.

To see what it has become, is in my estimation a tribute to the nature of touch, and a tribute to the better side of humanness. Touching hands upon a meeting has become a greeting, a welcome, and I have received some warm handshakes that felt like hugs.

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Hugging is perhaps the most equitable and universal of touches (at least in our culture; I acknowledge and understand that much of what I am writing may be culture bound, but even a non-universal cultural perspective can have great merit). It is the one touch I can think of that is fitting both after something very good has happened and after something very bad has happened; when someone is at a low point especially, a hug is one of the most simple and human actions of love and support, from one person to another.

In the book of Job, we read before any of the lengthy speeches, that Job's three friends came, and sat with him in silence for a week because they saw his misery was so great. And this is the one thing which they did for which they were not reprimanded. There is a time when sorrow and agony are great, and even the best of words are too much of a burden to bear. In that time, it is a tremendous comfort to have a friend who will come, forgo the usual bad habits about always having to do something, and sit in silence, sharing in your pain, sharing with you his presence. And a hug, moreso than any other touch, is very appropriate then.

But hugs are far more than that. They can also be soft hugs, bear hugs, gentle hugs, pick-me-up hugs, and all sorts of other possibilities.

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There was a man by the name of Bob Sklar at one of the places I worked, who would give all manner of friendly insults; the only time he didn't insult you was if he was angry with you, and then you were in trouble.

Something like this is descriptive of banter; it is a sign that everything is going well. As an example of how that can fail, I would point to its absence in the situation concerning racial humor.

If my guess is correct, at least some readers had a significant jump in tension level — am I going to advocate racism in the form of jokes? There are substantial racial tensions, so that people in many situations are walking on eggshells, afraid to tell jokes involving race because it might be taken as a sign of racism — nobody seems to consider the revolutionary idea that some people might tell jokes involving race for the same reason they tell jokes not involving race — because they find them funny, and want to share a bit of good-natured mirth.

The one major exception is the exception that proves the rule. It is acceptable to joke about your own race — we are not too completely thick-skulled to think that (for example) a Jew might have reasons besides anti-Semitism for telling jokes about Jews. The fact that an exception be of such nature is a testament to the strength of the rule.

If nothing else, I must regard such a state of affairs as unfortunate for the sake of humor. If you have had the good fortune to know a few Jews as I have, you will no doubt know that the Jewish consciousness has produced a number of jokes which are subtle, clever, and extremely funny. I will quote two of my favorite ones here:

At a Jewish wedding, how do you tell which branch it is?  
If it's an orthodox wedding, the bride's mother is pregnant. If it's a conservative wedding, the bride is pregnant. If it's a reformed wedding, the rabbi is pregnant.

I take this one to be a good meta-joke as well as a joke. There are four branches of something called Judaism; the fourth, reconstructionism, is far out in loonie land, a sort of Jewish PC-USA. And it is both fitting and amusing that the joke doesn't mention them.

A Jewish man named Jacob has fallen on hard times; he has lost his job, and goes to the synagogue to pray.

"God? Could I please win the lottery?"

He doesn't win the lottery, and not too much later his house is broken into, and everything of value is stolen.

Visibly upset, he goes to the synagogue again.

"God, I have done a lot for you, and I don't ask for too much. Please, I beg you, please let me win the lottery."

This week, not only does he not win the lottery, but his house burns down and his car is destroyed by a hit and run driver. Again he goes and prays.

"God, I have served you my whole life, and I don't ask for too much at all. I have taken good care of my wife and children, and I want this money for them and not just for myself. I do so much and ask for so little. Please, God, please, can't you let me win the lottery just this once?"

The voice of God booms forth, and fills the synagogue, saying,

"Jacob, meet me half way on this one. Buy a stupid ticket!"

One more:

Q: What do you say to a Puerto Rican in a three piece suit?

A: "Will the defendant please rise?"

I mention these jokes specifically because they disturb how we are trying to have races live together peaceably. That such jokes are not often told may be slightly sad from a humor perspective, but it is also a sign of a much deeper problem, and for this problem I will again go to Jews for a treasure, an even greater treasure this time. I hope you might see why I would tell offensive jokes.

This treasure is the word 'shalom', which means peace — a rich and full peace, a peace which is not merely characterized by what is absent — physical, violent strife — but goes much further. Shalom as understood by Jews is a positive state of well-being, a state of justice and equity — "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like ever-flowing streams." In my view, the best way to characterize this peace is to say that it is the manifest presence of love.

What we now have between races is not shalom; it is only a whitewashed wall. And it does not really help matters to put on another coat of whitewash, and proscribe racial humor because of how dangerously it threatens to reveal the racial tensions we pretend aren't there, and how dangerously it threatens something even more terrifying — to make a human to human contact in mirth, to separate us from our separateness and let us see each other as brothers and sisters, the sons and daughters of one man and one woman.

Roughhousing is very dear to my heart, in part because it can only exist where there is shalom. It is too energetic, too real, not to destroy a whitewashed wall. and therefore if roughhousing

can be enjoyed, there is a real shalom there, a shalom deep enough to take a bit of mock conflict on the surface and still be the strong flow of love between real people. In its own way, its obnoxious roughness achieves what a thousand polite and distant handshakes can never accomplish.

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Touch is not simply a tame thing in a box, and — while there are certain patterns of touch that are hit on more often than others — there is always more. I, for instance, am quite fond of grabbing my little brothers' noses, and tugging on their ears, and so on and so forth. These silly — or sometimes not so silly — little touches we make up have their place, their niche, as well. And other cultures, while almost certainly sharing foundational elements such as hugs and kisses, will have their own touches and their own variations on themes. What exactly this may be is variable, as the exact sounds of a language are variable. Having a language capable of communication is not. What I am writing in these pages is only one of a legion of possibilities on the topic; others can and should address other things that I omit.

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Another aspect of touch is that it is free and voluntary. The Christian understanding is not quite the same as the overblown (or underinterpreted) American notion, but that doesn't mean that there aren't substantial freedoms.

"If you love something, set it free; if it doesn't come back, it was never yours to begin with."

Another critical aspect of touch is that it is voluntary, that saying 'no' is an option. A part of what makes a touch enjoyable is the knowledge that it is not forced on you, that it comes from a love not only great enough to touch, but also and furthermore great enough not to touch. Another part of what makes rape is that the victim has no choice in the matter — that she is in fact in one of the most utterly powerless and defenseless situations, both physically and psychologically, that a person can be in. Then what should be one of the greatest goods becomes one of the greatest evils. The only other comparable situation I can think of is abortion, especially a partial birth abortion in which a child begins to receive that great and unique embrace called 'birth', and then his head is cut open and his brains are sucked out, live and unanaesthetized.

The nature of this freedom means, in particular, the freedom to become bound, the absence of which is an unnatural and constricting shackle. <<La liberté totale est la pire des prisons.>>

— total liberty is the very worst of prisons. The poetic, the romantic, the true freedom is the freedom which can choose a good, not merely for a moment, but permanently. This freedom, rather than having to re-evaluate all of the time and have no solid basis to rely on, is truly free, infinitely more free than if every decision and commitment is in danger of being revoked at

any time. This freedom is the basis for marriage and parenthood,  
a freedom that chooses permanently to be available to another  
person in touch and love.

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There is one last specific touch I would like to mention, and that is massage. I do not mean to give an account of how to massage, as there are good books on it. But I will say this: that it is the touch of a healer, that it goes past the surface to work inside the body. It is perhaps the most involved and giving of non-sexual touches, and I regard it as not entirely unfortunate that it is the one non-sexual touch that it is easy to come by books on.

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Touch is one of the blessings that lies far beyond Mammon.  
It's free.

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To begin what may well be the last section of this treatise, I will talk about something that is not so much a specific touch, as a topic relevant to touch. That is the difference between contract and covenant.

The contract is a very modern and very impoverished notion of the covenant. A contract is an external artifice which binds a person's actions. A covenant is an internal reality which binds persons themselves. A contract is shallow. A covenant is profound.

The contract, especially the social contract, is the impoverished notion of community that corresponds to a view of people as isolated and essential individuals and islands, between which thin strands of bridges are erected as a minimal concession to our inability to function as absolute islands. It is a superficial modification to a basis of individualism.

Christianity is not an individualistic religion, and it has a much more rich, complex, and multifaceted view of personhood — for example, the insistence that we are both as much spirit as any angel, and as much animal as any beast. And it claims both that we have a profound individual side, and a profound corporate side — and that these two truths are not only not exclusive, but complementary. The individual side, which I have not treated here only due to a restriction of attention, is one which (for example) solitude figures in deeply. Many things are a part of both facets. Our uniqueness and difference, for example, is perhaps most visibly related to our individual natures, but Paul's talk about the body — which needs not thirty-two ears but a great variety of different, equal, and necessary body parts, each in its proper place — shows how our differences can and should

contribute to community as well.

The view of touch as a specific action defined by the consent of two individuals, with no intrinsic meaning in and of itself, is to the Christian view of touch as the concept of contract is to the Christian understanding of covenant — an impoverished and woefully inadequate simplification and truncation. Touch is not something accidental, which means whatever we decide that it means; it is part and parcel of who we are, with a meaning ordained by God. It is a part of love and community; it is a physical aspect of the very highest and holiest in the *imago dei*.

John wrote at the end of his account of the Gospel that he did not record everything which Jesus said and did, and that he supposed that if everything which Jesus said and did were written down, the whole world would not have room for all the books which would be written. Christ's life is inexhaustible; even the four brief accounts which have come down to us from the apostles are themselves inexhaustible. It is one of the marks of what is great and profound.

I am drawing this work to a close rather arbitrarily — not because there is no more to be said, but because I decided that I would write for the length of the notebook I had chosen, and draw a line of moderation there. Instead of just writing forever, I am stopping to type it up, print it out, share the copies with other people, and what is most important of all, touch them.

I would ask you to do the same. I hope that you have enjoyed this; I hope that I have stimulated you to think; I hope that I have shared with you some good insights. Don't cut this work short by stopping there. Go out and touch someone.

## Epilogue, 21 June 03

Since I first wrote this, about six years have elapsed. I have since let it simmer inside me, and I have a couple of things to mention.

The first has been that what I wrote is incomplete. It's not quite in a mature state. One caring, touch-y friend observed that there was something forced in my touch.

The second has been a realisation which crystallised after two comments. The first comment when one friend said, "You and Robin hug differently from most people." I was surprised and asked, "How?" He said, "You hug with the whole of yourself."

The other comment came when I asked a close friend, Yussif, when a hug was appropriate in Ghanaian culture. He said that in England he learned to value hugs, and in Ghana he gives a handshake to close male friends. In retrospect, I realize that when Ghanaian men have shaken my hand, it has never been distant, or a perfunctory greeting. Something Yussif said about "palm against palm" made me realise how unappreciative I had been about handshakes.

I tried to apply this treatise by seeking out hugs and kisses. I thought in terms of what kind of touch to seek, and I was basically barking up the wrong tree when I did so. I hesitate to say that I would never ask, "May I give you a hug?" or, "May I give you a kiss?" but that sort of thing occupies a far less

central role than I assumed.

What would I put in its place? Go with the flow of the social situation rather than against it. Don't force it. Be careful about when you muster courage—sometimes trying to muster courage is the wrong thing. And, when it is fitting to give a touch, be able to do so with your whole person. Don't go overboard and try to give your total presence when you've just met someone and are shaking hands...

...but all these restrictions are but the shadow cast by a great light.

Good touch is a way that love shows itself. Embodied love, from one whole person to another, can appear in many different forms of touch, and what makes it deep is less dependent on technique or form than being given from the whole person. It is at least as much spiritual as physical, and is therefore to be sought in whole person love, given by God, which moves through the spirit to embrace the body. Things such as loving God and the other person, trying as much as possible to give your attention now rather than diverting it to other things (past or future), and meeting the other—whole person to whole person—are much deeper to pin down than any kind of minutia, and have a much deeper yield.

Perhaps after I have let this simmer for a few more years, there is something else I will be able to share.

# Treasures in Heaven: The Inner Meaning of "Do Not Store Up Treasures on Earth"

## The ground floor

I would like to begin and end with two C.S. Lewis quotes that fairly bracket the Biblical and Orthodox views on wealth. The plain sense of some painful passages in the Gospel and New Testament is an extraordinarily powerful door to important spiritual meadows. The first quote is about the [the Sermon on the Mount](#), but applies to some other passages. Lewis said, "As to 'caring for' the Sermon on the Mount, if 'caring for' here means 'liking' or enjoying, I suppose no one 'cares for' it. Who can like being knocked flat on his face by a sledge-hammer?"

A look at all the New Testament teaching on wealth, in its plain sense, clears things up. The [Parable of the Dishonest Steward](#) takes quite a mercenary view of wealth. It is to be squandered in the process of getting onto more important things.

Elsewhere, Christ is dismissive of many showy and lavish gifts given out of rich people's excess, and holds up the gift of [the widow's two mites](#), a gift of the only two practically worthless coins she had, as the paradigm example of right giving. God cares in giving, not what the number is on a cheque, but what they represent, what the spiritual act is that lies at the very heart of the gift. And in the case of the widow in this story, she would have been poor if she had kept both coins, much poorer than any of the wealthy donors after they gave their gift, and she would have been giving sacrificially if she had given "just" one coin. She gave both. Some people have said that she gave too much, but Christ held up the widow giving both her nearly worthless coins as the model of generosity, not moneybags.

The Old Testament passages are too long to quote and perhaps too long to summarize; the appropriate use of wealth is as basic a theme in the Prophets as sexual purity and worshipping God alone. But to pick one passage, and keeping in mind that the Old Testament ultimate insult is a comparison to Sodom as much as today's ultimate insult is a comparison to Hitler, [Ezekiel](#) is quite blunt at times and verse 16:49 says, "Moreover this was the sin of thy sister Sodom, pride: she and her daughters lived in pleasure, in fullness of bread and in abundance: this belonged to her and her daughters, and they helped not the hand of the poor and needy." And if this seems a twisting of [the Genesis passage telling Sodom's story](#), consider this: if the story of multiple horrors had at one stroke combined sexual perversion ("unnatural lust", Jude 7), and obscene inhospitality, how would

the people of Sodom have treated the poor? It may seem extreme to indict the whole city, and extreme to say that [when Abraham bargained with the Lord over Sodom](#) the Lord God of hosts could not find fifty righteous in the city, or even ten, but consider this: who else besides the Lot offered the visiting angels a night's shelter under a roof? Who in the whole society besides Lot offered the angels even a night's shelter?

There is much that could be said of this; an Orthodox monastic reader might see gluttony and failure to care for the poor as the bedrock sin that undergirded the obscene inhospitality of Sodom. And the Orthodox monastic tradition as well finds a tight tie between what lies above the belt, and what lies below; the wandering sexual curiosity shown by the men of Sodom is what happens when the reins are laid on the horse's neck as far as the belly goes. But let us waive this aside and return to the Biblical texts.

One passage in the New Testament that people wince and squirm at is [Matthew 25:31-46](#):

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Some Jewish readers have said that the point of the Creation story in [Genesis 1](#) is that the human race, including beggars, is one single family. And how we treat beggars is treatment of our brothers and sisters. Now this does not automatically mean in itself that we should give money to beggars: one mother on YouTube put out a plea to stop giving beggars change because her two sons were homeless drug addicts and were using people's generosity for their addictions. But it does mean out-and-out, in full, that come the Crack of Doom, when we can no longer repent, how we have treated our neighbor, including beggars, is tout court how we have treated Christ, and if we regard beggars as

being like vermin, we have regarded Christ himself as being like vermin.

The Orthodox Christian tradition is clear that we should give something to beggars, at least those of us who have not made the monastic renunciation of all claim to property and become above alms. None of the priests I've heard say that you should give very much; one Orthodox priest I've heard specifically suggested not giving very much. If we have nothing with us, we can at least give a warm greeting. But we are told to give money, those of us that have something, and we are not guilty if a beggar uses your free gift to feed an addiction ("they may be sponging—that's not for you to judge") any more than God is guilty when he gives us gifts, times, and opportunities that we use in an unworthy manner. I don't know exactly how far Jewish exegesis goes with the image of God, but in Orthodox Christian understanding that is as basic and fundamental to our understanding of personhood gets, and every person we meet, and in particular the low man on the totem pole, is more than our brother or sister. Every man, and not just every Orthodox, is a proxy for Christ. Christ in his own person is in Heaven and does not need anything we can give. But the question that will separate the sheep from the goats at the Last Judgment is "How did you treat me when I came to you in the least of these?" And the righteous and the damned will alike be astonished that everything they have done for the least of their neighbors is how we treated the Judge who comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

Another passage, cut from the same cloth, is [The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus](#) and reads:

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple

and fine linen, and tared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, â€˜Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.â€™™

But Abraham said, â€˜Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.â€™™

Then he said, â€˜I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.â€™™ Abraham saith unto him, â€˜They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.â€™™ And he said, â€˜Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.â€™™ And he said unto him, â€˜If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.â€™™

I will briefly pause to note that the rich man ate sumptuously every day. Slightly more to the point is that the rich man who

every day. Oughtn't more to the point is that the rich man, who never "got it"—even in torment he treated Lazarus as a servant and seemed not to care for him—did not care for the beggar who was at his doorstep. The rich man is not faulted because he failed to feed every beggar in the world, but that he failed to feed the beggar at his doorstep.

And this brings me to a point that I'd rather not mention, that some of us meet requests for money etc. coming from Africa or the Third World, and that in my experience and those I've consulted with these requests are "little better than a con." There may be a real need; but that real need can take a gift of \$12, more than one usually gives a beggar at one's doorstep, and persist in calling it small. Some of these requests for money are probably legitimate; it has not been my knowledge that they ever stop asking for more: [The leech has two daughters; "Give, give," they cry](#). We can and perhaps should give some non-local gifts, and while charity is one of many things that finds its a natural place in the home, this is a case where organizations like [International Orthodox Christian Charities](#) can best connect gifts with needs.

But enough of this for now, which should be a footnote after one has decided to show mercy and treat all neighbors as a face of Christ himself. The whole parable is meant to hit us flat on the chest with a sledgehammer. The heart of the parable says something very sharp and stark about being in luxury and failing to care for the beggar at our doorstep. There is a classic story about how millions of starfish had washed ashore, and a man was throwing them away from the sand, where they would die, back into the sea. Someone came to him and said, "What are you doing? There are so many that you can't make a difference!" and the man threw another starfish and said, "It made a difference to that one!"

We cannot address every face of Christ in our neighbor ("And who is my neighbor?"—yet another question Christ answered with a sledgehammer; see at least part of the footnote on verse 35). It's not just that we can't make things 100% better; perhaps we cannot make things right for 1% of the population, and most likely, if we can write just one cheque that will neatly solve a problem, odds are good that Christ is not working through us. But we would do well to buy one family a bag of groceries, or [buy a cheap refurbished Lenovo Thinkpad \(a line of notebooks that is cheap and good\)](#) and [ask the local professional or teen to install Linux Mint](#). If God is working with us, there probably isn't any way we can make everything better, but that isn't the point. We may be given the opportunity to make something better, and that is the point.

This discussion would not be complete without a discussion of the rich young ruler, [Matthew 19:16-26](#):

And, behold, one came and said unto him, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" And he said unto him, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." He saith unto him, "Which?" Jesus said, "Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

The young man saith unto him, "All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?" Jesus said unto him, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me." But when the young man heard

that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, "Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

The young man said, "All of these I have kept from my youth," but this was not true. Christ quoted the commandments dealing with love of neighbor, and underscored the Law of Love. But the Ten Commandments deal first with the love of God, and in fact the young man had an idol: money. He broke "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

Christ goes on to say that all things are possible with God: in fact St. Philaret the Merciful, discussed below, is a shining example of a man who was rich and who entered the Kingdom of Heaven. And "Go and sell all that thou hast" has been taken to be not just spiritual medicine for the one man, but part of the counsels of perfection of poverty, obedience, and chastity. But those of us who are not monastics are called to be poor in spirit, to be detached from our possessions and observe spiritually what monastics observe literally.

Some people have taken the passage to mean that whatever idol is more important to you than God, that must be sacrificed, and in this case the idol happened to be money. And indeed it is good to recognize that we can have other idols besides Money in our heart, and that spiritually speaking we should tear out our right hand and our right eye if that is the cost of spiritual freedom. But it is not the case that this passage is a passage about letting go of whatever idol you have, and it so happened that in this random sampling the idol was money. This passage is

about money as well as whatever may happen to be an idol, and it is cut from the same cloth as St. Paul writing, "greed, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). Any inordinate attachment is idolatry, and there are a great many things besides money that one may be attached to. But money is an easy-to-reach hazard, and it is not random that the Bible fills out the contours of an idol in the young man's heart with "great possessions."

On to a saint who handled money well:

I would like to give one extra-Biblical source in the life of a saint. Perhaps the saints are athletes and do not represent the threshold of what is barely adequate, but people are more quickly recognized from caricatures than from merely accurate portraits, and [St. Philaret the Merciful](#) provides, if you will, a diamond-sharp outline of one caring for the poor:

Righteous Philaret the Merciful, son of George and Anna, was raised in piety and the fear of God. He lived during the eighth century in the village of Amneia in the Paphlagonian district of Asia Minor. His wife, Theoseba, was from a rich and illustrious family, and they had three children: a son John, and daughters Hypatia and Evanthia.

Philaret was a rich and illustrious dignitary, but he did not hoard his wealth. Knowing that many people suffered from poverty, he remembered the words of the Savior about the dread Last Judgment and about "these least ones" (Mt. 25:40); the the Apostle Paul's reminder that we will take nothing with us from this world (1 Tim 6:7); and the assertion of King David that the righteous would not be forsaken (Ps 36/37:25). Philaret, whose name means "lover of virtue," was famed for his love for the poor.

One day Ishmaelites [Arabs] attacked Paphlagonia,

devastating the land and plundering the estate of Philaret. There remained only two oxen, a donkey, a cow with her calf, some beehives, and the house. But he also shared them with the poor. His wife reproached him for being heartless and unconcerned for his own family. Mildly, yet firmly he endured the reproaches of his wife and the jeers of his children. "I have hidden away riches and treasure," he told his family, "so much that it would be enough for you to feed and clothe yourselves, even if you lived a hundred years without working."

The saint's gifts always brought good to the recipient. Whoever received anything from him found that the gift would multiply, and that person would become rich. Knowing this, a certain man came to St Philaret asking for a calf so that he could start a herd. The cow missed its calf and began to bellow. Theoseba said to her husband, "You have no pity on us, you merciless man, but don't you feel sorry for the cow? You have separated her from her calf." The saint praised his wife, and agreed that it was not right to separate the cow and the calf. Therefore, he called the poor man to whom he had given the calf and told him to take the cow as well.

That year there was a famine, so St Philaret took the donkey and went to borrow six bushels of wheat from a friend of his. When he returned home, a poor man asked him for a little wheat, so he told his wife to give the man a bushel. Theoseba said, "First you must give a bushel to each of us in the family, then you can give away the rest as you choose." Philaretos then gave the man two bushels of wheat. Theoseba said sarcastically, "Give him half the load so you can share it." The saint measured out a third

bushel and gave it to the man. Then Theoseba said, "Why don't you give him the bag, too, so he can carry it?" He gave him the bag. The exasperated wife said, "Just to spite me, why not give him all the wheat." St Philaret did so.

Now the man was unable to lift the six bushels of wheat, so Theoseba told her husband to give him the donkey so he could carry the wheat home. Blessing his wife, Philaret gave the donkey to the man, who went home rejoicing. Theoseba and the children wept because they were hungry.

The Lord rewarded Philaret for his generosity: when the last measure of wheat was given away, a old friend sent him forty bushels. Theoseba kept most of the wheat for herself and the children, and the saint gave away his share to the poor and had nothing left. When his wife and children were eating, he would go to them and they gave him some food. Theoseba grumbled saying, "How long are you going to keep that treasure of yours hidden? Take it out so we can buy food with it."

During this time the Byzantine empress Irene (797-802) was seeking a bride for her son, the future emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos (780-797). Therefore, emissaries were sent throughout all the Empire to find a suitable girl, and the envoys came to Amneia.

When Philaret and Theoseba learned that these most illustrious guests were to visit their house, Philaret was very happy, but Theoseba was sad, for they did not have enough food. But Philaret told his wife to light the fire and to decorate their home. Their neighbors, knowing that imperial envoys were expected, brought everything required for a rich feast.

The envoys were impressed by the saint's daughters and granddaughters. Seeing their beauty, their deportment, their clothing, and their admirable qualities, the envoys agreed that Philaret's granddaughter, Maria was exactly what they were looking for. This Maria exceeded all her rivals in quality and modesty and indeed became Constantine's wife, and the emperor rewarded Philaret.

Thus fame and riches returned to Philaret. But just as before, this holy lover of the poor generously distributed alms and provided a feast for the poor. He and his family served them at the meal. Everyone was astonished at his humility and said: "This is a man of God, a true disciple of Christ."

He ordered a servant to take three bags and fill one with gold, one with silver, and one with copper coins. When a beggar approached, Philaret ordered his servant to bring forth one of the bags, whichever God's providence would ordain. Then he would reach into the bag and give to each person, as much as God willed.

St Philaret refused to wear fine clothes, nor would he accept any imperial rank. He said it was enough for him to be called the grandfather of the Empress. The saint reached ninety years of age and knew his end was approaching. He went to the Rodolpheia ("The Judgment") monastery in Constantinople. He gave some gold to the Abbess and asked her to allow him to be buried there, saying that he would depart this life in ten days.

He returned home and became ill. On the tenth day he summoned his family, he exhorted them to imitate his love for the poor if they desired salvation. Then he fell asleep in the Lord. He died in the year 792 and was buried in the

Rodolpheia Judgment monastery in Constantinople.

The appearance of a miracle after his death confirmed the sainthood of Righteous Philaret. As they bore the body of the saint to the cemetery, a certain man, possessed by the devil, followed the funeral procession and tried to overturn the coffin. When they reached the grave, the devil threw the man down on the ground and went out of him. Many other miracles and healings also took place at the grave of the saint.

After the death of the righteous Philaret, his wife Theoseba worked at restoring monasteries and churches devastated during a barbarian invasion.

And for a last quote from the Gospels, I will turn to the [Sermon on the Mount](#), and more specifically [Matthew 6:19-34](#):

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Is not the life more

for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more  
than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of  
the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather  
into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye  
not much better than they? Do you think you can add one  
single hour to your life by taking thought? You might as well  
try by taking thought to work your way into being a foot  
taller!

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies  
of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they  
spin: And yet I say unto you, Even Solomon in all his glory  
was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so  
clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow  
is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye  
of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, "What  
shall we eat?" or, "What shall we drink?" or,  
"Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" (For after all  
these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father  
knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye  
first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all  
these things shall be added unto you.

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the  
morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.

Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

"If thine eye be single:" a casual observer might think that  
this is a bit of something else tucked into a passage on a  
different topic, and most modern translations try to provide an  
equivalent rendering of "If thine eye be sound / whole", perhaps  
with a footnote clarifying that the word has connotations of  
generosity. This much is of course true, but it is beside the  
point. "If thine eye be single" means "If your eye looks on God

with an undiluted, unmixed gaze rather than trying to serve two masters." And there is more to be said, but I am getting ahead of myself slightly. Let it be enough now to say that "If thine eye be single" is cut from the same cloth as the verses that surround it. But I am about to get ahead of myself.

Let me pick up another thread. There are a number of threads in this seamless tapestry, and they're all interconnected. To pick up another thread, Christ says, "No man can serve two masters." We may relate to money, and the things it can buy, like a servant that washes our clothes and dishes, builds a fire in the winter and cools the air in the summer, and so on and so forth. But Christ in the [Sermon on the Mount](#) does not call Money a servant, but a master. Treasures on earth may do two things: they can bring pleasure and luxury (a point which the [Sermon on the Mount](#) does not really discuss), and they can be looked for for security. And Christ unconditionally forbids us to look to money for our security, because the security we are to have is God's providence and nothing less. My commentary on the [Sermon on the Mount](#) is called [The Most Politically Incorrect Sermon in History](#), and for good reason. To pick up one thread, the whole concept of American money management, that you treat almsgiving like a luxury in that you get your ducks in order and then give a portion to others, is simply not present in the [Sermon on the Mount](#). The [Sermon on the Mount](#) bids us to be like the birds of the air and the grass of the field, whom even Solomon with his yearly tribute of 666 seventy-five pound "talents" of gold never came close to. The [Sermon on the Mount](#) bids us trust in the providence of God. Money may have legitimate use; property may have legitimate use, and I am not poor like a monastic: I own both money and property. But the question is not whether trusting in God's providence is really a

secure alternative to financial planning; the question is whether financial planning is a valid substitute for trust in the Lord's providence that leaves one as naked as Adam before the threats of the world, and the answer is no. People try to trust in financial planning because they don't trust the most superficial sense of the [Sermon on the Mount](#) here: I can remember one Protestant pastor preaching, "Don't spend your life protecting the center of things," and he was right. We do have things we legitimately need, and our Creator out of all knows our needs better than we do. We are to pray for our daily bread, an exceedingly modest request and a formality in much of the first world, and trust that the Lord who guides us is the Lord who will provide us, and not because we have a financial plan that atheist and Christian alike could see as square and sound. We are to pray, but we do not need to inform God of our needs or how important our needs are; we are to trust in ways the atheist might find strange. And the entire [Sermon on the Mount](#) is an invitation to live the divine life as sons of God.

In [A Pet Owner's Rules](#), I described God as being like a pet owner who has two rules:

- I am your owner. Receive freely of the food and drink I have provided.
- Don't drink out of the toilet!

And all the imposing "Thou shalt not"s in the Bible really boil down to "Don't drink out of the toilet." Drunkenness—not getting drunk once or twice but drunkenness being the new normal—is drinking out of the toilet, and any recovering alcoholic will tell you that bondage to alcohol is suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. It takes humility to enjoy even pride,

as G.K. Chesterton observed, and the further you sink in pride the more miserable things look: pride is drinking out of the toilet, as is lust. Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe; it disenchants everything else and then disenchants itself. All sin is drinking out of the toilet, including seeking providence in things you own, but the second rule is a footnote to the first. "Don't drink out of the toilet" is a footnote to "I am your owner. Receive freely of the food and drink I have provided you." The [Sermon on the Mount's](#) "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal" is a footnote to "But lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and thieves do not break through and steal," the words about "No man can serve two masters" is an invitation to serve the one Master whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light, and the dismissive rebuke to those who would seek a second-rate, fake, ersatz providence in something that is less than man, in cold, soulless gold or stock shares, is so that we may seek the providence of a Heavenly Father who knows and loves us better than we can ask and who can care and provide for us, in needs he himself created in us, better than all the shares of stock that the world will ever know.

## The Ladder to Heaven

I will give perhaps one last long quote, if indeed anything can be given after these Gospel passages. The intent is not to transcend them further, but rather to open them up, and transcend their outer meaning to open up their inner heart. The quotes as I have treated them are a look at the literal plain sense of Scripture, which is perfectly legitimate, and is something like Dr. Who's TARDIS: once you open them up, they are larger on the inside than on the outside.

[Fr. Damascene in an Ancient Faith Radio interview:](#)

We will begin at the beginning. The holy fathers of the Orthodox Church say that man was created in a state of pristine simplicity—“pure awareness. In the beginning, his thoughts and memories were not diversified and fragmented as they are today, but were simple and one-pointed. He knew no mental distraction. While being wiser than any human being today, he was in a state of innocence, like a child, and in this state he lived in deep personal communion with God, and in harmony with the rest of creation.

Being in such close communion with God, primordial man participated directly in God’s™ grace, which he experienced as a divine and ineffable light dwelling within his very being. Here I am referring to the Orthodox Christian understanding of Grace as the unexpected energy

Christian understanding of grace, as the uncreated energy or power of God, in which God, Himself, is fully present. The holy fathers of the Church say that we can never know God's essence, but we can know and experience God through His uncreated energy. Through God's uncreated energy, or grace, we can participate in the divine life of God, Himself.

So in the beginning man had this grace dwelling with him, united with his soul. He was created in grace, and he possessed it as his own personal strength or power, but through the wrong use of his free will, he fell from the state of grace. Before, he had had communion with God. He had acted in accordance with the Way, the Tao, in accordance with the divine Logos. His fall was a departure from the Way, and this departure resulted in a corruption of his nature. Now grace was foreign to his nature, and he no longer had it living within him. He became spiritually dead, and this spiritual death made him subject to physical death.

With man's departure from the Way, he lost the primal simplicity and became fragmented. His awareness was no longer single and one-pointed. As St. Macarius the Great wrote in the 4th century, "After his transgression, man's thoughts became base and material, and the simplicity and goodness of his mind were intertwined with evil, worldly concerns."

Also with his departure from the Way, man fell under the illusion of his self-sufficiency. Before, when he had lived in communion with God, he did not regard himself as self-sufficient. Living in harmony with the Way, he had acted spontaneously, without striving and without self-interest. When he stepped away from God, he fell to the lie that he could exist of himself. This is a lie, because without God

could exist of himself. This is a lie, because without God willing him into existence, he would be nothing at all. Now man acted with calculation, no longer spontaneously, striving for the sake of personal gain, and pitting himself against others.

Man had been made to desire and to seek God, to rise ever higher toward God in the communion of love. But when he departed from the Way, he fell to love of himself, and to desire for created things. Since the desire for created things is against man's original nature, it leads to suffering. It can never bring true, complete, and lasting happiness.

I referred to being "naked as Adam" earlier, but I was not in a position to unlock things from "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth." To have treasures on earth is not a matter of having possessions, but of wrongful attachment; the problem is in us, not in the possession, and even monks who have taken a vow of poverty may have certain property in a relative sense that may be taken away at any time that is really not much different from how non-monks may own property without falling into the trap of the rich young ruler. Many warnings are given about a world we are to avoid, but the term is occasionally made exceedingly clear: what is evil is not the rest of our Lord's Creation, but our own passionate and wrongful attachment to it. It is like alcoholism: it doesn't exist in bottles, but inside our heart.

I will now speak plainly of one rung on the Ladder to Heaven, and leave others to go further. It is wrong to hold grudges. Now that may seem a strange, if true, thing to say, but there is a real and direct connection. It is wrong for us to be attached to gold, and if getting rid of gold is the price of freedom, good riddance

to the gold! (And this again is not because the gold is diseased but because we are diseased.) And if we are unable to let go of gold because we fear what we may lose if we loosen our grip on it, what is to be said for holding onto, and being afraid to let go of, festering wounds? For a grudge is in fact a festering wound that we cling to as if it were gold. And the state of blessedness is to hold every creation loosely, whether visible or invisible, and let go of passion. And we are to let go of grudges, which are a perverse treasure for us, and be as naked as Adam.

But there is more that we hold to our hurt that Adam didn't. The unfallen Adam did not have plans as we have plans and did not have a modern identity as we have identity. Now we may have identity in the anthropological sense, meaning little more than that we speak a particular language a particular way and wear particular clothes a particular way, and that marks us as members of one community and not another. And we must wear some clothing and speak some language. But modern identity is much more, and much less, than its mere anthropological sense: no one, having ponderings about "Who am I?", resolves those ponderings by saying "I dress and talk like other people I know."

That is not enough. That is nowhere near enough for such ponderings. The difference between identity in the merely anthropological sense is like the difference between the painter who paints a portrait intended to resemble someone, and the occultist who seeks to create an image just as imbued with life as the person portrayed, in a sense like the Pygmalion legend would have it. Making a picture that is like the person it represents is a feasible project to someone with basic artistic skills. Making a picture that is not merely lifelike, but fully living and alive, is God's prerogative, and modern identity is an effort to make an identity that is much too alive.

And regarding our plans, I remember one priest talking about our having "godly ambitions." There are some contexts where people add the word "godly" when they expect a person to sense that it is something other than "godly." There is no saying in the Gospel that we shall not have plans at all, but there is at least a piecemeal condemnation of trying to plan things out under circumstances when one would think that carefully planning your words is most appropriate: *But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.* On a large scale and small, it is my experience that having and acting on big-P (P)lans is a recipe for not appreciating the here and now that God gives. Perhaps there is room for little-p (p)lans, perhaps we cannot do without planning of some sort, as we cannot do without identity in the anthropological sense. But all these things—grudges, modern identity, plans—bear the spiritual imprint of treasures on earth. Perhaps what is wrong with them may be seen in Fr. Damascene's picture of Adam. It may be beside the point that Adam wore no clothes and

A good part of the suffering that I've caused others to suffer, and that I've suffered from others myself, has to do with forming plans before you meet a person or a situation, and then trying to impose the plan and to change the situation and people when they don't follow your expectations. It's a golden way to have an unhappy romance, as I have given and received. But the same is true on much smaller scales too. Trying to get things "back on track" when they don't follow your plans is a way not to enjoy life.

did not know any language not common to all mankind. Could the unfallen Adam bear a grudge and hold on to a festering wound?

Could he have plans that existed in his head that would in his mind trump God's will unfolding around him? Could he have some curated collection of individual attributes he used to construct a

"me, myself, and I"? In fact all of this would have been immeasurably foreign to him. The unfallen Adam and Eve may have had Paradise for a home, but they did not grasp it in a stranglehold; neither would they have tried to tighten a grip around plans, identity in the modern sense, or grudges. All these things that seem inescapable to us would be a jarring note in Eden, and in fact "Do not store up treasures on earth" in its inner chamber unfolds that we are not to hold physical things as treasures on earth, and we are not to hold invisible, mental things as treasures on earth either: the festering wound of a grudge, or plans, or identity is not to have our fingers close around it. If we climb this ladder that has the literal sense of the Gospel as its base, the higher rungs reach for something incomparably better than grasping at either visible or invisible things; "Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth" is a command to not grasp anything in our hands, but open them up to receive the hand of God and then hold his hand, not choke it with a death grip. It is "Don't drink out of the toilet" all over again.

This is not the top, not near the top, of the ladder that reaches to Heaven. If it reaches above the ground level of the plain sense of the Gospel's teaching about money, it does not yet rise too many steps higher: it simply recognizes that there are more things than treasure on earth we can hold with a deathgrip, and the treasures on earth we can wrongly store up are not only possessions but anything the heart can grasp. Our hands are not made for grasping, even in love. We can hold God's hand, but not

compel or grasp it; we can hold our neighbor's hand, and perhaps we can grasp that—but only to our neighbor's harm, and our own.

But the higher one climbs the ladder, the more one is free to store up treasures in Heaven.

Would you like to climb higher on the Ladder to Heaven? Read [The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#) and the [Philokalia](#) for the science of spiritual struggle and some of the finest literature outside the Bible for spiritual growth.

And as promised, one last C.S. Lewis quote. The portion I have been able to track down is from the introduction to [The Great Divorce](#): "You cannot take all luggage with you on all journeys; on one journey even your right hand and your right eye may be among the things you have to leave behind." But the introduction itself also states: "I believe, to be sure, that any man who reaches Heaven will find that what he abandoned (even in plucking out his right eye) was precisely nothing: that the kernel of what he was really seeking even in his most depraved wishes will be there, beyond expectation, waiting for him in 'the High Countries.'"

Have a blessed Lent.

Posted on Clean Monday, Lent, 2014.

# Twelve Quotes on Orthodoxy, Ecumenism, and Catholicism

1. Ecumenism: Invented by Protestants. Adapted by Catholics. Foisted on Orthodox. Won't you agree it smells fishy?
2. Many Protestants see Catholics generously, looking at them as basically equivalent to a Protestant. Catholics extend the same spirit of generosity to see Orthodox as essentially Catholic. But the differences are fundamentally deeper.
3. What Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant share is genuinely significant. There is really a lot in common. But there is also remarkably much in common between Christian, Hindu, and classical Taoist, even if there is less in common than what Christians hold in common. The commonalities are significant, but beyond the differences also being significant, Orthodox communion makes a profound difference. Looking at theological similarities and ignoring the point of communion is a way to strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.
4. The Church must breathe with both lungs. (And the sooner she starts breathing with the Western lung, the better.)

5. I've seen the shirts that say, "Orthodox Christian in communion with Rome" and wished to make, among other things, a shirt that says "Catholic Christian in communion with the [Archdruid of Canterbury](#)." Trying to be Orthodox without being in communion with the Orthodox Church is like trying to be married without a spouse.
6. The Orthodox Church shares common ground. It has common ground in one dimension with Catholics and Protestants, and it has common ground in another dimension with Hindus and Buddhists, and you are missing the point if you say, "Yes, but other Christians share the true common ground." For all of this, the Orthodox Church is capable of sharing common ground and recognizing differences that exist. And there is a way for Catholics and Protestants, and Hindus and Buddhists as well, to receive full communion with Orthodoxy: they can become Orthodox.
7. In matters of ecumenism and especially intercommunion, Rome is Orthodox in her dealings with Protestants, and Protestant in her dealings with Orthodox. If you want to know why Orthodoxy refuses intercommunion with Rome, you might find a hint of the answer in why Rome refuses Protestant intercommunion. And if your immediate reaction is, "But our theology is equivalent," ponder this: that is also what ecumenist Protestants say to you. (And they say it in perfectly good faith.)
8. It would be strange for every pope from here on to be like Pope Benedict XVI and not Pope John XXIII. And under Pope John XXIII, the question, "Is the Pope Catholic?" might have best been answered, "Well, from a certain point of view..."
9. In the history that is common to Catholics and Orthodox,

every time someone proposed a solution like ecumenism, the Church soundly rejected it. If we have reached a state where we can reject the ancient wisdom in these decisions, this is another reason why we have departed from Orthodoxy and another reason Orthodoxy should spurn our advances.

10. Christ prayed that we all may be one. But hearing "ecumenism" in that prayer is a bit like hearing a prayer that a room may be cleaned and pushing all the clutter under a bed. Christ's prayer that his disciples may be one transcends the mere whitewash that ecumenism can only offer. (Christ's prayer that we may all be one is solid gold. Ecumenism is a rich vein, but only of fool's gold.)
11. In Catholic ecumenical advances, I have never heard anyone mention any of the concerns about things Rome has done that may be obstacles to restoring communion. What kind of healthy advance bowls over and ignores the other's reservations?
12. Good fences make good neighbors. Ecumenism tramples down fences and invites itself into others' homes. Orthodox can be good neighbors, but when they reject ecumenical advances, it is part of keeping good fences for good neighbors.

# Two Decisive Moments

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

There is a classic Monty Python "game show": the moderator asks one of the contestants the second question: "In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" The contestant looks at him with a blank stare, and then he opens the question up to the other contestants: "Anyone? In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" And there is dead silence, until the moderator says, "Now, I'm not surprised that none of you got that. It is in fact a trick question. Coventry City has never won the English Cup."

I'd like to dig into another trick question: "When was the world created: 13.7 billion years ago, or about six thousand years ago?" The answer in fact is "Neither," but it takes some explaining to get to the point of realizing that the world was created 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD.

Adam fell and dragged down the whole realm of nature. God had and has every authority to repudiate Adam, to destroy him, but in fact God did something different. He called Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, and in the fullness of time he didn't just call a prophet; he sent his Son to become a prophet and

more.

It's possible to say something that means more than you realize. Caiaphas, the high priest, did this when he said, "It is better that one man be killed than that the whole nation perish." (John 11:50) This also happened when Pilate sent Christ out, flogged, clothed in a purple robe, and said, "Behold the man!"

What does this mean? It means more than Pilate could have possibly dreamed of, and "Adam" means "man": Behold the man!

Behold Adam, but not the Adam who sinned against God and dragged down the Creation in his rebellion, but the second Adam, the new Adam, the last Adam, who obeyed God and exalted the whole Creation in his rising. Behold the man, Adam as he was meant to be. Behold the New Adam who is even now transforming the Old Adam's failure into glory!

Behold the man! Behold the first-born of the dead. Behold, as in the icon of the Resurrection, the man who descends to reach Adam and Eve and raise them up in his ascent. Behold the man who will enter the realm of the dead and forever crush death's power to keep people down.

Behold the man and behold the firstborn of many brothers! You may know the great chapter on faith, chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, and it is with good reason one of the most-loved chapters in the Bible, but it is not the only thing in Hebrews. The book of Hebrews looks at things people were caught up in, from the glory of angels to sacrifices and the Mosaic Law, and underscores how much more the Son excels above them. A little before the passage we read above, we see, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you'?" (Hebrews 1:5) And yet in John's prologue we read, "To those who received him and believed in his name, he gave the authority to become the children of God." (John 1:9) We also

read today, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I have made your enemies a footstool under your feet?'" (Hebrews 1:13) And yet Paul encourages us: "The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet," (Romans 16:20) and elsewhere asks bickering Christians, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (I Corinthians 6:3) Behold the man! Behold the firstborn of many brothers, the Son of God who became a man so that men might become the Sons of God. Behold the One who became what we are that we might by grace become what he is. Behold the supreme exemplar of what it means to be Christian.

Behold the man and behold the first-born of all Creation, through whom and by whom all things were made! Behold the Uncreated Son of God who has entered the Creation and forever transformed what it means to be a creature! Behold the Saviour of the whole Creation, the Victor who will return to Heaven bearing as trophies not merely his transfigured saints but the whole Creation! Behold the One by whom and through whom all things were created! Behold the man!

Pontius Pilate spoke words that were deeper than he could have **possibly** imagined. And Christ continued walking the fateful journey before him, continued walking to the place of the Skull, Golgotha, and finally struggled to breathe, his arms stretched out as far as love would go, and barely gasped out, "It is finished."

Then and there, the entire work of Creation, which we read about from *Genesis* onwards, was complete. There and no other place the world was created, at 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD. Then the world was created.

That is a decisive moment, but decisive moments are not some kind of special exception to Christian life. Christian history and

the Christian spiritual walk alike take their pace from decisive moments. I would like to look at the decisive moment in the Gospel reading.

In that reading, the people who have gathered to listen to Jesus went beyond a "standing room only" crowd to being so packed you couldn't get near the door. Some very faithful friends of a paralytic did the only thing they could have done.

They climbed on the roof and started digging through it. I suspect that the homeowner didn't like the idea. But they dug in, and lowered him, hoping this teacher will heal him.

Jesus saw their faith and said, "Your sins are forgiven." And people were shocked—there was a very good reason for this! If I have two friends, and one owes the other money, I can't tell the first one, "Your debt is forgiven. It's wiped clean." That's not my place. Sin is not a debt, or a crime, or even a disease. It's worse. And Christ told a man who owed an infinite debt to God that his slate was wiped clean and his sins were forgiven. And the

reason people were saying, "This man blasphemes! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" was that they understood exactly how significant it was for Jesus to say, "Your sins are forgiven."

Maybe they failed to recognize Christ as God (it is very rare that anyone but the demons identified him as the Son of God), but they were absolutely right when they said that Jesus was saying something that only God had the authority to say.

They were murmuring, and Christ knew why. So he asked them, "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Arise. Take up your mat and walk.'" Everybody knew the answer, that forgiving sins was an infinitely weightier matter, but Jesus was about to give a lesser demonstration of the exact same authority by which he said, "Your sins are forgiven." He said to the paralytic, "Arise. Take up your mat and walk." And the

paralytic did exactly that.

That is authority. That is the authority that commands the blind to gaze on the light of the Transfiguration, the deaf to listen to the song of angels, the mute to sing with God's angels, the lame to dance for joy, and what is greater than all of these, command you and me, sinners, to be freed from our sins.

Great and rare as the restoration of one paralytic may be, everybody knew that that was less important than the forgiveness of his sins. The story of that healing is a decisive moment.

But it's not the only decisive moment, and there is another decisive moment that may be much less rare, much less something we want to write home about, but is profoundly important, especially in Lent. I am talking about repentance.

When the Holy Spirit convicts me of my sin, there are two responses I give, both of which I ought to be ashamed of. The first response is to tell God that he doesn't know what he's talking about. Now of course I am not blunt enough to tell God, "You don't know what you're doing." (Perhaps it would be better if I did.) What I say instead is something like, "I can see where you're coming from, and I can see that you have a point. But I've given it a little thought and I'd like you to consider a suggestion that is much better for everyone involved. Would you consider this consolation prize?" Now again, perhaps it would be better if I were honest enough to simply tell God, "You don't know what you're doing." Not only is it not good that I do that, but it is spurning the grace of God.

When a mother takes a knife or a sharp pair of scissors from a little boy, this is not because the mother wants a pair of scissors and is too lazy or inconsiderate to go get her own pair: her motivation is entirely for the child's welfare. God doesn't

need our repentance or our sin. When he commands us through his Spirit to let go of our sin, is this for our sake or for his need? It is entirely for our own benefit, and not something God was lacking, that we are commanded to repent from sin. And this has a deeper implication. If God convicts us from our sin and asks our surrender to him in the unconditional surrender for repentance, then that is how we will be healed from our sin: it is the best medicine chosen by the Great Physician, and it is out of his mercy that the Great Physician refuses all of our consolation prizes that will cut us off from his healing love. Repentance is terrifying at times; it is letting go of the one thing we least want to give over to God, and it is only once we have let go that our eyes are opened and we realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!" The more we understand repentance the more we understand that it is a decisive moment when God is at work.

The second response I give to the Holy Spirit is even more an affront to the decisive now in which the Lord meets me. I say, "Well, I think you're right, and I need to repent of it, only now isn't the best time for me. I'd like to deal with it at another time." Here, also, things might be better if I were at least honest enough to acknowledge I was telling God, "Your timing is far from perfect." God lives outside of time, and yet he has all the time there is. There is never reason for him to say with a sheepish grin, "I know this really isn't the best time for you, but I only have two minutes right now, and I'm going to ask for you to deal with this now even though this isn't the best time." When he comes and tells us to repent, now, the reason for that is not that some point later on we may feel more like repenting and that is a better time; the reason is that by the time I am struggling against God's Spirit I have already entered the decisive moment when I can choose either to be cleansed and

freed of my sin, or keep on fumbling for the snooze button while  
God tells me, "Enough sleep! It is time for you to arise!"  
Let us repent, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and  
of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

# Unashamed

The day his daughter Abigail was born was the best day of Abraham's life. Like father, like daughter, they said in the village, and especially of them. He was an accomplished musician, and she breathed music.

He taught her a music that was simple, pure, powerful. It had only one voice; it needed only one voice. It moved slowly, unhurriedly, and had a force that was spellbinding. Abraham taught Abigail many songs, and as she grew, she began to make songs of her own. Abigail knew nothing of polyphony, nor of hurried technical complexity; her songs needed nothing of them. Her songs came from an unhurried time out of time, gentle as lapping waves, and mighty as an ocean.

One day a visitor came, a young man in a white suit. He said, "Before your father comes, I would like you to see what you have been missing." He took out a music player, and began to play.

Abby at first covered her ears; she was in turn stunned, shocked, and intrigued. The music had many voices, weaving in and out of each other quickly, intricately. She heard wheels within wheels within wheels within wheels of complexity. She began to try, began to think in polyphony — and the man said, "I will come to you later. It is time for your music with your father."

Every time in her life sitting down at a keyboard with her

...  
father was the highlight of her day. Every day but this day. This day, she could only think about how simple and plain the music was, how lacking in complexity. Abraham stopped his song and looked at his daughter. "Who have you been listening to, Abigail?"

Something had been gnawing at Abby's heart; the music seemed bleak, grey. It was as if she had beheld the world in fair moonlight, and then a blast of eerie light assaulted her eyes — and now she could see nothing. She felt embarrassed by her music, ashamed to have dared to approach her father with anything so terribly unsophisticated. Crying, she gathered up her skirts and ran as if there were no tomorrow.

Tomorrow came, and the day after; it was a miserable day, after sleeping in a gutter. Abigail began to beg, and it was over a year before another beggar let her play on his keyboard. Abby learned to play in many voices; she was so successful that she forgot that she was missing something. She occupied herself so fully with intricate music that in another year she was asked to give concerts and performances. Her music was rich and full, and her heart was poor and empty.

Years passed, and Abigail gave the performance of her career. It was before a sold-out audience, and it was written about in the papers. She walked out after the performance and the reception, with moonlight falling over soft grass and fireflies dancing, and something happened.

Abby heard the wind blowing in the trees.

In the wind, Abigail heard music, and in the wind and the music Abigail heard all the things she had lost in her childhood. It was as if she had looked in an image and asked, "What is that wretched thing?" — and realized she was looking into a mirror. No. it was not quite that: it was as if in an instant her whole

world was turned upside down, and her musical complexity she could not bear. She heard all over again the words, "Who have you been listening to?" — only, this time, she did not think them the words of a jealous monster, but words of concern, words of "Who has struck a blow against you?" She saw that she was blind and heard that she was deaf: that the hearing of complexity had not simply been an opening of her ears, but a wounding, a smiting, after which she could not know the concentrated presence a child had known, no matter how complex — or how simple — the music became. The sword cut deeper when she tried to sing songs from her childhood, at first could remember none, then could remember one — and it sounded empty — and she knew that the song was not empty. It was her. She lay down and wailed.

Suddenly, she realized she was not alone. An old man was watching her. Abigail looked around in fright; there was nowhere to run to hide. "What do you want?" she said.

"There is music even in your wail."

"I loathe music."

There was a time of silence, a time that drew uncomfortably long, and Abigail asked, "What is your name?"

The man said, "Look into my eyes. You know my name."

Abigail stood, poised like a man balancing on the edge of a sword, a chasm to either side. She did not — Abigail shrieked with joy. "Daddy!"

"It has been a long time since we've sat down at music, sweet daughter."

"You don't want to hear my music. I was ashamed of what we used to play, and I am now ashamed of it all."

"Oh, child! Yes, I do. I will never be ashamed of you. Will you

come and walk with me? I have a keyboard."

As Abby's fingers began to dance, she first felt as if she were being weighed in the balance and found wanting. The self-consciousness she had finally managed to banish in her playing was now there — ugly, repulsive — and then she was through it.

She made a horrible mistake, and then another, and then laughed, and Abraham laughed with her. Abby began to play and then sing, serious, inconsequential, silly, and delightful in the presence of her father. It was as if shackles fell from her wrists, her tongue loosed — she thought for a moment that she was like a little girl again, playing at her father's side, and then knew that it was better. What could she compare it to? She couldn't. She was at a simplicity beyond complexity, and her father called forth from her music that she could never have done without her trouble. The music seemed like dance, like laughter; it was under and around and through her, connecting her with her father, a moment out of time.

After they had both sung and laughed and cried, Abraham said, "Abby, will you come home with me? My house has never been the same without you."

# Unvera Announces New Kool-Aid Line

Unvera has announced a new line of poison Kool-Aid supplements intended to bring its distributors unique extracts of the most powerful plant toxins available to its research.

"So what makes your offering different from other MLM's?" our reporter asked. "Relational marketing," the Unvera distributor insisted, "Unvera puts things in the most flattering terms possible. We have a **team** approach that really sets us apart. And with us, you're not just a cog in the wheel fueling profits for Unvera. You are the Jim Jones of your own cult, as we repeatedly insist, and we teach you to talk about "my cult". You have the privilege to choose just what you want your cult's very own cult-ure to be. And we will push you along every step of the way unless you have excellent boundaries and know how to say 'No' and put your foot down. At Unvera, we are your religion!"

The reporter asked, "I've heard your nutraceutical supplements are really something. But are the health effects worth a putting yourself in the hands of a pushy MLM, even with your new line of Kool-Aid?"

The Unvera distributor said, "At Unvera we believe strongly

The Unvera distributor said, "AT Unvera, we believe strongly in having multiple trickles of income, and it's good financial sense. If you are good at sales, good enough that you can get a regular job, we're talking three figures, maybe four. Do you have time for a quick online presentation tonight? I'd love to recruit you for my cult. And here, have a sample of our Kool-Aid!"

The reporter said, "There is an old mandate in the business world, 'Revenue must exceed expenses' and it seems that your multi-level marketing system is like most multi-level marketing jobs: it makes its money from its 'distributors' and is designed so that revenue exceeds expenses for the company and not for its, um, 'sales' distributors."

The Unvera distributor said, "But you could be, just like every other Unvera distributor, the Jim Jones of your own cult."

Our reporter said, "But I don't **want** to be the Jim Jones of my own cult!"

The distributor's jaw dropped, flabbergasted.

# Usability for Hackers

## Usability begins with anthropology

### **... and hackers have a good start on anthropology**

If you're reading this text, there's a good chance that you are already halfway to being an anthropologist. Note: for the purposes of this chapter, 'anthropology' is used to refer to cultural anthropology. Other anthropological disciplines exist, but it is cultural anthropology and its techniques which are most directly relevant here.

How could an author know that you are probably at least half an anthropologist? Let's turn the question around, and suppose you are a Python hacker. Why are you reading this article? Visual Basic .NET has enormous marketing muscle behind it, possibly eclipsing the marketing budgets for all open source technologies put together. Guido van Rossum holds a dim view of marketing, as does much of the Python community. Monster.com lists three thousand Visual Basic positions, almost five thousand .NET positions, but only one thousand Python positions. Why are you

reading a "usability for hackers" article when you could be reading a title like [Completely Master Visual Basic in Thirty Seconds or Less?](#)

You are probably a hacker. It does not matter if you were mortified when you found out the preferred JavaScript technique to create an object with fields that aren't globally accessible variables, or if you wince when you hear of a devious way to get technology to do things that shouldn't be possible, or if you have no desire to be considered a 133t hax0r. You're probably a hacker. The classic "[How to Become a Hacker](#)" for the most part outlines things that have a very obvious relationship to being a hacker: attitudes towards technical problem solving, or learning an open source Unix, learning to program and contribute to the web, and so on and so forth. Towards the end there is a particularly interesting section because on the surface it looks completely beside the point. The section is titled "Points for Style," and mentions learning to write well, reading in science fiction, training in martial arts, meditation, music (preferably obscure), and wordplay. Other things could be added: avoiding mainstream TV or having arcane hobbies and interests, for instance, so that in a social context hackers may ask each other questions about obscure hobbies as a rough social equivalent to, "What's your favorite TV show?"

Not that any of these is necessary to be a hacker, but together these common trends point to a personality profile that can learn the anthropological style of observation relevant to usability work much more easily than the general public, or even Joe Professional Programmer who regards learning new technologies as a necessary evil rather than a joy, works in Visual Basic .NET after being swayed by advertising, goes home and watches TV after work, has probably never heard of ThinkGeek,

and would probably rather do gift shopping at Walmart even if he does know of ThinkGeek.

All of this is to say that the culture surrounding you is not like water to a fish. It is a basic fact of life that you don't automatically share the perspective of others. Cross-cultural experience or ethnic minority status may accentuate this, but this is true even if you're not (regarded as) a minority. And this kind of experience provides a very good foundation for anthropological ways of understanding exactly how you are not a user and users don't think like you.

# **Anthropological usability techniques**

## **An introductory example: Card sorting**

One basic challenge for organizing a site's information architecture is the taxonomy, or way of breaking things down. If one is asked what an example of a good taxonomy, one example of a taxonomy par excellence is the biological taxonomy that organizes all the way from kingdoms down to species or subspecies and varieties. And indeed that is one kind of taxonomy, but it is not the only possibility. If one is asked to break down a list of a fork, spoon, plate, bowl, soup, and macaroni and cheese, one obvious way is to put the fork and spoon together as cutlery, the plate and bowl together as dishware, and the soup and macaroni and cheese together as food. But this is not the only basic way, and it can make sense to put the fork, plate, and macaroni and cheese together as representing one complete option, and the spoon, bowl, and soup together as representing another basic option. Stores and websites that have adopted the latter approach, such as a gardening store or website that organizes its products according to the type of garden a customer is trying to make and what the customer is trying to do, see a significant increase in sales. Even biology could use other complementary technologies: a taxonomy that

classified organisms according to both ecosystems and their roles within their ecosystems and ecological subsystems could say something very valuable that the eighteenth century classification wouldn't.

In terms of websites, an information architecture that corresponds to the organization's org chart is never a helpful choice. Even when we are talking about an intranet intended only for organizational insiders, one section or subsite for each department is not the right choice: one better option would be to support workflow and design around the tasks that employees will be doing with the intranet.

What is the best information architecture? That's not a question to answer by looking something in a book or even thinking it out; it is something that we should work out based on what we observe doing research, even if we also read and need to do a bit of thinking. And this is the best practice across the board for usability.

One valuable exercise to help guide information architecture design is called card sorting. In this exercise, we get a stack of index cards, perhaps 3x5", and write the individual names of different pieces of functionality the website should offer, trying to name things neutrally so that the names do not have common terms suggesting how certain parts belong together.

Then we shuffle and lay out the cards, and individually ask subjects (people who will participate in an experiment and who are not insiders, whether employees of your organization for an external website, or information technology professionals) to organize them so that cards that belong together are put in the same stack.

Then we note which cards have been placed together, thank the subject, and move on to the next person.

On looking through the notes you may see something. First

On looking through the notes, we may see a few things. First, not all people think the same. We will likely see some breakdowns that are very similar, but there will likely be two or more breakdowns as fundamentally divergent as our breakdowns of the fork, spoon, plate, bowl, soup, and macaroni and cheese. Second, there will probably be a breakdown that simply catches us off guard. And this is good; it means the exercise is working.

After doing this, we can go about looking for a preferably standard information architecture that will gracefully serve the major ways we observed of breaking things down.

### **Focus groups: Cargo cult research for usability**

With an eye to how to best approach observation, we would like to take a moment to talk about Coca-Cola's blunder with "New Coke" and explain why focus groups, bringing in a group of people and asking them what they want, are deprecated as a recipe to make products that look good on paper but don't wear well in normal use. For those of you who don't remember the uproar some years back, the Coca-Cola company announced that it was switching to a new and improved formula, and there was massive public outlash from people who wanted the old Coke back. (Now the company sells both the old formula as Coke Classic and the new formula as Coke II, and Coke Classic is vastly more popular.)

Why would the Coca-Cola company announce it was terminating its cash cow? The answer is that it did naïve marketing research, ran taste tests, and asked members of the public which they would choose: the formula today sold as Coke Classic, or the formula today sold as Coke II. The rather clear answer from the taste tests was that people said they would rather have the new formula, and it was a clear enough answer

that it looked like a sensible course of action to simply drop the second-best formula. It wasn't until everybody could see that the Coca-Cola company had given itself a PR black eye that the company woke up to a baseline observation in anthropology: the horse's mouth is a vastly overrated source of information. Most anthropological observation, including the kinds relevant to usability, are about paying close attention to what people do, and not be too distracted by their good faith efforts to explain things that are very hard to get right.

## **Anthropological observation: The bedrock of usability**

### **There is more than one way to see the same situation**

The kind of observation needed is probably closest to the anthropological technique of participant observation, except that instead of participating in using software or a website, we are observing others as they use software. Half the goal is to understand how the same thing can be observed differently. To quote from James Spradley's Participant Observation, which is an excellent resource:

One afternoon in 1973 I came across the following news item in the Minneapolis Tribune:

Nov. 23, 1973. Hartford, Connecticut. Three policemen giving a heart massage and oxygen to a heart attack victim Friday were attacked by a crowd of 75 to 100 people who apparently did not realize what the policemen were doing. Other policemen fended off the crowd of mostly Spanish-speaking residents until an ambulance arrived. Police said they tried to explain to the crowd what they were doing, but the crowd apparently thought they were beating the woman.

Despite the policemen's efforts the victim,  
Evangelica Echevacria, 59, died.

Here we see people using their culture. Members of two different groups observed the same event but their interpretations were drastically different. The crowd used their cultural knowledge (a) to interpret the behavior of the policemen as cruel and (b) to act on the woman's behalf to put a stop to what they perceived as brutality. They had acquired the cultural principles for acting and interpreting things this way through a particular shared experience.

The policemen, on the other hand, used their cultural knowledge (a) to interpret the woman's condition as heart failure and their own behavior as life-saving effort and (b) to give her cardiac massage and oxygen. They used artifacts like an oxygen mask and ambulance. Furthermore, they interpreted the actions of the crowd in an entirely different manner from how the crowd saw their own behavior. The two groups of people each had elaborate cultural rules for interpreting their experience and for acting in emergency situations, and the conflict arose, at least in part, because these cultural rules were so different.

Before making my main point, I would simply like to comment that the Spanish-speaking crowd's response makes a lot more sense than it would first seem. It makes a lot of sense even on the assumption that the crowd did in fact understand the police officer's explanation that they "apparently did not understand."

What the article explicitly states is that the police officers were using an oxygen mask, and that is a device that needs to be pressed against a person's face and necessarily cover the same

parts of a person's face one would cover to try to cause suffocation. If you're not expecting something like that, it looks awfully strange. Furthermore, although I do not know whether this actually happened, it is standard operating procedure to many emergency medical technicians and paramedics who perform CPR to cut off the person's top completely, palpate to the best place to place one's hands, and mark the spot with a ball-point pen. This may or may not have happened, but if it did, it is appropriate enough for neighbors to view it as an extreme indignity. Lastly, although today's best practices in CPR are more forceful than was recommended in the past, "heart massage" is a technical term that does not refer to anything like softly kneading a friend's shoulder. The people I have met who do CPR regularly say they crack ribs all the time: cracking ribs may not be desirable on its own, but if a responder is doing good CPR with enough force to be effective, breaking a patient's ribs is considered entirely normal and not a red flag that CPR is being done inappropriately. Furthermore, the woman's age of 59 raises the question of osteoporosis. Racism is almost certainly a factor in the community's memories; the community had quite probable stories circulating of bad treatment by police officers and possible police brutality. I know that the police tried to explain what they were doing, but if I saw police apparently trying to suffocate a member of our community, possibly saw an offensive indignity in that a senior's shirt and underwear had been cut away, and saw an officer keep on forcefully shoving down on her chest and probably heard ribs crackling with every shove, it would take quite some believing, almost a reprehensible gullibility, to believe the other officers who tried to explain, "No, really, we're trying to help her!" (And, for reasons below, I would be very wary of saying that

she probably would have survived if only the crowd hadn't intervened.)

I may pause to note that neither group, nor apparently the authors of the newspaper article or anthropology text, appears to grasp how the situation would be viewed by a doctor. "Heart massage" is now more commonly known as "Cardio-pulmonary resuscitation," or CPR, resuscitation being an otherwise obscure synonym for resurrection or returning from the dead: in French religious language, for instance, resuscitation is the term one uses for Christ returning to life after death on a cross. There is, to the purist, some fundamental confusion in the marketing-style slogan, "CPR saves lives." Clinically and legally, death occurs when a person's heart stops beating. If a person is still alive, and if there is any chance of saving the person's life, then CPR is both premature and inappropriate.

Once a person enters a state of "cardiac arrest," meaning death, then there might be a possibility of getting that person back by cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, even if that is a long shot. CPR at its very best is a third as effective as a heart beating normally, and even under ideal conditions can slow deterioration to give the emergency room perhaps a 5% to 10% chance of getting the person back. And that is assuming that ideal conditions are possible: in reality ideal conditions don't happen. Though most people giving CPR do not have to deal with a crowd interpreting their efforts as assault, hoping to deliver perfect CPR is like hoping to become a good enough coder that one need not contend with debugging: Eric Raymond implicitly showed great maturity as a programmer by saying he was dumbfounded when his first attempt at Python metaprogramming worked without debugging. The person who does CPR in a public setting will contend not only with the difficulties of CPR itself,

but an "uh-oh squad," bystanders who second-guess one's efforts and create a social dynamic like that of giving a speech to an audience of hecklers.

Now there is no question of blows or physical restraint when it comes to the idea of CPR or cardiac massage as a way to save lives that is apparently shared by the newspaper article author, the anthropology author, and possibly the police, and the medical view that CPR is "only indicated in the case of cardiac arrest," meaning that it is premature and inappropriate unless a person has already died, but can preserve a remote chance of getting a patient back after the patient has crossed the threshold of clinical death. Emergency room doctors who view CPR as slowing deterioration and holding onto a slender chance of getting someone back will be quite grateful for CPR performed by police officers and other members of the general public who view CPR as a skill which saves lives. But the understanding is still fundamentally different, and differences like this come up in how computer interfaces are understood: differences you will want and need to appreciate.

### **Applying this foundation to usability**

The core of usability testing is designing some sample tasks, asking users to do them, and observe, as a fly on the wall, without helping. If you can record sessions, great; if not, a notepad, notebook, or netbook works well. (The advantage of recording sessions is that almost invariably people will say, "There's no way the user could have that much trouble with our design," and a five-minute video of a user looking everywhere on the page but where users are intended to look, is worth a thousand arguments.) Usually studying five users is sufficient.

There is a saying in customer service of "The customer is

There is a saying in customer service of, "The customer is always right." One may read the cautionary tale of a salesperson who kept on winning arguments with customers and somehow never closed a sale. And the principle is very simple. A customer who is wrong is to be treated as a valued customer as well as a customer who is right, and whether your customer is right or wrong, you treat each customer as a valued customer. Unless you are talking about an abusive customer, in which case it is appropriate to draw a line in the sand, you don't send a message of "I'm right, you're wrong."

That's not what I am talking about when I say, "The user is always right." Anyone who teaches programmers or remembers what it was like to begin programming remembers hearing, "There's no way the computer can be right! The computer has to be running my code wrong, or the compiler isn't working right!" And it is a slow and at times painful lesson that the computer is in fact (almost) always right, that no matter how right your code seems, or how certain you are, if your code is not working, it is because you did something you did not intend, and your code will begin working when you find out how your code does not obviously say what you think it does, and adjust that part of your code. Bugs in libraries and (more rarely) compilers and interpreters do exist, but one important threshold has been crossed when a programmer stops blaming the tool for confusing bugs and begins to take responsibility personally.

And in the same sense that the computer is always right, and not the sense that the customer is always right, the user is always right about how users behave. If the user interacts with the user interface and does something counterproductive, this means the same sort of thing as code doing something counterproductive if it's been compiled. The user, who is always right, has identified an area where the interface needs

right, has identified an area where the interface needs improvement. The user should be regarded as "always right" just as the computer should be regarded as "always right," and when the user is wrong, that's good information about where the user interface has problems.

I could say that the only thing we really need to do at all is observe the user. But observing the user includes a major challenge: it includes the major task of grasping things that violate our assumptions. The task is something like first encountering how JavaScript's support for object-oriented programming includes objects and inheritance, but without classes, first coming to a scripting language and asking, "When does integer overflow occur?" and being told, "Your question does have an answer, but it matters less than you might think," or the experience of a novice programmer who posted to a forum, "How do I turn off all the annoying compiler warnings I'm getting?" and was extremely frustrated to have more than one guru say, "You want to beg your compiler to give you as many warnings as you can get, and treat all warnings as errors."

It was a deft move for Google to give Chrome a single search and URL bar, but the main reason may not be the one you think. Searching was heavily enough used that Firefox made life easier for many users by adding a second bar to the right of the search bar so that we could search without first pulling up the Google homepage; for heavy users, simplifying the URL bar and the search bar into one full-width piece is the next refinement. But this is not the main reason why it was deft for Google to give Chrome a unified search/URL bar, or at very least not the only reason.

My own experience helping others out with their computers has revealed that something obvious to us has been absolutely nonexistent in their minds. Perhaps you have had the experience

nonexistent in their minds. Perhaps you have had the experience, too, of telling someone to enter something in a page's text field, and they start typing it in the URL bar, or vice versa typing a URL into a page's search field. What this unearths is that something that is patently obvious to web designers is not obvious to many web users: "Here is an important, impenetrable dividing line, and all the chrome above that line belongs to the browser, and everything below that line (above the bottom chrome, and excluding any scrollbars) belongs to the website." This division of labor is obvious enough to most web designers that only experience could teach them that there are some people who don't understand it. But the real world has many users who do not have any such concept, and behaviors like typing search terms in the URL bar (years before Chrome was available) are clues to "This is something that's out there."

And if you think, "Ok, but users are more sophisticated now," you might go through your website's search logs and see how many website addresses you can see. It won't be nearly as many as ordinary search terms, but have you ever wondered where the addresses to MySpace and porn sites in your search logs come from?

Culture shock is a fundamental reality of when things go contrary to your expectations; most of us experience small amounts of culture shock in our day-to-day living and much greater amounts if we travel to another country or do something else. The three examples given above, of classless objects in JavaScript, integer overflow in scripting languages as not terribly important, and asking for a more draconian handling of warnings are examples of culture shock in relation to technologies. As a rule of thumb, if you aren't experiencing culture shock from your user observations, you're not deriving full benefit from them and you don't understand your users well

can benefit from them, and you don't understand your users well enough to make the fullest improvements to the design. As a rule of thumb, if you aren't experiencing culture shock from your user observations, that's because you're taking a shower with your raincoat on.

### **It's just like (hard) debugging**

I would like to make one closing parallel to debugging. There are several types of debugging I am not talking about: for instance, a missing close parenthesis causes an immediate error that makes it fairly quick work to find out what is wrong and what line of code it is. A traceback can also provide an excellent starting point for quick and effective debugging. Although debugging a failed unit test may not be quite so easy, a unit test is not just a tool to say that something is wrong, somewhere; it is a tool that should point a finger, and usually narrow the search field significantly. And many other bugs that are neither syntax errors nor resolved with the help of unit tests are still easy enough to fix that we need not be terribly aware of them; when we think of debugging we may only think of the few hard bugs rather than the majority of bugs which better programmers resolve without really thinking about it, like we turn on light switches on entering a darkened room, or unzip a coat outdoors when the day warms up, without giving the matter too much conscious thought or vividly remembering that we do this. (This is, incidentally, somewhat of an ethnographic observation of good programmers.)

What I am talking about, as hard bugs, are bugs where you go through every investigative tool you can think of, and still cannot pin down what is going on. (This may include a relatively small proportion of bugs that also generate tracebacks or unit test

failures.) Observing the bug seems like observing, not a miniature ship in a bottle, but a ship in a seamless glass sphere: there's no way you can tell that the ship could have gotten in there, but it is quite clear that the ship in fact is in a glass container that has no openings that you can imagine the ship getting in through.

Isaac Asimov said, "The most exciting sound in science is not, 'Eureka!' [I've found it!], but 'That's funny,'" and the history of science bears him out. Today, X-rays are widely known among scientifically literate people to be a very high-energy, short-wavelength radiation belonging to the same spectrum as visible light, but it was not always so; the name 'X-rays' is itself a holdover from when they were a fascinating and mysterious mystery, with the 'X' in 'X'-rays referring to something unknown. It was known that they were radiation of some sort, but they passed through some opaque material and in general did not fit into anything people had a conceptual place for.

In the middle of efforts to understand this mystery, there was one physicist who stumbled upon a golden clue that X-rays might be something like light: he left unexposed photographic plates near a source of X-rays, and upon using and developing them, observed that they had all been partially exposed. His response, however, was to contact the photographic supply company and demand that they replace the photographic plates as defective. As Winston Churchill observed, "Man will occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of the time he will pick himself up and continue on."

In debugging, hard bugs, the kind that remain unresolved after we have investigated all the usual suspects, are rarely solved because we go looking for the right error and find exactly what we expected to find. With the analogy of the ship in the

sphere, it is more like deciding there has to be some kind of concealed seam from gluing or otherwise sealing an aperture big enough to allow the ship to enter, at least in pieces, and after looking the glasswork over, using magnifying glasses and lights, and still finding no trace of a seam, you stop ignoring something you had noticed along the way: the ship itself appeared surprisingly glossy. When you stop to look at the ship for a second, you realize that it is not made of the wood and cloth you expected (and that it appears to be at first glance), but as far as you can tell is shaped out of colored glass. And, after doing a little more research, you learn of a glassblower who makes colored glass ships and forms seamless glass spheres around them. In this case, you were not wrong in saying there was no seam; there is still no way that such a thing could have been crafted at room temperature, and there is in fact no ultra-subtle seam that you failed to notice in our efforts to find the seam to an aperture through which the ship could have been inserted at room temperature, even in pieces. But that's not the point. The ship in a globe was made at glassblower's temperatures, and there it is possible to create a seamless sphere around a colored glass ship.

Hard bugs are debugged successfully when you learn to stop when you stumble over the truth. And the same is true in the anthropological side of usability techniques: some things you can know to look for, and find, but the much more important competency is to recognize when you have stumbled over the truth, and stop and pay attention to something you don't know to look for.

Almost all of the difference between doing user observation badly and doing it well hinges on learning to recognize when you have stumbled over the truth.

## **Lessons from Other Areas**

### **Live cross-cultural encounters**

Learning and observing in cross-cultural encounters is an excellent way to learn how to pick up cues the way a user interface developer needs to. There are two basic cross-cultural encounters I recommend as particularly valuable. The first of these, as it takes shape in the U.S., is to spend time volunteering with an English as a Second Language program and tutor on computer basics. Or find out if you can tutor in classes at your local library. (If possible, work in an adult computer class that has seniors and not too many young people.) This may or may not be the most pleasant experience, but it is some of the most valuable. I remember one experience where I was working with a Sudanese refugee, quite possibly an escapee of the genocide against Christians, who had just had his life uprooted under presumably traumatic circumstances and was learning to deal with living in the U.S. all at once, which would presumably be trauma in itself. I remember in particular one moment when we had very slowly typed a word or two in a word processor, and ticked the button to close a document, and were staring at a dialog box asking if we wanted to save the document before closing. And I remember a slow dawning realization that not only did he not know the quite substantial cultural concepts involved

in recognizing that this was how culturally one asks a question, expecting an answer in the form of a click on one of two areas of the screen to answer "Yes," "No," or "Mu" ("Cancel"), but the question itself, "Do you want to save this document before closing?" was a question that did not exist at all in his culture, and even if I spoke his native language I would probably not be able to explain the question on terms that would make any sense to him. That was probably my most difficult teaching experience, and the one where I have the most doubts about whether I succeeded in teaching anything at all. But it was a profoundly valuable experience to me, and helped me see how things could "go without saying" to me but be baffling to others.

The second of these two cross-cultural encounters is whatever you already have. Few if any of us have no cross-cultural encounters; whether one is ethnically or (a)religiously a majority or a minority, an immigrant or a native citizen of one's country, or considering face-to-face encounters or Internet connections, most of us have at least some experience in cross-cultural encounter. The differences are there; if you have learned something from cross-cultural encounter, the experience can help us more readily recognize the cues you need to recognize.

## History

While I am wary of reducing history to merely an apparatus to understand the cultures of previous times, most historians arrive at a fairly deep understanding of a culture that is not their own, and may arrive at a sensitivity to the ways, all too easy to ignore, in which historical texts veto modern assumptions. There was an experiment in which a question concerning Abraham Lincoln and a number of historical primary sources were given to

Lincoln and a number of historical primary sources were given to a number of elementary school teachers, plus one historian of Lincoln, and a historian whose specialties were unrelated. During the time of the experiment, the elementary school teachers started with a wrong conceptual framework that imposed today's basic categories on the texts, and did not progress to anything better. The historian of Lincoln started with a highly accurate conceptual framework and very quickly arrived at the answer. But what is particularly interesting is the other historian, who was trained as a historian but had little directly relevant knowledge to Lincoln. He started with the same conceptual framework as the non-historians, but by the end he had corrected his framework to the point of reaching where the Lincoln historian had started.

This latter historian is perhaps the most interesting, not because he was initially right, but because he was self-correcting: even though his starting framework was no better than the schoolteachers, he was able enough to adjust his perspective from cues based on the text so that he reached the framework the Lincoln historian started with. And, one would imagine, the Lincoln historian would have had a similar self-correcting sensitivity to the texts had he been asked the same kind of question about a historical setting he did not initially understand.

Getting history right is relevant to us in two ways. First, one understands one, or perhaps many, other cultures more or less well. Second, when one trips over a clue that one is wrong, one stops and learns from it, instead of hoping it will go away. Both of these strengths are a powerful foundation to usability.

## **Old Books and Literature**

Books can be a very good place to sharpen anthropological competencies through meeting other cultures. However, I might clear the ground of some distractions if it is tempting to say, "But I meet other cultures in all my favorite books! I'm an avid reader of science fiction and fantasy."

All science fiction is not created equal in terms of cultural encounter. There is a marked difference between reading Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* and watching *Star Trek*. Heinlein understood both culture and culture shock, and though his book only treats one alien culture, it is written to create culture shock in the reader, and challenge us in assumptions we didn't know we had. "Whaaa—? They can't do that!" is a normal and intended reaction to several parts of the book. In *Star Trek*, there are many races, but culture shock in the viewer is almost nonexistent even when the plot is intended to surprise. To put it more pointedly, the average American's culture shock from watching years of *Star Trek* is probably much less than the average American student's culture shock from a few months' experience in a foreign exchange program, perhaps less than the culture shock in the first month of that program. By comparison with a live encounter with another human culture, the alien races in *Star Trek* have less their own alien cultures than a shared personality profile we can already relate to even when we don't like it.

Likewise, not all fantasy is created equal. J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis were both Oxford-educated medievalists who knew medieval literature intimately. The genre of fantasy that appeared in their wake, if you have seriously read medieval literature, seems by comparison like the opening rant in the movie *Dungeons & Dragons*, where a supposedly medieval character gives an impassioned "Miss America" speech about how

horrible it is that the realm's government is unlike a U.S.-style democracy. Today's genre fantasy reads like the story of Westerners from our time who happen to be wearing armor; by contrast, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* some of the characters are indeed from the twentieth century, but in terms of how the story is put together there is something a bit medieval, and not individualist, about their characterization.

If our cultures' science fiction and fantasy are not the best place to be challenged by another encounter, and to develop that kind of sensitivity, where can we go? One obvious response is to look to be challenged by books like the *Dao De Jing* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Those are both excellent places to look to be challenged, but if we assume that we can be challenged by the *Bhagavad-Gita* but not Plato, we are selling both of them short. The image in Plato of climbing out of the cave with its shadows and looking at the sun is something that a Hindu commentator on the *Bhagavad-Gita* can quite easily relate to, and in a certain sense Plato has more in common with that kind of Hinduism than with his disciple Aristotle.

What does it look like to read a text to see what one can pick up culturally? Consider the following text:

**QUANTUM THEORY, THE.** As recently as the opening years of the present century the vast majority of physicists still regarded Newton's dynamical laws as something established for all time. And they were not without solid grounds for this faith. Many phenomena were indeed known, chiefly those which may be classed under the heading radiation, e.g. black body radiation and line spectra, which refused to accommodate themselves to any sort of theory founded on Newtonian principles; but it was generally

believed that such phenomena would, sooner or later, be completely accounted for without any departure from the classical principles of physics. Even the theory of relativity developed by Lorentz, Einstein, Minkowski and their successors was regarded only as a widening or generalization of the Newtonian basis of physics. It was the culmination of classical physical theory. These phenomena we now believe, cannot be accounted for on the basis of classical physical theory, whether Newtonian or Einsteinian. The first act of sacrilege was committed by Max Planck, until recently professor of theoretical physics at the University of Berlin, about the end of the year 1900, when he initiated the quantum theory. One of the problems engaging the attention of physicists during the closing years of the last century was that of the radiation from a black body...

The reconciliation of these two aspects of the phenomenon, namely the independence of the energy of the ejected photo-electrons and the intensity, on the one hand, and the wave character of the radiation on the other, constitutes one of the most formidable problems which physical science has ever encountered...

Now I would like to make a couple of points. I could, for instance, have chosen an interminable fight narrative from a medieval Arthurian legend to say, "We look on Arthurian legends as mysterious tales of wonder. Did you know that a large portion of those legends is actually quite dull to the modern reader?" Some readers may be wondering, "This is a scientific article, not a cultural area where anything goes." But, even if science is not a domain where anything goes, there are cultural issues here, and it may be possible to date the article by cultural markers as well

as by values given for physical constants (Avogadro's number appears to be given as  $6.06 \times 10^{23}$ , not today's  $6.022 \times 10^{23}$ , and the unit of electrical charge is reported to have current values consistent with initial measurements, despite the fact that the initial reported experimental value was erroneous and subsequent experimenters fudged until it was found acceptable to report what is now believed to be the correct value.)

In the quoted text, there are two significant markers that date the text as showing significant cultural difference from how things are viewed today.

A physicist or philosopher today would say that Newtonian physics, Einsteinian physics, quantum physics, and for that matter superstring theory are fundamentally irreconcilable on an ontological plane but happen to predict the same behaviors for the kind of experiments one would expect of a high school physics lab: the predicted results for each of these theories are vastly smaller than even a top-notch experimental physicist doing high school experiments could possibly observe. But the reasons behind those differences are irreconcilable, like the difference between saying "You see this OS behavior because it is running natively on your computer" and "You see this OS behavior because it is being emulated under virtualization with several levels of indirection that are extremely slippery to understand."

The behavior predicted is interchangeable, but the reasons proposed for the behavior are fundamentally irreconcilable. Furthermore, this is not just true if one compares quantum physics with Einsteinian or Newtonian physics; it is also true if one compares Einsteinian with Newtonian physics: to today's take on things, it is a bit astonishing to say, "on the basis of classical physical theory, whether Newtonian or Einsteinian." The usual way of presenting things in a physics class today is to

present Einstein's theory of relativity as the first in a stream of foundational upsets after Newton reigned unchallenged and apparently eternally established for centuries. Today we would expect to need to dig a bit to find more examples of Einstein's theory referred to as a further expansion developing Newton, which should still be considered "classical physical theory."

The second quoted paragraph refers to how light (and, it may be mentioned, practically everything else as seen in quantum theory) behaves as a particle when treated in some ways and as a wave as treated in others. This duality has since hit the rumor mill well enough that a favorite illustration from science in theology programs is how light exists as both a particle and a wave, which reflects the extent to which the duality of light as particle and wave remains unresolved but is no longer regarded as, "one of the most formidable problems which physical science has ever encountered."

Our point is not to deride the article, which is written at a higher level of sophistication and detail than, for instance, the Wikipedia. Apart from its certitude in the existence of an "aether," slightly surprising in light of the fact that the Michelson-Morley experiment dates to 1887 and the article refers to 1900 as a past year, its picture of quantum physics portrays the same core science one would expect of a physics text today. But, even in physics, which is not in any sense a field where just anything goes, culture is present, and for that matter in this article the cultural cues alone are most likely sufficient for an historian of 20th century physics to closely date it.

This kind of cue is what you can practice learning in reading old books, and this kind of cue is what you need to be able to pick up in observing for good user interface development.

The way you observe that a user doesn't share an

understanding that is obvious to you is by the same kind of cue that can clue you in that a text doesn't share an understanding that is obvious to you.

### **The last other area: Whatever you have**

Whatever else you have is probably a resource you can draw on. Do you love birding? Birding is a hobby of observation. Do you do martial arts, for instance? A common theme in martial arts is harmony between opponents, and if you can attune yourself to a sparring partner, you should be able to attune yourself to a user.

Comedy or performing arts? You're not a good comedian if you're insensitive to your audience. Have you made a lot of mistakes, and learned from them, or at least started to learn?

Wonderful news! (Are you an amateur or professional anthropologist? That one doesn't need explaining!) There is some connection between any two areas of life; let other skill support and strengthen your usability work.

# Understanding the User

## A lesson from optimization

Knuth said, for the novice programmer, "Don't optimize," and to experts only, "Optimize later." Always writing for optimization is a recipe for bad, unreadable code, and for that matter slow code, compared to code written for clarity that is later optimized using that clarity. And Knuth also said, "Premature optimization is the root of all evil."

In one production system I was working on, I wrote one search with the realization that the implementation I was using was extremely inefficient, and had to deliberately refrain from optimizing it, to leave for later. When the whole system was put together, it took a couple of seconds longer than was acceptable, and I began mentally gearing up to optimize the inefficient search. Before doing so, I did some testing, and found to my surprise that my inefficient search implementation took very little time to run, and when I began mapping things out, found the root problem. I had called a poorly chosen method, and with it made a purely preventable network call, and that network call took a few seconds. When that problem was fixed, the remaining code ran at acceptably fast times for even the largest accounts.

This story is my own version of something that keeps on being retold in the programming literature: "Our system was running slowly, and we had reasonable ideas about what was going on

slowly, and we had reasonable ideas about what was going on here, but our reasonable ideas were wrong. We didn't know what the real problem was until we dug into some observation."

This basic lesson in optimization is a fundamental phenomenon in usability as well. We will have reasonable ideas about what the usability issues are, and our reasonable ideas will be wrong. We won't know what the real issues are until we dig into some observation.

### **What's wrong with scratching an itch, *or*, you are not your user**

The open source community is largely driven by scratching itches, but scratching a programmer's itch is a terrible way to approach user interface design.

The story is told of a program used in an office where a popup window appeared and said, "Type mismatch." And the secretary obediently typed M-I-S-M-A-T-C-H, a perfectly appropriate user response to an inappropriate error message. (This kind of thing shows up in many more subtle ways, some of which are not so obviously wrong.)

Designing a user interface that makes sense to someone who understands its inner workings, and designing a user interface that makes sense to its intended audience, are not the same thing. A mechanic's understanding of how a car starts is very elaborate and detailed, but a user should be able to get by thinking, "I turn the key and press the gas, and the car starts" without necessarily thinking anything about what's under the hood. If users need to understand what's under the hood to operate the car, the car needs improvement.

### **Worst practices from the jargon file**

The jargon file defines the extremely pejorative "PEBKAC" as:

[Abbrev., "Problem Exists Between Keyboard And Chair"]  
Used by support people, particularly at call centers and help desks. Not used with the public. Denotes pilot error as the cause of the crash, especially stupid errors that even a luser could figure out. Very derogatory. Usage: 'Did you ever figure out why that guy couldn't print?' 'Yeah, he kept cancelling the operation before it could finish. PEBKAC'. See also ID10T. Compare pilot error, UBD.

And the particular example is unfortunately revealing of an attitude user interface people need to avoid like the plague.

It is common enough in computer programs to have modal dialog boxes; the humble JavaScript `alert("Hello, world!");` is one of innumerable ways to get them. And what they mean from an ordinary nontechnical user perspective is, "A box popped up, probably one that you don't want and may not understand. What is even more annoying is that it is blocking your work; you can't continue what you are doing until you get rid of it." And so an entirely appropriate way to deal with these annoyances is get rid of them as quickly as possible.

The example given in the jargon file's definition of "PEBKAC" is, "'Did you ever figure out why that guy couldn't print?' 'Yeah, he kept canceling the operation before it could finish. PEBKAC.'" For a long time, at least, attempting to print from a GUI gave something that looked like a modal dialog box, but for this "modal dialog lookalike", there is one important difference in behavior. When you click on the button to make it go away, it destroys your print job.

*This is not a case of a problem existing between the user's*

This is not a case of a problem existing between the user's  
keyboard and chair.

It is a case of a problem existing between the user interface  
designer's keyboard and chair. PEBKAC.

To pick on the jargon file a little more, "Drool-proof paper" is  
defined as:

Documentation that has been obsessively dumbed down,  
to the point where only a cretin could bear to read it, is said  
to have succumbed to the "drool-proof paper syndrome" or  
to have been "written on drool-proof paper". For example,  
this is an actual quote from Apple Computer's LaserWriter  
manual: "Do not expose your LaserWriter to open fire or  
flame."

Let's ignore the fact that this sounds less like a technical  
writer trying to be easy to understand, than corporate legal  
counsel trying to ward off ambulance chasers.

There is a very user-hostile attitude here, the basic idea that  
if your system is too difficult for your users to understand, the  
users must be too stupid, and making something user-friendly is  
a matter of stretching to meet people you shouldn't have to  
cater to. Stories and terms like this circulate among  
programmers. I might suggest that terms like these, for your  
software's audience, are little, if any, better than a racial slur.  
They reflect an attitude we don't need.

## Python and usability

You do not really understand Python until you understand something about usability as it appears in Python. Usability is the soul of 'Pythonic'.

### **It's not all about the computer!**

There is something genuinely different about Python, and to explain it I would like to discuss the advantages of *C*.

If you want to nano-optimize every ounce of performance you can get, there is little serious competition to *C*. You can write assembler for different platforms, or write in a *C++* that is multiparadigm like Python and have some parts of your program use high-level features like objects, templates, and operator overloading, while still writing almost unadulterated *C* for parts that are performance-critical. And the group of programmers that "vote with their keyboards" for using *C* this way, includes Guido van Rossum, who created Python. The first and canonical Python implementation is written in *C*, and a Pythonista underscoring the point that Python's switch statement is a very efficient dictionary will explain that Python's dictionary is implemented in tightly optimized *C*.

But this kind of advantage comes at a price. In the canonical list of ways to shoot yourself in the foot in different programming languages, *C* is "for people who want to load their

own rounds before shooting themselves in the foot." In one Python forum, a wannabe 133t hax0r asked how to write a buffer overflow in Python, and a wry Pythonista replied apologetically: "We're sorry, but Python doesn't support that feature." But C does support the "feature" of buffer overflows; its default string handling never leaves home without it. With manual memory management and manual handling of pointers, C also supports "features" including all kinds of memory leaks and subtle pointer errors that can be extremely difficult to debug. Python closes this Pandora's box, although Python is hardly the only language with the wisdom to do so. Python, PHP, Ruby, Perl, Tcl, and Java all close the Pandora's box that must be wide open if you are to have tightly optimized C.

C has been called a language that combines the power of using assembler with the ease of using assembler, and I know of no compiled language that surpasses C for power over bare metal, or for corresponding possibilities for tight optimization. However, this is not the only way to keep score. Python keeps score by another metric: programmer productivity.

The one overriding concern motivating decisions in Python is not how you can get the tightest control over the computer's productivity. It's how to let the programmer be most productive, and it has been said of this relentless pursuit of programmer productivity that capital sentences are passed with less thorough deliberation than obscure Python features. And if you've used Python, the difference you have experienced is precisely because of this one overriding concern, this relentless pursuit. The people in charge of Python have decided that Python isn't about what to do to optimize the computer; it's about what you do to empower the programmer.

If you're interested in usability, you have a good working

example of usability to look at. To put Python's strength a little differently, Python is a language where the one overriding concern and relentless pursuit is usability for you, the programmer. If you are working on usability, you are working to give end-users the same kind of thing that Python gives you. You are making a product more Pythonic to use, as opposed to giving the more C-like experience of an interface that lets users load their own rounds before shooting themselves in the foot. Usability is about how to go from giving C user interfaces, to giving Pythonic user interfaces.

# Usability, the Soul of Python

## *An Introduction to Programming Python Through the Eyes of Usability*

[cjshayward.com/python](http://cjshayward.com/python)

I would like to begin discussing Python with a feature that causes puzzlement to good programmers first meeting Python: significant whitespace.

Few features in Python are absolutely unique, and Python did not pioneer the concept of significant whitespace. The basic concept in significant whitespace is that how you use spaces, tabs, line breaks, etc. necessarily communicates certain basic aspects of your program, like how individual statements should be grouped together (or not). Previous influential languages to use significant whitespace include Cobol and Fortran, which are known by reputation, a reputation that survives in sayings like, "A computer without Cobol and Fortran is like a slice of chocolate cake without ketchup and mustard," "The teaching of Cobol cripples the mind. Its teaching should therefore be regarded as a criminal offence," or "You can tell how advanced of a society we live in when Fortran is the language of supercomputers." Early exposure to Fortran left an undeniably foul taste in Eric

Raymond's mouth, and when he learned that Python had significant whitespace, he repeatedly described Python's first impression on him as "a steaming pile of dinosaur dung."

Since the days of fixed formatting as in Cobol and Fortran, there was the invention of what is called freeform formatting, which means that as long as you follow a few basic rules, you can use whitespace to format your code however you please. The list of languages that have embraced this feature include C, C++, Java, C#, Perl, PHP, and SQL, and that's really just naming a few of the bigger players. Freeform formatting means that the compiler will accept all of the variations of the "internet user's drinking song" below as equivalent:

```
    for(i = 99; i > 0; ++i) {
        printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n", i);
        printf("%d slabs of spam,\n", i);
    printf("Send one to abuse and Just Hit Delete,\n");
    printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n\n", i + 1);
    }
```

```
        for(i = 99; i > 0; ++i)
        {
            printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n", i);
            printf("%d slabs of spam,\n", i);
        printf("Send one to abuse and Just Hit Delete,\n");
        printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n\n", i + 1);
        }
```

```
            for(i = 99; i > 0; ++i)
            {
                printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n", i);
                printf("%d slabs of spam,\n", i);
            printf("Send one to abuse and Just Hit Delete,\n");
            printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n\n", i + 1);
            }
```

```
                for(i = 99; i > 0; ++i)
                {
                    printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n", i);
                    printf("%d slabs of spam,\n", i);
                printf("Send one to abuse and Just Hit Delete,\n");
                printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n\n", i + 1);
                }
```

```

printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n", i + 1),
    }

```

Which is best? From a usability standpoint, the braces go with the lines to print out the stanza rather than the for statement or the code after, so the following is best:

```

for(i = 99; i > 0; ++i)
    {
    printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n", i);
    printf("%d slabs of spam,\n", i);
    printf("Send one to abuse and Just Hit Delete,\n");
    printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n\n", i + 1);
    }

```

The One True Brace Style did a good job of being thrifty with lines of screen space when monitors were small, but it is confusing now: the close curly brace is visually grouped with lines that follow: if I add a line:

```

for(i = 99; i > 0; ++i) {
    printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n", i);
    printf("%d slabs of spam,\n", i);
    printf("Send one to abuse and Just Hit Delete,\n");
    printf("%d slabs of spam in my mail!\n\n", i + 1);
    }
printf("I suppose even integer overflow has its uses...\n");

```

the close curly brace is visually grouped with the subsequent exclamation, and not, what would be better, visually grouped with the drinking song's stanza.

But the issue goes beyond the fact that the common style bold enough to proclaim itself as the One True Brace Style may not be the top usability pick now that we have larger monitors. The styles I mentioned are some of the styles that significant numbers of programmers who care about well-formatted code advocate for; freeform allows for laziness, and for that matter paved the way for one of the first contests elevating bad programming to a refined art form: the International

Obfuscated C Code Contest, where C code submitted was code that worked, but top-notch C programmers look at the code and have no idea how it works. (In the Computer Bowl one year, Bill Gates as moderator asked contestants, "What contest, held annually via UseNet, is devoted to examples of obscure, bizarre, incomprehensible, and really bad programming?" An ex-Apple honcho slapped the buzzer and said, "Windows!" The look on Bill Gates's face was classic, but this answer was not accepted as correct.) But deliberately lazy or inappropriately clever formatting isn't the real problem here either.

The problem with the fact that people can format freeform code however they want is that people do format freeform however they want. Not only do programmers grow attached to a formatting style, but this is the subject of holy wars; to go through another programmer's code and change all the formatting to another brace style is quite rude, like a direct invasion of personal space. And no matter what choice you make, it's not the only choice out there, and sooner or later you will run into code that is formatted differently. And worse than the flaws of any one brace style are the flaws of a mix of brace styles and the fact that they seem to be tied to personal investment for programmers who care about writing code well. Even if there are not ego issues involved, it's distracting. Like. What. Things. Would. Be. Like. If. Some. English. Text. Had. Every. Word. Capitalized. With. A. Period. Afterwards.

One way of writing the same code in Python would be:

```
count = 99
while count > 0:
    print u'%d slabs of spam in my mail!' % count
    print u'%d slabs of spam,' % count
    print u'Send one to abuse and Just Hit Delete,'
        count += 1
    print u'%d slabs of spam in my mail!' % count
```

```
print u''
```

The braces are gone, and with them the holy wars. Whatever brace styles Python programmers may happen to use in languages with braces, all the Python code looks the same, and while the major brace styles illustrated above are a few of many ways the C code could be laid out, there's only one real way to do it. It would not in principle be very difficult to write a program that would transform freeform syntax to Python, "compiling to Python" so to speak and allowing a freeform variant on Python, but so far as I know it's never been done; people who have gotten into Python seem to find this unusual feature, shared with some ridiculed predecessors, to be a decision that was done right. And in fact the essay "Why Python?" in which Eric Raymond said that Python's significant whitespace made the first impression of a "steaming pile of dinosaur dung", goes on to give Python some singular compliments, saying of one particular good experience with Python, "To say I was astonished would have been positively wallowing in understatement."

Another point about usability may be made by looking at "natural" languages, meaning the kinds of languages people speak (such as English), as opposed to computer languages and other languages that have been artificially created. Perl is very unusual among computer languages in terms of having been created by a linguist who understood natural languages well; it may be the only well-known programming language where questions like "How would this work if it were someone's native language?" are a major consideration that shaped the language. But there is a point to be made here about two different types of spoken languages, trade languages and languages that are native languages, that have everything to do with usability.

If you were born in the U.S. and grew up speaking English, you

could presumably not just travel around your state but travel thousands of miles, traveling from state to state coast to coast all the while being able to buy food, fuel, lodging, and the like without language being an issue. For that matter, you could probably strike up a meandering chat with locals you meet in obtaining food, fuel, and lodging without language being an issue. Even if their faraway English sounded a little different, you have pretty complete coverage if you know just one language, English.

For many people you meet, English would be their native language, too. Spanish is widely spoken and there are large groups with other native languages, but this does not really change the fact that you can travel from coast to coast, buy basic travel necessities, and for that matter chat if you want and only need English.

This is not something universal across the world. Nigeria in Africa is a country about the size of Texas, and it doesn't have a native language; it has hundreds of them. It is not at all something to be taken for granted that you can travel twenty miles and order food and basic necessities in your native language. (Depending on where you live, if you are a Nigerian, you may regularly walk by people on the street who may be just as Nigerian as you, but neither of you knows the other's native language.) And in the cultures and peoples of Africa, there is a basic phenomenon of a trade language. A trade language, such as Hausa in Nigeria and much of West Africa, or Swahili in much of East Africa, may or may not have any native speakers at all, but it is an easy-to-learn language that you can use for basic needs with people who do not speak your native language. If you are from the U.S. and were to need a trade language to get along with traveling, perhaps neither you nor the other party would

know a trade language like Swahili well enough to have a long and meandering chat, but you would be able to handle basic exchanges like buying things you need. One of the key features of a good trade language's job description is to be gentle to people who do not eat, sleep, and breathe it.

With that stated, it might be suggested that Perl is the creation of a linguist, but a linguist who seemed not to be thinking about why a language like English is hard for adults to learn and, in its native form, is a terrible trade language. English may be a powerful language and an object of beauty, but what it is not is easy for beginners the way Swahili is. English is considered an almost notoriously difficult language for an adult learner, and even English as a Second Language teachers may need a few sensitivity experiences to understand why the English pronunciation that they find second nature is so tricky and confusing for adult speakers of other languages to pin down. The enormous English vocabulary with so many ways to say things, and the broad collection of idioms, are tremendous tools for the skilled English communicator. It is also a daunting obstacle to adults who need to learn the many ways English speakers may say something to them. English has many things to appreciate as a native language, but these strengths are the opposite of what makes for a good trade language that adults can learn. Perl, designed by a linguist, is a bit like English in this regard. If you've given it years and years of hard work, Perl breathes very attractively, a native language to love. But if you're starting out, it's needlessly cryptic and confusing: the reasons people love the Pathologically Eclectic Rubbish Lister (as Perl as called by its biggest fans) are reasons it would make a painful trade language. A language like Visual Basic may be said to be the opposite on both counts, as making a very gentle start to programming, but

not a good place to grow to be an expert programmer: the sort of place where you'll be constricted by the language's ceiling. But Python pulls off the delicate balancing act of working well as a trade language where a programmer can be productive very quickly after starting, and having room to grow for those programmers who are able to experience it more like a native language. Visual Basic is an easy trade language but a limited native language. Perl is a vast native language and painfully vast as a trade language. Python is both an easy trade language for those beginning and a deep native language for gurus.

Perl users have an acronym, TMTOWTDI, pronounced "tim-towdy," standing for "There's more than one way to do it." It has been suggested that top-notch Perl programmers are slightly more productive than top-notch Python programmers, and if you were to speak a computer language natively, Perl would be an excellent choice. But it is not entirely easy to learn or read Perl, and this is not just something that affects novices. A classic joke reads:

**EXTERIOR:** DAGOBAH--DAY With Yoda strapped to his back, Luke climbs up one of the many thick vines that grow in the swamp until he reaches the Dagobah statistics lab.

Panting heavily, he continues his exercises--grepping, installing new packages, logging in as root, and writing replacements for two-year-old shell scripts in Python.

**YODA:** Code! Yes. A programmer's strength flows from code maintainability. But beware of Perl. Terse syntax... more than one way to do it... default variables. The dark side of code maintainability are they. Easily they flow, quick to join you when code you write. If once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny, consume you

it will.

**LUKE:** Is Perl better than Python?

**YODA:** No... no... no. Quicker, easier, more seductive.

**LUKE:** But how will I know why Python is better than Perl?

**YODA:** You will know. When your code you try to read six months from now.

This difference boils down to usability. It is a truism that code is read many more times than it is written, and write-only code is very much "the dark side of code maintainability."

Someone said, "Computer scientists stand on each other's shoulders. Programmers stand on one another's toes. Software engineers dig one another's graves," and write-only code is code with bad programmer usability, and a way of digging your own grave.

Perl carries on a tradition of one-liners, a program that has only one clever line, like:

```
perl -lne '(1x$_) !~ /^1?$|^(11+?)\1+$/ && print "$_ is prime"'
```

There is a tradition of writing programs like these that show off your cleverness. The Python community does not favor shows of cleverness in quite the same way; in fact, saying, "This code is clever," is a respectful and diplomatic way of saying, "You blew it." There is a well-known Easter egg in Python; normally one uses the import statement to let code access an existing module for a specific task, but if you start the Python interpreter interactively (in itself a powerful learning tool to try things out and learn some things quickly) and type import this, you get:

```
>>> import this  
The Zen of Python, by Tim Peters
```

Beautiful is better than ugly.  
Explicit is better than implicit.  
Simple is better than complex.  
Complex is better than complicated.  
Flat is better than nested.  
Sparse is better than dense.  
Readability counts.  
Special cases aren't special enough to break the rules.  
Although practicality beats purity.  
Errors should never pass silently.  
Unless explicitly silenced.  
In the face of ambiguity, refuse the temptation to guess.  
There should be one-- and preferably only one --obvious way to do  
Although that way may not be obvious at first unless you're Dutch.  
Now is better than never.  
Although never is often better than \*right\* now.  
If the implementation is hard to explain, it's a bad idea.  
If the implementation is easy to explain, it may be a good idea.  
Namespaces are one honking great idea -- let's do more of those!

This little poem speaks against trying to be as clever as you  
can, and this is something deep in Python's veins.

While simplicity is important in Python, Python is a  
multiparadigm language (like many others, including Ocaml and  
JavaScript as well as Perl) and directly supports procedural,  
object-oriented, and (in part) functional programming, letting  
the programmer choose what works best for a situation. On this  
point I may point out that object oriented programming is not a  
better way of solving problems than procedural programming; it  
is one that scales better for larger projects. I would choose  
object oriented methodology over procedural for large projects,  
and procedural over object oriented for small to intermediate  
sized projects, with some tiny projects not even needing  
procedural structure. (If I have enough cargo to fill the trailer  
on an eighteen wheel truck, then the most efficient use of  
resources is to pay for that way of transporting the payload, but  
if the cargo fits neatly inside an envelope, a postage stamp is  
enough.)

Let's look at some of the core language features that are likely to come up.

Python is a scripting language, along with such languages as Perl, PHP, Ruby, Tcl, and shell scripting like bash. As opposed to C and C++ which are compiled to a standalone executable (or library, etc.), Python is interpreted from a script's source file, or more precisely compiled to a bytecode. To simplify slightly, "the thing you run" is usually not a separate executable that is derived from the source code; "the thing you run" is effectively the source code. Now Python does have compiled bytecode, and it is possible to get an implementation of Python that runs on a Java VM or creates a standalone executable, but distributing a Python program or library usually means distributing the source code. Because in Python we are effectively "running the source code," this usually means a faster feedback cycle than the edit-compile-test process one uses in working with a C application. For some Python software such as CherryPy, if you make a change in one of your source files, the application immediately reloads it without needing separately quit and restart, making the feedback cycle even shorter and more responsive.

The "significant whitespace" mentioned earlier means that a statement usually ends with a line break rather than a semicolon. You are allowed to add a semicolon at the end of a statement or use semicolons to separate more than one statement on a single line; hence both of the following are legal:

```
print u'Hello, world!';  
print u'Ping!'; print u'Pong!'
```

However, the standard practice is to let line breaks end your statements:

```
print u'Hello, world!'
```

Note that this differs from JavaScript, where the final semicolon on a line is treated as optional but it is usually considered best practice to explicitly include the semicolon. In Python, it is uncommon to end a statement with a semicolon.

If you want to break a statement over multiple lines, usually because it would be a very long line otherwise, you can end a line with a backslash, and then continue after whitespace, which I suggest you indent to two spaces more than the beginning of the line:

```
print \  
u'Hello, world!'
```

There are some cases where the backslash is optional and discouraged: in particular, if you have open parentheses or square/curly braces, Python expects you to complete the statement with more lines:

```
stooges = [  
    u'Larry',  
    u'Moe',  
    u'Curly',  
]  
  
opposites = {  
    True: False,  
    False: True,  
}  
  
falsy = (  
    False,  
    0,  
    0.0,  
    '',  
    u'',  
    {},  
    [],  
    (),  
    None,  
)
```

The three statements above represent three basic types: the list, the dictionary, also called the hash, dict, or occasionally associative array, and also the tuple. The list, denoted by square braces ("[]") and tuple, which is often surrounded by parentheses ("()") even though it is not strictly denoted by them unless a tuple is empty, both contain an ordered list of anything. The difference between them is that a tuple is immutable, meaning that the list of elements cannot be changed, and a list is mutable, meaning that it can be changed, and more specifically elements can be rearranged, added, and deleted, none of which can be done to a tuple. Lists and tuples are both indexed, with counting beginning at zero, so that the declaration of stooges above could have been replaced by creating an empty list and assigning members:

```
stooges = []
stooges[0] = u'Larry'
stooges[1] = u'Moe'
stooges[2] = u'Curly'
```

I will comment briefly that zero-based indices, while they are a common feature to most major languages, confuse newcomers: it takes a while for beginning programmers to gain the ingrained habit of "You don't start counting at 1; you start counting at 0."

The dictionary is a like a list, but instead of the index automatically being a whole number, the index can be anything that is immutable. Part of my first introduction to Perl was the statement, "You're not really thinking Perl until you're thinking associative arrays," meaning what in Perl does the same job as Python's dictionary, and lists and dictionaries in particular are powerful structures that can do a lot of useful work.

The example of a tuple provided above are some of the few values that evaluate to false. In code like:

```
if condition:
    run_function()
else:
    run_other_function()
while condition:
    run_function()
```

The if and while statements test if condition is true, and the variable condition can be anything a variable can hold. Not only boolean variables but numbers, strings, lists, dictionaries, tuples, and objects can be used as a condition. The rule is basically similar to Perl. A very small number of objects, meaning the boolean False, numeric variables that are zero, containers like lists and dictionaries that are empty, and a few objects that have a method like `__nonzero__()`, `__bool__()`, or `__len__()` defined a certain way, are treated as being falsy, meaning that an if statement will skip the if clause and execute the else clause if one is provided; and a while statement will stop running (or not run in the first place). Essentially everything else is treated as being truthy, meaning that an if statement will run the if clause and skip any else clause, and a while loop will run for one complete iteration and then check its condition again to see if it should continue or stop. (Note that there is a behavior that is shared with other programming languages but surprising to people learning to program: if the condition becomes false after some of the statements in the loop has run, the loop does not stop immediately; it continues until all of the statements in that iteration have run, and then the condition is checked to see if the loop should run for another iteration.) Additionally, if, else, while, and the like end with a colon and do not require parentheses. In C/C++/Java, one might write:

```
if (remaining > 0)
```

In Python, the equivalent code is:

```
if remaining > 0:
```

If-then-else chains in Python use the `elif` statement:

```
if first_condition:
    first_function()
elif second_condition:
    second_function()
elif third_condition:
    third_function()
else:
    default_function()
```

Any of the example indented statements could be replaced by several statements, indented to the same level; this is also the case with other constructs like `while`. In addition to `if/else/elif` and `while`, Python has a `for` loop. In *C*, the following idiom is used to do something to each element in array, with *C++* and *Java* following a similar pattern:

```
sum = 0;
for(i = 0; i < LENGTH; ++i)
{
    sum += numbers[i];
}
```

In Python one still uses `for`, but manually counting through indices is not such an important idiom:

```
sum = 0
for number in numbers:
    sum += number
```

The `for` statement can also be used when the data in question isn't something you handle by an integer index. For example:

```
phone_numbers = {
    u'Alice Jones': u'(800) 555-1212',
    u'Bob Smith': u'(888) 555-1212',
}
```

In this case the dictionary is a telephone directory mapping

In this case the dictionary is a telephone directory, mapping names to telephone numbers. The key "Alice Jones" can be used to look up the value "(800) 555-1212", her formatted telephone number: if in the code you write, `print phone_numbers[u' Alice Jones']`, Python will do a lookup and print her number, "(800) 555-1212". If you use `for` to go through a dictionary, Python will loop through the keys, which you can use to find the values and know which key goes with which value. To print out the phone list, you could write:

```
for name in phone_numbers:
    print name + u': ' + phone_numbers[name]
```

This will print out an easy-to-read directory:

```
Alice Jones: (800) 555-1212
Bob Smith: (888) 555-1212
```

Now let us look at strings. In the examples above, we have looked at Unicode strings, and this is for a reason. If you are in the U.S., you may have seen signs saying, "Se habla español," Spanish for "We speak Spanish here," or "Hablamos español," Spanish for "We don't speak Spanish very well." The difference is something like the difference in Python between:

```
sum = 0
for number in numbers:
    sum += number
```

and:

```
sum = 0
index = 0
while index < len(numbers):
    sum += numbers[index]
    index += 1
```

Now if one is sticking large block letters on a sign in front of a store, it is acceptable to state, "SE HABLA ESPANOL"; it's

appropriate to use an "N" because you don't have any "ñ"s, a bit like how it doesn't bother people to use a "1" because you've run out of "I"s or an upside-down "W" because you've run out of "M"s. And to pick another language, Greeks often seem willing to write in Greek using the same alphabet as English; this is the equivalent of writing "Hi, how are you?" in English but written with Greek letters: "ai ou ap iu:" it works pretty well once you get used to it, but it's really nice to have your own alphabet.

There is one concern people may have: "So how many translations do I have to provide?" I would suggest this way of looking at it. The people in charge of major software projects often try to produce fully internationalized and localized versions of their software that appears native for dozens of languages, but even they can't cover every single language: if you support several dozen languages, that may be full support for 1% of the languages that exist. Even the really big players can't afford an "all-or-nothing" victory. But the good news is that we don't need to take an "all-or-nothing" approach. Russians, for instance, are often content to use forum software that has an interface and a few other things in English, and most of the discussion material in Russian. Perhaps the best thing to offer is a fully translated and localized Russian version of the forum, but many Russians will really do quite well if there is a good interface in English, and if the forum displays Russian discussions without garbling the text or giving errors.

The most basic of the best practices for internationalization and localization is to choose Unicode over ASCII strings. ASCII lets you handle text in a way that works for American English; Unicode lets you handle text in a way that works for pretty much everybody. Working with Unicode strings is similar to working with ASCII strings, but once you use Unicode, you can store

information people enter in other languages for free.

In Python code, an ASCII string looks like 'foo' or "foo", and a Unicode string has a 'u' before the opening quote, like u'foo' or u"foo". Strings may be marked off by either double or single quotes, and a triple double quote or triple single quote can be used to mark a multiline string (which can contain double or single quotes anywhere except for possibly the last character):

```
print u'''Content-type: text/html

        <!DOCTYPE html>
<html xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml" xml:lang="en">
    '''
```

The only gotchas are that you cannot include the same triple quotation mark delimiter, and if the last character of the string is the same kind of character, it needs to be escaped with a backslash, like: u'''This string ends with an apostrophe: \'''.

Probably the next step to internationalization after using Unicode strings is, instead of storing the interface language in your code like:

```
print u'Please enter your email address below:'
```

you would instead do string look-ups that would pull the appropriate translation:

```
print translate(messages.PLEASE_ENTER_YOUR_EMAIL_ADDRESS_BELOW)
```

If you do this, the only language that needs to initially be supported is your own, perhaps tested by a second language, but then you don't need to do major rewrites to support a second language, or a third, fourth, or twelfth. Maybe that wouldn't be a perfect localization, but it's another major step, and it's not too hard.

Having looked at that, let's look at another topic: exceptions and errors. Exceptions are thrown when something doesn't work

and errors. Exceptions are thrown when something doesn't work ideally, and usually you want to catch them. The basic idea is that plan A didn't work and you should have a plan B.

For example, suppose that you have a string value that's supposed to be an integer displayed as a string, like `u'1'`. Suppose further that you want to get the integer out of the string, but default to 0 if parsing fails (for instance, `u'one'` will not be parsed as an integer). Then you can write:

```
try:
    result = int(input)
except ValueError:
    result = 0
```

This code says that plan A is to get an appropriate integer value out of the input, and plan B is to set a default of 0. This kind of thing is very appropriate in dealing with the web, where you should assume that input is inappropriate and possibly malicious until proven otherwise. If you write a web script that asks people to enter their age, and someone hits two keys at once and enters an age of `u'22w'`, you need to be able to roll with it-and this is nothing next to what might happen if someone is acting maliciously. In working on the web, there may be ideal input that you intend, but both from a usability and a security perspective you need to be able to respond appropriately to input that was not what you intended. If you only type:

```
result = int(input)
```

your whole program will break on even an innocent typo like entering `u'22w'` when asked for their age.

Exceptions are important in Python. In Java and some other languages, recommended best practices say, "Exceptions should not be used for regular flow control." In other words, an exception is only appropriate for a very rare case when

something very unusual has happened. That is not how Python works, and exceptions are a commonly used way of saying "the ideal case didn't happen." Perhaps you have seen the famous "Mom's Brownie Recipe" on the web:

- Remove teddy bear from oven and preheat oven to 375.
- Melt 1-cup margarine in saucepan.
- Remove teddy bear from oven and tell JR. "no, no."
- Add margarine to 2 cups sugar.
- Take shortening can away from JR. and clean cupboards.
- Measure 1/3-cup cocoa.
- Take shortening can away from JR. again and bathe cat.
- Apply antiseptic and bandages to scratches sustained while removing shortening from cat's tail.
- Assemble 4 eggs, 2-tsp. vanilla, and 1-1/2 cups sifted flour. Take smoldering teddy bear from oven and open all doors and windows for ventilation.
- Take telephone away from Billy and assure party on the line the call was a mistake.
- Call operator and attempt to have direct dialed call removed from bill.
- Measure 1-tsp. salt & a cup nuts and beat all ingredients well.
- Let cat out of refrigerator.
- Pour mixture into well-greased 9x13-inch pan.
- Bake 25 minutes.
- Rescue cat and take razor away from Billy.
- Explain to kids that you have no idea if shaved cats will sunburn.
- Throw cat outside while there's still time and he's still able to run away.
- Mix the following in saucepan: 1 cup sugar, 1 oz unsweetened

chocolate, 1 cup margarine.

- Take the teddy bear out of the broiler and throw it away—  
far away.
- Answer the door and meekly explain to nice police officer  
that you didn't know JR. had slipped out of the house and  
was heading for the street.
- Put JR. in playpen.
- Add 1/3-cup milk, dash of salt, and boil, stirring constantly  
for 2 minutes.
- Answer the door and apologize to neighbor for Billy having  
stuck a garden hose in man's front door mail slot. Promise to  
pay for ruined carpet.
- Tie Billy to clothesline.
- Remove burned brownies from oven.
- Start on dinner!

Because people are intelligent, you can write a recipe book and describe only the ideal case. When you're programming, you need to be able to say, "This is plan A; this is plan B if plan A doesn't work; this is plan C if plan B doesn't work." You can't just say, "Gather these ingredients, mix, and bake;" you need all the except clauses like, "Remove teddy bear from oven..."

In addition to try and except, there is a finally clause which follows the try clause and any except clauses, and is to be executed whether or not an exception was caught. It can appear:

```
try:  
output_message(warning)  
finally:  
log_message(warning)
```

or:

```
try:  
result = items[0]
```

```

    result = 0
except IndexError:
    result = 0
finally:
    return result

```

One note to be given: it can be appropriate to put `pass` in an `except` clause, so we have:

```

    total = 0
for input in inputs:
    try:
        total += int(input)
    except ValueError:
        pass

```

If you are making a running sum, it may be appropriate to ignore a specific error like this. But it is begging trouble to do:

```

    try:
        first_method()
        second_method()
        third_method()
    except:
        pass

```

This use of `except:` is a bit like the `goto` statement; it offers convenience at the beginning and can bring headaches down the road. What it says is, "Try to run these three methods; if anything goes wrong, just ignore it and move on." And this is a recipe to bake JR's teddy bear at 375 and then be left wondering why the house is so full of foul-smelling smoke: proper exception handling removes the teddy bear from the oven, repeatedly if need be, instead of just boldly ignoring problems that need to be addressed properly.

This can mean that, even if we expect we will mainly just write code for the ideal case, we may have to write a significant amount of code for non-ideal cases.

How do you create functions, procedures, and methods in Python? The function/procedure distinction that exists in C

Python? The function/procedure distinction that exists in C, where a function returns a value and a procedure does not, is not as prominent and Python programmers do not usually speak of "procedures." If a function completes without returning a value, or returns without specifying a value, it returns the special value None, which is like an SQL NULL value. (Or a function can explicitly return None). The following three functions are equivalent; they take no arguments and return None:

```
def first():
    pass
def second():
    return
def third():
    return None
```

A function's required arguments are named; their type is not specified.

```
def ternary(condition, first_option, second_option):
    if condition:
        return first_option
    else:
        return second_option
```

I might note that in Python, the common ternary operator that appears in C/C++/Java like  $a > b ? a : b$ , is not a built-in structure in Python. There are some somewhat hackish ways Pythonistas use to fake it, notably  $a > b$  and  $a$  or  $b$ , but besides reading somewhat strangely, they run into problems a bit like C macros, where the C macro  $MAX(a, b)$  defined to  $a > b ? a : b$  will double-increment the selected argument if invoked as  $MAX(++c, ++d)$ . In Python, a ternary operator like  $a > b$  and  $a$  or  $b$  can malfunction if its middle argument is falsy; it is more robust to write  $(a > b$  and  $[a]$  or  $[b])[0]$ , at a significant cost to Pythonic ease in reading and understanding.

Returning to functions, it is possible to specify default values,

as in:

```
def parse(input, default = 0):
    try:
        return int(input)
    except ValueError:
        return default
```

This code somewhat flexibly parses string/unicode input for an integer value, returning a default if it cannot be parsed. If invoked like `parse(text)`, it will default to 0 in the case of a parse failure; if invoked like `parse(text, 1)`, it will default to another value, such as 1, and if invoked like `parse(text, None)`, the result can be examined for a parse failure: it will hold an integer if parsing was successful and the (non-integer) value `None` in the case of failure.

If a function has two or more arguments with default values, unnamed arguments are specified from left to right. Hence a function of:

```
def name_pets(dog = None, cat = None, bunny = None):
    result = []
    if dog:
        result.append(u'I have a dog named ' + dog + u'.')
    if cat:
        result.append(u'I have a cat named ' + cat + u'.')
    if bunny:
        result.append(u'I have a bunny named ' + bunny + u'.')
    return u'\n'.join(result)
```

Now there are a couple of things going on.

`name_pets(u'Goldie')` will return, `u'I have a dog named Goldie.'`

That is, the first argument will be assigned to `dog`, and `name_pets(u'Jazz', u'Zappy')` will correspondingly name the dog "Jazz" and the cat "Zappy." But what if you want to name a cat but not a dog? Then you can explicitly name the argument: `name_pets(cat=u'Guybrush')` will specify the value of the cat argument while leaving `dog` and `bunny` to have their default

values.

That is one thing going on; there is something else going on with strings. If you have more than one pet, this method will place a line break between each sentence. It is common practice to build up a long string by creating an initially empty list, and then bit by bit build up the contents of the string in the list. Usually you can just stick them all together by `u''.join(buffer)`, but if you choose another string, like `u'\n'` here, then that other string is the glue that joins the pieces, and you get a line break between each sentence here.

You can specify an open-ended number of arguments, with a single asterisk before the last argument name, like:

```
def teach(teacher, course_name = None, *students):
    result = []
    result.append(u'This class is being taught by ' + teacher + u'
        if course_name != None:
            result.append(u'The name of the course is "' + course_name
                for student in students:
                    result.append(student + u' is a student in this course.')
    return u'\n'.join(result)
```

If invoked just as `teach(u'Prof. Jones')`, the result will be one line: `u'This class is being taught by Prof. Jones.'`. But if invoked as `print teach(u'Prof. Jones', u'Archaeology 101', u'Alice', u'Bob', u'Charlie')`, the output will be:

```
This class is being taught by Prof. Jones.
The name of the course is "Archaeology 101."
Alice is a student in this course.
Bob is a student in this course.
Charlie is a student in this course.
```

The last way arguments can be specified is by keyword arguments, where any arguments given by keyword that have not been otherwise claimed in the argument list are passed into a dictionary. So if we define a function:

```
def listing(**keywords):
    for key in keywords:
        print key + u': ' + keywords[key]
```

If we then call `listing(name='Alice', phone='(800) 555-1212', email='alice@example.com')`, it should print out something like:

```
phone: (800) 555-1212
name: Alice
email: alice@example.com
```

As an aside, note that the arguments appear in a different order than they were given. Unlike a normal list where you should be able to get things in a fixed order, elements in a dictionary should not be expected to be in any particular order: nothing in the dictionary's job description says that it should give back first the name, then the phone number, then the email. You are welcome to sort the keys where appropriate if you want them in alphabetical order:

```
def alphabetical_listing(**keywords):
    keys = keywords.keys()
    keys.sort()
    for key in keys:
        print key + u': ' + keywords[key]
```

If you then call `alphabetical_listing(name='Alice', phone='(800) 555-1212', email='alice@example.com')`, you should then get the keys in fixed alphabetical order:

```
email: alice@example.com
name: Alice
phone: (800) 555-1212
```

You can have any combination, or none, of these ways of accepting an argument. If you use all of them, it should be like:

```
def example(required, default = u'default value', *arguments, **ke
```

Before leaving the topic of functions, I would like to mention

that there are a couple of ways in which you can speak of a function returning more than one value, both of which are useful, and both of which are supported in Python. One way, which happens to be implemented by a tuple, is useful if you want to return (for instance) both a status code and a text description of the status. Let's return to the task of parsing integers. We can write:

```
def parse(input, default = 0):
    try:
        return int(input), 1, u'Parsed successfully.'
    except ValueError:
        return default, 0, u'Parsing failed.'
```

There are a couple of ways these multiple results could be unpacked; one is:

```
value, status, explanation = parse(input)
```

But there is another sense in which you may want a generator that can keep on returning values. There is a classic story in mathematics in which one famous mathematician, as a boy, was in class and the teacher wanted some time and so decided to give the students a time-consuming task to keep them busy. And so the teacher told the students to add up the numbers from 1 to 100. And the future mathematician tried to figure out how to do things the smart way, realizing that if you add 1 and 100 you get 101; if you add 2 and 99 you also get 101, if you add 3 and 98 you get the exact same thing. If you pair the numbers like that, you have 50 pairs that have the same sum, 101, and so the grand total has to be  $50 * 101 = 5050$ . And this is the number he gave the teacher. (The teacher, seeing that he had the correct answer so quickly, assumed that the boy must have cheated and gave him a spanking as his just reward.)

Based on this realization, there is a simple mathematical

formula to calculate the sum of the first n positive integers: the sum is equal to  $n * (n + 1) / 2$ . But let us suppose we did not know that, and we wished to manually check what the result was. It turns out that there is a better and a worse way to calculate the sum of the numbers from 1 to 10,000,000,000. The bad way is:

```
sum = 0
for number in range(1, 10000000001):
    sum += number
```

And the good way is:

```
sum = 0
for number in xrange(1, 10000000001):
    sum += number
```

What's the difference? The only surface difference is the letter 'x'. But there is a major difference. It's not primarily about speed; both are painfully slow, especially if you compare them to calculating  $10000000000 * (10000000000 + 1) / 2$ , which is lightning fast. But the first one, the one with `range()`, creates a list with a staggering ten billion integers; a workstation with eight gigs of RAM doesn't have nearly enough memory to hold the list, and if you try to run it, you may well observe your computer slow to a crawl as more and more memory is used just to create that one array. But the one with `xrange()` uses very little memory because it is a generator that produces the numbers as needed but never creates an enormous list. Something like `xrange()` can be implemented for our purposes as:

```
def xrange(first_number, second_number = None):
    if second_number == None:
        bottom = 0
        top = first_number
    else:
        bottom = first_number
        top = second_number
    current = bottom
    while current < top:
```

```
while current < top:
    yield current
    current += 1
```

The yield statement is like a return statement, except that the function yielding a value keeps on going. What `xrange(1, 10000000001)` does is keep on yielding the next counting number until it reaches its limit and it has nothing more to yield, but it doesn't use very much memory itself, and using it like for number in `xrange(1, 101)` also doesn't take that much memory. Using `xrange()` to calculate a very large sum may be very slow, but it won't make everything else running on your whole computer grind to a halt by exhausting all available memory, and then crash without giving you a result.

There is one point we would like to stop on: depending on some prior language, some experienced programmers may be thinking, "Wait, did you try this? Isn't that going to overflow?" And in fact it does give the correct result if we do it in Python:

```
>>> print 10000000000 * (10000000000 + 1) / 2
500000000005000000000
```

This result is correct, but C programmers, as well as C++ and Java programmers, may have a conditioned reflex: in C, for instance, just as a string buffer is an array of characters with a fixed length, integer types have a maximum and minimum possible value, and you may be able to choose an integer type with a bigger range, but there is always an arbitrary line, and if you cross it you get an overflow error that causes incorrect results.

If we write in C:

```
#include <stdio.h>

int main()
{
    long top;
    scanf("%ld", &top);
```



The logic behind this rule is that there are often situations where it makes clear sense to allow one of something instead of none. However, if one decides to go further and allow  $N$  (for  $N > 1$ ), then why not  $N+1$ ? And if  $N+1$ , then why not  $N+2$ , and so on? Once above 1, there's no excuse not to allow any  $N$ ; hence, infinity.

Many hackers recall in this connection Isaac Asimov's SF novel *The Gods Themselves* in which a character announces that the number 2 is impossible - if you're going to believe in more than one universe, you might as well believe in an infinite number of them.

Here Python observes a principle that you should observe in what you pass on to your users. In terms of user interface design, for the iPhone to allow exactly one application at a time and for the Droid to allow multiple applications are both sensible approaches: perhaps the Droid marketing campaign insists that we need to run multiple apps, but for a long time the iPhone, designed to run one app at a time, was an uncontested darling.

But what was not a correct decision was for the iPhone web browser to be able to have up to eight windows open, but not nine or more. If you are going to make a web interface that allows the user to upload files, you don't want to say, "I don't know exactly how many the user will want, so I'm deciding five is probably enough;" you start with one file upload input and add a button that creates another file upload input, and lets the user keep adding as many files as are wanted. Or, depending on context, you may create an interface that allows the user to upload at most one file as an avatar, or you may write an opinion survey in which uploading files does not make sense as part of the design.

Zero, one, and infinity each have their places.

Python does not require you to do object-oriented

programming, but in Python everything is an object. Functions are first-class objects and can be treated as such. Unlike Java, the humble integer is an object. `dir()` is a function that lists all of the methods of an object: if at the interpreter you call `dir()` on the integer 1, you get:

```
>>> dir(1)
['__abs__', '__add__', '__and__', '__class__', '__cmp__', '__coerc',
 '__delattr__', '__div__', '__divmod__', '__doc__', '__float__', '_
__format__', '__getattr__', '__getnewargs__', '__hash__', '_
__index__', '__init__', '__int__', '__invert__', '__long__', '__l
__mod__', '__mul__', '__neg__', '__new__', '__nonzero__', '__oct_
__pos__', '__pow__', '__radd__', '__rand__', '__rdiv__', '__rdivm
__reduce__', '__reduce_ex__', '__repr__', '__rfloordiv__', '__rls
__rmod__', '__rmul__', '__ror__', '__rpow__', '__rrshift__', '__r
__rsub__', '__rtruediv__', '__rxor__', '__setattr__', '__sizeof__
__sub__', '__subclasshook__', '__truediv__', '__trunc__', '__xor_
'conjugate', 'denominator', 'imag', 'numerator', 'real']
```

Methods with names like `__add__()` are methods you can create or override for operator overloading; without attempting to explain all of these methods, I will briefly observe that not only is an integer like 1 an object, it is an object that supports quite a number of methods.

Python's objects are in some ways like Java and in some ways like JavaScript: Python objects come from full-fledged classes like Java, but are more dynamic: fields and methods can be deleted from a Python object on the fly, like JavaScript, even though inheritance is classical and not prototypal. The typing is so-called "duck typing": if it walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck, it's a duck, and we have already seen one instance of duck typing at work: if an integer computation overflows, Python deftly substitutes another class that walks like the basic integer class and quacks like the basic integer class, but can handle millions of digits or more as long as you have enough memory and processor time. In Java, it is usually preferred practice to

choose object composition over multiple inheritance; in Python, it is usually preferred practice to choose multiple inheritance over object composition.

The simplest example of a class is:

```
class simple:
    pass
```

An instance of this class can be created as:

```
instance = simple()
```

A somewhat more ornate example would be:

```
class counter(object):
    def __init__(self):
        self.value = 0
    def increment(self):
        self.value += 1
    def reset(self):
        self.value = 0
```

This is a working, if not necessarily advisable, counter class. The first argument to each of its methods is `self` (N.B. `self`, rather than `this`), and the class has one instance variable, defined in the `__init__()` method called in initialization, although it could just as well have many or none. What if we wanted to make the member field private? The short answer is, we can't, and we don't really want to. We could legitimately follow a convention that a member with a leading underscore in its name, `_like_this` instead of `like_this`, is a part of the present private implementation, does not represent in any sense the public API, and is subject to change or removal at any time. Rewritten that way, our class would look like this:

```
class counter(object):
    def __init__(self):
        self._value = 0
    def get_value(self):
```

```

        return self._value
    def increment(self):
        self._value += 1
    def reset(self):
        self._value = 0

```

But this way of solving things makes more sense in Java than Python; in Java it is recommended practice to make most or all instance variables private and then define corresponding getters and setters, and perhaps build a counter class that let you guarantee it could only be incremented, read, and optionally reset. It's not just that the solution we have built works a bit more like Java than Python, but the problem we were addressing in the first place works more like Java than Python. Truer to the spirit of Python would be to use an integer and avoid the work of creating a class, let alone accessor methods.

A more Pythonic example might be a simple way to list tags in a webpage. It's longer than our counter class, but not all that much longer:

```

#!/usr/bin/python

import re
import urllib2

class webpage(object):
    def __init__(self, url = None):
        self.initialized = False
        if url:
            self.load_url(url)

    def __nonzero__(self):
        return self.initialized

    def list_tags(self):
        if self.initialized:
            result = []
            for tag in re.findall(ur'<(\w+)', self.text, re.DOTALL):
                if tag.lower() not in result:
                    result.append(tag.lower())
            result.sort()

```

```

        return result
    else:
        raise Exception(u'No webpage is loaded.')

    def load_url(self, url):
        try:
            text = urllib2.urlopen(url).read()
            self.url = url
            self.text = text
            self.initialized = True
            return True
        except URLError:
            return False

if __name__ == u'__main__':
    page = webpage(u'http://cjshayward.com/')
    if page:
        print page.list_tags()
    else:
        print u'The page could not be loaded.'

```

A few remarks about the very top: the top line, "#!/usr/bin/python", tells Unix, Linux, and OS X systems that this is to be run as a Python program; if you intend at all to distribute your scripts, you should put this at the top. (It won't do anything bad on a Windows system.)

At the beginning a couple of modules from the standard library are imported. urllib2 can fetch web and other URL's, and re provides regular expressions.

This class can be initialized or uninitialized; if you ask for an analysis when it is not initialized, it raises an exception. Note that it considers itself fully initialized and set up, not necessarily when its `__init__()` method has been called, but when it has loaded a URL successfully.

There are a couple of conditions where a webpage object might not be initialized once the `__init__()` constructor has returned. The URL is an optional parameter, so it might not have passed through initialization. Or any of a number of transient or

permanent network errors could have prevented the URL from loading successfully. The code to load a URL has:

```
def load_url(self, url):
    try:
        text = urllib2.urlopen(url).read()
        self.url = url
        self.text = text
        self.initialized = True
        return True
    except URLError:
        return False
```

Note the first real line of the method, `text = urllib2.urlopen(url).read()`. This will do one of two things: either load the URL's contents successfully, or throw a `URLError`. If it throws an error, none of the next three lines is called. This means that an instance of this class is only fully set up with URL etc. stored after a successful read, and if you have an initialized class and try to load another URL and fail, previous data is not clobbered. This is something that can fail, but it is transactional, like a database transaction. Either all of the data is updated or none of it is updated, and in particular the object won't be left in an inconsistent state.

It uses Perl-style regular expressions, which are powerful and popular but can be a bit cryptic. The one regular expression used is `ur'<(\w+)'`, with an 'r' after the initial 'u' to specify a raw string without Python doing things with backslashes that we don't want when we're doing regular expressions. What the core of the regular expression says in essence is, "a less than sign, followed by one or more word characters, and save the one or more word characters." This will find more or less the HTML tags in a webpage.

And the last thing I will say, besides saying that you can use this class by giving,

```
page = webpage("http://cjshayward.com/")
print page.list_tags()
```

is that its present functionality is a foot in the door compared to the analysis that is possible. Right now the webpage class can load a webpage and do one thing with it, list the tags.

From that starting point, it is not hard to copy and adapt `list_tags()` to make another method that will count the tags:

```
def count_tags(self):
    if self.initialized:
        result = {}
    for tag in re.findall(ur'<(\w+)', self.text, re.DOTALL):
        if tag.lower() in result:
            result[tag.lower()] += 1
        else:
            result[tag.lower()] = 1
    return result
    else:
        raise Exception(u'No webpage is loaded.')
```

There are any number of ways this class could be extended; listing and even counting the tags in a page are something like a "Hello, world!" program: they show the very beginning of the possibilities, not where they end.

Lastly, the portion of the file at the end, beginning with `if __name__ == u'__main__':`, is part of a Python pattern of writing for reusability. The basic idea is that you write portions of a program you might want to reuse, such as objects and classes, in the main body of a program, and then material you want to run if you run the script directly, but not if you import it, beneath. If the script above is run directly, it will try to create a webpage and list its tags; but it can also be imported as a module, by something like:

```
import webpage_inspector
```

if the file is named `webpage_inspector.py`. If it is imported as

a module, any classes and functions will be available, as `webpage_inspector.webpage` for instance, but the demo code at the bottom will be skipped.

(If you are interested in parsing webpages, I might suggest that you look at existing tools for Python, such as Beautiful Soup at <http://www.crummy.com/software/BeautifulSoup/>, that put even more power at your fingertips.)

Finally, this class takes advantage of one of the special methods, in this case `__nonzero__()`. What that means is that, while works well enough to write:

```
page = webpage(u'http://cjshayward.com/')
if page.initialized:
    print page.count_tags()
```

you could also write:

```
page = webpage(u'http://cjshayward.com/') if page: print
page.count_tags()
```

That is, you can treat a `webpage` instance like a boolean variable; if you wanted to keep trying to load a page when your network is flaky, you could try:

```
import time
page = webpage(u'http://cjshayward.com/')
while not page:
    time.sleep(30)
page.load_url(u'http://cjshayward.com/')
```

Or, using another feature of the method, you could more concisely write:

```
import time
page = webpage()
while not page.load_url(u'http://cjshayward.com/'):
    time.sleep(30)
```

This will keep on trying to load the page, and if necessary keep on trying, waiting 30 seconds between attempts so as not to

engage in busy waiting. Busy waiting on a resource (network, filesystem, etc.) is the practice of trying to access a resource without interruption, which can be a way to be a very bad neighbor who drains resources heavily compared to someone who delays. Note that this will keep on trying forever if the error is permanent, such as a nonexistent domain.)

Python partially supports functional programming; here I will attempt, not to explain functional programming to the interested newcomer, but to orient the functional programmer who would like to know what features of functional programming Python supports. I have mentioned one feature of functional programming, (lazy) generators. Python also supports list comprehensions: if you have numbers, a list of integers and/or floating point numbers and want only the positive values, you can do:

```
positives = [x for x in numbers where x > 0]
```

lambdas, anonymous functions close to the lambdas of functional programming, are commonly used with filter, map, and reduce:

```
>>> numbers = [1, 2, 3]
>>> filter(lambda x: x > 1, numbers)
      [2, 3]
>>> map(lambda x: x * 2, numbers)
      [2, 4, 6]
>>> reduce(lambda x, y: x + y, numbers)
      6
```

Python's support of functional programming has not always been the best, and functional programmers may be dismayed to learn that Guido was hoping at one point to remove lambda altogether. This may be unfortunate, but to the reader interested in functional programming in Python, I may suggest

downloading, reading, and using [the Xoltar Toolkit](#). The Xoltar toolkit provides a module, `functional`, which is written in pure Python, is largely self-documenting code, and provides tools and/or reference implementations for currying and other favorites.

Now I will be discussing "usability for programmers." Normally people who discuss usability discuss making a system usable for nontechnical end users, but there is such a thing as usability for programmers; a good chunk of Python's attraction is that it shows meticulous attention to detail in the usability it provides to programmers.

There are a couple of ways in Python programming that we can provide good usability for other programmers. One is, in choosing names (for variables, methods, objects, classes, and so on), use `whole_words_with_underscores`, not `camelCase`. Emacs is perfectly willing to insert spaces in displayed `camelCase` words, but this is a compensation for `camelCase`'s weakness, and not everyone uses Emacs: or either of vim or Emacs, for that matter:

GUI editors are not going to go away, even if our beloved command line editors might go away. The best thing of all would be to just use spaces in variable names, but so far the language designers have not supported that route. For a consolation prize, underscores are a little bit better than `camelCase` for native English speakers and significantly better than `camelCase` for programmers struggling with English's alphabet. (At a glance, `aFewWordsInCamelCase` look a bit more like a block of

undifferentiated text than

`a_few_words_separated_by_underscores` if you live and breathe English's alphabet, but if you have worked hard on English but its alphabet is still not your own, `aFewWordsInCamelCase` looks absolutely like a block of undifferentiated text next to

a\_few\_words\_separated\_by\_underscores. Remember reading "Hi, how are you?" written in Greek letters as "αι &omicron;υ αρ ιυ:" sometimes just using another language's alphabet is a challenge.

Python has comments, but I would like to make a point. In Python, comments are not there to make code understandable.

Python has been called "executable pseudocode," and is your code's job to be understandable itself. Comments have a place, but if you need to add comments to make your code understandable, that's a sign you need to rewrite your code.

A Python comment, like Perl and Tcl (and one option in PHP), begins with a hash mark and continues to the end of the line.

Adding a comment to one of the more cryptic lines of the example we have:

```
for tag in re.findall(ur'<(\w+)', self.text, re.DOTALL): # For each
```

Classes and functions have what are called "docstrings," basically a short summary that is programmatically accessible, written as a (usually) triple quoted string immediately after the class/function definition:

```
class empty:
    u'''This class does nothing.'''
    def __init__(self):
    u'''This initializer does nothing.'''
        pass
```

In terms of indentation, you should always indent by four spaces. Emacs handles this gracefully; vim's autoindent by default will substitute a tab for eight spaces where it can, leaving code that looks right in your editor but breaks when you run it in Python. If you use vim for Python, you should edit your ~/.vimrc, creating it if need be, and include the following:

```
set autoindent smartindent tabstop=4 shiftwidth=4 expandtab shift
```

Now we will look at a basic issue of problem solving, the Python way. Usually "encryption" refers to strong encryption, which refers to serious attempts to protect data; when you shop at a responsible merchant and your credit card information is transferred at a URI that begins with "https," that's strong encryption in use. There is also something called weak encryption, which includes such things as codes written as puzzles for children to break. If strong encryption is meant to resist prying, weak encryption is at times intended to be pried open. One classic use of weak encryption is rot-13, which moves each letter forward or back by thirteen places and has the convenient feature that running rot-13 again on encrypted text decrypts it. Historically, on UseNet, some offensive material was posted in rot-13 as a matter of common courtesy, so that people were warned and did not need to unintentionally read things that would offend them, and many old newsreaders included a single keystroke command to decrypt rot-13 text. For an example, if you rot-13 "The quick brown dog jumps over the lazy red fox.", you get, "Gur dhvpx oebja qbt whzcf bire gur ynml erq sbk.", and if you rot-13 "Gur dhvpx oebja qbt whzcf bire gur ynml erq sbk.", you get the original "The quick brown dog jumps over the lazy red fox.", restored perfectly.

Now suppose we want to be able to rot-13 encrypt text from Python. Rot-13 represents an extremely simple algorithm, and for the most part there is a perfectly obvious way to do it:

```
def rot13(text):
    result = []
    for character in unicode(text):
        if character == u'a':
            result.append(u'n')
        elif character == u'b':
            result.append(u'o')
```

```
elif character == u'c':
    result.append(u'p')
elif character == u'd':
    result.append(u'q')
elif character == u'e':
    result.append(u'r')
elif character == u'f':
    result.append(u's')
elif character == u'g':
    result.append(u't')
elif character == u'h':
    result.append(u'u')
elif character == u'i':
    result.append(u'v')
elif character == u'j':
    result.append(u'w')
elif character == u'k':
    result.append(u'x')
elif character == u'l':
    result.append(u'y')
elif character == u'm':
    result.append(u'z')
elif character == u'n':
    result.append(u'a')
elif character == u'o':
    result.append(u'b')
elif character == u'p':
    result.append(u'c')
elif character == u'q':
    result.append(u'd')
elif character == u'r':
    result.append(u'e')
elif character == u's':
    result.append(u'f')
elif character == u't':
    result.append(u'g')
elif character == u'u':
    result.append(u'h')
elif character == u'v':
    result.append(u'i')
elif character == u'w':
    result.append(u'j')
elif character == u'x':
    result.append(u'k')
elif character == u'y':
    result.append(u'l')
elif character == u'z':
    result.append(u'm')
```

```
    result.append(u'm')
elif character == u'A':
    result.append(u'N')
elif character == u'B':
    result.append(u'O')
elif character == u'C':
    result.append(u'P')
elif character == u'D':
    result.append(u'Q')
elif character == u'E':
    result.append(u'R')
elif character == u'F':
    result.append(u'S')
elif character == u'G':
    result.append(u'T')
elif character == u'H':
    result.append(u'U')
elif character == u'I':
    result.append(u'V')
elif character == u'J':
    result.append(u'W')
elif character == u'K':
    result.append(u'X')
elif character == u'L':
    result.append(u'Y')
elif character == u'M':
    result.append(u'Z')
elif character == u'N':
    result.append(u'A')
elif character == u'O':
    result.append(u'B')
elif character == u'P':
    result.append(u'C')
elif character == u'Q':
    result.append(u'D')
elif character == u'R':
    result.append(u'E')
elif character == u'S':
    result.append(u'F')
elif character == u'T':
    result.append(u'G')
elif character == u'U':
    result.append(u'H')
elif character == u'V':
    result.append(u'I')
elif character == u'W':
    result.append(u'J')
elif character == u'X':
```

```
        result.append(u'K')
    elif character == u'Y':
        result.append(u'L')
    elif character == u'Z':
        result.append(u'M')
    return u''.join(result)
```

This is a perfectly effective way of solving the problem, but you may wince at the thought of all that typing, and that is a good sign that this solution is not very Pythonic. Some readers may perhaps be disappointed with me (or, perhaps, not disappointed with me in the slightest) to learn that I cheated: I wrote three lines of code so Python would generate for me the long and tedious part of the routine so I could get out of such a chore, and then pasted the output into the page. We need a better solution in this.

One of the paradoxes in the programming world is that solving a problem in a more general sense may actually be less work. What we basically need is to do some translations of characters, so how can we do that? Remembering that Python's switch statement is the dictionary, we could try:

```
def translate(text, translation):
    result = []
    for character in unicode(text):
        if character in translation:
            result.append(translation[character])
        else:
            result.append(character)
    return u''.join(result)
```

This is a big improvement: cleaner, simpler, much shorter, and much more powerful. So if we are dealing with strings used to store genetic data, we can also get the complement of a string.

So to get the complement of u'ATTAGCGACT', we can do:

```
original = u'ATTAGCGACT'
complement = translate(original, {u'A': u'T', u'T': u'A', u'C': u'
```

And we've improved things, or at least it seems we've improved until we get around to the chore of typing out the dictionary contents for every uppercase and lowercase letter. We could write another Python snippet to autogenerate that, as the chore is not only tedious but an invitation to error, but is there a better way?

In fact there is. We can import the string library and take advantage of something that is already there, and here is a solution that is not daunting to type out, only slightly tedious, although here we must use a little ASCII:

```
import string
translation = string.maketrans('ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZabcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz',
translated = 'The quick brown dog jumps over the lazy red fox.'.tr
```

And with that, instead of solving the problem of translation ourselves, we have the problem already solved for us, for the most part. The variable translated is now u'Gur dhvpx oebja qbt whzcf bire gur ynml erq sbk.'

Those versed in Python's character, though, might possibly not stop here. You can make up your own forms of weak encryption, but rot-13 encoding is not the world's most obscure thing to do. Is this really the easiest and most Pythonic way to rot-13 a string? Let us fire up our Python interpreter:

```
>>> print u'The quick brown dog jumps over the lazy red fox.'.encod
Gur dhvpx oebja qbt whzcf bire gur ynml erq sbk.
```

The problem is already solved for us.

A famous blog post called [Python Is Not Java](#) addresses Java programmers rather bluntly on why doing everything you'd do in Java is not getting the most out of Python:

Essentially, if you've been using Java for a while and are

new to Python, **do not trust your instincts**. Your instincts are tuned to Java, not Python. Take a step back, and above all, **stop writing so much code**.

To do this, become more demanding of Python. Pretend that Python is a magic wand that will miraculously do whatever you want without you needing to lifting a finger.

Ask, "how does Python already solve my problem?" and "What Python language feature most resembles my problem?" You will be absolutely astonished at how often it happens that thing you need is already there in some form.

In fact, this phenomenon is so common, even among experienced Python programmers, that the Python community has a name for it. We call it "Guido's time machine", because sometimes it seems as though that's the only way he could've known what we needed, before we knew it ourselves.

Python's core library is documented extensively, searchably, and well at <http://docs.python.org/library/> (be advised that [python.com](http://python.com), besides being easy to type when you really mean [python.org](http://python.org), is a famous porn site), and Python's core library is your best friend. The code samples peppering this chapter are intended to simply illustrate basic features of the language; once you get up to speed, it's not so much that you'll have better ways of doing what that code does, as that you'll have better ways of avoiding doing that, using Python more like a magic wand.

I will not be attempting to provide select highlights from the core library because that would easily be a book in its own right. But we are saying that [the Python core library](#) is among a good Python programmer's most heavily used bookmarks.

I advocate, when possible, moving from unadorned, "bare

metal" Python to what might be called "Python++." Let me explain what I mean by this and why it is more Pythonic.

The move from C to C++ is a move made by extending the core language to directly support objects, templates, and other features. There have been some efforts to extend the Python core language: `easy_extend` is intended to make it Pythonically easy to tinker with and extend the language syntax. However, I have never heard of production use of these extensions Pythonically saving time and effort while making programmers more productive.

What I have heard consistently is that using a good library really does qualify as a move from "unadorned Python" to "Python++". A StackOverflow user asked, "Have you considered using Django and found good reasons not to?" And people listed legitimate flaws with Django and legitimate reasons they use other alternatives, but one developer got over thirty upvotes with a response of, "Yeah, I am an honest guy, and the client wanted to charge by the hour. There was no way Django was going to allow me to make enough money." For the web, frameworks like Django, TurboGears, and web2py offer significantly greater power with less work in more truly Pythonic fashion. Python's standard library does come with its `cgi` module, and it is possible to write webapps with it, but using the `cgi` module and the standard library to implement a social networking site with all the common bells and whistles would take months or years. With Python + Django + Pinax the time is more like hours. If you use Python, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. If you want a social network and you use Django and Pinax, you don't have to reinvent the internal combustion engine either, or power steering, or antilock brakes, because they are all included in standard packages for a car or truck. If your goal is an online

store instead of a social network Pinax will not likely be of much help, but Django + Satchmo will. Both of them provide ready-made solution to routine tasks, whether user avatars with gravatar support, or a shopping cart with that works with any of several payment gateways.

This is true if you are developing for the web; if you are in another domain, similar remarks could be made for NumPy or SciPy.

I do not wish to discourage anyone from using different frameworks than I have mentioned, or suggest that there is something wrong with thinking things out and choosing TurboGears over Django. Web2py in particular cuts out one very daunting hurdle to new programmers: a command line with a steep learning curve. However, I do advocate the use of a serious, noteworthy "Python++" framework and not the standard library alone: the cgi module works entirely as advertised, but the difference between Python + Django + Pinax and just Python with the cgi module is comparable to the difference between Python with the cgi module and programming on bare metal in C.

I may further comment that fundamental usability is the same whether the implementation is Django, TurboGears, web2py, or for that matter Python with the cgi module or C working with bare metal. It would not be a surprise if Ruby on Rails or PHP developers were to look through this and find it speaks to how they can create a better user interface.

## Summary

What is it that is attractive about Python?

Perl has been rightly called "Unix's Swiss Army Chainsaw," and perhaps nothing else so well concisely describes what it is that Perl has to offer. Java might be compared to the equipment

owned by a construction company, equipment that allows large organizations and a well-organized army to erect something monumental. C would be a scientific scalpel, molecular sharp: the most exacting precision you can get unless you go subatomic with assembler or machine language, but treacherously slippery and easy to cut yourself with, something like the scientific-use razor blades which came in a package labelled: "WARNING: Knife is extremely sharp. Keep out of children."

It is my suggestion that Python is a lightsabre, and wielding it well makes a graceful foundation for usability.

# A Variation on the Toastmasters >"Icebreaker" Speech

html

I am trying, before leaving for Mount Athos, God willing, October 16, 2017, to complete the Toastmasters Competent Communicator badge. This means a documented path towards ten speeches developing progressive competency. After a gentle reminder from my home club's leadership, I am bringing the book used to record results and feedback, and I am now usually keeping it in the car.

That book didn't have records of the usual "Icebreaker" speech, the first speech and a speech of self-introduction, and so I gave one today, visiting at a second club that gives more, and more direct, feedback, and what I was told about the speech was different from usual: people usually talked about themselves and things they had done, and I talked about things other people had done and my aspiration. The feedback was polite, but the gently given point was that my speech was off-topic for an introduction in Toastmasters's "Icebreaker."

I thought about that a bit. and decided that the speech really

did introduce me, and that it really was worth repeating. I present it here, slightly changed, as follows:

The theme of fatherhood is one that is important to me. The time that I most felt like a man was after I had been away for schooling, and I went to say hello to our neighbors across the street. I chatted with the wife briefly, and their little boy didn't remember me at first, which is not surprising. (Please keep in mind that the absence represented a much greater proportion of his life than any adult in the picture.)

About an hour later, I wanted to fix a flat on my van, and by that point he was starting to more than remember me. He came over and wanted to help. And I did my delighted best to accommodate him. In each step of the process I was looking for where I could slice off a little-boy-sized increment of work, and work with him while giving him bite-sized assignments. It took more time and more effort to work with his help, but I wouldn't have exchanged it for anything in the world.

This is something I believe I picked up from my parents. When I was a kid, they seemed to almost never want to say "No" to "Can I help you?" Once in a while they did say "No;" I was upset when I came as a little boy to help my father work with the garbageman to heave an unusually large item into the garbage truck. But events like these were rare enough, and my parents' strong preference was to try to honor any child's offer of help.

One process where help was invited was carrying things when a group of friends would help one of their members move house. One of my brothers, at one point, was a little

boy holding a tiny load, and said, perhaps feeling rather small, that he wasn't carrying very much. My Dad gave him a big smile, and said, "You're helping!" It really didn't seem that long before that little boy holding a smaller item was a bigger boy holding a bigger item, and then a youth or young man carrying an adult load.

On this point I thoroughly hold to what my parents practiced. I've been helping people move on various occasions, and I've seen little children ask to help and be told, "You can't help." That's been about the only situation where I've openly challenged a friend's parenting decision in front of a young child. At at least one point, I gave the parents an explanation, but not before reaching in the top of an open box, finding some small item, and asking the child to carry that item.

More recently I have been noticing that I have been behaving in a slightly more fatherly way to those who are college aged. When I went in for some labwork, a supervisor was helping guide a young trainee through the multi-step paperwork to check me in, and early on I commented, "It's so nice to see a young person going into the medical professions." When I walked out from my labs not much later, the supervisor was glowing.

My heart's desire and everything I am trying to do now is enter Orthodox monasticism, which is entering into receiving the deepest fatherhood the Orthodox Church offers. I'm counting the days. In the famed vows of "poverty", "obedience", "chastity", the absolute "obedience" is the greatest fatherly healing that is available, and my only real regret in seeking monasticism now is that I didn't do it twenty years ago.

There are other things I have already done that are fatherly. Not long after my first nephew was born, people were commenting that he wanted to be using a phone; he seemed to me to be playing in a way that suggested he wanted to be in on an adult game. So I began calling my brother, who worked a slightly early shift and was home by late afternoon, and initially just talked to my nephew nonstop for a few minutes, just telling him that I loved him. Then he started talking, and things shifted quickly to my spending maybe ten percent of the time asking him social questions, and the rest listening as he talked about his day. The relationship didn't really change with this change in behavior.

There have been other things. I was at one point visiting with some friends, and the parents repeatedly told a slightly older little boy to play catch with his slightly younger brother. After I heard "I don't want to play catch with [Name]" enough times, I stood up, said, "I want to play catch with [Name]," scooped him up, and said, "What I'm going to do is I'm going to count to three, and when I get to three, I'll throw you to your Daddy!" Then I swung him around in the air while counting to three, and after swing number three, lifted him high up in the air, and set him with feather gentleness in his father's outstretched arms. That event pretty much changed what it meant to the adults in that family to play catch with someone.

Right now I stand at an open door. It is time to be receiving again fatherly care, entering the Kingdom of Heaven as a little child. I have seen great generosity from people, and I pray that God will repay them, as I cannot.

The speech is perhaps imperfect and not a usual

The speech is perhaps imperfect and not a usual Toastmasters "Icebreaker" speech, but I do not count among its imperfections that I speak of contact with others whom I am connected to, nor that I look ahead out my windshield as well as my rear-view mirror. Monasticism is the biggest thing in site, and I look forward to that help in repenting of my sins, and working in obedience to an Elder's spiritual fatherhood to reach the one freedom that matters.

**Veni, Vidi, Vomi:  
A Look at "Do  
You Want to Date  
my Avatar?"**

*Awake, O  
north wind;  
and come,  
thou south;  
blow upon  
my garden,  
that the  
spices  
thereof may  
flow out. Let  
my beloved  
come into  
his garden,  
and eat his  
pleasant*

*fruits.  
I am come  
into my  
garden, my  
sister, my  
spouse: I  
have  
gathered my  
myrrh with  
my spice; I  
have eaten  
my  
honeycomb  
with my  
honey; I  
have drunk  
my wine with  
my milk: eat,*

*O friends;  
drink, yea,  
drink  
abundantly,  
O beloved.*

**The Song of  
Songs, 4:16-5:1,  
King James  
Version**

**A Socratic dialogue  
triggered by [The  
Labyrinth](#)**

Trimmed slightly, but "minimally processed" from an email  
conversation following [The Labyrinth](#):

**Author:** P.S. My brother showed me the following video as  
cool. He didn't see why I found it a bit of a horror: "Do

You Want to Date My Avatar?"

**Visitor:** Oh gosh, that's just layers and layers of sad. It's all about the experience, but the message is kept just this side of tolerable ("nerds are the new sexy" - the reversal of a supposed stigmatization) so it can function as an excuse for the experience. At least that's my analysis.

**Author:** Thanks. I just hotlinked a line of Labyrinth to Avatar...

...and added a tooltip of, "Veni, vidi, vom!".

**Visitor:** (Laughs) You have me completely mystified on this one, sorry.

However, you are welcome. And I'm glad to see that you're cracking jokes. (I think.)

No seriously, laughing out loud. Even though I don't exactly know why.

Is 'vomi' a made-up word? Men... when it comes right down to it you all have the same basic sense of humor.

(I think.)

**Author:** Veni, vidi, vici: I came, I saw, I conquered.

Veni, vidi, vom!: I came, I saw, I puked.

**Visitor:** Yep... the basic masculine sense of humor, cloaked in Latin. I'm ever so honored you let me in on this. If the world were completely fair, someone would be there right now to punch your shoulder for me... this is my favorite form of discipline for my brother in law when he gets out of line.

But what's Avatar... and hotlink and tooltip?

**Author:** The link to "Do you want to date my Avatar?"

Hotlink is a synonym for link; tooltip, what displays if you leave your mouse hovering over it.

**Visitor:** Oh dear, I really didn't understand what you were telling me; I was just in good spirits.

OK, I find that funny - and appropriate.

**Author:** Which do you think works better (i.e. [The Labyrinth](#) with or without images):

**Visitor:** I have some doubts about the video showing up in the text.

**Author:** Ok; I'll leave it out. Thanks.

**Visitor:** Welcome.

I did like the Christ image where you had it. It encouraged a sober pause at the right place in the meditation.

**Author:** Thank you; I've put it in slightly differently.

**Visitor:** I like that.

**Author:** Thank you.

I've also put the video (link) in a slightly different place than originally. I think it also works better there.

**Visitor:** Taking a risk of butting in... Would this be a more apropos place?

The true raison d'Ãatre was known to desert  
monks,  
Ancient and today,  
And by these fathers is called,  
Temptation, passion, demon,  
Of **escaping the world**.

Unless I've misunderstood some things and that's always possible. (laughs) I never did ask you your analysis of what, in particular, horrified you about the video. But it seems like a perfect illustration not of pornography simple but of the

underlying identity between the particular kind of lust expressed in pornography (not the same as wanting a person) and escapism, and that's the place in the poem where you are talking about that identification.

**Author::** Thank you. I've moved it.

In [That Hideous Strength](#), towards the end, Lewis writes:

"Who is called Sulva? What road does she walk?  
Why is the womb barren on one side? Where are  
the cold marriages?"

Ransom replied, "Sulva is she whom mortals call the Moon. She walks in the lowest sphere. The rim of the world that was wasted goes through her. Half of her orb is turned towards us and shares our curse. Her other half looks to Deep Heaven; happy would he be who could cross that frontier and see the fields on her further side. On this side, the womb is barren and the marriages cold. There dwell an accursed people, full of pride and lust. There when a young man takes a maiden in marriage, they do not lie together, but each lies with a cunningly fashioned image of the other, made to move and to be warm by devilish arts, for real flesh will not please them, they are so dainty (*delicati*) in their dreams of lust. Their real children they fabricate by vile arts in a secret place.

Pp. 270/271 are in fantasy imagery what has become quite literally true decades later.

**Visitor:** Yes, that would be what I was missing... that

fantasy banquet at the end of the video feels particularly creepy now.

However the girl I was telling you about had among other things watched a show where a "doctor" talked about giving seminars where women learn to experience the full physical effects of intercourse, using their minds only. (Gets into feminism, no?)

That's why I was trying to tell her that "richter scale" measurements aren't everything...

In this hatred of the body, in putting unhealthy barriers between genders, and in seeing the body as basically a tool for sexual experience, fundamentalist Christianity and cutting edge worldliness are really alike. (I had a pastor once who forbade the girls in the church school to wear sandals because they might tempt the boys with their "toe cleavage.")

**Author:** I would be wary of discounting monastic experience; I as a single man, prudish by American standards, probably have more interaction with women than most married men in the patristic era.

But in the image... "eating" is not just eating. In the initial still image in the embedded version of "Do You Want to Date My Avatar?", I made a connection. The sword is meant as a phallic symbol, and not just as half of a large category of items are a phallic symbol in some very elastic sense. It's very direct. Queer sex and orgy are implied, even though everything directly portrayed seems "straight", or at least straight as defined against the gender rainbow (as opposed, perhaps, to a "technology rainbow").

**Visitor:** Yes, I see what you are saying. I suppose the

opening shots in the video would also imply self-abuse. I was seeing those images and the ones you mention as just icky in themselves without thinking about them implying something else.

**Author:** P.S. My brother who introduced it to me, as something cool, explained to me that this is part of the main performer's effort to work her way into mainstream television. She demonstrates, in terms of a prospect for work in television, that she can look beautiful, act, sing, dance, and be enticing while in a video that is demure in its surface effect as far as music videos go. (And she has carefully chosen a viral video to prove herself as talent.)

Not sure if that makes it even more disturbing; I didn't mention it with any conscious intent to be as disturbing as I could, just wanted to give you a concrete snapshot of the culture and context for why I put what I put in [The Labyrinth](#).

**Visitor:** It's making a lot more sense now.

I'm not remembering the significance of the technology rainbow.

**Author:** As far as "technology rainbow":

In contrast to "hetero-centrism" is advocated a gender rainbow where one live person may have any kind of arrangement with other live people, as long as everyone's of age, and a binary "male and female" is replaced by a rainbow of variety that is beyond shades of gray.

I was speaking by analogy: a "technology rainbow", in contrast to "face-to-face-centrism", would seek as normative any creative possibility, again excluding child

pornography, where face-to-face relationships are only one part of a "technology rainbow".

It might also help make the point that internet-enabled expressions of sexuality, for most of the men, aren't exactly straight. They do not involve same-sex attraction, nor animals or anything like that, but they depart from being straight in a slightly different trajectory from face-to-face relationships where heterosexuality is only one option.

Neither member of this conversation had anything more to say.

# The Voyage

## I

He kicked the can, which skittered across the sidewalk. Shards of glass bounced off, their razor sharp edges gleaming in the light. Jason sat down on a park bench, and glared at the old man sitting on the other end. He looked decrepit and stupid, with a moronic smile. The man was feeding pigeons. The geezer probably didn't even own a TV. A boring man doing a boring thing in a boring place on a boring day.

Jason liked to verbally spar with people. He liked to free them from their deceptions, their illusions. "The unexamined life is not worth living," and he would rather be hated as a gadfly than loved as a demagogue.

As Jason sat thinking, the old man said, "It's a beautiful, sunny day, isn't it?"

"The Poet Wordsworth aptly called it 'the dreary light of common day.' It is a dull surface, under which ferments a world of evil. Did you know, for instance, that Hitler's Holocaust was only one of many massive genocides this century that killed over a million people? Did you know that even Hitler's Jews are dwarfed by the fifty million who died in Stalin's purges?"

The smile disappeared from the old man's face. "No, I did

not."

"You who say that it's a beautiful day — what do you know about suffering?"

The old man's face quivered, ever so slightly, for a moment. "My best friend, when I was a boy, was named Abraham. He died at Auschwitz. My eldest brother, on the other hand, was swept up by the Nazi propaganda and became a concentration camp guard. He was never convicted of war crimes, but he hanged himself a week after I was married. I am now a widower."

Jason was silent for a moment. He was struck with respect at this man's suffering — and watched as a tear gathered in his eyes, and slowly trickled down his wrinkled cheek. As he looked, he saw part of why the old man looked so ugly to him — his face bore scars of chemical burns.

A sense of discomfort and unease began to fill the young man. He shifted slightly, and began to talk about something else.

"I have read many books about knights and ladies, about wizards and dragons. In those stories, there is magic and wonder; there are fairies who grant wishes. The hero wins, and the story is beautiful. This world is so bleak and desolate and gray next to those worlds. If only there were another world. If only there were a way to get in."

"How do you know that there isn't?"

The young man looked with puzzlement. "What do you mean?"

"How do you know that this fantasy isn't true?"

"I have never had any reason to believe in it."

"When you were a little boy, did you believe in the Holocaust?"

"I hadn't even heard of it, let alone having reason to believe in it."

"But was it true?"

The young man looked as if he was about to answer, and then said, "Do you really believe in another world, in magic and wonder?"

"I might."

"Tell me about it."

"I cannot now explain it in any words that would make sense to you. I could try, but it would sound like complete nonsense."

"Try."

"Pretend that I am blind. Explain to me the colors."

Jason opened his mouth, paused for a second, and then closed it.

"Am I to believe that you are some sort of great wizard, and that you have a gift of seeing into and travelling to another world?"

"Maybe."

The old man spoke in enigmas and riddles, and yet there was something about him... He did not seem to be lying — and if he was, he was a far better liar than most. He was a puzzle, and Jason liked puzzles. He had been tricked and manipulated many times, and it might at least break the tedium to be tricked and manipulated by someone who was more interesting than he looked. So he decided to play along.

"Do you think that I could make my way into another world?"

"Maybe."

"Is it hard?"

"It is very hard, and very easy. How much do you want to do it?"

"Very much."

"If I send you on great and difficult tests, to meet many trials, will you do it?"

"I will."

"If I tell you to spend long hours studying spell books and grimoires, finding potions and amulets, are you ready for that?"

"I am."

"And if I set before you tasks more difficult and strange, and send you to do battles against monsters more evil than assassins and more deadly than dragons, can you do that?"

"I will try."

"Can you trust me?"

For a moment, Jason's mask slipped. He stalled. A minute passed — a minute that seemed like a year. Finally, he croaked,

"I don't know."

The old man nodded, and said, "I understand." He looked at the young man; there was something in his eyes that the young man could not identify.

"The way is difficult, with many trials, and the last one is the most difficult of them all. I cannot tell you what they will all be like, or even their number. When we next meet, I will be ready to give you the first."

"When do you want to meet next?"

"No matter when; we will meet."

"Can you help me?"

"I cannot do your tasks for you. But I give you this."

The old man placed his hand on the young man's head, his palm atop the skull, fingers and thumb spreading out across his scalp. He closed his eyes — and Jason felt that it would be proper to do the same. He sat in absolute silence and stillness. A moment passed.

Finally the old man removed his hand. Picking up his cane, he stood up, and slowly began to walk away, leaving Jason sitting and pondering.

## II

The next day, doubts filled Jason's mind. Had he dreamed the encounter? Why would there be such a bizarre old man? If he really had the powers and knew the wonders he hinted at, why on earth would he be sitting in a park and feeding pigeons? Each city had its share of eccentrics, but still...

As he went about his studies and activities for the next few days, he was nagged by thoughts about the man. He loved fantasy, from childhood games of make-believe to reading books and watching movies — but all of his yearning would not make it come true. He felt that he could neither believe nor trust the old man. Yet their interaction had excited, not quite a hope, but at least a desire that it could be true. He believed in fairies as a child, and he wondered if there might be a time to believe in fairies again.

He didn't talk with anyone about it; others would probably think him a fool. He was sitting in a diner, sipping a cup of coffee and pondering, when a familiar voice said, "May I join you?" He looked up, startled, and then said, "Please." As the old man sat down, Jason asked, "I forgot to ask your name."

"Senex. And yours?"

"Jason."

"The name of a hero, if I am remembering my mythology correctly," Senex said.

Jason had been thinking of how dull and common his name sounded next to 'Senex', and was again slightly startled. The man still looked old, wrinkled, and ugly — and yet there now seemed to be the faintest hint of something regal about his appearance. After a time, Jason asked, "Do you really have quests for me?"

"Yes, I do. They will help prepare you to enter, and receive the gift and the power."

"And what is the first?"

Senex reached, with both hands, into his pocket. He moved his hands for a little while, as if grasping something slippery, and then brought forth a loosely closed hand. He held his hand over the table, and opened it.

"What do you see?"

"I see nothing. Your hand is empty."

"Do you really see nothing in my hand?"

"Nothing."

"Look closer."

"I still see nothing."

"Wait."

Senex turned his hand, slowly, slightly, from side to side. At last, a tiny gleam of light caught Jason's eye. He immediately bent over to look more closely.

"What do you see?"

"I see a tiny grain of sand."

"Take it."

Jason picked up the grain of sand, and looked at it for a second. "What is my first quest?"

"You have already embarked on your first quest."

"When will I be done?"

"I don't know."

The old man stood up, and walked out of the diner.

### III

Back in his room, Jason took the grain of sand out of the napkin he had wrapped it in, and placed it on a white handkerchief on his desk.

It was small, and barely visible. It did not quite look the yellow of beaches — more like a tiny, oddly shaped pebble.

He pulled out a pin, and began to push it about. It rolled irregularly, like a tiny football. As it turned about, it gleamed every now and then. He pulled out a magnifying glass through which to look at it. Magnified, it appeared a small, bulbous crystal, which turned light and dark as it rolled over the fibers of the cloth.

"I wonder if..." He wrapped it up and went to a jeweler, to see if it might be a diamond or some other precious stone.

He came back, disappointed. It was sand, the same as untold numbers of other grains on beaches and in children's sand boxes.

It puzzled him. Was it more precious than diamond, a key to a magical portal? It did not scream out, "I am magical!"; it did not glow in the dark, or levitate in the air, or shock him as he touched it. If there was something special about it, it was more subtle than that. But how would Jason unlock the secret? Time passed, and he began to doubt that there was any secret at all — that it was anything more than a common grain of sand.

It was in one of these moments of doubt that he again

encountered Senex in the diner, drinking a cup of coffee.

"I don't get it," Jason said, sitting down. Senex still looked into his coffee, sipping it. "What don't you get?"

"You hint at a world of wonders, and then give me a common grain of sand. Are you playing games with me?"

Senex set down his coffee, and looked into Jason's eyes.

"What do you think?"

Jason looked at the old man. He began to open his mouth, and then swallowed. "I cannot say that you seem cruel, but neither can I say that your words and actions make any sense to me."

"And?"

After Jason said nothing, the old man said, "What were you looking for?"

"Something great. Something awesome. Something mysterious. A storm of light, maybe. Turgid forces. Ritual magic."

"And what did you find?"

"A common grain of sand."

"Is that all?"

Jason pulled the napkin from his pocket, and unfolded the grain of sand. "All I see is a common grain of sand. Maybe there is something else, but it is invisible to me." He looked at the old man in puzzlement, and saw a look of knowledge in Senex's eyes.

"Can you see something else, something that is invisible to me?"

"I can."

"What?"

"Tell me everything that you know about it. What is it?"

"It is something that is found on beaches."

"That is where it is found. What is it?"

"It is an odd-shaped, bulbous thing, very tiny."

"That is its size and shape. What is it?"

"The jeweler said that it is not diamond, or quartz, or

anything else like that."

"That is what it is not. What is it?"

"The jeweler said that it is a crystal of silicon and oxygen atoms."

"That is its scientific structure and constituency. What is it?"

"Is it all of these things?"

"All of these things are true of it. What is it?"

Jason drew a deep breath and said, "I don't know."

"Make it into a rabbit."

"How am I supposed to do that?"

"If you can't do that, make it into something else. A fish, perhaps."

"I can't."

"Destroy it."

Jason placed the grain of sand between a knife and a spoon, and crushed it to dust.

"You have broken it into smaller pieces. Now destroy it."

Jason dropped the spoon and knife; the fragments that were the grain of sand, settled on the table. "I can't."

"What is it?"

"I don't know." Jason looked into the old man's eyes, expecting to see a look of sadistic pleasure. Instead, he saw the look of greatest compassion.

Jason said, "It is a mystery."

The old man smiled.

Jason gathered the fragments into his napkin, and walked away.

## IV

Jason began to think about stones and crystals. The exquisitely rare crystals, the diamond as their queen, were prized, not only because they were beautiful, but because they were rare. Quartz and other crystals, in their luminous beauty, were no surprise to be said to be magical. So it was not too surprising that there should also be a hidden, tiny beauty to the stone and crystal commonly called a grain of sand. Few people owned these gems, not because they were hidden deep within the earth, but because they were hidden from people's notice. When entering another world, Jason would like to be ready to appreciate its beauty — and who knows? Perhaps sand was a treasure imported en masse from that world. In the mean time, he would enjoy his newfound crystalline treasure.

## V

Jason asked Senex, "Am I prepared to enter another world,  
the world from which crystals come?"

Senex answered, "You have begun to begin."

Jason asked, "Are there wonders which make sand pale in  
comparison?"

Senex answered, "There are wonders which make sand look  
very bright by the light they shine on it."

## VI

Senex lit a candle. Jason watched, waiting for an explanation.

The flame danced and spun. It filled the white column of wax beneath it with a soft glow that melted into the darkness. The flame itself, divided into tongues, danced and jumped again and again into the air, looking as if it just might fly. All around, it illuminated the surrounding forms with a golden light; shadows loomed on the walls and melted into the surroundings.

As Jason watched, a thin layer of clear, molten wax began to form atop the candle. As the flame burned, the heat began to seep into the wax, and the tiny pool grew deeper. A drop, like a tear, began to form on one side of the pool. The molten wax flowed, the stream carrying an indentation in the top of the wax column. The flame jumped and blazed, then settled down as, one by one, drops of molten wax trickled down the side.

The candle was tapered and thin, and it seemed to Jason only a minute until it burned all the way down, and a tiny red glow in the wick rested at the base of an ascending, twisting, turning stream of wispy smoke. Jason sat in peace, enjoying a sense of calm and fullness, digesting the beauty he had watched.

Senex's voice broke the silence. "You have passed your second test, Jason."

## VII

The old man had helped Jason open his eyes to one part of the natural world, and he began to explore, with the wonder of a child, the magic all around him.

He discovered that there was one type of item which was the easiest thing in the world to cut with a knife — but, as soon as you had cut it, the cut would instantly heal; there it would be, as whole as ever! It would shape itself around whatever you put it in, and could squeeze through even the tiny holes in cloth — but he had to be careful, because it would also climb the cloth like a ladder. It was quite mischievous — there were some things, which resembled grains of sand, which it would take and make completely invisible.

There were other things that would hide behind, and yet mimic the people and the trees. They were like marionettes, except that they exaggerated and distorted the profiles of whatever they were making fun of. They also played hide and seek with the light, and were very quick — whenever the light would peek to see if it would find them, they would already be hidden somewhere else.

He saw great, massive citadels with vaults beneath, storing hoards of gold and gems deep within, under protections that a dragon's fire could not scratch. Those citadels were decorated, so that even those who dare not break in, would yet come and

visit, seeing the gay streamers and the skittish sentinels.

There was another creature that Jason could not see, but was forever sneaking up and tackling him. It never knocked him over, but always wanted to play — it would tousle people's hair, and tickle the little children. It played with the other creatures, too — it jumped around on the grass, and danced and spun with the leaves.

There were other strange creatures that skittered around timidly — some jumped along the ground; some climbed trees and buildings; some swam like fish through the air. Most fled at his approach, but a few would let him touch them — and they were soft and warm.

Even greater than his joy at this beauty was a sense that, beautiful as these things were, they also hinted at something else, a deeper magic. Jason tried to see what it might be, but it always eluded him.

## VIII

Enthralled as he was, Jason could not shut out a sense that the beauty was not alone — that there was also something dark and perverse as well. With such beauty, Jason thought in his most enthralled moments that this surely must be the best of all possible worlds. But then he was shocked by ugly realities that forced themselves upon his consciousness: robberies and rapes, children being treated cruelly, and children treating others cruelly. The beauty made him feel as if, somehow, if he opened his eyes wide enough to see all the beauty there was, everything would be perfect — but, try as he might, it didn't work. It was like smelling the softest lilac fragrance on the breeze — and then being punched in the stomach.

It was sinking into a darker mood that he again met Senex, this time on a street littered with garbage. He greeted the old man harshly: "Wave your magic wand, old man, and make this refuse turn into flowers. Open my eyes, so that I may see that all suffering is an illusion, that we live in the best of all possible worlds."

"Suffering is not an illusion, and we do not live in the best of all possible worlds."

"What of the world you said I had begun preparing to enter? Is it not an escape from suffering?"

"Do you not remember the very first question you asked me?"

Do you not remember the answer?" Tears began to gather in Senex's eyes.

Jason savored a thrill of pleasure at watching the old man suffer, and knowing that the same darkness tormented them both. Then he realized what he was doing, and felt a sense of shame and revulsion at himself. He hated himself and the old man for what he felt.

"If you were going to attack a dragon," the old man finally began, "would you rush at it with neither weapon nor armor nor training? Or would you take at least a little preparation before setting out to attack a leviathan that has slain many heroes far greater than yourself?"

Jason said nothing.

"The questions you ask are big questions, and they must be faced. I wrestle with them, too. And I fear. I do not blame you at all for asking them, though your attitude in asking pierces me." A tear trickled down Senex's cheek.

Jason felt a black hole of shame inside his heart. The darkness he saw, and hated in the world around him — Jason now realized that it was inside him, too. It was like a worm, attacking from outside, and gnawing from within.

He wanted to die.

"Jason," the old man's voice said. "Jason, look at me."

Jason stared at the ground.

"Please."

Jason looked up and cringed, expecting a storm of fury. He looked up, waiting for his punishment. But his gaze was met by teary eyes — and compassion.

"I forgive you."

## IX

It was with a certain heaviness that Jason awaited the coming lessons. Not that they doubted that they were good — he was sure of that. But up ahead loomed a fierce battle. The worst part of it was that he knew that the enemy, the worm, was not only lurking at large. It was also inside his heart.

Yet dark as the darkness was, it could never put the light out.

And Senex was showing him new things at each meeting.

Senex had with him a book. He said, "Close your eyes and imagine." He opened its dusty leaves, and began to read:

"You pull your arms to your side and glide through the water. On your left is a fountain of bubbles, upside down, beneath a waterfall; the bubbles shoot down and then cascade out and to the surface. To your right swims a school of colorful fish, red and blue with thin black stripes. The water is cool, and you can feel the currents gently pushing and pulling on your body. Ahead of you, seaweed above and long, bright green leaves below wave back and forth, flowing and bending. You pull your arms, again, with a powerful stroke which shoots you forward under the seaweed; your back feels cool in the shade. You kick, and you feel the warmth of the sun again, soaking in and through your skin and muscles. Bands of light dance on the sand beneath you, as the light is bent and turned by the waves."

Senex began to lead Jason through mathematics, history,

philosophy, literature — and Jason began to behind a new and different beauty, a beauty that cannot be seen with the eye, nor touched with the hand, but only grasped with the mind. He began to explore imagination, and ideas, and metaphors. He saw light dance in the poetry Senex read; he saw the beauty of order and reason in the philosophers Senex cited. The connections, the play, the dance of ideas was wonderful. Together they explored ideas, and it was an awesome beauty. Jason had a razor sharp mind, and he began to make connections that surprised even Senex.

## X

"I still wish that I were a fairy," Jason said, "or that I could become one."

"What do you think you are?"

A searing pain, a pain of dark memory, flashed through Jason's soul. "I don't know," he said. "I hate myself."

"Do you believe that there are some things for everyone to enjoy?"

"Of course. You have shown me what I was blind to — that, outside of us, there are rocks, and stars, and the sky, and trees, and blades of grass, and snails, and stags, and chipmunks, and fish, and eagles, and logs, and mountains, and clouds, and wind, and rain, and the moon, and silence, and music, and beauty, and artwork, and poetry, and stories, and theorems, and arguments, and logic, and intuition, and laughter, and happiness, and books, and subtlety, and metaphors, and words, and st—"

Senex cut him off. "Do you believe that any of it has been given specifically to you?"

Jason looked down at his feet.

"What are you looking at, Jason?"

Jason mumbled, "My feet."

"What are your feet?"

"I don't know," he said, pausing for a moment. Then he continued, "I don't know where they are from, but they move

about at my command, like two strange servants, carrying me  
wherever I want to go."

"What do they carry?"

"A house that has eyes to see, and hands to let me touch and  
move things, and innards that support and let me live." He paused  
for a second, and then said, "It is a clockwork masterpiece."

"What lives in this house."

"Well, there is at least a mind that can learn, and think, and  
explore, and feel."

"Is that rubbish?"

Jason begrudgingly admitted, "No."

"Jason, why are you so downcast?"

"Because that is not all. Because there is a worm. It roams  
the world, and it lives deep inside of me."

"I know."

Jason drew back in fear. "What are you going to do to me?"

"What do you think?"

"You must hate me."

"I hate the worm inside of you with all my heart. But I do not  
hate you."

"You don't?"

"Jason, I love you."

Jason looked up. His face quivered, and tears began to slide  
down his cheeks. "You do?"

"Jason, may I give you a hug?"

Jason nodded his head.

The tears flowed from deep within. They were tears of  
sorrow, but yet they were different from the bitter tears he  
had fought before. They were painful, yet also tears of cleansing  
and healing.

## XI

"In the stories I read, I believe that there are people like us, and also strange and wonderful people like fairies, and elves, and dwarves, and gnomes. I wish I could know them."

"I believe that there are people like us, and also strange and wonderful people like blacks and Hispanics and Asians and Native Americans. And I count myself the richer for the friendships I have shared with such people."

Senex paused, and then continued. "I believe that you have seen much of the beauty that can be perceived with the body and with the mind, and also that you are beginning to appreciate your body and mind — yes, I know that you still wonder why they were given you. You are close to being ready to enter the other world now."

Jason suddenly looked up. "There's more?"

"There is much more, my friend. I think that you are ready for the last trial before entering. The challenge is this: that you must make a friend."

"So I can enter after I make a friend?"

"Yes, but you can't make a friend in order to get in. You must make a friend for the sake of making a friend."

"Does it matter which race?"

"It matters a great deal, but not in the way that you are thinking. You will be blessed by a friend of any race; the

difference is not the amount of blessing, but what kind."

## XII

Jason was walking along a sidewalk, and saw some children playing in the street, kicking a ball around. Then he watched in horror

a truck comes along  
a child kicks the ball  
a little girl runs after it  
in front of the car  
girl trips  
brakes screech

Time seemed to slow down; Jason watched everything in horrible slowness.

Then Jason realized he was lying on his side, on the opposite sidewalk. The little girl was in his arms, screaming and holding her knee. The ball was still in the street — flat as a pancake.

Adults began to come out of the building. A young woman ran over to the girl, yelling, "My baby!"

An older woman, with wrinkled walnut skin and silvery skin, walked up to him and said, "Son, you wanna come in? You bleedin'."

Jason looked down. There was a rough abrasion on his elbow, and his shoulder hurt.

Inside the apartment, he was in the same room as the little girl. Her mother was gently wiping her skinned knee with a warm,

wet washcloth; the girl was screaming bloody murder. He also had a cloth washing over his elbow; it stung sharply. The children had come in, and were simultaneously and very quickly trying to explain what happened.

The chaos subsided; the children were calmed, and (the children speaking more slowly, and one at a time) the adults understood what happened. "You gonna be soah t'marrah" — and he was.

The family invited Jason for dinner, and told him that he was welcome any time. They were very warm and friendly; at first Jason thought this was because he had saved their little girl.

The family was grateful, extremely so, but...

He started to visit from time to time, and he saw the same warm welcome extend to anybody who came in. The family was warm, and emotional, and playful, and as time passed, Jason began to know the specific people —

Emma, the matron who had first invited in, was wise, gentle, and motherly. She was a big woman with an even bigger heart, that seemed to have ample room for anybody who came into the house. She was the person most in charge.

Harold, her younger brother, was full of stories and jokes. He was the life of gatherings, and often had people laughing. He was the person who had travelled the most throughout the United States, and seemed to have his finger on the pulse of the nation — how it had changed, how it had stayed the same, throughout the years.

Jane was Edna's eldest daughter, and the mother of the little girl whom Jason saved. All of the people in the family had an easy-going, warm, welcoming manner — it really was not long before Jason felt as if he were one of the family — but the welcome seemed to crystallize in Jane. She took the most effort

to include Jason, and asked him the most questions.

Alfred was Jane's husband. He worked at a factory, and was quite the musician; he played several instruments, and often managed to get the whole family singing and dancing.

Anne was Edna's second daughter, and was perhaps most actively involved in race relations and the womanist movement. Through him, Jason saw a kind of feminism which was completely different; what most struck Jason was that, in its adamant advocacy of womanhood and motherhood, neither Anne nor any of her other womanist friends found any need for abortion, or regarded children as an inconvenience.

Erica, the little girl whom Jason saved, was a little ball of life. She was insatiably curious and inquisitive; more than once, she managed to put Jason somewhat on the spot: "Why you a comin' heah? Da other white folk doan come heah much, like they afraid of us, o' sumthin'." — but she asked in perfect innocence and sincerity, and the open warmth of the others (especially Jane) defused the tension. She was also quite a cuddlebug, and (Jason eventually discovered) more than a little bit ticklish.

Steve, Alfred and Edna's second child, wanted to be a scientist; he was somewhat quiet, and a bookworm. Jason was sometimes amazed by his intelligence, and was able to talk with him about some of the things he had learned from Senex.

Ronald, the baby of Alfred and Edna's family, was full of energy, and energy, and energy, and energy. He would run around the house all day long, and it did not take long for Jason to learn what was Ron's favorite word: "Again!" He seemed to have a tireless enjoyment of the things he knew.

Monica had been adopted by the family, and (in a sense) was Anne's baby. The two of them were quite close, and she seemed to be able to learn very quickly anything Anne told her.

There were also a number of neighborhood children going in and out of the house; the family treasured them, and seemed to welcome them as if they were their own. James wanted to be a pilot; Michael was very much interested in fire, and loved the Fourth of July; Desiree loved to dance with anyone and everyone; Edward chased the other children around.

Jason cherished his moments visiting the apartment, and grew especially fond of Erica. She would often sit on his lap and try to understand the things Jason was talking about (though Jason tended to too often talk about things that were rather complex to reasonably expect a child to understand), and would often playfully tell him how funny he was. Jason came to love the music, the dancing, the laughter, the emotion. He was struck by how different the family was — and how human.

As he came out of the apartment, he saw Senex walking towards him, and tipping his hat. "I am pleased," Senex said, "and I think that you are ready to enter."

## XIII

Senex said, "Are you ready to hear a story?"

Jason said, "I think I am."

Senex said, "This is the most important story that I will ever tell you."

Jason said, "I am listening."

Senex began, "Once upon a time, there was a coruscating Light, a surge of power, a rock greater than a mountain. And from this Light was begotten... another facet of the same eternal Eternal essence. Father and Son. Between them shot a fire of love and energy. In and among and from them were glory, majesty, light, power, love, goodness.

"And the Light spoke, and star upon star upon star upon star poured fourth, pulsing with life. They all joined in the great Dance, and spun and turned in wheel within wheel within wheel within wheel. As they danced the great Dance and sung the great Song, the Light and all of the stars revelled in the glory and beauty.

"The first and most glorious of the stars that were formed, held a place in the dance that was second only to the Light itself. The very least of the stars held a place of glory to contemplate for a lifetime, and this was the greatest.

"Then the first star turned, and stepped out of the harmony of the dance, and spoke to the Light. He demanded to be placed

above the Light, to lead the Dance himself. 'I am the greatest of the stars; I am greater and wiser and more glorious than you. Cede to me my rightful place.'

There was something about the demand that jarred Jason, filling him with revulsion to the very core. In it, he saw the essence of everything that is perverse and vile and impure. He wondered why the Light did not blast the star out of existence right there.

"The Light paused, and then said, 'You believe that you are better than me.

"'You believe that you are wiser than me.

"'Prove it.

"'You and your glory were the beginning of my plan; you are not the end of it. I have a plan deep within my heart. You may form whatever plan your wisdom may find for you. And we will let the plans play out, and we will see whose plan is the wiser - yours or mine.'

"And then the star screamed out his blasphemous accord, screamed a scream that tore the very fabric of space. And a third of the stars joined him in his rebellion, and became dragons, and serpents, and worms.

"Thus began a cosmic war.

"The Light again created, a creation that was vivid and new and detailed and wondrous. Slowly, with the patience of an artist, he formed rocks, mountains, and trees. The smallest blade of grass was perfect. He formed a great rock surrounded by lights, then plants which live, then animals which move, then finally men in his own image, likeness, and glory. When he stopped to rest, all of the stars stood watching in awe.

"Then the darkened star came, in the form of a serpent, and beguiled man, to do the one thing that is accursed. And the man

and woman, created as immortal gods, bore in them a curse, and began to die from the inside out. They, also, stepped out of the harmony of the dance and out of the source of health; their spirits rotted in vice and evil, and the worm began to infest and grow inside their hearts. There was perversity after perversity after perversity after perversity. One generation after the first sin, came the first murder: brother murdered brother. And the people were quick to embrace evil and forget what is good, even the Light himself.

"And all of the dragons, and serpents, and worms, cackled and screeched with unholy laughter, and the stars winced in pain. The first of Dragons taunted the Light: 'Your plan? Your glorious and wise plan? You have indeed made a fine creation for me to soil. Thank you; I very much enjoy watching the curses grow and multiply.'

"And the men grow wicked, so that they all deserved to die.

"All but one.

"One man walked in the Light.

"And the Light called out to the one man. 'You. You there in the desert, where neither rain nor mist dampen the earth.'

"And the man answered, 'Yes?'

"And the Light commanded, 'Build an immense boat.'

"And the dragons and worms cackled and jeered.

"And the man, ridiculed and cursed by even his friends, built an immense boat.

"And the great Dragon said, 'One candle? You hope by lighting one single candle to vanquish a whole world of darkness? Come, old fool; it doesn't work that way.'

"And the Light remained silent.

"Then the Light called to a man, and told him, 'Leave your kin, your land, your family, everything that is dear to you, and I will

give you a son, and make you into a great nation.'

"And the man took up his belongings and left.

"And the Light gave the man a son, and the son grew and matured.

"Then the Light told the man, 'Take your son, whom you love, and sacrifice him to me.'

"And the man obeyed, taking the son up on the mountain to sacrifice. He raises his arm, knife in hand, to strike the child dead.

"And the Light, quick as lightning, sent a star to say, 'Stop. Because you have not withheld from me even your son, I will bless you richly.'

"And the Dragon says, 'What's the point of this? Do you call one or two righteous men to help us see how evil all the rest are? Or could it just be that you are unwilling to admit defeat?'

"And the Light remained silent.

"And in the great Dragon, was the faintest tremor of fear.

"Then the Light called another man, and told him to forsake riches and luxury to free his people from slavery. The man hesitated, shied away from the task before him - and ultimately obeyed.

"Then the great dragon said, 'Can't you just end it now? I know that you've lost, but I'm beginning to feel uncomfortable.'

"And the Light continues his work.

"Through the man, the Light gave a law, showing what is right and what is wrong. And the people - staggeringly, and with many misgivings - started to obey.

"Then the Dragon came to the Light, and the Light said of another man, 'Have you seen this servant of mine? He is upright and blameless.'

"The Dragon scoffed and said, 'Well, of course! Look at all

the prosperity you have given him. That is why he worships you.

Take it away, and he will curse you to your face.'

"The Light said, 'Prove it. I give you permission to take away everything that he holds dear to him - only do not touch his body.'

"The Dragon breathed fire, and destroys the man's livestock, his possessions, his children. And the man wept in misery. He was told to curse the Light and die. In agony, he screamed in pain and cursed even the day of his birth - but refuses to curse the Light.

"Then the Dragon said, "You know, a man will give everything he owns for his health. You have given this man abundant health - and he is still healthy. Only take that away, and he will curse you to your face.'

"And again, the Light gave permission, only requiring that the dragon not slay him. And the man was covered in painful sores from head to toe, his body wracked with pain, tortured. He was in agony. When three of his friends came, they sat with him for a week in silence because his pain is so great. And still, the man refused to curse the Light.

"The friends then talked, insisting that the man had done wrong, yet he does not even accept their claim. Finally the Light came and spoke through a storm, healing the man and restoring what was lost twice over.

"And the stars rejoiced.

"Then the Light pulled another corner of the veil off of his plan. The Light begotten was sent, and became a man himself, suffering and walking the dust of the fallen world. He called people, telling them to abandon net and boat to follow him - and they obeyed. He healed the sick, diseased, and injured; he casts out fallen stars who have taken possession of people. The dragon attacked again again, trying to have him killed, and tempting him

in every way. And yet the Light in earth remained pure and blameless. He began to call people about him, and teach them.

"Then one of the Light's closest friends betrayed him, and the Light himself was hung out and exposed to die. And when the Light died, darkness reigned.

"And the dragons, and serpents, and worms, jeered and cackled. And the great Dragon taunts, 'Your great and wise plan gave me an even greater victory than I had hoped for. I set about to destroy your creation - and now I have destroyed your uncreated Son.'

"And tears flowed.

"Then a surge of light and power flowed, and the begotten Light was alive, transformed, coursing with the power of an indestructible life, and bearing with him the cure for the curse. And the fire of love and energy flowing among and in and from the Light flowed into his followers, too. The Light ascends back into Heaven from whence he came - and dwelt inside them.

"And in the community of those who believe and accept his cure, heroes and martyrs stand for the truth and fought, alongside the stars, against the darkness. And as all were watching — the Light, the stars, and also the dead, that is those who walked before, and now stood cheering those who walk now as they continue in the battle — the wisdom of the plan formed by the Light was revealed in the community of those who believe. In this community, in those whom the Light again draws into the great Dance, was

"A large family of many children for the Light  
Mother, and brother, and sister for the begotten Light  
A body for the begotten Light to live in  
A dwelling place and temple for the eternal fire of love and  
enerav

A witness to the world  
A moral preserver and purifier to the world  
A servant to the world  
A warrior against the great Dragon

"With all of its faults and foibles, the community reached out, and invited others also to step into the Dance.

"Then, as the begotten Light left the world, he returned - in full, unveiled glory and majesty, with all of the stars with him. The dead and the living members of the community were imbued with the same life as he has, their bodies transformed, and shared in the divine nature. The earth was destroyed in a great apocalypse, then remade even better than before. All — the living and the dead alike — were brought forth, and brought to account for their life and deeds; those who had chosen a curse were accursed, and those who had chosen were imbued with life beyond intense. And it was before the renewed, regenerated, transformed community of believers that the Dragon stood, and saw the wisdom of the plan. And it was below their feet that the Light crushed the Dragon, before casting it and all of its minions into a lake of fire. And all of those watching saw in full, not only that the Light is more powerful, but also the immeasurably greater wisdom."

After a time, Jason said, "That is the most beautiful story I have ever heard."

Senex said, "Would you like to have slain the worm that is inside your heart? Would you like to dance the great Dance?"

Jason said, "Yes, I would."

Senex said, "The story is true, and we are now living between the first and second comings of the Light. And he bears with him the cure for the curse — and, if you ask him, he will help you slay

the worm that is inside your heart, and let you join his forces to fight the darkness that is in the world."

"How do I do that?"

Senex said, "You must pray a prayer, something like,

"Lord Jesus, come into my heart.

Forgive my sins.

Draw me into your Light.

Fill me with your Life.

Make me your own.

I give myself to you,

And accept you giving yourself to me."

A look of surprise crossed Jason's face. "Is this Christianity?"

"Yes."

Jason's surprise turned to disgust. "But Christianity is narrow-minded and intolerant and repressive and archaic and — You deceived me, and tricked me into thinking it was something beautiful!"

"Jason, have you ever heard Plato's allegory of the cave?"

"No."

"Plato made an allegory, which was more or less as follows:

"Imagine that there is a cave. In this cave are prisoners who have been there from birth. They are shackled, and held in place.

"Behind the prisoners is a wall, and behind the wall a fire.

"People carry things back and forth, above the wall, so that they cast great, flickering shadows on the wall. And as these prisoners grow up, they will never see what a chair, or a book, or a sword looks like. They will only see the shadows on the wall.

"And they will become very good at identifying and recognizing the shadows and think that they are the realities

...recognizing the shadows, and think that they are the realities themselves. They won't think that a pot is a pot. They will think that the shadow is a pot.

"Now imagine that one of these prisoners is brought out of the cave, into the world. He will first be blinded by the light, and then only slowly be able to see. He will see nothing he will recognize, and he will curse those who brought him out.

"But, eventually, he will learn to see — and he will see things infinitely fuller, and richer, and more real than ever before. He will see the realities that cast the shadows.

"Now imagine that he is taken back in the cave again. At first, he won't be able to see anything in the darkness; the others in the cave will believe that he is blind. When he does adjust, he will begin to speak of realities beyond the shadows, which are far greater than what is seen — and the other people will think him mad as well as blind. They will vow to kill anyone who should take anyone else up out of what they believe is reality, into the light."

Senex paused a moment, and then continued.

"There are two things which I would like to say.

"The first is that there are a lot of evil Christians, and Christians have done a lot of bad things. I have been bored by a lot of dull Christians, and hurt by a lot of hypocritical Christians. And I am ashamed of a great deal of what has been done in the name of Christ."

"The second is that what you have seen called 'Christianity' is only a shadow cast in bad light. What I have been doing is helping you to see the reality itself, in the light of the sun."

"But why didn't you tell me it was Christianity to begin with? Wasn't that deceptive?"

"I did not tell you for a reason. I wanted to un-deceive you, and show you the reality itself. If I told you that I wanted to show you Christianity, you would have thought I meant the usual

shadow that is called Christianity — and would you have wanted to know anything about it?"

Jason begrudgingly said, "No."

After a time, Senex said, "I can see by your face that you have more questions. What are they?"

"They are questions you won't like."

"Ask them."

"What about the Inquisition? What about the intolerance? What about saying that all those other people's religions are wrong? What about saying that everyone else is damned to Hell?"

"The Inquisition was one of the darkest moments in Christian history, and it has done damage that hurts people down to this day. It, along with the Crusades has fractured the relationships Christians have with Muslims and Jews to this day. And it does another, even deeper damage. It makes people believe that standing for the truth is evil."

"But what about not accepting other religions? What about Hell?"

"Jason, do you know the worm inside your heart?"

"Yes."

"The worm is inside my heart, too. It is in everybody's heart. And it needs to be killed again and again and again. And, if you do not fight it to the death, it will kill you."

"But... I still don't see why you have to be so intolerant."

"Jason, if I am shot in the arm, can a doctor help me?"

"Yes. He can help stitch you up, so your body can heal."

"What if I refuse to be stitched up? What if I shoot myself again and again, and insist that the doctor heal me without stitching me up or stopping me from shooting myself?"

"But... the doctor can't help you because you won't let him."

"That's right. Jason. A doctor can't help you if you choose

injury over medicine. And Jesus is a doctor with the only medicine that works.

"I don't believe in Hell because I want to think about people dying. I believe in Hell for the same reason I believe that shooting yourself is bad for your health — because that's the way it is. I know that other religions are things people put a lot of work into, and take very seriously. But they are not the doctor's medicine, and the cold, harsh reality is that taking the medicine — all of it — is the only way to be healed."

"What about homosexuals? Can't they be Christians like everyone else?"

"Homosexuals can be Christians just like everyone else, the exact same way that everyone else is a Christian. Namely, by letting the doctor heal all of their injuries. All of us have different wounds, and they all need to be healed. I have wounds that most homosexuals don't. I am a recovering alcoholic. I haven't had a drink for sixteen years now, but I spent twenty years of my life as a drunkard. Whatever wounds we have, be they homosexual lust, or drinking too much alcohol, or pride, or any of ten thousand other sins, we need to have them to be healed. All of them."

Jason thought for a while, and then said, "This is the most difficult thing that anyone has ever asked me. I don't know if I can do it."

Senex said, "I know it's difficult, and I can't do it by myself. But there is help. It is a difficult path, but the Light will give you the strength, and give me the strength. And remember the community in the story? They will help you, as they help me."

Jason leaned back, and thought for a time. Then he closed his eyes, trembled, and prayed,

"Lord Jesus, come into my heart.  
Forgive my sins.  
Draw me into your Light.  
Fill me with your Life.  
Make me your own.  
I give myself to you,  
And accept you giving yourself to me."

And angels rejoiced.  
And Jason entered another world.

# The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab

Before I get further, I'd like to say a few words about what I drive.

I drive an Oldsmobile F-85 station wagon. What's the color? When people are being nice, they talk about a classic, subdued camouflage color. Sometimes the more candid remarks end up saying something like, "The Seventies called. They want their paint job back," although my station wagon is a 1965 model. All in all, I think I had the worst car of anyone I knew. Or at least that's what I used to think.

Then I changed my mind. Or maybe it would be better to say that I had my mind changed for me.

I was sitting at the cafeteria, when I saw someone looking for a place to sit. He was new, and I motioned for him to come over. He sat down, quietly, and ate in silence. There was a pretty loud conversation at the table, and when people started talking about cars, his eyes seemed to widen. I asked him what kind of car he drove.

After hesitating, he mumbled something hard to understand, and looked like he was getting smaller. Someone said, "Maybe he

doesn't drive a car at all, and whatever he mumbled was forgotten in raucous laughter.

I caught him in the hallway later, and he asked if I could help him move several large boxes that were not in the city. When we made the trip, he again seemed to be looking around with round eyes, almost enchanted by my rustbucket.

I began to feel sorry for the chap, and I gave him rides. Even if I didn't understand.

He still managed to dodge any concrete hint of whatever it was that got him around—and I had a hunch that he hadn't just walked. My other friends may have given me some ribbing about my bucket of bolts, but really it was just ribbing. I tried to impress on him that he would be welcome even if he just got around on a derelict moped—but still not a single peep.

By the time it was becoming old to joke about whatever he drove, I accepted a dare and shadowed him as he walked along a couple of abandoned streets, got to the nearest airstrip...

and got into an SR-71 Blackbird. The man took off in an SR-71 Blackbird. An SR-71 Blackbird! Words failed me. Polite ones, at any rate. The SR-71 Blackbird may be the coolest looking reconnaissance plane ever; as far as looks go, it beats the pants off the spacecraft in a few science fiction movies. But the engineers weren't really trying to look cool; that was a side effect of trying to make an aircraft that was cool. It has those sleek lines because it's a bit of a stealth aircraft; it can be detected by radar, but it's somewhat harder. And suppose you're in an SR-71 Blackbird and you are picked up by radar, and enemy soldiers launch a surface-to-air missile at you—or two, or ten? Just speed up and you'll outrun it; the SR-71 Blackbird is the fastest aircraft ever built. Some SR-71 Blackbirds have been shot at. Ain't never got one shot down. One of the better

surface-to-air rockets has about the same odds of hitting an SR-71 Blackbird doing Mach 3.2 as a turtle trying to catch up with a cheetah and ram it. An SR-71 Blackbird is a different kind of rare. It's not just that it's not a common electronic device that you can pick up at any decent department store; it isn't even like something very expensive and rare that has a waiting list is almost never on store shelves. The SR-71 Blackbird is more like, if anything, an invention that the inventor can't sell—perhaps, some years back, one of the first, handmade electric light bulbs—because it is so far from how people think and do things that they can't see anyone would want to use them. The SR-71 Blackbird is rare enough that few pilots have even seen it. And I saw, or thought I saw, my friend get into one.

and got into an SR-71 Blackbird. The man took off in an SR-71 Blackbird. An SR-71 Blackbird! Words failed me. Polite ones, at any rate. And probably the impolite ones, too. The SR-71 Blackbird may be the coolest looking reconnaissance plane ever; as far as looks go, it beats the pants off the spacecraft in a few science fiction movies. But the engineers weren't really trying to look cool; that was a side effect of trying to make an aircraft that was cool. It has those sleek lines because it's a bit of a stealth aircraft; it can be detected by radar, but it's somewhat harder. And suppose you're in an SR-71 Blackbird and you are picked up by radar, and enemy soldiers launch a surface-to-air missile at you—or two, or ten? Just speed up and you'll outrun it; the SR-71 Blackbird is the fastest aircraft ever built. Some SR-71 Blackbirds have been shot at. Ain't never got one shot down. One of the better surface-to-air rockets has about the same odds of hitting an SR-71 Blackbird doing Mach 3.2 as a turtle trying to catch up with a cheetah and ram it. An SR-71 Blackbird is a different kind of rare. It's not just that it's not a common

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I walked back in a daze, sat down, decided not to take any drinks just then, and cornered the joker, who couldn't keep his mouth shut. I told him to fess up about whatever he slipped me, but he was clueless—and when I couldn't keep my mouth shut and blabbed why, he didn't believe me. (Not that I blame him; I didn't believe it myself.)

I ate by myself, later, and followed him. The third time, I caught him in the act.

I was red with anger, and almost saw red. He blanched whiter than at the wisecrack about him maybe not driving a car.

What I would have said then, if I were calmer, was, "Do you think it's right for a billionaire, to go around begging? You have things that none of us even dream of, and you—?"

After I had yelled at him, he looked at me and said, "How can I fuel up?"

I glared at him. "I don't know, but it's got to be much cooler than waiting in line at a gas station."

"Maybe it is cooler, but I don't think so, and that's not what I asked. Suppose I want to fly in my airplane. What do I do to be fueled up?"

"Um, a fuel truck drives out and fills you up?"

"And then I'm good to go because I have a full tank, just like you?"

"I don't see what you're getting at."

"Ok, let me ask you. What do you do if you want to make a long trip? Can you fill your tank, maybe a day or two before your trip, and leave?"

"Yes. And that would be true if you had a moped, or a motorcycle, or a luxury car, or even something exotic like an ATV or a hovercraft."

"But not an SR-71 Blackbird."

"What do you mean, not an SR-71 Blackbird? Did you get a good deal because your aircraft is broken?"

"Um, just because you can assume something in a good car, or even a bad car, doesn't mean that it's true across the board. When it's sitting on the ground, my aircraft leaks fuel."

"It leaks fuel? Why are you flying an aircraft that's not broken?"

"There's a difference between designing a passenger car and what I deal with. With a passenger car, if the manufacturers are any good, the car can sit with little to no fuel leak even if it's badly maintained."

"But this does not apply to what the rest of us can only dream of?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"A passenger car heats up a little, at top speeds, due to air friction. One and the same part works for the fuel line when it's been in the garage for an hour, and when it's driving as fast as you've driven it. Not so with my aircraft. The SR-71 Blackbird is exposed to one set of temperatures in the hangar, and then there is air friction for moving at Mach 3.2, and there's a basic

principle of physics that says that what gets hotter, gets bigger."

"What's your point?"

"The parts that make up an SR-71 Blackbird are one size in the hangar and other sizes when the aircraft is flying at high speeds. The engineers could have sized the parts so that you could keep an aircraft in the hangar without losing any fuel... or they could make an airplane that leaks fuel on the ground, but it works when it was flying. But they could not make an airplane that would work at Mach 3.2 and have a sealed fuel line in the hangar... and that means that, when I go anywhere worth mentioning in my hot, exciting airplane, even I get fueled up on the ground, and I lose quite a lot of fuel getting airborne and more or less need an immediate air-to-air refueling... This is besides the obvious fact that I can't run on any fuel an ordinary gas station would carry. For that matter, the JP-7, a strange beast of a 'fuel' that must also serve as hydraulic fluid and engine coolant, is about as exotic compared to most jet fuel as it is compared to the 'boring' gasoline which you take for granted—you can't get fuel for an SR-71 Blackbird at a regular airport any more than you can buy 'ordinary' jet fuel at a regular gas station... and you think me strange when I get excited about the fact that you can drive up to any normal gas station and fill-er-up!"

I hesitated, and then asked, "But besides one or two details like—"

He cut me off. "It's not 'one or two details,' any more than—than filling out paperwork and dealing with bureaucracy amounts to 'one or two details' of a police officer's life. Sure, on television, something exciting happens to police officers every hour, but a real police officer's life is extremely different from

police shows. It's not just paperwork. Perhaps there is lots of paperwork—a police officer deals with at least as much paperwork and bureaucracy as an employee who's a cog in a big office—but there are other things. Police officers get in firefights all the time on TV. But this is another area where TV's image is not the reality. I've known police officers who wouldn't trade their work for anything in the world. Doesn't mean that their work is like a cop show. When police officers aren't being filmed on those videos that make dramatic shows, and they aren't training, the average police officer starts firing maybe once every three or four years. There are many, many seasoned veterans who have never fired a gun on the street. And having an SR-71 Blackbird is no more what you'd imagine it was like to have a cool, neat, super-duper reconnaissance plane instead of your unsatisfying, meagre, second-rate, dull car than... than... than being a police officer has all the excitement of surviving a shootout every day, but only having to fill paperwork once every three or four years if at all!"

"Um, what else is there?"

"Um, what's a typical trip for you? I mean, with your car?"

"My wife's family is at the other side of the state, and—"

"So that's an example of a common trip? More common than shopping or driving to meet someone?"

"Ok; often I'm just running some errands."

"Such a boring thing to do with a station wagon. If you want things to get interesting, try something I wouldn't brave."

"What?"

"Go for the gusto. Borrow my vehicle! First, you can fuel up at home, as any fuel that had been in your tank is now a slippery puddle underneath the vehicle you wish you had. Then start the vehicle. You'll have something to deal with later, after the hot

exhaust sets your trees on fire. And maybe a building or two.

Then lurch around, and try to taxi along the streets. (Let's assume you don't set any trees on fire, which is not likely.) Now you're used to be able to see most of the things on the road, at least the ones you don't want to hit? And—"

"Ok, ok, I get the idea! The SR-71 Blackbird is the worst, most pitiable—"

"Perhaps I have misspoken. Or at least wasn't clear enough. I wasn't trying to say that it's simple torture flying an SR-71 Blackbird. There are few things as joyful as flying. And do you know what kind of possibilities exist (in everything from friendship to work to hobbies) when the list of things you can easily make a day trip to the other side of the globe? When—"

"Then why the big deal you just made before?"

"An SR-71 Blackbird is many things, but it is not what you imagine if you fantasize about everything you imagine my vehicle to be, and assume almost everything you take for granted in yours. There are a great many nice things that go without saying in your vehicle, that aren't part of mine. You know, a boring old station wagon with its dull room for a driver plus a few passengers and some cargo, that runs on the most mundane petroleum-based fuel you can get, and of course is familiar to most mechanics and can be maintained by almost any real automotive shop, and—if this is even worth mentioning—can be driven safely across a major network of roads, and—of course this can be taken for granted in any real vehicle—has a frame that gives you a fighting chance of surviving a full-speed collision with—"

"Ok, ok, I get the picture. But wouldn't it have helped matters if you would tell people these things up front? You know, maybe something about avoiding these confrontations, or maybe

something about 'Honesty is the best policy'?"

He said, "Ok. So when I meet people, I should say, 'Hi. My vehicle leaves Formula One racecars in the dust. It also flies, can slip through radar, and does several things you can't even imagine. But don't worry, I haven't let any of this go to my head. I'm not full of myself. I promise I won't look down on you or whatever car you drive. And you can promise not to feel the least bit envious, inferior, or intimidated. Deal?' It seems to come across that way no matter how I try to make that point. And really, why shouldn't it?"

I paused. "Do our vehicles have anything in common at all?"

"Yes—more than either of us can understand."

"But what on earth, if we're so different? My vehicle is a 1965 model; your vehicle sounds so new you'd need a time machine to get one—"

"My vehicle is a 1965 model too."

"If you want to lie and make me feel better, you could have told me that your vehicle was years older than mine."

"I meant it. There is something about our vehicles that is cut from the same cloth."

"How can you say that? I mean, without stretching? Is what they have in common that they're both in the same universe? Or that they're both bigger than an atom but smaller than a galaxy? Or some other way of really stretching?"

"If you want to dig deeper, have you read, '[I, Pencil](#)'? Where an economist speaks on behalf of a common, humble pencil?"

"A speech from a pencil? What does that have to do with our vehicles? Are you going to compare our vehicles to a pencil?"

"Yes."

"So you're stretching."

"No."

"In [I, Pencil](#), a cheap wooden pencil explains what it took to make it. It talks about how a diamond in the rough—I mean, graphite in the rough—crosses land and sea and is combined with clay, and a bit of this and that to make the exquisite slender shaft we call pencil 'lead'. The wood comes from the majestic cedar—do you know what it takes to make a successful logging operation—and then a mind-boggling number of steps transform a hundred feet of tree into something that's a little hard to explain, but machined to very precise specifications, and snapped together before six coats of laquer—oh, I forgot, before the cedar wraps around the slender graphite wand, it's also adorned by being tinted a darker color, 'for the same reason women put rouge on their faces' or something like that. Its parts come through a transportation network from all over the world, and the rubber eraser—which wouldn't erase at all well if were just rubber; it needs to be a cocktail of ingredients that perform at least three major tasks if it will work as an eraser. Try erasing pencil with a rubber ball sometime; it will erase terribly if it erases at all. Your erases is not mere rubber, but a rubber alloy, the way airplanes are made, not with mere aluminum, but with an aluminum alloy, and—"

"So the parts of a pencil have an interesting story?"

"Yes. And the quite impressive way they are put together—pencils don't assemble themselves, and a good machine—for some steps—costs a king's ransom. And the way they're distributed, and any number of things necessary for business to run the whole process, and—"

"Then should I start offering my daughter's pencils to a museum?"

"I wouldn't exactly offer one of her pencils to a museum. Museums do not have room for every wonder this world has. But

I will say this. The next pencil you forget somewhere wouldn't have been yours to lose without more work, talent, skill, knowledge, venture capital, and a thousand other things than it took to make a wonder like the Rosetta Stone or the Mona Lisa."

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As usual, she was dressed to kill. Her outfit was modest—I can almost say, ostentatiously modest—but, somehow, demurely made the point that she might be a model.

I had a bad feeling about something. During our conversation on the way over, I said, "You have an issue with Saab drivers." He replied, "No. Or yes, but it's beside the point. Saab drivers tend to have issues with me." I was caught off-guard: "That sounds as arrogant as anything I've—"

He asked me to forget what he had said. For the rest of the conversation, he seemed to be trying to change the subject.

She greeted us, shook his hand warmly, and turned back. "—absolutely brilliant. Not, in any way, like the British Comet, which never should have been flown in the first place, and was part of why jumbo jetliners were dangerous in the public's eye. The training for people who were going to be in that jumbo jetliner—the Comet—included being in a vacuum so that soldiers would know what to do if they were flying in a sparse layer of the atmosphere and the airplane simply disintegrated around them and left them in what might as well have been a vacuum. This sort of thing happened with enough jumbo jetliners that the public was very leery of them. For good reason, they were considered a disaster looking for a place to happen.

"And so, when Boeing effectively bet the company on the Boeing 707—like they did with every new airplane; it wasn't just one product among others that could be a flop without killing the company—they gave the test pilot very careful instructions about what to do when he demonstrated their new jumbo jetliner.

"At the airshow, he was flying along, and after a little while, people began to notice that one of the airplane's wings was

lower, and the other was higher...

"The Boeing 707 test pilot was doing a barrel roll, which is extremely rough on an airplane. It's like... something like, instead of saying that a computer is tough, throwing it across the room. This stunt was a surprise to the other people at Boeing, almost as much as to the other, and it wasn't long before Boeing got on the radio and asked the pilot, 'What the ~~S+XQ~~ do you think you're doing?' The pilot's reply was short, and to the point:

"'Why, selling airplanes, sir.'

"He told a reporter afterwards, 'And when I got done with that barrel roll, I realized that the people weren't going to believe what they just saw... so I turned around and I did another one!'"

A moment later, someone else said, "What does 'Saab' mean again? You've told me, but—"

She smiled. "It took me a while to remember, too. 'SAAB' stands for 'Svenska aeroplan Aktiebolaget,' literally 'Swedish Aeroplane Limited.' It's a European aerospace company that decided that besides making fighter jets and military aircraft, they would run a side business of selling cars, or at least the kind of car you get when you combine a muscle car, a luxury vehicle, and more than a touch of a military jet. It's like an airplane in big and small ways—everything from, if you unbuckle your seatbelt, a 'Fasten seatbelts' light just like an airliners', to the rush of power you feel when you hit the gas and might as well be lifting off... I'm not sure how you would describe it... It's almost what Lockheed-Martin would sell if they were Scandinavian and wanted to sell something you could drive on the street."

He said, "It sounds like a delight to drive."

She said, "It is. Would you two like me to take you out for a spin? I'd be delighted to show it to you. What kind of car do you

drive?"

He paused for a split second and said, "I needed to get a ride with him; I have nothing that I could use to get over here."

I told her, "He's being modest."

She looked at me quizzically. "How?"

"He flies an SR-71 Blackbird... um... sorry, I shouldn't have said that just as you were taking a drink."

He seemed suddenly silent. For that matter, the room suddenly seemed a whole lot quieter.

She said, "You're joking, right?"

No one said a word.

Then she said, "Wow. It is a privilege and an honor. I have never met someone who..."

He said, "I really don't understand... maybe... um... I'm not really better, or—"

She said, "Stop being modest. I'd love to hear more about your fighter. Have you shot anything down?"

He looked as if he was thinking very hurriedly, and not finding the thought that he wanted.

"The SR-71 Blackbird would be pretty useless in a dogfight. It is neither designed or equipped to fight even with a very obsolete enemy aircraft; it's just designed to snoop around and gather information."

She said, "Um, so they get shot down all the time? Wouldn't you tend to get a lot of missiles fired by enemy fighters who aren't worried about you shooting back? What do you do when you run out of countermeasure flares?"

He paused for a moment, saying, "The SR-71 Blackbird doesn't have anything you'd expect. Flares are a great way to decoy a heat-seeking missile, but the SR-71 Blackbird doesn't have them, either."

I turned to him and said, "You're being almost disturbingly modest." Then I turned to her and said, "An SR-71 Blackbird can go over three times the speed of sound. The standard evasive to a surface-to-air rocket is simply to accelerate until you've left the rocket in the dust. I'm not aware of one of them being shot down."

Her eyes were as big as dinner plates.

She said, "I am stunned. I have talked with a few pilots, but I have never met anyone close to an SR-71 Blackbird pilot. I hope we can be friends." She stood close to him and offered her hand.

The three of us ran into each other a number of times in the following days. She seemed to want to know everything about his aircraft, and seemed very respectful, or at least seemed to be working hard to convey how impressed she was.

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It was a dark and stormy night. He and I were both on our way out the door, when she asked, "What are you doing?"

He said, "I want to try some challenges. I plan on going out over the ocean and manoeuvring in the storm system."

She turned to him and said, very slowly, "No, you're not."

He turned to me and said, "C'mon, let's go."

She said, "Are you crazy? A storm like that has done what enemy rockets have failed to do: take down your kind of craft. I've grown quite fond of you, and I'd hate to see you get killed because you were being stupid. Think about 61-7969 / 2020."

He said, "May I ask why you know about that?"

"I have been doing some reading because I want to understand you. And I understand people well enough, and care about you enough, to tell when you are acting against your best interests."

He grabbed my arm and forced me out the door. Once in the car, he said, "I'm sorry... I needed to get out before saying something I would regret."

"Like what?"

"So you know just the perfect way to straighten me out, and you don't even need to ask me questions. Walk a mile in my shoes, to a place you can reach in a car but not my aircraft, and then we might be able to talk."

I watched him take off, and I came back to pick him up, after waiting an hour. I could tell something that seemed not quite perfect about his flying, but I do not regret that I kept my mouth shut about that.

The next day she surprised us by meeting us first thing in the morning.

She gave us a stack of paper. "I care about you quite a lot,

and I don't want to be invited to your funeral in the next year. Here are detailed aviation regulations and international laws which are intended for your safety. I could not get an exact count of the number of crimes you committed, either for last night or for your reckless day-to-day flying around. I am sure that there are many responsible ways a vehicle like yours can be used, and I have inquired about whether there are any people who can offer some guidance and free you to..."

He turned around, took my elbow, and began walking out to the parking lot. We got in my car, and she raced for hers.

I saw her go to the mouth of the parking lot and then stop. The one Rolls-Royce in town had broken down, of all places there, and the owner and chauffer were both outside. I had thought that the person who was chauffeured in a Rolls-Royce was a peaceful sort of man, but he was yelling then, and before she got over the owner positively erupted at the chauffeur and waved his arms. She had gotten out and wanted to talk with them, but you can't get a word in edgewise at a time like that.

Now I'd like to clarify something about my car. I've only seen a vehicle like mine in a demolition derby once, but I was surprised. I wasn't surprised, in particular, that the wagon was the last vehicle moving. What I was surprised at was that over a third of the derby had passed before the ugly wagon started to crumple at all.

And one other thing: one April Fools' Day, a friend who drives a sleek, sporty little 1989 Chrysler LeBaron gave me a bumper sticker that said, "Zero to sixty in fifteen minutes," and then acted surprised when I challenged him to a short race. When the race had finished, he seemed extraordinarily surprised, and I told him, "There is a question on your face. Let me answer it."

Then I opened the hood on my ugly, uncool station wagon and said, "Your sleek little number can get by on a 2.2 liter engine. Do you know what that is?" He said, "Um, the engine?" And I said, "That is a 6.6 liter V8. Any questions?"

Ok, enough clarification. I looked around, turned in the opposite direction, and floored my car, blasting through the hedges and getting heavy scrapes on the bottom of my car. I got shortly on the road, and had a straight shot at the airport. She did eventually catch up to me, but not until there was nothing left to see but some hot exhaust and the fuel that had leaked when he tried to take off. (I still get the occasional note from him.)

Besides worrying about him, I was also much less worried about my car: tough as it is, cars don't like getting their undersides scraped on gravel, and I decided to take my car to the garage and have the mechanic take a look at it and tell me if I broke anything.

I was surprised—though maybe I shouldn't have been—to see the Rolls-Royce in the garage when I pulled in. I intended to explain that I might have scraped the bottom up, and after I did so, my curiosity got the better of me. I asked something about Rolls-Royces breaking down.

The mechanic gave me the oddest look.

I asked him, "Why the funny look?"

He opened the hood, and said, "Rolls-Royces do break down easily... and it's even easier to break down if you open the hood, jam a screwdriver right there, and rev it as hard as you can."

# The Watch

**Metacult:** So, Pater, I was thinking—wait a minute; I hear someone scratching at the door.

**Janra:** Hi, Vespucci. How are you?

**Vespucci:** Doing well. Take a seat.

**Janra:** Where?

**Vespucci:** Anywhere.

**Janra:** Anywhere?

**Vespucci:** Anywhere...

Off! Off! Get off my lap! Only my wife is allowed to sit there. You know that. Anyways, the Radical Gadgets catalogue came in today...

**Janra:** By the way, I phoned the company today. I think I can get some World War II vintage mechanical—

**Vespucci:** Don't even think about it. If you—

**Pater:** Easy, brothers. As you were saying?

**Vespucci:** As I was saying... Radical Gadgets has the most interesting tools. The cover product this month was an e-mail filtering package that uses Bayesian filtering techniques to block unwanted messages.

**Janra:** That's original! I checked Freshmeat today, and I think they only have half a dozen well-known anti-spam packages, not counting lesser products and tools that

have just been released. Does Radical Gadgets always find products this original?

**Vespucci:** But it is original. And it's not an anti-spam package. It has nothing to do with spam.

**Pater:** Huh?

**Vespucci:** Let me explain. You know that Bayesian filtering looks at a message and uses statistics to guess what category it belongs to, right?

**Pater:** Yes; go on.

**Vespucci:** But that will work whether you use it for incoming or outgoing e-mails. Most people use the filtering techniques on incoming e-mails, to try and reduce the fire hose of spam coming in. But you don't have to stop there. You can also filter outgoing e-mails.

**Pater:** Why would I want to filter the e-mails I send out?

**Vespucci:** You've never sent a flame? Come on; I remember a couple of times that you flamed me over something minor, and sent a very embarrassed apology when I waited two weeks and simply sent it back, and asked you to read it aloud, and tell me whether that's what you want me to hear from you. And it's not just you. When you're talking with a person face to face, there are two eyes looking at you and reminding you that a person hears every cutting word you say. That doesn't stop conflicts, but it does mitigate some of the abrasive things we're tempted to say. On a computer, it seems like there's just a keyboard and pixels—no person you can actually hurt. So people hit harder, and you have incredible flamewars, often between people who conduct themselves like responsible adults when they're talking to someone face to face. It's possible to learn

discipline, of course, and conduct yourself maturely, but all too many people don't realise there's a discipline you have to learn even if you're mature.

And so instead of just assuming that the only bad e-mails are offensive messages from people who've never seen you, telling you that part of your body isn't big enough and you need to buy their snake oil, or that you're impotent, or that you're not man enough for a relationship with a real woman and will have to content yourself with pixels on a screen—apart from these, there are offensive messages that you send out and then wish you could somehow take back and delete.

And this program does just that. Once you've trained it on your sent mail folder, it watches messages you send out, and uses the same Bayesian technology that's so powerful in identifying spam, and identifies when you're writing something you'll regret later. Then it saves it, quarantining it in a separate folder until you come to your senses and delete it.

**Pater:** That's... um, I'm going to go to their computer and order it from their website. Please excuse me for a moment. I really need to—

**Metacult:** Sit down, Pater. You're not going to e-mail out any flames while we're here talking.

**Vespucci:** Hmm... um, I hadn't meant to have a big discussion about the anti-flame software. There were several things that caught my attention, but what caught my eye most was a watch that keeps exceptionally accurate time.

**Pater:** Huh? Who would need a more accurate way to keep time? Most cultures find an hour to be a short time, and

a cheap digital watch keeps more accurate time than a \$5000 Rolex, because our watches are too accurate already. It would be awfully hard to explain our to-the-second accuracy to an aboriginal—I can't see why, besides pride that wants a possession to boast about, someone would benefit from a more accurate watch.

**Vespucci:** Oh, but there is benefit—worth paying \$5,000 for a digital watch. Even worth having to change the batteries too often.

**Pater:** How?

**Vespucci:** The watch doesn't just have an oscillating quartz crystal; it has an array of sensors in the watchband that measure skin temperature and conductivity, pulse, even a clever estimate of blood pressure, and feeds all of these into an embedded chip with some extraordinarily clever software.

This software takes these data and gets a picture of the person's emotional state. You know how time flies when you're having fun?

**Pater:** Didn't Einstein explain his theory of relativity by saying, "When a man sits with a pretty girl for an hour, it seems like a minute. But let him sit on a hot stove for a minute—and it's longer than any hour. That's relativity."

**Vespucci:** Um... that has nothing to do with the theory of relativity, and I'm not interested in discussing Einstein's spacetime now. If Einstein said that, he probably had a merry twinkle in his eye. But... Come to think about it, that is a pretty good picture. The watch estimates your emotional state for one purpose: it keeps track of how long time seems to be

passing. It has a normal timer that can count forty minutes until dinnertime, but it can also tell you how long the wait will feel like. And that's something no other watch can do.

**Metacult:** So it deals with subjective time? I read a book once which was trying to argue that time could be understood as something besides the number a machine has counted to. It talked about how a small child will ask Mom how long she's leaving for, and Mom's answer—she's really trying to avoid feeling guilty about leaving the child alone—are singularly unhelpful for a child trying to figure out how much perceived time must be endured before Mom returns.

**Vespucci:** Yes, and the minute-hour quote captures that. All watches tell what time it is from a machine's perspective. This is the only watch that tells time from a human perspective.

**Metacult:** Wonderful. What does it take into account besides clock ticks and the person's emotional state?

**Vespucci:** Huh? What else contributes to our experience of time besides the physical time and our psychological state?

**Pater:** Your question betrays nominalism. The way you've framed things shuts out the true answer.

**Vespucci:** We're entering the third millenium; I don't see why you're dragging in a controversy from medieval times.

**Janra:** Mmmph. Excuse me. I think I need a glass of water.

**Metacult:** Sit down, Janra. And don't look at me like that. I'm going let you answer that.

**Janra:** Certainly. Here are the steps to hunt a bear: First,

fire your gun. Second, aim your gun. Third, locate a bear. Fourth, buy a gun.

**Metacult:** Try again.

**Janra:** Clothing to wear in winter: a heavy coat, then on top of that a good sweater or two, then two shirts and two pair of pants, then underwear, with woolen socks over your boots.

**Metacult:** Please be serious.

**Janra:** I am being serious.

**Metacult:** Then be mundane.

**Janra:** Oh. That's another matter entirely.

Your entire approach is backwards and inside-out, as backwards as trying to shoot a bear before you have a gun, and as inside-out as wearing your anorak next to your skin.

How? Let me respond to your second comment. If I said, in the most reverent of tones, "We're standing at the forty-second latitude and eighty-seventh longitude," you'd think I was making a mountain out of a molehill: yes, we're at a particular latitude and longitude, but what does that have to do with the price of eggs in China? It's true, but what does that have to do with anything we're discussing? Yet people say, "We're entering the third millenium" as if it is this great statement of far-reaching consequences, the sort of thing that should settle a matter. As you yourself did.

People in the Middle Ages often did not know what year it was, or even what century, any more than people today know what latitude and longitude we're at—quick—do you know what latitude and longitude you're at?

The reason is that we think the past is under a glass bell, where we humans are living our lives while those odd and quaint creatures under the bell are not the same as us. And it doesn't need to be that way. For a long time after Shakespeare's death, when people put on Shakespeare, they didn't try to reconstruct period accurate costumes. Why? Did they not know that Shakespeare lived long before them? Perhaps, but they also recognised that Shakespeare was a human who worked with human problems and wrote human drama, and that the reason his plays are worth performing is not because they're old but because they're timelessly human. And we forget this when we take great care to dress actors in funny costumes that tell people that this is something quaint from long ago and far away.

You know that many of your physical possessions that make up the physical world come from far away: when you buy something at Target, and make no effort to find treasures from faroff land, you buy a lamp that was made in China or underpants that were made in Mexico. You know that the whole world is interconnected, so even if you don't go hunting off for exotic imports, a great many of the things you buy were made far away.

You can as much live without ideas from bygone ages as you can live in a house you built with your own hands —or for that matter, be born in a house you built with your own hands. That isn't how things work. Nominalism is one of innumerable ideas that has survived, just as the custom of using pots and pans has survived.

**Vespucci:** If it's one of innumerable ideas, why pay it that

much attention?

**Janra:** Because I can count on my fingers the number of conceptual revolutions that are more important today than nominalism. Trying to understand how people think today without looking at nominalism is like trying to look at a summer meadow without seeing plants. There are other important ideas, but this one makes the short list.

**Vespucci:** Then why have I not heard more about nominalism, when I hear people talking about postmodernism, for instance, or modernism? And what is nominalism to begin with?

**Janra:** For the same reason a fish won't tell you about water. Modernism and postmodernism are both nominalism writ large; nominalism is a seed, whose flower is modernism, and whose fruit is postmodernism.

**Vespucci:** Hmm. I hear the distinct accent of a person laboring in the prison of one idea.

**Janra:** Bear with me. Nominalism may be seen as the lock on a prison: we need to pay close attention to the lock to see if there's any way to open it. Then, if we can get out, let us see if there are not many more ideas available after we have paid proper attention to nominalism.

Now what is nominalism? In a sentence, nominalism says, "There's nothing out there; it's all in your head." A nominalist doesn't literally mean "nothing" is outside our heads; you can't put on a watch and say, "I refute nominalism thus."

**Vespucci:** But it was a non sequitur when—

**Janra:** Yes, I know, I know. Another tangent. But let's

forget about saying that matter is just in people's heads and not something external to mind. As I was saying, you can't put on a watch and say, "I refute nominalism thus." But if we really follow nominalist logic, you can't put on a watch. You can have nerve impulses that result in the motion of some elementary particles, but a watch is a tool-to-tell-time-which-you-wear-on-your-wrist, and a tool-to-tell-time-which-you-wear-on-your-wrist does not and cannot exist in nature. All the meaning that makes those atoms a watch can only exist in minds, and for the same reason what-we-call-a-watch can't have the time displayed on its face. It can have elementary particles that are placed like so and interact with light just so, but the meaning that can read a time in that configuration isn't at all in the atoms themselves; it's in your head. This is clarified in a distinction between "brute fact" and "social reality:" brute fact is what exists outside of minds and social reality can only exist in minds, and almost anything humans value consists of a small amount of brute fact and a large portion of social reality—larger than most people would guess. Everything is either brute fact or social reality.

**Pater:** Is the boundary between brute fact and social reality a brute fact or a social reality?

**Metacult:** Shut up.

**Janra:** Imagine three umpires at a baseball game: the first says, "I calls 'em as they are." The second says, "I calls 'em as I sees them." But the third says, "Some's strikes, and some's balls, but they ain't nothing 'til I calls 'em."

With apologies to Kronecker, God created cold matter. All else is the work of man.

**Pater:** Whoa. Is the basic faculty that lets man create social reality derived from brute fact or social reality?

**Janra:** Shut up.

Now I have been showing what happens when you push nominalism a good deal further than non-scholars are likely to do. But in fact nominalism has been seeping into our consciousness for centuries, so that we might not find the claim that nature is beautiful to be a mistake, but we see with nominalist eyes and hear with nominalist ears. Most of people across most of time have understood and experienced symbols very different from how a nominalist would.

If we assume that matter is basically something cold and dead, devoid of spiritual properties, then of course a symbol can only exist in the mind, a mental connection between two things that are not connected by nature. Any similarity is in the eye of the beholder, or if not that, is at least a coincidence that isn't grounded on anything deeper. There is no organic connection.

But if we look at how people have understood symbols, their understanding has to do with a view of reality where a great many things are real, where a symbol bespeaks a real and spiritual connection. The crowning jewel of this understanding of symbol was the claim that man is the image of God. When Christians talked about man being the image of God, they were not talking about what we would understand by a photograph or a painting, where pigments are arranged in such a way that an observer can tell they were meant

to look like God; they meant a real and organic connection that went far beyond a mere representation of God; they meant that we were what you would think a kind of magical statue which not only represented God, but embodied his actual presence: God's presence operates in us in a real way, and every breath we breathe is the breath of God.

Now the reason we began discussing nominalism was that you said something, and I said, "That question betrays nominalism." Do you remember what you said?

**Vespucci:** No.

**Janra:** We were discussing what I consider to be a very interesting watch, and you asked what could contribute to our experience of time besides what an ordinary watch tells, and our emotional state.

That question betrays nominalism. You were in essence asking what could interest us in time besides the brute fact of what most watches tell, and the social, or at least mental, reality of our emotional state. But there's a world of other things out there.

**Vespucci:** But what else is there?

**Metacult:** Hmm. I think we need to work a bit harder to help you look at what you believe. You've been keeping up on superstring theory, right?

**Vespucci:** Yes. I loved the explanations I could get of relativity, and I love how scientists can turn our commonsense notions upside down.

**Metacult:** Do you know any classical, Newtonian physics?

**Vespucci:** I did in high school. I've forgotten most of it now, but I don't remember it being nearly as exciting: a lot of math to go through to get at common sense.

**Metacult:** May I instead suggest that your common sense is a nonmathematical version of Newtonian physics?

Newton's physics was big on grids: everything was placed on a grid of absolute space, and absolute time. And it connected rooms the wrong way: different places are on the same meaningless grid, but they're not connected besides the grid.

To the medieval mind, it wasn't so. Each space was its own little world as far as Newton was concerned. But they were connected spiritually. There is an icon of two saints from different centuries talking, and the medieval mind was comfortable with this because it saw things other than "but they're from other parts of the spacetime grid!"

**Vespucci:** But what does this have to do with time? It seems to me you're going off on a tangent.

**Metacult:** Ok, back to time. Time isn't just a grid adorned by emotions. It's spiritually connected. You yourself are not self-contained.

**Pater:** And there's liturgical time. One of the things that shocked me was that people seem to have no time. It helped me to appreciate the colorful time I had breathed. I was stunned when people experienced time as torture. I experienced it as a sacrament, a channel of God's grace.

From other conversations, I get the impression that the liturgical year isn't real to you: one source of holidays among others. But it is real: interlocking cycles of day, week, year, so that you are breathing in this rhythm and are given something to live in each moment. Sometimes you're feasting; sometimes you're fasting;

often you're given something to meditate on.

**Vespucci:** So the watch would do a more complete job if its little computer were programmed to keep track of the liturgical cycles? I think the engineers could do that.

**Pater:** Errmmmm...

**Metacult:** I think what he means, but cannot articulate, is that what a computer could make of the liturgical cycles are not the place that makes liturgical time. They are more of a doorway into the place, into a room that the Spirit blows. If the watch were to keep track of that, it would have to have, not more sophisticated computer programming, but something else altogether, something sensitive to spiritual realities.

**Pater:** And that's just what a scientific computer, even a very small one, cannot do. Science works on nominalism. It's brought a lot of good stuff, but it can't perceive or work with spiritual qualities, any more than a pair of binoculars will improve your hearing. And that's fine when you recognise that spiritual qualities are left out, but the temptation is to say, "Because science is so powerful, it sees everything that's real." And a watch designed by scientific engineering can do scientific things, but if it were to try and see liturgical time from the inside, it would inevitably kill what breathes in it.

**Janra:** So if we were to imagine a watch that keeps track of time, true time, it would need not only sensors and a miniature computer, and a time-keeping quartz crystal, but something attuned to spiritual realities.

**Pater:** If that were possible. In my culture, we never wear watches. The best watch would be no watch, or perhaps a rock on a wristband, where if you go to it looking for

trivia, it doesn't give what you're looking for—and in so doing, reminds you of something important, that you need to look elsewhere.

**Janra:** What about a watch that had a rock alongside the things we've just described?

**Pater:** Ermmm...

**Janra:** And what would men's and women's models look like? Would the rocks be respectively rough and smooth?

**Metacult:** Actually, men's and women's experience of time differs significantly, so if you had a watch with a truer way of telling time, there would be a much bigger difference than men's watches being heftier and women's watches being slender.

**Janra:** How?

**Metacult:** I remember one time when you were talking with a new mother, and whenever the baby needed care, you stopped talking so that Mom could pay attention to her new son. It was a thoughtful gesture, and one that wasn't needed.

**Janra:** Why not? I'd have wanted to be allowed to give the child my full attention.

**Metacult:** I know. So would most good men. A man's particular strength is to devote his full attention to a task. A woman's particular strength is to lightly balance several tasks, giving genuine attention to each. That mother was perfectly able to give attention to her son and listen to you at the same time. That's why she looked at you, slightly puzzled and with an attention that says, "I'm listening," when you stopped talking.

And there are other differences as well. If there is a situation that colors a man's understanding of time, it

is a brief period of intense pressure. A woman's understanding of time more has the hue of a longer period that requires sustained attention. And even that misses something. The difference between a man's experience of time and a woman's is not so much like a difference between numbers as a difference between two colors, or sounds, or scents. It's a qualitative difference, and one that is not appreciated—usually people feel in their heart, "She's treating time the same way I do, but doing an unexplainably bad job of it."

**Vespucci:** I forgot to tell you, the watch also asks when you were born.

**Pater:** Why? To remind you if you forget your birthday?

**Vespucci:** I'm surprised, Pater. It's so it can keep track of your age. You experience time differently as you grow. What seems like an hour when you're five only seems like half an hour when you're ten, or fifteen minutes when you're twenty, or five minutes when you're sixty. Time seems to go faster and faster as you grow: there's one change between when you're a child and an adult, and senior citizens say that every fifteen minutes it's breakfast. The quality and pace of time change as you age, which is why young people think youth lasts forever and the rest of us think it vanishes. They say that once you're over the hill, you begin to pick up speed.

**Pater:** What does "over the hill" mean?

**Vespucci:** Um...

**Metacult:** He really doesn't understand. To him, aging is about maturing and growing, not only for children, but adults as well. He values his youth as a cherished

memory, but he's enjoying his growth and looking forward eagerly to the joy awaiting him in Heaven. He doesn't understand your self-deprecating humor that speaks as if aging were a weakness or a moral failing.

**Vespucci:** Ok.

**Metacult:** Which reminds me. One of the ways my experience of time has changed as I have grown has been to recognize that time flows faster and faster. For some people, this is a reason to try way too hard to be healthy—taking care of their bodies, not because their bodies should be taken care of, but to try and postpone the inevitable. But I'm looking forward to the Heaven that's getting closer and closer, and I am delighted by a glimpse into the perspective of a God who created time and to whom all times are both soon and now.

But the other major change is more internal, more a matter of discipline. I used to live in hurry, to always walk quickly and love to play video games quickly. Then I set foot in Malaysia, and something changed.

There was a difference, which I imperfectly characterized as life being lived more slowly in Malaysia. Which is true, or was for me, but is somewhat beside the point. And I experienced the joy of living more slowly. You know how I've thought that it takes humility to enjoy even pride, and chastity to enjoy even lust. At that point I would have added to those two that it takes slowness to enjoy even haste.

**Vespucci:** So you tried to be as slow as you had been quick?

**Metacult:** Yes. I observed that I had been obsessed with time under the tyranny of the clock, and so I tried to

abolish time by being slow. Which isn't right; besides chronos, the time a clock can measure, there is kairos, relational or task-oriented or creating time, where you are absorbed in another person or a task, and there time is a glimmer of eternity. And I was interested in the idea of living time as the beginning of an eternal glory, which Pater understands much better than I ever will. First I tried to negate time and live as something less-than-temporal, and I am slowly realizing that instead it means embracing time and entering something more-than-temporal.

In liturgical time—and Pater could say much more about this than I—it flows. Here it moves quickly, there it moves slowly, and there it spins in eddies. It isn't just the speed that flows; it's the color, if you will.

Just as the priest is the crowning jewel of the priesthood every person is called for, so the touch of Heaven as we worship is the crowning jewel of what time is meant to be.

And I had also been realizing that I had sought to escape time, and not cherish it as God's good creature. Most recently, I am trying to... There's a famous quote by Oliver Wendell Holmes, saying, "I wouldn't give a fig for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I'd give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity." Now I'm looking for a time that is on the other side of complexity: not the mundane ordinariness of disfigured time, but a beautiful ordinariness on the other side of this complexity we've been discussing.

**Vespucci:** How do you think that will work?

**Metacult:** I don't know. Part of it has to do with the

metaculture you used for my nickname. I don't simply breathe in my culture and ask "How else could it be?", but am in the odd position of being able to step into cultures but never be absolutely at home. And have part of me that doesn't fit. That's not quite right; I do connect, partly in a way that is basically human, and partly in a way that is—

**Janra:** Don't try to explain. That would take an hour.

**Metacult:** At any rate, a fair number of people talk about living counterculturally, and one way you can live counterculturally is let live time as a blessing rather than a curse. People who say technology determines our lives are almost right, and that almost makes a world of difference if you're willing to live counterculturally.

The pressure on us to live in hurry is not a pressure that no one can escape. It is a pressure that few try to escape in the right way—but you can, if you try and go about it the right way.

But quite a lot of the rest of it has to do with very basic parts of the Christian life. God wants us to seek him first, and when we do, he knows full well what else we need. "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be given to you as well." includes a life where time unfolds as a rainbow or a river, something of both color and flow, like the year with its beauty in due season.

**Vespucci:** Do you see time as a line or a circle? Something that keeps moving in a direction, or something that does the same thing over and over again?

**Metacult:** Both, of course. God is revealing himself in history and transforming it to his ends. And there is

decay; decay follows a line down. In our lives, we are progressing towards Heaven or Hell, and in each day... here we meet the cycles, but if we live well, the cycles in our lives aren't just an aimless meandering, but like a man who keeps running through a ditch, digging. In one way, he's going to the same places again and again, but in another way, he's going deeper—and he may meet both the earth's warmth in winter (or coolness in summer), and the water of life. The line moves through circles.

**Janra:** So what would make the perfect watch?

**Vespucci:** Are there any we haven't covered?

**Metacult:** Umm... we've looked at one big change from a normal watch—instead of adding a calculator, that *Radical Gadgets* catalogue had a watch that tries to tell a more human time by taking your age and emotional state into account as well as what most watches tell. That was sort of a Pandora's box. I think we could all agree that that watch was leagues more human than any normal watch... and it was just human enough to reveal how un-human watches are.

**Vespucci:** How?

**Metacult:** When the only kind of watch kept track of seconds, it was easy enough to think that time was simply what a watch told. But when one watch started to pay attention to how you feel...

It was kind of like when you've been in the freezing outdoors for a long time, so long that it still hurts a little, but you can almost ignore it. Then you come inside, and THEN it stings. It's not until you enter a genuinely warm room that you realize how cold and numb

you really are.

The watch in that catalogue was just human enough to reveal how un-human watches, and the time that they tell, are. It did what no other watch could. It's enough of a success to be a spectacular failure. Someone brought up liturgical time, which led to the suggestion that the watch be programmed to keep track of liturgical time. And then we stumbled into a hole with no bottom. Why can't a computer keep track of liturgical time? Well, you see, the Spirit does more than just follow calculations... A watch would need far more than better electronics to do that, far more than scientific engineering can provide. Although I did like the suggestion of adding a rock. Even if I don't see how to make a rock sensitive to women's time and men's time. Or rather, what to do to appropriately respect the difference.

**Vespucci:** Janra, what you said about nominalism interests me. Could you give a more complete explanation?

**Janra:** I'd love to, but I need to be somewhere next month.

**Vespucci:** Please be serious.

**Janra:** I am being serious.

**Vespucci:** Then be mundane.

**Metacult:** He is being mundane. If you'd like a good introduction, read Philip Sherrard's *The Rape of Man and Nature: An Enquiry Into the Origins & Consequences of Modern Science*. In it, Sherrard says almost nothing about time and everything about the things time is connected to. I think it goes overboard, but if you read it and pay attention to the haunting beauty that keeps coming up, then you'll learn

something about being human—and living in human time. It doesn't use the word 'nominalism' very much, but it says quite a lot about it.

**Vespucci:** Are there any other things you've all left out?

**Metacult:** Only about two billion. I've talked about kairos as an absorbed time instead of a time when you're watching the clock. What I haven't talked about as kairos as a divinely appointed time, where you are in a divinely orchestrated dance, and you are free, and yet your movements are part of the divine plan. We are human, not by "just" being human, but by allowing the divine to operate in us; it is the divine, not the human, that we need most to be human. I haven't discussed that. We haven't discussed, in connection with nominalism, how there is a spiritual place in us where we meet God, and we have the ability to reason from what we see, and in tandem with nominalism we have become impoverished when both functions are dumped on the reasoning ability and we don't know where we can meet God, where our minds connect with the very Reason that is God himself. It makes a difference whether we experience time through both our reasoning ability and this spiritual meeting-place, or through our reasoning ability alone.

I also haven't talked about turning back the clock. When people rightly or wrongly believe there is a golden age they've lost, and try to re-create it, they end up severing connections with the recent past and even the golden age.

**Vespucci:** How does that work?

**Metacult:** I'm not exactly sure.

My guess is that a living culture has a way of not being ambiguous. It gives corrections when you make false assumptions about it; that's why people experience culture shock. People trying to re-create a past golden age need never experience culture shock; if you make a false assumption about the golden age, the golden age won't correct you. So the golden age appears to be whatever you want, and people who aren't satisfied with the present, and want to re-create past glory, end up pushing a fantasy that is different both from the present and the past. The Renaissance and Enlightenment neo-classicism both tried to re-create the glory of classical antiquity and are both notable as departures from the past. People who aren't trying to re-create the past can preserve it, saying, "Be gentle with this tradition. It was not inherited from your parents; it is borrowed from your children." People eager to restore past glory all too often, if not sever, severely damage the link between past and future.

I also haven't talked about keeping up with the Trumps, and your unadvertised way to say "No!" to the tyranny of the urgent. I haven't even talked about—  
**Janra:** Stop! Stop. You're going way overboard. He got your point. In fact, I think he got your point half an hour ago. He—

**Pater:** Could I interrupt for a moment?

**Janra:** Certainly. What is it?

**Pater:** I know this is going to sound REALLY strange, but I want a watch.

**Vespucci, Janra, Metacult:** Huh?

**Pater:** You heard me.

**Janra:** But why?

**Pater:** I know this is going to sound strange, but I want one.

To you a watch represents all sorts of problems, and I don't wonder if you're dumping too much on it. But that's another issue. I don't have the ticking clock in me that you do. There's an issue of sensitivity—I know you hate watches and probably planners, but I burn people by being late and forgetting that just an hour's delay to me is not "just" an hour to them.

Is it really impossible to make a watch that can represent liturgical time, or even hollow out a space liturgical time can abide in? I thought it was possible now to make a watch that will keep track of sunrise and sunset. Scientific engineering can't do some things, but could there be another kind of engineering? I suppose that "even" that technical marvel in your catalogue, the watch that knows how long something feels like, would make an awfully neat conversation piece.

**Metacult:** I think I may know of just the thing for you.

This watch is a sort of hybrid. Part of it is traditional electronic—something that tells hours, minutes, and seconds, that displays the date, and has a timer, alarm, and a stopwatch accurate to the nearest hundredth of a second—and for that matter it's water resistant to two hundred meters. It's a bit battered—which adds to its masculine look.

But that's not the interesting part. The interesting part has an exquisite sensitivity to liturgical rhythm, such as purely electronic gadgetry could never deliver. And it is a connected time, a part of the *Great Dance* that moves not according to the wearer's emotions

alone but what the *Great Choreographer* orchestrates.  
It moves in beautiful ordered time. And there is more.  
It can enter another person's or place's time, and fit.  
Among other things.

**Pater:** This is great! Where can I get one?

**Metacult:** Just a second while I take off my watch... here's  
the littlest part. The rest is already inside your heart.

# The Way of the Way

## I Beyond

Beyond doing, there is being.  
Beyond time, there is eternity.  
Beyond mortality, there is immortality.  
Beyond knowledge, there is faith.  
Beyond justice, there is mercy.  
Beyond happy thoughts, there is joy.  
Beyond communication, there is communion.  
Beyond petition, there is prayer.  
Beyond work, there is rest.  
Beyond right action, there is virtue.  
Beyond virtue, there is the Holy Spirit.  
Beyond appreciation, there is awe.  
Beyond sound, there is stillness.  
Beyond stillness, there is the eternal song.  
Beyond law, there is grace.  
Beyond even wisdom, there is love.  
Beyond all else, HE IS.

## II Order

Love and the Spirit are the basis for all true order.

When love and true religion have departed, there is honor and morality.

When honor and morality have departed, there are rules.

Rules do not depart when they have lost their power. They grow and multiply.

When rules have grown to their full measure, there is chaos.

The more the rules, the less the order, and how does that profit anyone?

### **III Silence**

The value of silence, of stillness, of meditation, of rest, is  
great.

I will not attempt to explain it with words.

## **IV Power**

Strength is made perfect in weakness.

A vessel that is solid is worthless.

A vessel that is empty and hollow has room to be filled.

If you wish to become strong, learn weakness.

## V The Heart

Thought goes before deed; that which fills the heart will fill the hands.

Greater than any conquest without, is the conquest within. Remove the log from your own eye, and you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye. Master the mountain within, and you will be in a right state to challenge the mountain without.

Do you consider yourself ready for the task? You do not take it seriously.

Do you despair of ever accomplishing it yourself? You are ready to receive help.

## VI Wealth

Poverty is a deadly bane. Yet it can be made a blessing.  
If you wish to see the power of love and the Spirit of God at  
work, look at those who have nothing else.

Wealth is a blessing. Yet it can become a deadly bane.  
Look at the wealthy.

There are few who own and are served by many possessions.  
There are many who are owned by and serve many possessions.

Look at the wealthy.

There are many who can buy their children toys, video games,  
and cars.

There are few who pick their children up and hold them.  
Look at the wealthy.

There are many who can afford any pleasure they want.  
There are few who know joy.

Look at the wealthy.

There are many who can buy any vacation or entertainment  
device they want.

There are few who ever know leisure, rest, peace.  
Look at the wealthy.

There are many who have more money than the poor would know  
how to spend.

There are few who are as generous as the poor.  
Look at the wealthy.

There are many who can buy the softest and most luxuriant pets.

There are few who truly know the feel of a human touch.

Look at yourself.

Look at most of the people in the world.

Are you not wealthy?

## **VII Through**

Joy comes through suffering.  
Freedom comes through discipline.  
Glory comes through humility.  
Security comes through letting go.  
Masculinity comes through not being macho.  
Femininity comes through not being a sex toy.  
Life comes through death.

## VIII The Kingdom

The Kingdom of Heaven is not a kingdom of this world.  
It is a kingdom in which the weak have been chosen to shame  
the strong.

It is a kingdom in which the foolish have been chosen to  
shame the wise.

It is a kingdom in which the poor have been chosen to shame  
the rich.

It is a kingdom in which the humble have become the friends  
of God.

It is a kingdom in which that which the world has told, "You  
are worthless," God has told, "You are priceless."

It is a kingdom in which there is more rejoicing over one  
filthy sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous men  
who do not need to repent.

It is a kingdom in which vulgar peasants have been chosen to  
shame great theologians and sages.

It is a kingdom in which many wealthy men gave great and  
ostentatious gifts, and a poor widow, dropping in two pennies,  
surpassed them all.

It is a kingdom in which the power to conquer is held, not by  
the man who is able to stand behind the barrel of a gun, but by  
the man who is willing to stand in front of it.

It is a kingdom in which, to become a leader, you must become

a slave.

It is a kingdom which begins, not with the love that you pour out, but with the love that is poured out on you.

## IX Service

A river in health has water flowing in and water flowing out.  
If it dams its outflow, saying, "I will gain more fresh water  
this way," then it only grows stagnant. Its greed and selfishness  
create an illusion of gain, that is only loss.  
It must give out as it has received, and then it will be filled  
with water fresh and pure as it was first filled.

So it is with men.

Proclaim Christ at all times, and use words if need be.

Words are powerful, and can speak mightily.

Deeds are more powerful, and can speak more mightily.

The way to teach is not as a master.

It is as a brother, as a friend, and as a slave.

The one who seeks to control and dominate does not  
understand how to lead. Manipulation is not much different from  
dominating by intimidation; it is only better hidden. Both are  
hurt and pain lying and saying that they are health. If you wish  
to become a leader, scrub out a wastebasket.

## X Lessons

Once, after years of teaching, the Buddha was walking with his students, and one of them asked him for one last, final lesson.

He bent down, and picked a flower.

All of his students looked intently, waiting for an explanation.

All but one.

The one student smiled.

And to this one student, Buddha smiled back.

Lessons are everywhere. They are in books and in the classroom, to be certain. But there are many, many other places.

Look at a single blade of grass. Its beauty bears the fingerprints of the Creator. There is a lesson there.

Feel the warmth of a friend when you give him a hug. We were not created to spend time only in solitude, but also in community, and touch is vital. There is a lesson in the touch of another person.

Write a story or draw a picture. You will learn something when you do it.

Pray. There is a lesson in the simplest prayer.

Where is there not a lesson to be learned?

## **XI Children**

Children are a lot like everyone else, except that they have not fully learned how to act like everyone else. Therefore there is much to learn from them.

There is nothing like a child seeing that you are hurt, and coming up and giving you a hug. There is nothing like a child making a gift to give to someone.

There is also nothing like a child being loud, rude, and inconsiderate, ripping a toy away from someone smaller because he wants it and he is strong enough to take it. There is nothing like a child staring into your eyes with eyes of ice and saying, "I hate you."

Children embody good things that others have forgotten. A child knows how to imagine, how to look at how pretty a flower is, and they have not yet learned that it's not OK to say that you're hurting and need help. Children also embody pure and unmasked vice; it is very easy to see a child lie, manipulate, tear apart the one who doesn't fit in, and fight anyone who dare stand in the way of his selfishness.

Confucius said, "When I see a virtuous man, I try to be like him. When I see an evil man, I reflect on my own behavior."

## **XII Untainted virtue**

Become as a little child, but do not become childish.

Become loving, and yet become firm.

Become strong, and yet become gentle.

Become wise, and yet do not rely on your own wisdom.

Become great, and yet become humble.

Become filled with imagination and dreams, and yet do not  
forget the world.

Become as a skillful warrior, and yet become peaceful.

Become ancient, and yet do not lose your childhood.

Become timeless, and yet use time wisely.

## XIII Shadows

When people are unwilling to draw near to *God* and neighbor,  
they become religious.

When people shun worship, they create ceremonies.

When people are afraid to pray, they babble endless words.

When people abandon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they  
try to create order by rules and regulations.

When people refuse to let themselves be drawn into holiness,  
they ordain priests.

When people flee from confronting the evil that lies within,  
they become self righteous and holier-than-thou.

When people do not accept the glory of the reality and  
substance that is found in *Christ*, they flee to familiar comforts  
and embrace mere shadows.

## XIV Fullness

Once a father gave each of his three sons a penny, as a test; he would bestow his inheritance on the son who could go into the marketplace and, in a day, buy something to fill the room.

The eldest son came, with his pouch filled with sand. He took the sand and threw it, scattering it through the room. It covered a little of the floor, but not all of it.

The second son came, with his arms full of straw. He spread the straw on the floor, scattering it through the room. It covered all of the floor, but it did not fill the room.

The youngest son came, and, opening his hand, held out a tiny candle. He lit it, and filled the room with light.

## XV Wrong Questions

It is possible for an answer to a question to be wrong.

"Is murder good or evil?"

"Good."

Yet it does not take an answer for there to be a mistake.  
"How many times must I forgive my brother before I may  
bear a grudge against him?"

If you are asking such a question, you are already mistaken.

Here are some, to avoid:

"What is the rational justification for faith?"

"What must I do to make myself good and make myself  
righteous before God?"

"Where should I seek out suffering in order to take up my  
cross?"

"How may I learn humility?"

"How do I decide for myself what is good and what is evil?"

"How much force is necessary to bring order to this  
situation?"

"How do I choose the lesser of two evils?"

"What words constitute a true prayer?"

"What is the necessary, time, place, and form for true  
worship?"

"Where do you draw the line between proper use of food and  
drink, and gluttony and drunkenness?"

"How much money do I need in order to be able to do something good?"

"What kind of rules should I use to infuse life to my spirituality?"

"What denomination should I join?"

"Who is my neighbor?"

## **XVI The Middle Path**

In many ways, the Way is balance. The temptation is not infrequent to try to avoid one error by embracing its opposite.

Good speech and writing does not contain words for the sake of words. Neither is it cut short for the sake of being concise.

Order is not gained by adding rules to what God has given, nor freedom by acting as if sin were not evil.

Wisdom is not gained by deifying the mind as something supreme which God must bow down and worship, nor humility by rejecting it as a piece of filth which God did not create.

In moderation and balance are work, play, rest, exercise, thought, meditation, words, music, silence, food, drink, and refrain, all good things.

## **XVII Evil**

Do you wish to see twistedness and depravity beyond belief?  
Look within.

## XVIII Impossible

If a man were offered five dollars to not think of a glowing pink bear, he would not be able to claim the prize. Yet he would have been doing it perfectly until he tried.

Likewise, people act inconspicuous until they try to act inconspicuous.

That is easy; they are matters where something is done automatically until they are tried.

Were a plank of wood a foot wide laid across the floor, anybody could walk across it without falling.

Yet, were it crossing a yawning and abysmal chasm, firmly secured so that it would not shake, many people would try to walk across it without falling, because they would, seeing the possibility of falling, cease to walk perfectly across the plank and instead try to walk perfectly across it.

The prayer of faith is like this; he who offers a prayer of faith succeeds, and he who tries to offer a prayer of faith fails.

That is more valuable and more difficult; it is a matter where it is not done automatically, nor something that is done by trying, but something that can be done only by doing. It is easy; children do this with great power until they grow up and learn to try.

There is something greater yet, which is most valuable and impossible.

Man is fallen, and sin and evil have pervaded his whole being.

Sin must be escaped to enter into life, for its wages are absolute death.

But what is the way for man to escape from sin? Automatic doing or trying or doing or not-doing? Wisdom or stupidity or knowledge or ignorance or tantrism or willpower or doing nothing?

That is like asking what brand of gasoline to use to extinguish a fire.

Such proceed from man and are inescapably tainted by evil. At their worst, they are straw. At their best, they are straw. They cannot save.

God emptied himself of divine power and majesty to become a man, and then emptied himself of even human power and majesty to die on a cross.

He who was without sin became anathema, bearing the curse for sins.

Now, to those who have earned in full the full measure of God's wrath, he offers this: that they accept the gift of God taking the curse upon himself, so that they will not have to bear it themselves.

The impossible is freely given to whoever believes, praying, "Jesus, please forgive my sins and come into my heart."

This is the message of the Cross. It is foolish and weak.

There is no way around it, no escape.

You cannot stoop to such useless nonsense? There is some question which remains unresolved, which must be answered before you can accept it?

Then go, and extinguish your fire with gasoline.

## **XIX A Difference**

Once a man was on a beach, where countless thousands of starfish had washed up, their life and water ever so slowly ebbing into dust.

Someone came along, and asked him, "What are you doing? Had you the rest of your life to spend doing this, you would not scratch the surface of the dying starfish. You cannot help more than a drop in the bucket. Why do you think that it matters?"

The man calmly, patiently, bent over, took a starfish, and threw it up in the air, arcing as it came down to splash back into the life giving water.

"It mattered to that one."

## XX Not

Teaching is not fallible men claiming divine authority.

It is divine authority claiming fallible men.

Righteousness is not, do what is right and you will be justified.

It is, be justified, and you will do what is right.

The beginning is not man reaching up to God.

It is God reaching down to man.

God is not a reflection of the best in man.

Man is a reflection of the best in God.

Wisdom is not mind establishing the place for faith and building it up.

It is faith establishing the place for mind and building it up.

You do not come to see the world as you should and therefore know God.

You come to know God, and therefore see the world as you should.

The Cross was the point where the power of sin and death crushed God.

It is the point where God crushed the power of sin and death.

## **XXI The Other Side**

The foundation is that *God* loves you and your neighbor.  
The foundation is that you shall love *God* and your neighbor.

Only those who believe can obey.

Only those who obey can believe.

A wise man will pursue love.

A man of love will pursue wisdom.

Christ shared in our life and died our death,

That we may share in his death and live his life.

The believer abides in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy  
Spirit.

The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit abide in the  
believer.

Inside of your heart, there is a void that can be filled only by  
*God*.

Inside of *God's* heart, there is a void that can be filled only by  
you.

## XXII Necessary

If you have nothing that you are ready to die for, then you  
have nothing that you are ready to live for.

If you will not lose yourself, then you can not find yourself.

If you can not accept that your own wisdom is not the final  
measure, then you can not become wise.

If you can not let go of efficiency, then you can not use what  
has been entrusted you properly.

If you do not fear God, then you will not know either courage  
or peace.

If you do not renounce everything to gain Christ, then you can  
not truly gain anything.

If you do not see the net sum of all your good works as —, —,  
then you can never produce good works.

## XXIII Teaching

Once a man came out of a church service, visibly moved. He walked along with the town cynic, and began to speak.

"There's a new preacher, and his message is totally different."

"Really? What did the old one say?"

"He said that we have all sinned, and that Jesus died for our sins, and that, unless we accept his forgiveness for our sins, we're all going to go to Hell."

"And what does the new one say?"

"He says that we have all sinned, and that Jesus died for our sins, and that, unless we accept his forgiveness for our sins, we're all going to go to Hell."

"Bah! Doesn't sound like much of a difference to me."

"Oh, there's a world of difference. He says it with tears in his eyes."

## XXIV Faith

The just shall live by faith.

Not, "The just shall live by works," to which faith is a means.

"The just shall live by faith," of which works are a result.

Not, "The just shall live by meaning," to which faith is a means. "The just shall live by faith," of which meaning is a result.

Not, "The just shall live by rational explanation," to which faith is a means. "The just shall live by faith," of which rational explanation is a result.

Not, "The just shall live by mystery," to which faith is a means. "The just shall live by faith," of which mystery is a result.

Not, "The just shall live by power," to which faith is a means.

"The just shall live by faith," of which power is a result.

Not, "The just shall live by security," to which faith is a means. "The just shall live by faith," of which security is a result.

Not, "The just shall live by happiness," to which faith is a means. "The just shall live by faith," of which happiness is a result.

The just shall live by faith.

## **XXV Means**

The more haste, the less speed.

The more prudishness, the less purity.

The more rules, the less order.

The more will, the less power to obey.

The more excess, the less satisfaction.

The more license, the less freedom.

The more wrong means, the less right ends.

It is necessary, not only to believe that God has given the right ends, but also that he knows the best means to those ends.

## **XXVI Law**

There is the Law for the lawless.

There is no Law for the righteous.

The Law is not a tool to help people obey. It is a mirror to show people that they can't obey.

It is meant to show people that however hard they try, they need something greater: that the Something Greater is how they are to obey.

Alas, for how many have tried to obey with the Law?

## XXVII Virtue and Vice

The one man perfect in virtue was the Man of Sorrows, and we are not greater. In this world, virtue is no escape from suffering.

Yet vice is anything from the path of joy. Joy, indeed, is a part of virtue, and can not truly be separated from it.

Virtue is hard to begin with, but ends in joy.

Vice is easy to begin with, but ends in misery.

What does Heaven look like?

He who is proud will see that every man present is present, not because of, but despite what he merits.

He who is rebellious will see people serve an absolute King.

He who desires self-sufficiency will see that joy is offered in community.

He who seeks wealth, prestige, power, and other ways to dominate others, will find his effort in Heaven to be like buying a gun in a grocery store.

He who strives will see that there is no one to strive with.

He who despises the physical will see a bodily resurrection.

He who desires his own interpretation and his own set of beliefs, will see absolute truth in crystalline clarity.

To those who will not let God change their character to virtue and love, even Heaven would be Hell.

## XXVIII Wrong Tools

Does one use an ice cube to start a fire?

Does one use a chainsaw to mend a torn garment?

Does one use nerve gas to heal paralysis?

Then why do people use worry to create security, or wealth and power to create happiness, or excess to create satisfaction, or distortions of pleasure to surpass pleasure in its proper function?

Perhaps the reason that the Tempter is the Father of Lies, is that only a master of illusion could make sin appear desirable.

## **XXIX Fallenness**

Fallenness is subtle, and appears in many ways.

People do reverence to nothings, and disturb the order.

What should be used is loved, and what should be loved is used.

People consider ends which are good themselves, to be merely means to other ends, ends which are trivia. It is like seeking to heal a man deaf and dumb, so that he can tell you what time it is.

People try to achieve the right ends through the wrong means.

People take the right action for the wrong reason.

People try to do good by themselves instead of relying on the Spirit.

As well to give a thirsty man a canteen, without first allowing it to be filled with water.

Man alone can not escape sin. Only in God is that power found.

## **XXX Peace**

Peace is not the absence of violent conflict between men.  
Peace is first of all a peace between *God* and man, and then  
virtue inside a man.

Peace is not an absence of anything, but the presence of love.  
The manifest presence of love does not leave room for people  
to try to kill each other, but it is far more than an absence.

In that way, peace is like many good things. Right action does  
not lie, steal, or commit adultery, but its essence is not what it  
does not do, but what it does do: in the Spirit, act according to  
love and compassion. Virtue does not contain vice, but it is a  
positive thing, the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience,  
kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,  
moderation, courage, justice, wisdom, honor, purity, timelessness,  
balance, obedience, submission, honesty, chastity, simplicity,  
penitence, faith, hope, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, humility.

Violence can not create peace. Only love can.

## **XXXI Nothing Else**

Nothing can atone for the insult of a gift, except for the love  
of the person who gives it.

Nothing can allow the power to do good, except letting go of  
grasping power as the means to do good.

Nothing can sanctify any activity, possession, or skill, except  
offering it up completely to God.

Nothing can bless any activity of man reaching up to God,  
except for the activity of God reaching down to man.

## **XXXII Deprivation**

Too much information; not enough wisdom.

Too many subtleties of interpretation; not enough understanding of the plain and simple.

Too much amusement; not enough leisure.

Too many activities; not enough true accomplishment.

Too much on the surface; not enough in the core.

Too much acceptance; not enough love.

Too much filled-by-man; not enough filled-by-God.

Sometimes, more is less.

## XXXIII The Upside-Down Kingdom

The Kingdom of Heaven knows madness in which there is infinite method. The kingdom of this world knows method in which there is infinite madness.

It is a kingdom in which walking is a luxury, and driving a car is a necessity.

It is a kingdom in which lifelong marriage is less cherished than the isolated pleasure of sex.

It is a kingdom in which peace is pursued through intimidation and violence.

It is a kingdom in which men pursue freedom and joy by doing what they were never meant to.

It is a kingdom in which labor-saving devices destroy leisure.

It is a kingdom in which an unexpected moment of rest at a busy time, is considered an annoyance.

It is a kingdom in which certainty is pursued through doubt.

It is a kingdom in which men try to elevate and build up, by separating from foundations.

It is a kingdom which ignores, ridicules, or kills the prophets God sends it.

It is a kingdom which manages to be so terribly practical that it loses what practicality is meant to achieve.

It is a kingdom in which holding power is more esteemed than

being loved.

Which kingdom is really the upside-down kingdom?

## **XXXIV He Who Is**

He is the Way.

He is Truth.

He is Tao.

He is Light.

He is Life.

He is Love.

He is the Word.

He is Mystery.

He is Beyond.

He is the Origin.

He is Energy.

HE IS.

It is in him that we walk, and live, and breathe.

It is by knowing him that we know ourselves.

It is by being united with him that we become ourselves.

## **XXXV Rotting**

When people forsake the Spirit, they embrace rigid  
asceticism.

Asceticism gives birth to libertinism, and libertinism gives birth  
to death.

When people forsake wisdom, they embrace rationalism.  
Rationalism gives birth to anti-intellectualism, and anti-  
intellectualism gives birth to chaos.

When people forsake faith in God, they embrace faith in man.  
Faith in man gives birth to faith in nothing, and faith in nothing  
gives birth to nothing.

There are ten thousand improvements on the Way. Do you  
know where they lead?

## XXXVI Eden

In Eden, there were no temples.  
There was no place where men did not come to meet God.  
In Eden, there were no priests.  
There was no one who did not know God intimately.  
In Eden, there were no oaths.  
There was no falsehood.  
The words, "At that time, men began to call on the name of Yahweh," do not tell of heights to which man had risen. They tell of the depths to which man had sunk.  
The Kingdom of Heaven does not know a great many things. Rather, it knows what was unspoiled in Eden, and something yet greater.  
Its members are gentle, humble, and pure.  
They carry a sense of timelessness about them, and they make peace.  
They repay evil with good, and rejoice when persecuted.  
They walk in the Spirit.  
They have overcome the world.  
Eden saw the image of God.  
The New Jerusalem will see sinners redeemed, who are not only God's image, but share in the divine nature.  
In Eden, men saw by lights God had made.  
In the New Jerusalem, there will never be a lamp, for God

himself will be their light.

## XXXVII Unconditional

Like is because. Love is despite.

If you begin to understand all of the reasons man has given God not to love him, you will begin to understand the nature of God's love.

Love is not desire, nor is it want, nor is it even duty.

Love is love.

When does love prove that it is love?

When you look into a man, see some virtue, something beautiful, something great he has done for you, and love him more?

No. When you look into a man, see some vice, something ugly, some great wrong he has committed against you, and love him more.

It is perhaps those who are called unloveable who are easiest to love, for love for them will truly be love.

## XXXVIII True Learning

A student, beginning the study of a new language, will first ask, "What does this word mean? What is the word for that?"

Translation will be difficult.

As time passes, he will learn more of the skill of translation. He will know more words, and understand not only what word stands for what word, but what idiom stands for what idiom.

Then, gradually, something else will begin to happen. He will begin to understand the new language, not in terms of the old tongue, but on its own terms. He will learn to think in the new language. He will begin to understand that which lies a step beyond words or even idioms, that which can not be translated. His words in the new tongue will begin to sound, not like a new translation, but like the language itself.

Then, even more gradually, this will be done, not with effort, but as a part of him. His speech will flow, free and unconstrained, as in his native tongue. Translation, in the end as in the beginning, will be difficult; in the beginning, as an unnatural artifice to which there is no alternative, and in the end, as an unnatural artifice which does not compare to the beauty and simplicity of the language itself.

The language has been mastered, not when the student has become skilled in translation, but when he does not need to.

The Way, the Kingdom, the Spirit, are like this.

They are not new. They are ancient. But sin has grown so great that they are not even recognized.

Of course it is possible to strive to make these clear. It is in their nature that this be done. The Way has come, that those who are blind may see.

There are many parables which tell, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like."

Yet the parables say always, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like," never "The Kingdom of Heaven is."

It can never be fully translated.

It must be learned.

## **XXXIX Heaven**

The blind will see *God's* face.  
The dumb will sing praises to him.  
The deaf will listen to the eternal song.  
The lame will dance for joy.  
Those convulsed by spasms will rest in perfect stillness.  
The leprous will feel *God's* touch.  
But all this is dwarfed by the shadow of the wonder beyond  
wonders.  
Sinners will be made holy.

## **XL God**

Believe and know that which can be grasped by reason.

Believe that which can only be called mystery.

So also, know *God* who is very personal.

So also, know *God* who is beyond personality.

Call him firstly and finally, "Abba," Daddy.

Rest in his bosom.

Know also that, though man is like *God*, *God* is not like man.

Embody *Tao*, and walk according to the *Way*.

The nature of *God* — three persons who are yet one — is vast  
and incomprehensible.

He is all of the things of which I have spoken, and more, far  
more.

## **XLI Better**

It is good to love so that any sacrifice considered is made.  
It is better to love so that sacrifice is no longer considered.

It is good to understand through profound symbols.  
It is better to come to the point of understanding from which  
profound symbols are made.

It is good to have faith be a part of everyday life.  
It is better to have everyday life be a part of faith.

It is good to abstain from what should not be done.

It is better to do what should be done.

It is good for the Way to become a part of you.

It is better for you to become a part of the Way.

It is good to know a friend so that you understand his words.  
It is better to know a friend so that you understand without  
words.

It is good to see an enemy, with all the evil he has done you,  
and love him.

It is better to love so that you do not see an enemy.

## **XLII Knowledge**

He does not know how to swim who can recite manuals and  
comment on them.

He knows how to swim who can fall into water and not be harmed.

Those who have pursued knowledge have learned that  
knowledge is never mastered when it resides only in the head.

This character of knowledge is difficult to describe;  
something of it is captured in that the word 'know' tells of the  
union of male and female.

Knowledge proceeds from faith. The call is to believe and  
know the truth.

There is much to wisdom that is not captured by systematic  
theology, and he is wise who knows systematic theology and the  
rest of wisdom.

The call to know *God* and know yourself is a call to truly know.  
The one who knows the Way, knows it in the head, the heart,  
the hands; it rests in his spirit.

## XLIII Sanity

Sanity builds an immense boat in the middle of a desert.

Sanity offers up the son of the promise on the altar.

Sanity leaves net and boat to obey the words, "Come, follow me."

The only true sanity will let go of everything to grasp the Way.

Therefore,

He who follows the Way may have no possessions.

He who follows the Way may have no identity.

He who follows the Way may have no security.

He who follows the Way may have no good works.

He who follows the Way may have no friends.

He who follows the Way may have no family.

He who follows the Way may not have even his own life.

The Way costs everything. To follow it, one must let go of, renounce, hate all of these things, offering them up completely to God.

Then, and only then,

His possession will be the Kingdom of Heaven.

His identity will be Christ.

His security will be the providence of God.

His good works will be the good works of Christ.

His friends will begin with God.

His family will be all who follow the Way.

His life will be eternal.

Of the old things, he will expect nothing back.

That which is given back will be taken to be an unexpected gift.

Even then, he will not have them as before.

He will not have them except according to the Way.

They are not his; they belong to the Way.

## **XLIV Greatness**

*A great leader is not overbearing.*

*A humble man is not self-deprecating.*

*A man of love is not accepting.*

*Why is this?*

*It is because they follow, not the pattern below, but the  
pattern above.*

## **XLV Leaving Room**

A great teacher does not spell out every detail.  
He leaves room open for the student to understand.  
Think about why a joke is funny. It causes no laughter if it is  
explained.  
A great teacher leaves room for his students to learn.

## **XLVI Voice**

Wind, earthquake, and fire are but heralds of something  
greater.

That something greater is soft and still.

That is the voice to listen to, and the voice to imitate.

It is shouting which makes a man hoarse.

If you wish to be heard, do not raise your voice.

Speak in a gentle whisper.

## XLVII Between

The Way between man and God does not leave them separate.  
It draws them together.

The Way between two people does not leave them separate.  
It draws them together.

The Way between man and nature does not leave them  
separate.

It draws them together.

Where there is separation, the Way enters the separation  
and creates intimacy.

Where there is discord, the Way enters the discord and creates  
harmony.

Where there is absence, the Way enters the absence and  
creates presence.

In the beginning was the Way.

And the Way was with God.

And the Way was God.

## XLVIII Slowly

Slowly, slowly, ever so slowly.  
It is over untold aeons that coal is turned to diamond.  
The Way is not speedy, hasted, or rushed.  
It is always on time, because it is never in a hurry.  
It is nonsense to pray, "Lord, give me patience, and give it to  
me now."  
God gives patience, patiently.  
God draws people into the Way, according to the way of the  
Way.  
It is ever so slowly and imperceptibly that they grow in virtue.  
The time to obey is now.  
The time for results to come, is God's concern, not yours.  
Do not be in a hurry with God.  
God is not in a hurry with you.

## **XLIX Prayer**

Do not spend a season without food,  
nor a week without drink,  
nor an hour without air,  
nor a second without prayer.

Prayer is not useful. Wonders come of it, but it is not useful.  
Prayer makes innumerable petitions, but it is not a tool to get  
things.

Prayer is the step by which a man walks in the way.  
Prayer is the letting go by which a man rests in the Spirit.  
Prayer is the force by which God draws man into himself.

Prayer does not draw into communion with God to ask and  
receive.

Prayer asks and receives to draw into communion with God.

## L Control

A microbe controls the biologist who studies it. It causes him to place it on a glass slide, and look at it through a microscope.

A mountain controls the climber who scales it. It causes him to flatten himself against the rock, grab on to tiny holds, and move according to their pattern.

A thermometer controls the patient who uses it. It causes him to sit still and close his mouth.

There are many other things that control, for good or evil, and the control rarely extends only to the moment.

Lust causes a man to look at a person and see only breasts and legs.

Devotion to mammon causes a man to think of "What does this cost? What am I willing to pay?", and worry for his riches.

Playing a tactical assassination game causes a man to think about how to kill stranger and friend, and jump in fear at every sound, paranoid without cease about which stranger or friend is trying to kill him.

But,

The Way causes a man to be filled with peace and innocence. Forgiving wrongs causes a man to be undisturbed by hate and anger.

Prayer causes a man to be filled with trust and security.

Mercy causes a man to be filled with love.

A man can choose what will control him.  
He cannot choose whether or not he will be controlled.  
It is those who most resist control, who are most under  
control, and whose master destroys.  
What controls you?

## LI Great

A step into the Way has been made by the person who ceases to say, "God, look how big my problems are!", and instead says,

"Problems, look how big my God is!"

Greatness is in God, and in everything that comes from him.

The Way is great.

The Kingdom of Heaven is great.

Tao is great.

I do not know words that will hold the greatness of God.

Greatness comes to a man, not by conquering a city, nor by earning a million dollars, but by growing into accord with the Way.

To enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, become as a little child.

## LII Accordance

A true climber will climb according to the shape of the mountain.

A true wayfarer does not stay in hotels, ride tour buses, and buy shiny trinkets; he steps into the culture, meeting its people, listening to its music, tasting its food.

A true architect will not take a medieval cloister and attach to it an addition that belongs in a shiny new mall. Rather, he will build new buildings that fit the pattern of the landscape, and new additions which fit the pattern of the old.

Being will do, but it is a doing which is in accordance with being and does not strive.

A man who walks in the Way will not strive with what around him is not evil.

One does not write poetry to defy the rules of a language; it is rather to write in accordance with the nature of the tongue.

A poet may change the structure of his language, but he does so only according to its spirit.

An intercessor can change the will of God, but he will do so only in accordance with what God wills.

God is eternal, constant, timeless, unchanging.

In time, he has constantly changed his will, that there may remain inviolate his unchanging love.

Therefore, to change the will of God is in accordance with

God's will.

Such change will be the nature of change made by a man who walks in the Way; he will never try to make changes which are haphazard or random. If that is how it is changed, even more accordance is how it is not changed.

He who walks in the way will know accordance.

## LIII Freedom

Freedom of motion is the freedom of a skeleton intact. It is a freedom that allows a person to run, and jump, and dance.

What comes of breaking a bone is freedom to bend a limb in ways it was never meant to move, freedom to have sherds of bone tear at living flesh, freedom to writhe in agony, and freedom to die.

That is not freedom.

It is only in accordance with the Way that there is freedom.

It hurts to kick against the goads.

For freedom, all who walk in the Way have been set free.

Freedom is the nature of the Way.

## LIV Return

To the faithful, God shows himself faithful.  
To the forgiving, God shows himself forgiving.

To the kind, God shows himself kind.

To the wise, God shows himself wise.

To the patient, God shows himself patient.

To the pure, God shows himself pure.

To the loving, God shows himself loving.

When the Spirit places virtue in a man, he is ready to see  
that virtue in God.

Seek what is right, and it will be accorded to you.

## LV Title

"Master!"

"Do not call me master. There is but one."

"Surely you know that you are a sage."

"He is a fool who considers himself wise."

"Teacher?"

"Do not think of me as teacher, either."

"But I see in you such wisdom, such gentleness, such peace. If I may not call you master, nor sage, nor even teacher, then how may I call you?"

"Brother."

## LVI Growth

A wise man learns from the words of the simple.  
Only a man of little learning says, "I have nothing to learn  
from you."

In this, wisdom reflects the Way.

Growth is not like an empty room being filled with boxes,  
where each thing placed inside leaves less and less room for  
more.

It is rather like dominoes being placed on a table; the more  
are set in place, the more possibilities are created to add more.

The more a man grows in the Way, the more he is able to  
grow.

## LVII Measure

Playing with one sniffly child and lecturing to one thousand  
eminent scholars,  
Blessing a meal and commanding a mountain to be thrown into  
the sea,

Praying for a minute and praying for an hour,  
Giving up a shoe and giving up life,  
These things are not different in the Way; they are  
different only in men's minds.

One who walks in the Way will not care for numbers, or fame,  
or so-called greatness. They come, and he will not be puffed up;  
they leave, and he will not be distraught.

There are many people who have faith to move mountains.  
Then why is it not seen? Because the Spirit does not lead them  
to perform parlor tricks to obviate the need for faith.  
The Way is silent as light; ears filled with the din and noise of  
the world must grow silent to hear it. It performs great  
wonders, but they go unnoticed.  
The Way has its own measure.

## **LVIII Behold**

Behold the candle. It gives itself up, that others may have  
light.

Behold water. It does not resist one who pushes against it,  
yet it changes the shape of mountains.

Behold light. Men see it, and by it see all else.

Behold. Even the pebbles beneath your feet tell of God, of  
the Way, of the man who walks in the Way. They bear its  
imprint.

## LIX Unity

When two believers come together, the power of their prayer  
increases tenfold.

A hand or a foot on its own is dead. The sum of such hands,  
feet, eyes, and other members is still dead. That it is larger and  
more complete means only that its stench will be greater.  
Yet there is the breath of life, animating the body of every  
man alive.

Life is in each part, and each part is united with the whole.  
The body is controlled by the head, which loves it, and the  
breath of life animates each member.

Christ is the head.

The Spirit is the breath of life.

All who follow the Way are the members.

There is infinite variety among them.

Why are they different?

Because they are members of one body.

The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

## LX Increase

The step from boyhood to manhood has been made, not by the one who looks into the mirror and finds the first excuse to shave, but by the one who looks into the mirror and finds the first excuse not to shave.

Dignity is found, not by the one who tears others down, but by the one who builds others up.

Good works shine before men, not when they are paraded, but when they are done in secret.

Ceasing to make God the image of man comes, not by making God the impersonal image of not-man, but by letting God be God:

HE WHO IS,

mysterious and incomprehensible,  
unlike a man,

far beyond anything that can be captured by personality,  
and therefore more personal than any man.

He who loves God will have all the more love for his neighbor,  
and he who loves his neighbor will have all the more love for God.

The more love and joy are shared, the more they abound.

The more prayer, worship, and Communion abound, the more they become special, sacred.

## LXI Sight

One who sees will look at a gift and see also the love which gave it.

One who sees will look at a face and see also a person.

One who sees will look at artwork and see also an artist.

One who sees will look at the physical and see also the spiritual.

One who hears will listen to the words of a friend, and hear both what is said and what is not said.

One who hears will listen to a question, and hear also the thoughts, the perspective, and the knowledge from which it came.

One who feels will sense the presence of God's love in the dryness of the absconditus deus.

The Way is a way of reality and substance.

An artist who creates a masterpiece will care for the smallest detail, but the compilation of technical details never forms art.

One who abides in the way will never despise accident, for he knows that a forest is never seen by chopping down trees; yet neither will he look at accident and fail to see substance.

Look at the surface and see into the depths.

## **LXII Practicality**

Nobody who enjoys wine takes some grape juice, throws some yeast in, and hopes that it will be ready in ten minutes.

Instead, it is carefully prepared, and stored away to rest.

Years will pass before it graces a table as fine wine.

This is how a wise man is like the master of a storehouse, producing from it treasures old and new.

In studying the Scriptures, looking into the wonders of Creation, listening to the voice of the Spirit, every morcel of wisdom will be carefully stored away, allowed to ferment for minutes or years until the right moment comes.

Even in use, the thought of utility does not come. Like all else in the way, wisdom is pursued, not for the sake of using, but for the sake of having.

The first lesson in practicality is to let go of it.

## LXIII Gifts

To come into being is not something one causes; it is given by  
God.

The forgiveness of sins is not something one earns; it is given by  
God.

Obedience is not something one accomplishes; it is given by God.  
The Father created man in his image.

The Son was crucified that men's sins might be forgiven.

The Spirit is poured out that men be given the power to obey.  
Do not do; obey.

## LXIV Intimacy

It is only to a stranger that respect is shown by formality and distance. To a good friend, respect is shown by a love that has no need of such things.

It is only to a foreign student of language that thoughts of grammatical rules occur. To a native speaker, the language flows.

It is only to someone outside that obedience looks like willpower and rules. To someone inside, obedience flows from the motion of the Spirit and its fruit, virtue.

The Way is a way of closeness, intimacy. It knows the great order which lets go of the silliness of little order. It has no need for formal structure, ceremonial laws, and other such trivia.

It is in this Way that men greet each other with a warm embrace and address the Creator of Heaven and earth as "Daddy." It is in this Way that men grow into all that is good and pure.

It is in this Way that men become of one spirit with HE WHO IS.

No distance.

## LXV Invisible

Good acting does not cause people to think about what good acting there is. It allows them to see into the characters.  
Good clothing does not cause people to think about what good clothing they are wearing. It allows them to move without discomfort or restraint.

Good government does not cause people to think about what good government they have. It allows them to go about their affairs without interference.

A good window does not cause people to think about what a good window it is. It allows them to see clearly what is on the other side.

A good waiter does not cause people to think about what a good waiter he is. He allows them to enjoy their meal.

A good temperature does not cause people to think about what a good temperature the air has. It allows them to live undisturbed by heat or cold.

A good preacher does not cause people to think about what a good preacher they have. He allows them to think about what a great God they have.

The Way is as silent as light. It is gentle, soft, and unobtrusive. One who walks in the Way does not seek his own glory.

It is from the Way that issued the words,

"My precious, precious child,  
I love you and will never leave you.  
When you see but one set of footprints,  
It was then that I carried you."

## LXVI Mercy

When man embraced evil, he was expelled from Paradise and bestowed a curse. Accursed, that time would see him wither and die.

Yet even in that curse, was an act of great mercy. The true curse would have been an imperishable body, filled with eternal youth.

A body forever young, as spirit and soul rot in vice. Time would see bitterness and suffering grow without end. Worse than a curse to die away from the Way, is a curse to live apart from the Way.

But Mercy did not do that.

Mercy gave another gift, a gift greater still. In the Way, though men waste away outwardly, inwardly they are renewed day by day.

The moment of death is transformed into a birth into life. After death comes the resurrection; spirit, soul, and body filled with a life even greater than that of Eden. Men will become the sons of God, sharing in the divine nature. HE WHO IS took death beyond death, and transformed it into life beyond life.

## LXVII Not-Doing

Swallowing a pill is a difficult thing to learn.  
It is difficult because a child will strive to do it, and it is  
something which can only be not-done.  
Even discipline follows the path of not-doing.  
Discipline does not force a square peg into a round hole; it slides  
a round peg into a round hole.  
Six days of work were not evil, but it was one day of rest that  
was holy.  
Rest surpasses work because it was before.  
Before the worlds began, before even the creation of time,  
the Father is in glory with the Son.  
In that glory is absolute rest.  
In that glory will be the rest of all who follow the Way.  
From being issues doing; from being and not-doing issue doing.  
This is the order of the Way.  
Not-doing leaves room open for God to fill.  
Faith is a rest-in-God; it is a state of being and not-doing.  
It is from faith that actions proceed.  
Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.  
To those who not-do, abide, receive, believe, life is given.  
The Son rests in the Father's bosom, and the Spirit flows  
between them.  
In this nature, rest, glory, and love, will they share.

Be and become.  
Not-do and rest in God.  
Let love flow into action.

## LVXIII Honesty

To walk in the Way is to become honest.  
Honesty certainly does not lie on an income tax form, but  
there is something more. To become honest is to become  
unmasked.

A mask is an armored shell.  
It protects from feeling pain.  
It protects from being healed.  
It protects from growing and becoming real.  
To remove it is to become naked and vulnerable.  
It is to allow people to look into your eyes.  
The pain of removing it is the pain of being healed.  
It is like swallowing pride.

To swallow pride tastes foul, not because of the nature of  
humility, but because it is the taste of the foul and bitter nature  
of the pride that is swallowed.

After the mask is removed, there is a warmth and freedom  
like the freshness that comes after tears.

There is substance and reality in the image of God.

There is substance and reality in the Way.

There is too much substance and reality to fit inside of a  
mask.

## LXIX Interaction

The Kingdom of Heaven does not know interactions based on power: "I will compel you to do this."

Neither does it know interactions of economic character: "I will do this for you if you do this for me."

Instead, its interactions are based on love, freely and lavishly bestowed.

This lavishness is embedded in the words, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

He who uses power to compel things from other people, or economic exchanges to bargain things from them, does so for a reason. He does so in order to gain what is good, desirable, and beneficial for himself.

The question, "Why does he want that?" is a misplaced question. He does not wish to benefit himself as a means to something else. He loves himself.

This is how you should love yourself.

This is how you should love your neighbor.

Love is not the son of want.

Love is the foundation of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Love is the air which its citizens breathe and through which they see.

Prayer is love in communion with God.

Kindness is love wearing work gloves.

It is freely received and freely given, poured out without  
measure.

It is shared, and increases all the more.

It is generous, like the woman who poured pure nard over  
Jesus's feet.

It is a cascade of flowing water, which cleanses what is soiled  
and heals what is wounded.

It is full of joy; finding something good, it seeks to share.

It is forgiving; it looks upon the person who has wronged it, and  
says, "I love you."

Love God.

Love the brothers and sisters, all mankind, yourself.

Love the stars, the waters, the animals, the trees.

All that is written about the nature of godly living is an  
explanation of love.

Heaven, the hope of the ages, is the final hope of being  
united and immersed in love with God and the saints.

The Kingdom of Heaven is a kingdom of love.

## **LXX Being**

The rock, the foundation, the origin of all.  
A state of being eternal and changeless.  
All glory, all holiness, all authority, all wisdom.  
Beyond all measure.  
Infinite stillness.  
Life beyond life.  
Light without any darkness.  
One.

## **LXXI Dim**

Thomas Aquinas wrote many books; among numerous others,  
he wrote a Summa Theologica of encyclopaedic volume.

Late in life, he had a vision.

In this vision, Christ spoke to him from the Cross.

The vision profoundly affected him.

He became silent, and ceased to write.

And all his great and wonderful writings?

He declared them to be straw.

## **LXXII End**

A journey is a long voyage that leads home.  
Childlike faith meets testing and fire and new experiences,  
that it may become childlike faith.  
Depths of theology, profound insight, and great learning, lead  
to hearing the simple words, "Jesus loves you," and trusting  
them.  
The Alpha is the Omega; the First is the Last; the Beginning  
is the End.  
All good things come from God through the Way;  
all good things return to God through the Way.

## **LXXIII Around**

To worship is to take a little step into Heaven.  
A candle which is lit, glows. It sheds light and warmth on all  
that is around it.

One who walks in the Way will carry little pieces of Heaven  
with him. He will bear with him a sense of timelessness, peace,  
joy, and love.

Bringing Heaven down to earth is very important.

It is to be not-done and done.

A relief worker, returning to a war zone, said, "I'm going back  
to Hell, to plant some flowers."

## LXXIV Maps

All mapmakers face a difficult task.  
They have a flat surface with which to represent a surface  
which is not flat.

Many maps of the world look very different.  
Some have a grid which preserves latitude and longitude.  
Some preserve the area of each part.

Some preserve something else.

Someone who knows only flat surfaces may be confused.  
He may think that each mapmaker has produced a map of his own  
perspective.

He may imagine something vague and indefinite, tell a parable of  
blind men feeling an elephant, and call it great arrogance when  
mapmakers examine something which looks like a map and declare  
it unacceptable.

This is not a mark of openmindedness, nor of nuanced  
understanding, nor of humility.

It is a mark of ignorance.

The truth is not something indefinite and unreal.

The truth is very definite and real.

Maps vary because they represent something too definite and  
too real to fully capture with a flat surface.

A mapmaker never alters geographical features which he doesn't  
like or which do not seem to make sense to him.

Mapmaking is an activity of absolute fidelity.

## **LXXV Within**

A parent has properly disciplined a child, not when he behaves properly upon sight of an authority figure, but when he behaves properly regardless.

Protection from drunkenness does not come from restricted access to alcohol, but from learning to know and respect one's limits.

Order is not externally imposed; it comes from what is placed within.

Training does not give men the power to conform reality to their nature, but to conform their nature to the ultimate reality.

Fighting the evil without never comes without fighting the evil within.

To walk in the Way is always to look inwards.

## LXXVI Bread

There is no need to worry about what to eat; God feeds even the birds of the air, and we are worth more than many sparrows.

He knows our needs and desires before we begin to pray. He desires to give even more than we desire to receive.

It would seem that a man of faith would believe in this, and not annoy God by interrupting him with requests for bread.

Yet the model for prayer asks for the coming of the Kingdom, the forgiveness of sins — and, day by day, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Why is this?

It is because man does not live by bread alone.

God wishes that man be nourished in body and spirit. As bread sustains the body, prayer and communion sustain the spirit.

Therefore, we are invited to share his presence in the smallest detail of our lives.

It is by prayer that we receive each meal as a gift wrapped in love.

It is by prayer that a blade of grass can draw us into the heart of the Father.

Pray continually.

## LXXVII Meta

Cognition is made complete by metacognition.

Cognition sees that wealth will buy an abundance of  
possessions.

Metacognition sees that life does not consist of an abundance of  
possessions.

Cognition finds an edge in the rat race.

Metacognition climbs out of the rat race.

Cognition finds a way to admire the Emperor's new clothes.

Metacognition asks, "Why is that man naked?"

Cognition gives the greatest volume of food to the highest  
number of beggars in the least amount of time.

Metacognition shares a human touch with at least one beggar.

Cognition asks, "What does this say?"

Metacognition asks, "Is this orthodox?"

Cognition asks, "How can I do this?"

Metacognition asks, "Is this right?"

Cognition thinks.

Metacognition thinks about how cognition thinks.

Cognition is necessary, but it is even more vital to take a step  
back and restore things to sanity.

## **LXXVIII Undisturbed**

### LXXIX Life

Of what is to be known, I know little.

Of what I know, I can explain little.

These words tell of the Way by which a man may find life.

Come to the Way of which these words tell.

These words are imperfect; the Way is perfect.

Do not come to these words to find life.

If you do, they will kill you.

## **LXXX Love**

Love is the foundation and cornerstone of Law and virtue.

Love is the character of a saint.

The Law, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, care for the poor, worship God alone", is an extended commentary on the actions which love dictates.

Virtue is only another name for the different sides of love. Patience and forgiveness are the nature of love when it is wronged.

And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love.

The greatest of these is love.

## **LXXXI Beyond**

Beyond doing, there is being.  
Beyond time, there is eternity.  
Beyond mortality, there is immortality.  
Beyond knowledge, there is faith.  
Beyond justice, there is mercy.  
Beyond happy thoughts, there is joy.  
Beyond communication, there is communion.  
Beyond petition, there is prayer.  
Beyond work, there is rest.  
Beyond right action, there is virtue.  
Beyond virtue, there is the Holy Spirit.  
Beyond appreciation, there is awe.  
Beyond sound, there is stillness.  
Beyond stillness, there is the eternal song.  
Beyond law, there is grace.  
Beyond even wisdom, there is love.  
Beyond all else, HE IS.

**What  
Evolutionists Have  
to Say to the  
Royal, Divine  
Image:  
*We're Missing Something***

**Jerry Mander, [Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#)**

**Robb Wolf, [The Paleo Solution: The Original Human Diet](#)**

I have been rereading and thinking over parts of the three titles above, and I have come to realize that at least some evolutionists have something to give that those of us who believe there is something special about humanity would profit from. I believe more than the "special flower" assessment of humanity that Wolf ridicules; I believe more specifically that humanity is royalty, created in the image of God, and if for the sake of argument at least, the agricultural revolution and what follows are largely a mistake, I can say more than that Homo sapiens (sapiens) is the only species out of an innumerable multitude

across incomparable time to be **anywhere near** enough of a "special flower" to make such a mistake. I believe more specifically that man is created in the divine image and is of eternal significance, and each of us is in the process of becoming either a being so glorious that if you recognized it you would be tempted to worship it, or a horror such as you would not encounter in your worst nightmare—and that each of us in the divine image is in the process of freely choosing which we shall be. No other life form is conferred such a dignity—and I would focus that statement a little more and say no other animal.

'No other animal:' the phrase is perhaps jarring to some, but I use it deliberately. I do not, in any sense, say mere animal. But I do quite deliberately say animal. Let us turn to Alisdair MacIntyre, [Dependent Rational Animals](#), in the opening of the second chapter:

From its earliest sixteenth century uses in English and other European languages 'animal' and whatever other expressions correspond to it have been employed both to name a class whose members include spiders, bees, chimpanzees, dolphins and humans—among others, but not plants, inanimate beings, angels, and God, and also to name the class consisting of nonhuman animals. It is this latter use that became

Alisdair MacIntyre's title, 'dependent rational animals', is an adaptation of Aristotle's definition of man as 'rational mortal animal'. His thesis, that virtue is central to the natural condition of man, is well worth studying, and provides a counterbalance to seeing the original condition of the human race in terms of the contemporary Western preoccupations with

dominant in modern Western cultures and with it a habit of mind that, by distracting our attention from how much we share with other animal species...

Since then, evolutionary claims that we are in fact animals is not a resurrection of the older usage; it is a new usage that claims we are nothing more than animals, a claim not implied by Aristotle's definition of us as 'rational mortal animals.' There is both a continuity and a distinction implied between rational humans and non-rational animals, and while many animals have intelligence on some plane (artificial intelligence, after failing to duplicate human intelligence, scaled back and tried to duplicate insect intelligence, and failed at that too), there's something special to human intelligence. The singularity we are in now may be a predicament, but no other animal could make such dimensions.

I will be interested in a direction taken by Mander and the neo-Paleo movement, in a line that MacIntyre does not really explore. Perhaps his thesis about why we, as dependent rational animals, need the virtues, is greater than anything I will explore here. But I have my sights on something lower.

I would like to define two terms for two camps, before showing where one of them shortchanges us.

The first is revolutionary punk eek. Darwin's theory of

diet and exercise.

The neo-Paleo ('Paleo') movement's diet and exercise are very powerful, and probably very close to optimal, but virtue is worth consideration. But while portraying [Dependent Rational Animals](#) as well worth a read, I will not engage him to the same degree as the likes of Mander and Wolf.

evolution is no longer seriously believed by much of anyone in the (generally materialist) scientific community. People who say they believe in evolution, and understand the basic science, normally believe in neo-Darwinian theories of evolution. That is, with Darwin, they no longer believe that species gradually morph into new species. They believe that the fossil record shows a punctuated equilibrium, 'punct eek' to the irreverent, which essentially says that evolution has long periods of stable equilibrium, which once in a long while are punctuated by abrupt appearance and disappearance of life forms. (What causes the punctuations is accounted for by the suggestions that life forms evolve very slowly when things are on an even keel, but rapidly mutate substantial beneficial improvements when things turn chaotic. When I protested this, I was told that there were people who evolved HIV/AIDS resistance in a single generation, a premise that I cannot remotely reconcile either with my understanding of probability or of genetics.) As my IMSA biology teacher put it, "Evolution is like baseball. There are long periods of boredom interrupted by intense periods of excitement."

Now I am deliberately making a somewhat ambiguous term, because I intend to include old earth intelligent design movement's authors such as Philip Johnson, who wrote [Darwin on Trial](#). Johnson argues that natural forces alone do not suffice to punctuate the equilibrium and push evolution forward; but his interpretation of the fossil record is largely consistent with that of someone who believes in neo-Darwinian evolutionary punct eek. And so I lump Richard Dawkins and Philip Johnson together in the same cluster, a move that would probably leave them both aghast.

The distinction between them is between evolutionary punct

reek adherents, who believe the universe is billions of years old, and young earth creationists, including perhaps some Jews, most Church Fathers, Evangelical conservatives who created Creation Science as an enterprise of proving a young earth scientifically, and [Fr. Seraphim \(Rose\)](#), who saw to it that Orthodox would not stop with quoting the Fathers but additionally import Creation Science into Orthodoxy.

Now let me give some dates, in deliberately vague terms. The age of the agricultural revolution and of civilization weighs in at several thousand years. The age of the world according to young earth creationists is also several thousand years. According to revolutionary punk eek, the age of the world is several billion years, but that's a little besides the point. The salient point is where you draw the line, a question which I will not try to settle, beyond saying that the oldest boundary I've seen chosen is some millions of years, and the newest boundary I've heard is hundreds of thousands of years. What this means in practice is that on young earth assumptions, agriculture is about as old as the universe, while on revolutionary punk eek assumptions, the beginning of the agricultural revolution occurred at absolute most in the past five percent of the time humans have been around, not leaving enough time for our nature to really change in any way that makes sense for revolutionary punk eek. Or to put it more sharply, young earth creationism implies that agrarian life has been around about as long as the first humans, and revolutionary punk eek implies that the agricultural revolution represents a big-picture eyeblink, a mere blip on the radar for people built to live optimally under normal hunter-gatherer conditions. To the young-earther, there might be prehistory but there can't be very much of it; the normal state of the human being is at earliest agrarian, and there is not much argument

that the ways of agrarian society are normative. To the revolutionary punk eek adherent, there is quite a lot of prehistory that optimized us for hunter-gatherer living, and agrarian society and written history with it are just a blip and away from the baseline.

The other term besides revolutionary punk eek is pseudomorphosis, a term which I adapt from an Orthodox usage to mean, etymologically, conforming to a false shape, a square peg in a round hole. The revolutionary punk implication drawn by some is that we were optimized for hunter-gatherer living, and the artificial state known in civilisation and increasingly accelerating away from these origins is a false existence in something like the Call of C'thulu role playing game played by my friends in high school, where rifts occur in the fabric of reality and "mosters" come through them, starting with the relatively tame vampires and zombies and moving on to stranger monsters such as a color that drives people mad. A motley crew of heroes must seal these rifts, or else there will come one of the "Ancient Ones", a demon god intent on destroying the earth. (It is an occult picture, but not entirely different from the state of our world.)

I don't want to give full context, but I was in a discussion with my second thesis advisor after my studies, and he asked whether I would make 'allowances for greater ignorance in the past.' Now he was a member of a college with one of the world's best libraries for the study of Graeco-Roman context to the New Testament, and he was expert in rabbinic Jewish cultural context to the New Testament. Hello? Has he heard of the Babylonian Talmud? A knowledge of the Talmud is easily on par with a good liberal arts education, and it really puts the reader through its paces. And its point is not just a training ground with

mental gymnastics that stretch the mind, but something far greater. My reply to him was, 'I do not make allowances for greater ignorance in the past. Allowances for different ignorance in the past are more negotiable.' And if it is true that we live in escalating pseudomorphosis, perhaps we should wonder if we should make allowances for greater ignorance in the present. I know much more about scientific botany than any ancient hunter-gatherer ever knew, but I could not live off the land for a month much of anywhere in the wild. Should I really be looking down on hunter-gatherers because unlike them I know something of the anatomical structure of cells and how DNA basically works? If a hunter-gatherer were to answer, an appropriate, if not entirely polite, answer would be, "Here is a knife, a gun, and a soldier's pack with bedroll and such. Live off the land for a month anywhere in the world, and then we'll talk."

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Reading these accounts made it clear to me that all life in the jungle is constantly of all other life in exquisite detail. Through this, the Indians gained information about the way natural systems interact. The observation was itself knowledge. Depending on the interpretation, the knowledge might or might not become reliable and useful.

Each detail of each event had special power and meaning. The understanding was so complete that it was only the rare event that could not be explained—a twig cracked in a way that did not fit the previous history of cracked twigs—that was cause for concern and immediate arming.

Examples could easily be multiplied. There are many passages like that in the book, and many to be written for life. We seem to have a filter where 'knowledge' implicitly means 'knowledge of the sort that we possess', and then by that filter judge other cultures, especially cultures of the past, as knowing less than us.

The anthropological term is ethnocentrism. I believe a little humility is in order for us.

Humans have eyes, skin, a digestive tract, and other features that are basic animal features. When studying wild animals, for instance, we expect them to function best under certain

conditions. Now the locality of an organism can vary considerably: in North America, there are certain relatively generic species of trees that can be found over a broad swath of land, while in Australia, trees tend to be more specialized and occupy a very specific niche. But in some ways human adaptability is overemphasized. The human body can adapt to regularly breathing in concentrated smoke, in one sense: keeping on smoking is so easy it is hard to quit. But that does not mean that human lungs adapt to breathing in concentrated smoke on a regular basis. The ease with which a person or society can adjust to cigarettes exceeds any adaptation revolutionary punk eek would allow for lungs. Perhaps hunter-gatherers have ingested some smoke from fires, and possibly we have enough tolerance that we do not puff up with an allergic reaction at the first smoke. Nonetheless, in no quarter has the human body adapted to be able to smoke without damage to lungs and health.

For most of the human race to embrace the agricultural revolution, and the revolutions that follow, might be like smoking. We can adapt in the sense of making the change and getting used to it. But that does not include, metaphorically speaking, our lungs. We still have hunter-gatherer lungs, as it were, perhaps lungs that work better if we follow neo-Paleo diet and exercise, and we have adopted changes we have not adapted to.

## What punk eek revolutionists have to give us

What is perhaps the most valuable thing revolutionary punk has to offer us is a question: "What conditions are we as revolutionary organisms best adapted to?" And [The Paleo Solution](#) offers a neo-Paleo prescription for diet and also exercise. This may not exactly be like what any tribe of hunter-gatherers ate, but it is lightyears closer than fast food, and is also vastly closer than industrial or even agrarian diets. And the gym-owning author's exercise prescription is vastly more appropriate than a sedentary lifestyle without exercise, and is probably much better than cardiovascular exercise alone. And Mander's [Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#) argues, among other things, that humans do substantially better with natural organic sunlight than any of the artificial concocted lights we think are safer. They don't suggest social structure; the question of whether they held what would today be considered traditional gender roles is not raised, which may itself be an answer. (For the text Mander cites, the answer is 'Yes', although Mander, possibly due to other reasons such as brevity and focus, does not make this point at all clear.) And they don't complete the picture, and they don't even get to MacIntyre's point that our condition as dependent and

ultimately vulnerable rational animals means that we need the virtues, but they do very well with some of the lower notes.

The argument advanced by vegetarians that we don't have a carnivore digestive tract is something of a breath of fresh air. It argues that meat calls for a carnivore's short digestive tract and vegetables call for an herbivore's long digestive tract, and our digestive tract is a long one. Now there is to my mind, a curious omission; for both hunter-gatherer and modern times, most people have eaten an omnivore's diet, and this fallacy of the excluded middle never brings up how long or short an omnivore's digestive tract is: apparently, we must either biologically be carnivores or herbivores, even though the people vegetarians are arguing with never seem to believe we should be straight carnivores who eat meat and only meat; even people who call themselves 'carnivores' in fact tend to eat a lot of food that is not meat, even if meat might be their favorite. But the question, if arguably duplicitous, is a helpful kind of question to ask. It asks, "What are we adapted to?" and the answer is, "Living like hunter-gatherers." That's true for the 2,000,000 or however many years the genus *Homo* has been around, and it's still true for the 200,000 years *Homo sapiens sapiens* has been around. Or if you want to subtract the 10,000 years since the agricultural revolution began and we began to experiment with smoking, 190,000 years before we created the singularity that opens rifts in the fabric of reality and lets monsters in, including (as is argued in [Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#), in the chapter on 'Artificial Light'), the 'color that makes people mad' from the phosphor glow of a television screen in a darkened room.

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Price spirit, wrote the half-argument, half-cookbook volume of [Nourishing Traditions](#), which argues that we with our industrial diet would do well to heed the dietary solutions found in agrarian society, and prescribes a diet that is **MUCH** better than the industrial diet. But she essentially only looks at recorded history, which is millenia newer than agricultural beginnings. But the pseudomorphosis was already well underway by the times recorded in [Nourishing Traditions](#), and not just diet. Everything had begun a profound shift, even if with later revolutions like electricity and computing the earlier agrarian patterns looked like the original pattern of human life. And indeed if you are a young earther, the first chapters of *Genesis* have agriculture in the picture with some of the first human beings. And so Bible-focused young earth approaches will not arrive at the correct answer to, "What conditions is man as an animal [still] best adapted to?" In all probability they will not arrive at the question.

Revolutionary punk eek will. It asks the question, perhaps with a Western focus, and its answers are worth considering. Not on the level of virtue and asceticism, perhaps, but the 'lower' questions are more pressing now. The default diet and the default level of exercise are part of a profoundly greater pseudomorphosis than when the agricultural revolution took root. And getting a more optimal diet and exercise now may be a more pressing concern, and a diet of more sunlight and better light, if you will, and other things. There is a certain sense in which sobriety is not an option for us; we have a gristly choice between being 5, 10, or 20 drinks drunk, and people who take into account this gift from revolutionary punk eek will be less drunk, not sober. But it is worth being less drunk.

So a word of thanks especially to secular adherents of

revolutionary punk eek who do not see us who have perhaps made the mistake of civilization as any particular kind of "special flower," and ask, "What is Homo sapiens sapiens biologically adapted to as an animal and an organism?" They might not hit some of the high notes, but I am very grateful for the neo-Paleo diet. And I am grateful to Mander's [Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#) for exposing me to the unnatural character of artificial light and the benefits of real, organic sunlight. I've been spending more time outside, and I can feel a difference: I feel better. Thanks to revolutionary punk eek!

**What  
Evolutionists Have  
to Say to the  
Royal, Divine  
Image:  
*We're Missing Something***

**Jerry Mander, [Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#)**

**Robb Wolf, [The Paleo Solution: The Original Human Diet](#)**

I have been rereading and thinking over parts of the three titles above, and I have come to realize that at least some evolutionists have something to give that those of us who believe there is something special about humanity would profit from. I believe more than the "special flower" assessment of humanity that Wolf ridicules; I believe more specifically that humanity is royalty, created in the image of God, and if for the sake of argument at least, the agricultural revolution and what follows are largely a mistake, I can say more than that Homo sapiens (sapiens) is the only species out of an innumerable multitude

across incomparable time to be **anywhere near** enough of a "special flower" to make such a mistake. I believe more specifically that man is created in the divine image and is of eternal significance, and each of us is in the process of becoming either a being so glorious that if you recognized it you would be tempted to worship it, or a horror such as you would not encounter in your worst nightmare—and that each of us in the divine image is in the process of freely choosing which we shall be. No other life form is conferred such a dignity—and I would focus that statement a little more and say no other animal.

'No other animal:' the phrase is perhaps jarring to some, but I use it deliberately. I do not, in any sense, say mere animal. But I do quite deliberately say animal. Let us turn to Alisdair MacIntyre, [Dependent Rational Animals](#), in the opening of the second chapter:

From its earliest sixteenth century uses in English and other European languages 'animal' and whatever other expressions correspond to it have been employed both to name a class whose members include spiders, bees, chimpanzees, dolphins and humans—among others, but not plants, inanimate beings, angels, and God, and also to name the class consisting of nonhuman animals. It is this latter use that became

Alisdair MacIntyre's title, 'dependent rational animals', is an adaptation of Aristotle's definition of man as 'rational mortal animal'. His thesis, that virtue is central to the natural condition of man, is well worth studying, and provides a counterbalance to seeing the original condition of the human race in terms of the contemporary Western preoccupations with

dominant in modern Western cultures and with it a habit of mind that, by distracting our attention from how much we share with other animal species...

Since then, evolutionary claims that we are in fact animals is not a resurrection of the older usage; it is a new usage that claims we are nothing more than animals, a claim not implied by Aristotle's definition of us as 'rational mortal animals.' There is both a continuity and a distinction implied between rational humans and non-rational animals, and while many animals have intelligence on some plane (artificial intelligence, after failing to duplicate human intelligence, scaled back and tried to duplicate insect intelligence, and failed at that too), there's something special to human intelligence. The singularity we are in now may be a predicament, but no other animal could make such dimensions.

I will be interested in a direction taken by Mander and the neo-Paleo movement, in a line that MacIntyre does not really explore. Perhaps his thesis about why we, as dependent rational animals, need the virtues, is greater than anything I will explore here. But I have my sights on something lower.

I would like to define two terms for two camps, before showing where one of them shortchanges us.

The first is revolutionary punk eek. Darwin's theory of

diet and exercise.

The neo-Paleo ('Paleo') movement's diet and exercise are very powerful, and probably very close to optimal, but virtue is worth consideration. But while portraying [Dependent Rational Animals](#) as well worth a read, I will not engage him to the same degree as the likes of Mander and Wolf.

evolution is no longer seriously believed by much of anyone in the (generally materialist) scientific community. People who say they believe in evolution, and understand the basic science, normally believe in neo-Darwinian theories of evolution. That is, with Darwin, they no longer believe that species gradually morph into new species. They believe that the fossil record shows a punctuated equilibrium, 'punct eek' to the irreverent, which essentially says that evolution has long periods of stable equilibrium, which once in a long while are punctuated by abrupt appearance and disappearance of life forms. (What causes the punctuations is accounted for by the suggestions that life forms evolve very slowly when things are on an even keel, but rapidly mutate substantial beneficial improvements when things turn chaotic. When I protested this, I was told that there were people who evolved HIV/AIDS resistance in a single generation, a premise that I cannot remotely reconcile either with my understanding of probability or of genetics.) As my IMSA biology teacher put it, "Evolution is like baseball. There are long periods of boredom interrupted by intense periods of excitement."

Now I am deliberately making a somewhat ambiguous term, because I intend to include old earth intelligent design movement's authors such as Philip Johnson, who wrote [Darwin on Trial](#). Johnson argues that natural forces alone do not suffice to punctuate the equilibrium and push evolution forward; but his interpretation of the fossil record is largely consistent with that of someone who believes in neo-Darwinian evolutionary punct eek. And so I lump Richard Dawkins and Philip Johnson together in the same cluster, a move that would probably leave them both aghast.

The distinction between them is between evolutionary punct

reek adherents, who believe the universe is billions of years old, and young earth creationists, including perhaps some Jews, most Church Fathers, Evangelical conservatives who created Creation Science as an enterprise of proving a young earth scientifically, and [Fr. Seraphim \(Rose\)](#), who saw to it that Orthodox would not stop with quoting the Fathers but additionally import Creation Science into Orthodoxy.

Now let me give some dates, in deliberately vague terms. The age of the agricultural revolution and of civilization weighs in at several thousand years. The age of the world according to young earth creationists is also several thousand years. According to revolutionary punk eek, the age of the world is several billion years, but that's a little besides the point. The salient point is where you draw the line, a question which I will not try to settle, beyond saying that the oldest boundary I've seen chosen is some millions of years, and the newest boundary I've heard is hundreds of thousands of years. What this means in practice is that on young earth assumptions, agriculture is about as old as the universe, while on revolutionary punk eek assumptions, the beginning of the agricultural revolution occurred at absolute most in the past five percent of the time humans have been around, not leaving enough time for our nature to really change in any way that makes sense for revolutionary punk eek. Or to put it more sharply, young earth creationism implies that agrarian life has been around about as long as the first humans, and revolutionary punk eek implies that the agricultural revolution represents a big-picture eyeblink, a mere blip on the radar for people built to live optimally under normal hunter-gatherer conditions. To the young-earther, there might be prehistory but there can't be very much of it; the normal state of the human being is at earliest agrarian, and there is not much argument

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revolutionary punk eek who do not see us who have perhaps made the mistake of civilization as any particular kind of "special flower," and ask, "What is Homo sapiens sapiens biologically adapted to as an animal and an organism?" They might not hit some of the high notes, but I am very grateful for the neo-Paleo diet. And I am grateful to Mander's [Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#) for exposing me to the unnatural character of artificial light and the benefits of real, organic sunlight. I've been spending more time outside, and I can feel a difference: I feel better. Thanks to revolutionary punk eek!

# What Makes Me Uneasy About Fr. Seraphim (Rose) and His Followers

Uncomfortable and uneasy  
—the root cause?

There are things that make me uneasy about many of Fr. Seraphim (Rose)'s followers. I say many and not all because I have friends, and know a lovely parish, that is Orthodox today through Fr. Seraphim. One friend, who was going through seminary, talked about how annoyed he was, and appropriately enough, that Fr. Seraphim was always referred to as "that guy who taught the tollhouses." (Tollhouses are the subject of a controversial teaching

***Two out of many quotes from a discussion where I got jackhammered for questioning whether Fr. Seraphim is a full-fledged saint:***

"Quite contrary, the only people who oppose [Fr.

about demonic gateways one must pass to enter Heaven.) Some have suggested that he may not become a canonized saint because of his teachings there, but that is not the end of the world and apparently tollhouses were a fairly common feature of nineteenth century Russian piety. I personally do not believe in tollhouses, although it would not surprise me that much if I die and find myself suddenly and clearly convinced of their existence: I am mentioning my beliefs, as a member of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, and it is not my point to convince others that they must not believe in tollhouses.

It is with sympathy that I remember my friend talk about how his fellow seminarians took a jackhammer to him for his admiration of "that guy who taught the tollhouses." He has a good heart. Furthermore, his parish, which came into Holy Orthodoxy

because of Fr. Seraphim, is much more than alive. When I visited there, God visited me more powerfully than any parish I have only visited, and I would be delighted to see their leadership any time. Practically nothing in that parish's indebtedness to Fr. Seraphim bothers me. Nor would I raise objections to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia's newsletter affectionately calling Fr. Seraphim "our editor." Nor am I

Seraphim's] teachings, are those who oppose some or all of the universal teachings of the Church, held by Saints throughout the ages. Whether a modern theologian with a 'PhD,' a 'scholar', a schismatic clergymen, a deceived layperson, or Ecumenist or rationalist - these are the only types of people you will find having a problem with Blessed Seraphim and his teachings."  
"If he's not a saint, who is?"

bothered that a title of his has been floating around the nave at my present parish.

But with all that said, there is something that disturbs me about most devotees of Fr. Seraphim, or at very least most of his vocal devotees. The best way I can put it has to do with subjectivism, which says in essence, "I will accept what I will accept, and I will reject what I will reject, and I will project what I will project." There is something that demands that Fr. Seraphim be canonized as a saint regardless of whether he really should be, almost like "My country, right or wrong!" This isn't the only thing that smells disturbing, but it is one. And these followers who insist that Fr. Seraphim be canonized as a saint seem to quickly gloss over how he broke away from canonical status in the Orthodox Church to dodge Church discipline. Now I do not wish to exceed my authority and speak *ex cathedra* to decisively say which sins should be a bar from sainthood; it is God's job to make saints out of sinners, and any sin that Fr. Seraphim has committed, there are canonized saints who did something ten times worse. However, this is an example of something that needs to be brought to light if we are to know if Fr. Seraphim should be considered a saint, and in every conversation I've seen, the (vocal) devotees of Fr. Seraphim push to sweep such things under the rug and get on with his canonization.

To pull something from putting subjectivism in a word: "I will accept what I will accept, and I will reject what I will reject, and I will project what I will project" usurps what God,  $\Omega$ N, supremely declares: "**I AM WHO I AM.**" Subjectivism overreaches and falls short in the same gesture; if you grasp it by the heart, it is the passion of pride, but if you grasp it by the head, it is called subjectivism, but either way it has the same

stench. And it concerns me gravely that whenever I meet these other kinds of followers, Fr. Seraphim's most vocal advocates, it smells the same, and it ain't no rose.

## Protestant Fundamentalist Orthodoxy

A second concern is that, in many of Fr. Seraphim's followers, there is something Protestant to be found in the Church. Two concerns to be mentioned are "Creation Science"-style creationism, and the fundamentally Western project of worldview construction.

On the issue of "Creation Science"-style creationism, I would like to make a couple of comments. First, the Fathers usually believed that the days in *Genesis* 1 were literal days and not something more elastic. I believe I've read at least one exception, but St. Basil, for instance, insists both that one day was one day, and that we should believe that matter is composed of earth, air, fire, water, and ether. The choice of a young earth and not any other point of the Fathers is not the fruit of the Fathers at all; it is something Protestant brought into the Orthodox Church, and at every point I've seen it, Orthodox who defend a young earth also use Protestant Creation Science, which is entirely without precedent in the Fathers. One priest said, "It was easier to get the children of Israel out of Egypt than it is to get Egypt out of the children of Israel." There have been many Orthodox who believe entirely legitimately in a young earth, but every single time I have met young earth arguments from a follower of Fr. Seraphim, they have drawn on recycled

Protestant arguments and fundamentalist Protestant Creation Science. And they have left me wishing that now that God has taken them out of Egypt they would let God take Protestant Egypt out of them.

I observed something quite similar to this in a discussion where I asked a partisan of Fr. Seraphim for an example of his good teaching. The answer I was given was a call for Orthodox to work on constructing a worldview, and this was presented to me as the work of a saint at the height of his powers. But there's a problem.

The project of worldview construction, and making standalone adjustments to the ideas in one's worldview, is of Western origin. There is no precedent for it in the Fathers, nor in medieval Western scholastic theologians like Thomas Aquinas, nor for that matter in the Reformers. The widespread idea that Christians should "think worldviewishly", and widespread understanding of Christianity as a worldview, is of more recent vintage than the Roman proclamations about the Immaculate Conception and the Infallibility of the Pope, and the Protestant cottage industry of worldview construction is less Orthodox than creating a systematic theology. If there is an Orthodox worldview, it does not come from tinkering with ideas in your head to construct a worldview; it arises from walking the Orthodox Way for a lifetime. Protestants who come into Orthodoxy initially want to learn a lot, but after time spend less time with books because Orthodoxy has taken deeper root in their hearts and reading about the truth begins to give way to living it out. Devotional reading might never stop being a spiritual discipline, but it is no longer placed in the driver's seat, nor should it be.

## **This tree: What to make of its fruit?**

This is strong language, but in the [Sermon on the Mount](#),  
Christ says:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

Not every one who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers."

Fr. Seraphim has borne fruit in his lifetime and after his death. In his lifetime, there was the one fruit I mentioned, a close tie to someone who broke communion with the Orthodox Church shortly after his death. After his death he has brought

Protestants into the Orthodox Church. But in the living form of his disciples, those who have been taken out of Egypt seem not to have Egypt taken out of them; they have asked me to pay homage to Protestant calves they've brought with them.

Let me try to both introduce something new, and tie threads together here. Subjectivism can at its heart be described as breaking communion with reality. This is like breaking communion with the Orthodox Church, but in a way it is more deeply warped. It is breaking communion not only with God, but with the very cars, rocks and trees. I know this passion and it is the passion that has let me live in first world luxury and wish I lived in a castle. It tries to escape the gift God has given. And that passion in another form can say, "If God offers me Heaven, and Heaven requires me to open up and stop grasping Fr. Seraphim right or wrong, I will escape to a Hell that makes no such demand for me to open up to God or His reality." And it is a red flag of this passion that breaks communion with reality, that the people most devoted to Fr. Seraphim hold on to pieces of fundamentalism with a tightly closed fist. And these Protestant insistences are a red flag, like a plume of smoke: if one sees a plume of smoke coming from a house, a neighbor's uncomfortable concern is not that a plume of smoke is intolerable, but that where there's smoke, there's fire and something destructive may be going on in that house. And when I see subjectivism sweep things under the rug to insist on Fr. Seraphim's canonization, and fail to open a fist closed on Protestant approaches to Holy Orthodoxy, I am concerned not only that Fr. Seraphim's colleague may have broken communion with the Orthodox Church to avoid Church discipline, but that Fr. Seraphim's devotees keep on breaking communion with reality when there is no question of discipline. The plume of smoke is not

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intolerable in itself, but it may betray fire.

I may be making myself unpopular here, but I'm bothered by Fr. Seraphim's fruit. I know that there have been debates down the centuries between pious followers of different saints—but I have never seen this kind of phenomenon with another well-known figure in today's Orthodoxy.

So far as I have tasted it, Fr. Seraphim's fruit tastes bad.

# What the Present Debate Won't Tell You About Headship

Today I'm going to talk about head and body (headship). And I say "headship" with hesitation, because in today's world asserting "headship" means, "defending traditional gender roles against feminism." And that maybe important, but I want to talk about something larger, something that will be missed if "headship" means nothing more than "one position in the feminist controversy."

One speaker didn't like people entering Church and saying, "It's so good to enter the Lord's presence." He said, "Where were you all week? How did you escape the Lord's presence?" And whatever Church is, it is absolutely not entering the one place where God is present. At least, it's not stepping out of some imaginary place where God simply can't be found.

But if we are always in the Lord's presence, that doesn't mean that Church isn't special. It is special, and it is the head of living in God's presence for all of our lives. Our time in Church is an example of headship. Worshipping God in Church is the head of a life of worship. and it is the head of a body.

There is something special about our time in Church. But the way we live our lives, our "body" of time spent, manifests that glory in a different way. Christ didn't say that people will know we are his disciples by our "official" worship, however much God's blessing may rest on it. Christ said instead that all people will know we are his disciples by this, that we love one another. That isn't primarily in Church. That's in our day to day lives. If our time in Church crystallizes a life of worship, our love for one another is to manifest it. And that is the place of the body.

The relationship between head and body is the relationship between corporate worship and our lives as a whole. The body manifests the glory of the head. In my head I can decide to walk to a friend's house. But the head needs the body and the body needs the head, and I can only go to a friend's house if my head's decision to visit a friend's house is lived out in my body.

"The head cannot say to the feet, 'I have no need of you.'"

The Father is the head of the Son. "No man can see God and live." God the Father is utterly beyond us; he transcends anything we could know; he is pure glory. If we were to have direct contact with him, we would be destroyed. And yet the Son is equal to the Father; the Son is just as far beyond this Creation, but there is a difference. The Son is the bridge between God and man, and God and his Creation. God the Father created the world through the Son, and the Son is just as glorious as the Father, but the Son can touch us without destroying us. The Father displays himself through the Son. The Father's love came to earth through the Son. The Father's wish that we may be made divine is possible precisely because the Son became man. And finally we can know the Father through the Son. If you have seen the Son, you have seen the Father.

We read in the New Testament that Christ is the head of

man, that Christ is the head of all authority, that Christ is the head of the Church, and that Christ is the head of the whole Creation. If we think, with people today, that to have any authority over us, any head, is degrading, then we have to resent a lot more than a husband's headship to his wife. But that's not the only option. When Christ is the head of the cosmos, there is more than authority going on, even if we have a negative view of authority. Our Orthodox understanding that the Son of God became a man that men might become the sons of God, that the divine became human that the human might become divine, expresses what the headship of Christ means. Christ is the head, and that means that the Church is drawn up in his divinity. If we are the body of Christ the head, that doesn't mean we're just under his authority. It means that we are a part of him and share in his divinity. The teaching that we share in his divinity is very tightly connected to the teaching of "recapitulation", or "re-heading," where Christ being the head of the Church, and our sharing in Christ's divinity, are two sides of the same coin. Christ is the head, and we, the body, make Christ manifest to the world. Some people may not know Christ except what they see in us. We cannot have Christ as our head without being a manifestation of his glory, and if Christ is the head of the Creation and Christ is the head of the Church, that means that when we worship, inside this building and in our daily lives, we are leading the whole visible Creation in turning to God in glory, and living the life of Heaven here on earth.

Christ is the head of the whole Creation, not just the Church. Christ isn't just concerned with his people, but the whole created world. By him and through him all things were created. Icons, which reflect the full implications Christ's headship over his Creation, exist precisely because Christ is the head of the

whole Creation. We use a censer, a building, icons, water, flowers, and other aspects of our matter-embracing religion as representatives of the whole material Creation over which Christ is head. Christ doesn't tell us to be spiritual as spirits who are unfortunately trapped in matter; far from it, we are the crowning jewel of the material Creation, and Christ's headship glorifies the whole Creation and makes it foundational to how we are saved. The universe is a symbol that manifests the glory of its head, Christ.

One example of headship that is immediate to me, although I don't know how immediate it is to the rest of you, is artistic creation. I create, write, and program, and in a very real sense I am at my fullest when I create. When I create, at first there is a hazy idea that I don't understand very well. Then I listen to it, and begin struggling with it, trying to understand my creation, and even if I am wrestling with it, I am wrestling less to dominate it than to get myself out of its way so I can help bring it into being. If in one sense I wrestle with it, in another sense I am wrestling with myself to let my creation be what it should be.

If I were to simply dominate my creation, I would crush it, breaking its spirit. My best creations are those which I serve, where I use my headship to give my creations freedom and cooperate with them so that they are greater than if I did not give my creations room to breathe. My best work comes, not when I decide, "I am going to create," but when I cooperate with a creation, love it, serve it, and help it to become real, the creation becomes a share of my spirit.

A great many writers could say that, and I don't think this is something that is only found in writing, but how something far more general plays out. All of us are called to exercise headship

over our work. In a family, the father is the head of the household and the mother is the heart of the household. The mother's headship over work in the home provides ten thousand touches that make a house a home. A mother's headship over the home is as much human headship over one's work as my headship over my creations and writing. What I do when I create is love my creation, serve it, develop it, work with God and with my creation to help it be real. If I'm not mistaken, when a woman makes a house into a real home, she loves it, serves it, develops it, and works with God and what she has to make it real. When a woman makes a house into a warm and inviting home, that's headship.

What is the relationship between women and the home? In societies where people have best been able to honor what the Bible says about men's and women's roles, there is a strong association between women and the home. The home, in those societies, was the main focus of business, charity work, and education, besides the much narrower role played by a home today. To say that women were mainly in the home is to say that they held an important place in one of society's important institutions, an institution that was the chief home of business, education, hospitality, and what would today be insurance, and held many responsibilities that are denied to housewives today. The isolation felt by many housewives today was much less an issue because women worked together with other women; like men, they worked in adult company. I believe there should be an association between women and the home, and I believe the home should be respected and influential. And, for that matter, I believe that both men and women are sold short with the options they have today. But instead of going too deep into that sort of question, important as it may be, I would like to look at what

headship means.

The sanctuary is the head of the nave. Part of what that means is that there is something richer than either if there were just an sanctuary or just a nave. But we'll miss something fundamental if we only say that the sanctuary is more glorious to the nave. They are connected and part of the same body. They are part of the same organism, and the sanctuary manifests the glory of the sanctuary. There is also a head-body relation between the saint and the icon. Or between the reality a symbol represents, and a symbol. Or between Heaven and earth. Bringing Heaven down to earth is a right ordering of this world. Heaven isn't just something that happens after death after we serve God by suffering in this world. "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has any heart imagined what God has prepared for those who love him," but God wants to work Heaven in our lives, beginning here and now. If we are bringing Heaven down to earth, we are realizing God's design that Heaven be the head of earth, in the fullness of what headship means.

What about husbands and wives? There's something that we'll miss today if we just expect wives to submit to their husbands, even if we recognized that that's tied to an even more difficult assignment for husbands, loving their wives on the model of Christ giving up his own life for the Church. And we need to be countercultural, but there's something we'll miss if we just react to the currents in society that make this unattractive. Quite a few heresies got their start in reactions against older heresies; it is spiritually dangerous to simply react against errors, and if feminism might have problems, simply reacting to feminism is likely to have problems. Wives should submit to their husbands, and husbands should love their wives with a costly love, but there's more.

It bothers me when conservatives say, "I want to turn the clock back... all the way back... to 1954!" If we're just reacting against some feminists when they say women should be strong and independent, and have no further reference point, we're likely to defend a femininity that says that women are weak and passive. What's wrong with that? For starters, it's not Biblical.

If you want to know God's version of femininity, read the conclusion of Proverbs. The opening of this conclusion is often translated, "Who can find a good wife?" That's too weak. It is better translated as, "Who can find a wife of **valor**," with "valor" being a word that could be used of a mighty soldier. She is strong—physically strong. The text explicitly mentions her powerful arms. She is active in commerce and charity. There are important differences between this and the feminist picture, but if we are defending an un-Biblical ideal for womanhood, some delicate thing that can't do anything and is always in a swoon, then our reaction against feminism isn't going to put us in a much better spot.

And men should be men, but that doesn't mean that men should be rugged individuals who say, "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul!" That is as wrong as saying that Biblical femininity is weak and passive. Perhaps men should be rugged, but to be a man is to be under authority. Trying to be the captain of your soul is spiritually toxic, and perhaps blasphemous. There is one person who can say, "I am the captain of my soul," and it isn't Christ. Not even Christ can say that, but only God the Father. Christ's glory was to be the Son of God, so that the Father was the captain of his soul, and he did the Father's work. Even Christ was under the headship of the Father, and if you read what John says about the Father and the Son, the fact that Christ was under headship, under authority, is

part of his dignity and his own authority. To be a man is, if things are going well, to be a contributing member of a community, and in submission to its authority. Individualism is a severe distortion of masculinity; it may not be feminine, but it is hardly characteristic of healthy masculinity. There are a lot of false and destructive pictures of what a man should be, as well as what a woman should be.

If simply reacting against feminism is a way to miss what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman, it is also a way to miss something more, to miss a broader glory. This something more is foundational to the structure of reality; it is a resonance not only with God's Creation, but within the nature of God and how the Father's glory is shown through the Son. This something more is in continuity with God's headship to Christ, Christ's headship to the Church, Christ's headship to the cosmos, Heaven's headship to earth, the sanctuary's headship to the nave, the spiritual world's headship to the physical world, the soul's headship to the body, contemplation's headship to action, and other manifestations of a headship relation. On the Sunday of Orthodoxy, we proclaim:

...Thus we declare, thus we assert, thus we preach Christ our true God, and honor as Saints in words, in writings, in thoughts, in sacrifices, in churches, in Holy Icons; on the one hand worshipping and reverencing Christ as God and Lord, and on the other hand honoring as true servants of the same Lord of all and accordingly offering them veneration... This is the Faith of the Apostles, this is the Faith of the Fathers, this is the Faith of the Orthodox, this is the Faith which has established the Universe.

*What does this have to do with heads and bodies? The word*

What does this have to do with heads and bodies? The word "icon" itself means a body, and its role is to manifest the glory of the saints, as the saints are to manifest the glory of God.

We don't have a choice about whether we will live in a universe with headship, but we do have a choice whether to work with the grain or against it, work with it to our profit or fight it to our detriment. Let's make headship part of how we rejoice in God and his Creation.

# What the West Doesn't Get About Islam

## English translation needed

Muslims who say "Islam is peaceful" are neither insincere nor sloppy in what they claim, but you do not understand the claim "Islam is peaceful" until you understand what peace **means** in Islam.

"Islam" means "surrender," and the peace Islam seeks is also surrender. Some have said, "surrender at the point of a gun." If you would describe yourself as not religious but spiritual, demanding your forced conversion at the point of a gun would be fitting and appropriate in the peacefulness of Islam. And if you refused, pulling the trigger to blow your brains out would be a proper act of peace. The peace offered by Islam is forever incomplete if there are still people who have not surrendered in Islam, and the one world religion founded in violence, Islam, offers a peace that was rightly and properly advanced in this initial violent conquest. "Islam is peaceful" is quite an honest

claim but what it is **not** is proof that Islam, just much as you, wishes so dearly that we could all ☪☪☪☪☪☪☪☪☪☪/coexist.

**An Indian woman asks, "Anybody home? *Hello?*"**

An Indian woman, trying to get through to Westerners who are thick-skulled about getting Islam, explained that when Muslim invaders were conquering in India, many Hindu women committed suicide because they knew "Muslim men would rape them in front of their husbands' eyes, kill their husbands, and [forcibly] take them for wives." Not, perhaps, that Islam has a monopoly on soldiers raping: in World War II, after D-Day, U.S. military courts hanged dozens of soldiers for rape, and some of both the court members and the soldiers tried had to be Christian. Rape in war happens, is recognized to happen, and in better moments is treated as a clear atrocity. But, unless you are very anti-Christian, a Christian who rapes under any circumstance is acting in an un-Christian way. At least in the Indian women's perspective that was articulated, it may not be acting in a clearly un-Muslim way to rape an Indian woman in front of her husband's eyes, murder her husband, and forcibly marry her.

## **Western stupidity about Christian fundamentalists as nut jobs and Muslims as much more attractive?**

One roommate I had talked about hearing something that scared him silly, about the younger George Bush. He didn't present this as 100% certain, but he claimed that George Bush, in a meeting with several Muslims, had shown the staggering insensitivity to Islam of saying that God had told him to do X. Apparently only one of the Muslim leaders remembered this striking claim, and that one leader didn't understand what was such a big deal, but then-President Bush had shown a most appalling insensitivity to Islam and Muslims that scared him silly.

I pointed out to him, or tried to, that on his account:

- President Bush had done something in the presence of several influential Muslims that was patently offensive to Muslims,
- Only one such Muslim remembered it and didn't see what the big deal was.

And these two do not match.

Really, whatever other things Islam may be accused of, we cannot accuse them of going off in a corner, quietly sulking, and leaving the rest of us to play imperviously guessing games about

leaving the rest of us to play impenetrable guessing games about why they're upset and what they want us to do to make amends.

But I tried quite in vain to point this out.

Whether in fact George Bush ever told Muslims that God told him something I do not know. But there is a bit of illogic going on.

It may scare an academic liberal silly for someone in power to believe there is a God who makes such claims on us. But it is not offensive to Muslims to believe there may be a God and this God could make such claims on us; the basic implication need offend Muslims scarcely more than it need offend scientists to say that it is helpful to test our theories by experiment, or that it need offend coaches to say that athletes should train before they go to competitions.

There is a sense among the people I have known that "Bible-believing Christians" are really not enlightened, and are really nut jobs, but with due charity we should pay Muslims the common courtesy of recognizing that they are basically enlightened and not like Christian fundamentalist nut jobs, and that unlike stupid and dangerous types like John McCain and Sarah Palin, Muslims want to ☺☻☼☽☿☿ and unlike those weird Christian fundamentalists, they will ☺☻☼☽☿☿ quite nicely. Maybe this is changing; [South Park can obscenely mock every religious founder but one, as far as Comedy Central allows after Muslim response](#), and people in the West are starting to act like saying something vile about Mohammed will get a bit different of a response from those nut job Christians (you know, those dunces who just don't get that we should ☺☻☼☽☿☿). But the way it has changed in the West may not be for the best.

If you find something objectionable about conservative Christianity, fine, but understand that Islam is further, not nearer, to your outlook than such Christianity. It is a capital





# **Where is the Good of Women?**

**Feminism is called the  
women's movement. But is  
it?**

## Three types of lies: Lies, *Statistics*, and INFOGRAPHICS

To begin with, I would like to quote a portion of a poster, posted for government-required regulatory compliance at a once bastion of Christian conservatism, Wheaton College. My choice of this part of departure is not specifically focused on Wheaton, which was presumably not trying to be provocative, but to represent enough of a mainstream influence of feminism that I am not discussing a lunatic fringe of feminism, but something basic and (on feminist terms) not particularly controversial.

I apologize in advance for the poor quality of the picture as it was an attempt to take an accurate picture of a part of a poster that was roughly one to two feet above my head. I will reproduce the graphics as best I can, including the dark, dingy look of the

Perhaps the poster girl for way looney left feminism is the scholar who said Newton's Principia Mathematica as 'Newton's Rape Manual', and I have more sympathy for that than you might think. The birth of science had a moral stench, both in being mingled with deep occult currents, and in being [advanced through a rhetoric of sexual violence for a very specific and deplorable reason](#). I

coins (on the original you can see the scissors cuts where the pictures of the quarters had been cut out), but in clarity because I want to represent the poster fairly and not by the standards of my photography in a difficult shot. The poster says at the top, "In Illinois, a woman makes 71 cents for every dollar a man makes." Then there is a picture of 71 cents in coins, "for her" at the top, and a picture of a dollar bill,

"for him" below. The picture is as described:

In the interests of fairness, I want to start with a crisp reproduction of what the INFOGRAPHIC said. It looked like:

**For her:**

[71 cents in coins]

**For him:**

[A dollar bill]

And the natural response is outrage. But what if we tweak things a little and compare coins with coins? Then we have:

**For her:**

[71 cents in coins]

**For him:**

[100 cents in coins]

But the objection may come, "Um, that almost destroys the

do not agree with that specific feminist professor about what Newton's Principia Mathematica might as well be called, but I also do not see that diagnosis as the kind that is inspired by hallucinogens.

effect." And my response is, "Yes. That is exactly the point." And in this there are two visual lies exposed by this revamp:

1. Whatever a man gets, it looks like literally a dozen times what a woman gets. The sheer space taken for \$.71 in coins (and, following usual practice, as few coins as you can use to reach that amount), is dwarfed by the visual space taken by a dollar bill. For that matter, the visual space taken by a man's four quarters is dwarfed by the visual space taken by a dollar bill. This may only register subconsciously, but it is a powerful subconscious cue: the real, emotional impact is not that a woman earns 71 cents on the dollar for a man, but more like a miniscule 5 to 10 cents on the dollar. This cue, which may only register subconsciously (compared to the revised comparison of \$.71 in coins and \$1.00 in the largest common coin, the quarter), is only more powerful for its subconscious effect.
2. Secondly, the INFOGRAPHIC registers something else that only renders subconsciously. Compared to the currencies of other countries, especially before the slightly new look for larger bills, paper currency was big currency, and real money. If you walked into a store and paid for something cash, you paid with bills. Coins, while having some value, are often only something you get back as the smallest remaining money and have to figure out what to do with. Not only is spare change a small sort of thing compared to real money, it was honestly a bit of a nuisance. Now people usually pay with plastic or other non-cash items, and money is a bit tighter for most of us, so we may want the change more, but saying that she gets change and he gets real money is an apples and oranges comparison; the effect is like saying that he is paid in cold,

hard cash, while she is paid only in coupons.

**Lies.**

**Statistics.**

**INFOGRAPHICS.**

Now it is not simply the case that INFOGRAPHICS can only ever lie; the works of Tufte such as [Envisioning Information](#) and [The Visual Display of Quantative Information](#) never stop at tearing apart bad INFOGRAPHICS; they compellingly demonstrate that the visual display of information can be at one stroke beautiful, powerful, and truthful. Something a little more informative, if perhaps imperfect, to convey a 71% statistic would be to simply show 71% of a dollar bill:

**For her:**

[A rectangle showing 71% of a dollar bill]

**For him:**

[A dollar bill]

But it is a serious misunderstanding of feminism to think that a feminist will argue this way. Instead it is another case of:

**Lies.**

**Statistics.**

**INFOGRAPHICS.**

## The beating heart of feminism

I'm not sure how this plays out in feminism outside of feminist theology, but every feminist reader I've read has been in an extreme hurry to neutralize any sense that the Roman veneration of the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary. Now I have heard Orthodox comment that Roman and Orthodox veneration vary: Romans stress the Mother of God's virginity, Orthodox stress her motherhood, and presumably there's more. But one finds among feminist theologians the claim that since the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary was both a virgin and a mother, that means that you're not really OK if you're a woman unless you are both a virgin and a mother. And never mind that spiritually speaking it is ideal for Orthodox Christians, women and men to have a spiritual virginity, and to give birth to Christ God in others, the Roman veneration means a woman isn't OK unless she is (literally) both a virgin and a mother. Fullstop. One gets the sense that feminists would sell a story that the Roman Catholic Church reviles the Virgin Mary, if people could be convinced of that.

## **A first glimpse of the good estate of women**

I would like to make an interstitial comment here, namely that there is something feminism is suppressing. What feminists are in a hurry to neutralize is any sense that the veneration of the Mother of God could in any way be a surfacing of the good estate of women. What is it they want to stop you from seeing?

Let's stop for a second and think about Nobel Prizes. There is presumably no Nobel Prize for web development, but this is not a slight: web development is much newer than Nobel Prizes and regardless of whether Alfred Nobel would have given a Nobel prize to web development if it wasn't around, the Nobel Prize simply hasn't commented on web development. There is a Nobel Prize for physics, and (the highest one of all), the Nobel Prize for Peace. When a Nobel Prize is given to a physicist, this is a statement that not only the laureate but the discipline of physics itself is praiseworthy: it is a slight that there is no Nobel Prize for mathematics (rumor has it that Alfred Nobel's wife was having an affair with a mathematician). To award a Nobel Prize for physics is to say that physics is a praiseworthy kind of thing, and one person is singled out as a crystallization of an honor bestowed to the whole discipline of physics. And, if I may put it that way, the Mother of God won the Nobel Prize for womanhood.

Called the New Eve, She is reminiscent of the Pauline passage, And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. Christ is called the Last or New Adam, and Mary the Mother of God is called the New Eve. Let us not say that bestowing a Nobel Prize for physics on one scientist constitutes a rejection of every other.

At feasts of the Mother of God, the Orthodox Church quotes a passage from Scripture that seems at first glance surprising as a way to honor the Mother of God: a woman from a crowd tells Christ, "Blessed are the womb that bore you and the breasts that you nursed at!" and Christ replies, "Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it." The text appears at first glance to downplay the significance of the Mother of God, and in fact has been taken to do so by Protestants. So why would the Orthodox Church read this text at all kinds of feasts in honor of the Mother of God?

The answer comes after a question: "Who heard the Word of God and kept it?" "Who pre-eminently heard the Word of God and kept it?" Of course many people have done so, but the unequalled answer to "Who pre-eminently heard the Word of God and kept it?" is only the Mother of God, She who said, "Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." The woman who spoke up at the crowd said, "Your mother must really be something because she bore you!", and Christ implies, "My Mother is really something because she obeyed." The Mother of God did not achieve the combination

of virginity and motherhood; she obeyed God's command, and in the wake of that obedience, motherhood was added to her virginity. But taking the Mother of God as a role model for women does not mean that women need to be both virgins and mothers, any more than Evangelicals who ask "What would Jesus do?" feel themselves obliged to learn Aramaic and move to Israel. I don't want to downplay Mary's virginity and motherhood, both of which are sacred offices, but it is a serious confusion—or rather a serious duplicity—to say that venerating the Mother of God means that women aren't OK unless they pull off the combination of virginity and motherhood.

The Mother of God is She who obeyed, and obedience is for everyone, and highlighted for women. And while it may be easy enough for feminist theologians to excuse themselves from a fabricated straw obligation to be both virgins and mothers if they are to be OK as women, excusing oneself from obedience presents more of a pickle, and one that they don't want you to see. Feminism doesn't like obedience (especially of women to men); engineered, synthetic feminist "fairy tales" like *Ella Enchanted* make it clear that for a woman to be in a position of obedience is a curse: a clear and unmitigated curse.

The First Eve fell because she disobeyed; the Last or New Eve offered the perfect creaturely obedience and the gates of Hell began to crumble at her obedience. The Incarnation, the point has been plainly made, would have been absolutely impossible without the consent, obedience, and cooperation of the Mother of God as it would have been without the Holy Trinity. And only a woman could have first opened that door. The Theotokos is called the first Christian; she was the first of many to receive Christ, and men learn from her.

A look at early Antiochian versus Alexandrine Christology may

also be instructive. In Antiochian Christology, Christ was significant pre-eminently because he was the Son of God, born of a Virgin, lived a sinless life, died as a sacrifice, and rose as the firstborn of the Dead. In Alexandrian Christology, Christ was significant as a teacher primarily. At least one theologian has said that St. Paul's epistles don't make much of Christ, because not a single one of his parables comes up in St. Paul's writing. But this is a misunderstanding: St. Paul was in fact making a (proto-)Antiochian use of Christ, and the Christ who was the Son of God, died a sacrifice, and rose from the dead is of central significance to the entire body of his letters. Christ's teaching recorded in the Gospels is invaluable, but we could be saved without it, and many people effectively have been saved without that teaching as believers who did not have the Gospel in their language. But we could not be saved by a Christ who lacked the Antiochian distinctives: who was not Son of God or did not rise from the dead, trampling down death by death. If I may describe them in what may be anachronous terms, early Antiochian Christology held Christ to be significant as an archetype, while early Alexandrian Christology held Christ to be significant as an individual. And the distinction between them is significant. You do not know the significance of Christ as the New Adam until you grasp him as an archetype and not a mere individual on a pedestal, and you do not know the significance of the Mother of God as the New Eve until you grasp her as an archetype and not a mere individual on a pedestal.

On a level that includes the archetypal, the Mother of God is mystically identified by such things as Paradise, the earth, the Church, the Container of Christ, and the city, and many other things such as a life lived of prayer that completes its head in time spent at Church. To be a man is a spiritual office, and to be

a woman is a spiritual office. The Mother of God serves as a paradigm, not only of Christians, but of woman. And that is noble, glorious, and beautiful.

There are more things that are beautiful about God's creation than are dreamed of in feminism—and more things than are dreamed of even in women.

I remember one Indian woman I spoke with in an online author's community; she was taking stories from Indian lore and trying to make concrete retellings of them: moving from the archetypes to individuals on a pedestal. And what I told her is, basically, don't. The archetypal stories were something I could well enough relate to; the archetypal (Indian) loving elder in the story had the same pulse and the same heart as loving elders I knew as a small (U.S.) child. The archetypal level is universal.

Now what happens in the concrete is important, profoundly important, but you miss something if you cut out its archetypal head and heart and then try to talk with the body that is left over. And there is real rapprochement between men and women:

Christ the New Adam and Mary the New Eve enjoyed indescribable intimacy, an interpenetration or perichoresis where she gave him his humanity and he gave her her participation in his divinity. The Mother of God's perpetual virginity stems from this; after such a perichoresis with God incarnate, a merely earthly husband's physical union was impossible. I have heard a complementarian Roman Catholic theology suggest that the word *homoousios* to describe the relationship between men and women: *homoousios* being the word of the Creed used to affirm that the Son is not an inferior, creaturely copy of the Father but of the same essence, fully of the same essence. The statement may be an exaggeration; if so, it was forcefully stating something true. I have attempted [postmodern thick description of differences](#)

between men and women; I was wrong, not in believing that there are real differences, but in assuming a postmodern style of thick description in rendering those differences. St. Maximus the Confessor is described as describing five mediations in which any gulf is transcended: that between male and female, that between Paradise and the inhabited world, that between Heaven and Earth, that between spiritual and visible Creation, and ultimately that between uncreated and created nature, the chasm between God and his Creation. All of these chasms are real; all are transcended in Christ, in whom there is no male nor female, paradise nor merely earthly city, Heaven nor mere earth, spiritual nor merely physical, Creator nor mere creature. All these distinctions are transcended in a Christ who makes us to become by grace what He is by nature.

## **The ~~beating heart~~ throbbing head of feminism**

I have mentioned two points of feminism: first, an infographic that was mainstream enough to be proclaimed as part of a regulatory compliance poster; and second, the neutered veneration of the Mother of God that is not allowed to mean anything positive for the estate of women. However, these are not intended as the core of a critique of feminism; in part they are intended as clues. Feminism gives a clue about its ~~beating heart~~ throbbing head in an unsavory infographic, and in its haste to neutralize any sense that the veneration of the Mother of God could be any good signal for women (or the ordinary kind—those who are not both virgins and mothers). Another author might have substituted other examples, and I must confess a degree of instance in that I keep bumping into feminism and I have tried to understand it, but there are depths unknown to most feminists and I would be wary of claiming exhaustive knowledge that I do not claim for cultures I have lived in for months or years. But I still observe, or have acknowledged, one major point.

One text, *Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in a White Male Society* by Annd Schaeff, admittedly considered dated by many feminists today, mentioned that the author

mentioned that many men say that women understand them better than men. And this puzzled her, because on the surface at least, it looked quite frankly like a compliment paid, by men, to women. But then she put on her feminist X-ray goggles, observed that the beginning of 'understand' is 'under', and juridically decided that to "understand" is by nature to stand under, that is, to be an inferior. And so she managed to wrest a blatant affront from the jaws of an apparent (substantial) compliment.

There was a counselor at my church who was trying to prepare me for my studies in a liberal theology program, and he told me that there was something I would find very hard to understand in feminism. Now I found this strange as I had already lived in, and adapted to, life in four countries on three continents. And he was right. What I would not easily understand is subjectivism, something at the beating heart, or throbbing head, of feminism. And what is called subjectivism looking at one end is pride recognized by the others, and pride is a topic about which Orthodoxy has everything to say. Pride is the heart, and subjectivism the head, of what Orthodoxy regards as one of the deadliest spiritual poisons around.

It is said that the gates of Hell are bolted and barred from the inside. It is only an image, but some say that the fire of Hell is the Light of Heaven as it is experienced through its rejection.

And Heaven and Hell are spiritual realities that we begin to experience now; and feminism is, if anything, bolted and barred from the inside. To pick another example, with the influential *You Just Don't Understand* by Deborah Tannen, the metamessage that is read into men holding doors for women was, "It is mine to give you this privilege, and it is mine to take away."

And on that point I would comment: I won't judge this conversation by today's etiquette, in which more often than not

people are expected to hold the door for other people; I will comment on the older etiquette that met feminist critique. And on that point I must ask whether any other point in the entire etiquette, much of which was gender-neutral then, received such interpretation? Did saying, "Please," or "Thank you," or "I'm sorry," ever carry a power play of "I extend this privilege to you and it is mine to take away?" More to the point, do body image feminists wish to find a sexist power play in the saying, "There are three things you do not ask a woman: her age, her weight, or her dress size."? Or Was it not just part of a standard etiquette that no one claimed to be able to take away?

But even this is missing something, and I do not mean "men who are fair and women who care." **The unfairness is significant, not for being unfair in itself, but because it is the trail of clues left by something that breaches care.** And to try to address this issue by reasoning is a losing battle, not because logic is somehow more open to men than women, but because you cannot reason subjectivism into truth any more than you can reason an alcoholic to stop drinking, fullstop. Now one may be able to make the case to a third party that it would be better for a particular alcoholic to stop drinking, or that a particular feminist argument played fast and loose with the rules of logic, but it is madness to bring this to feminism. What is unfair in feminism is most directly speaking a breach of one of the lowest basic virtues of the Christian walk, namely justice, and caring is at essence about the highest of virtues in the Christian walk, namely ἀγάπη or love, but this is not what's wrong. Dishonest arguments in feminism are a set of footprints left by pride or subjectivism, and it is by pride that Satan fell from being an angel in Heaven to being the Devil. It is also through pride, here known under the label of "consciousness

raising", that just as Michael Polanyi has been summarized as saying that behaviorists do not teach, "There is no soul," but induce students into study in such a way that the possibility of a soul is never considered, feminists put on subjectivist X-ray goggles that let them see oppression of women in every nook and cranny, even in social politeness. And if you read Daniel Goleman's [Emotional Intelligence](#), which has its merits even if they are limited, it is well worth studying what he says about bullies. Bullies do not see themselves as triumphant, or for that matter as oppressors, but as beleaguered victims. Everything has significance, and everything has hostile significance. Why did someone bump a bully in the hallway? The possibility that it was a crowded hall and growing children can be just a little bit clumsy with the current state of their bodies, is never even considered. An innocent bump in the hall is the tip of an assault, the tip of an iceberg in which a piece is moved in chess to achieve their defeat. And the bully's actions are only a modest self-defense. The bully has X-ray goggles that make everything plain, and the bully's state of mind is what is built up by the X-ray goggles of "consciousness raising."

"Consciousness raising" is a brilliant euphemism for taking women who are in many cases happy and well-adjusted and transforming them into alienated, hostile women who believe that everything outside of feminism has it in for them.

## Unpeeling the infographic a little further

In my discussion above, I left unchallenged the figure that women make \$0.71 on the dollar compared to what men make. How can I put this? Subjectivists do not go out of their way to use statistics honestly. Subjectivists go for the most convenient cherry-picked data they could. As others have said, they use statistics as a drunken man uses lampposts: for support rather than illumination.

Christina Sommer's [Who Stole Feminism: How Women Have Betrayed Women](#) suggests that that book does not follow the *ceteris parabis* principle of comparing with all other things being equal. Motherhood is hard to grind out of women, and spending significant time with her young children is hard to grind out of most women. The "71 cents on the dollar" figure keeps cropping up; in one discussion I remember it was repeatedly claimed that women made 69 cents on the dollar until one person said "Please either substantiate this statistic or stop bringing it up." The comparison in that study compared men who had a single, so to speak, major time commitment to their work, to women who were working hard to juggle a major time commitment to work with a major time commit to their younger children. When things were genuinely *ceteris paribus*, when men were only compared to women who had worked without reduced employment to care for

children, then the figure was more like 86-91 cents on the dollar.

## **Is 86+ cents on the dollar in 1987 and a closing gap acceptable?**

There was a short story that a roommate read to me in high school; it offended me and I was I was horrified. It showed a hiring manager saying, "Insidious. Pathetic. Disgusting. Miserable." as he threw one more resume into the trash. Then a doorkeeper said, "Your 3:00 is here." The manager said, "You've got some balls applying for a position like this. Why are you wasting my time?" The applicant said, "I have wanted to work with this company all my life. I want this position; I have friends, family, and a religion, but all of them are secondary; I will miss the birth of a child if that is what it takes to work." The manager said, "Get out. Are you going to go by yourself or will I have to call to have security escort you off the premises?"

In a flash, the applicant leveled a .45 magnum at him and said, "I want this job. Now will you hire me or do I have to blow you away?" The hiring manager said, "Very well. Report to my desk at 8:00 AM Monday." After the applicant left the room, the manager pulled the intercom and told the doorkeeper, "Tell all of the other applicants to f\_\_\_ off. We have our man."

This story horrified me a great deal more than an F-bomb alone, and it was part of an attempt on his part to convince me that no one ever does any action for any motive besides financial

gain. (In the past I've had several people try to convince me of the truth of this point. In no case did any of these people stand to benefit financially from their efforts to persuade me. **But I digress.**) However, my roommate was trying to help me appreciate something about the business world that this caricature caught right on target.

Women in the business world have been advised to make a practice of asking, "What's in it for me?" And for that matter, compassionate men may be advised to make a practice of asking, "What's in it for me?" and play by the rules of a jungle because compassionate men do not do the best at succeeding in the business world. Now must you ask, "What's in it for me?"

The answer is a simple "No, it's optional," but there's a **caveat**. If you do not negotiate based on "What's in it for me?", you are less likely, man or woman, to receive more paycheck, prestige, power, and promotion. In the short story it did not strictly speaking need to be a man who negotiated with a gun in a job interview. But it is more often a man and not a woman who is mercenary to that degree. I myself do not naturally gravitate towards that thinking even if I've been advised to, and my salary history is an IT salary history, which is something to be thankful for, but it has been below average for many of the areas I've been working in, and whatever gifts I may have are applied on the job without necessarily receiving even average pay.

Let us ignore for one moment the Times cover story about "The Richer \$ex," meaning women. Is it possible that the following could be justified?

**For him, *ceteris paribus***

[A dollar bill]

For the love of  
money is the root of  
all evils: "I climbed  
to the top of the

**For her, *ceteris paribus***

[A dollar bill]

Could there be possibly more important questions for women than the question that began and ends this article?

corporate ladder only to discover that it was leaning against the long building:" even if you win the rat race, you're still a rat: the best things in life are still free.

I might comment that while I am meticulously analyzing money, the premises are wrong. We've been barking up the wrong tree. **I'm answering the wrong question.**

**There is great gain in godliness with contentment:** more than money can buy. It would speak well of us to be concerned, less than if someone else is making more than we could, than with the things that are truly important in life.

The more inequity

disturbs you, the  
more you stand to  
profit from  
*Maximum Christ,*  
*Maximum Ambition,*  
*Maximum Repentance*  
for what is more  
important, and  
*Money* for what is  
less.

## **The war against *real* women**

In the Catholic social encyclicals, the modern ones since *Rerum Novarum*, the tone prior to Pope John Paul was celebratory, or sometimes complaining that the encyclicals were not progressive enough. But one thread out of this many-patched quilt is the call (added or amplified) for a "living wage". That wage was something like \$15 or \$20 per hour, but not really set in stone. And there is a legitimate concern: perhaps not as dramatic as the situation in sweatshops, but being a greeter in Wal-Mart may be a great way for a kid to earn some change, but eking out a living on what Wal-Mart pays most employees in its stores is not really possible. Now there may also be a point in that the position labeled as progressive would result, not in a great many people earning \$15-\$20 an hour, but a great many people earning \$0 an hour because businesses that can only keep employees paid a living wage have a short lifespan. (But let's brush this under a rug.)

The consistent call was for work to pay a living wage, with one notable exception. Pope John Paul II called for a man to be able to earn a "family wage", meaning not a living wage for an individual but some sort of support that would be sufficient for a family to live off of. And this was universally derided by feminist commentators, and not because John Paul II failed to

also specify that women should be able to earn a family wage.

I'm not sure if you've heard, either in the context of [artificial intelligence](#)-related transhumanism or of planned exploration of Mars, the term 'Melanesian'. The term may be racially charged, but I'm going to ignore that completely. The thought is vile on grounds that make it completely irrelevant whether the people being derided belong to one's race or another. The basic idea of being 'Melanesian' is that for ages untold people have hunted, built, crafted things with their hands, told stories and sung songs, made love and raised children, and all of this is innocent enough in its place, but now we are upon the cusp of growing up, and we must leave 'Melanesian' things behind. The John 3:16 of the Mars Society is "Earth is the cradle of humankind, but one does not remain in a cradle forever." We must grow up and leave 'Melanesian' things behind. Now the exact character of this growing up varies significantly, but in both cases the call to maturity is a call to forsake life as we know it and use technology to do something unprecedented. In the case of transhumanism, the idea is to use human life as a discardable booster rocket that will help us move to a world of artificially intelligent computers and robots where mere humans will be rendered obsolete. In the case of the Mars Society, it is to branch out and colonize other planets and the furthest reaches of space that we can colonize, and in the "Martian" (as Mars Society members optatively call themselves) mind heart, this mission, and the question of whether we are "a spacefaring race", bears all the freight one finds in fully religious salvation. All this is scaled back in the feminists who comment on Pope John Paul II's call for a family wage, but there is something there that is not nearly so far on a lunatic fringe as transhumanism or the Mars Society, but much more live as a

threat as it would be a brave soul who would call this a lunatic fringe. The feminist critique of Pope John Paul II's call for a family wage is that it is unacceptable, and men should earn low enough amounts of money that it takes both parents' work to support them. Women are to be made to "grow up", and however much it may be untenable to deny a woman's right to attend university or a woman's work to do any job traditionally done by men, it is absolutely out of the question to allow a woman's right to do a job traditionally done by women. They are to be pushed out of the nest and made to grow up. They are to be compelled by the economics of a situation where a husband cannot earn a family wage to work like a man.

The argument has been advanced that women are "The Richer \$ex." The question has been raised about whether men have become "the second sex", as was the title of a classic of French feminism. A book could easily be pulled on [The War Against Boys](#), and discussion could be made of how school and the academy are a girl's game—and one Wheaton administrator described how some of the hardest calls he has to make is to explain to one parent why her daughter, with a perfect record of straight A's, was rejected by Wheaton—and explain that Wheaton has four hundred others like her; Wheaton, which has a 45% male student body, could admit only female applicant with straight A's and still be turning people away.

But the argument discussed just above is something of a side point. To put it plainly, feminism is anti-woman. Perhaps ire against men is easily enough found; Mary Daly, now unfashionable, makes a big deal of "castration" and defines almost every arrangement of society not ordained by feminism as "rape." (This would include most of all societies in all of history that we have recorded.) And if Mary Daly is now unfashionable,

she is unfashionable to people who follow in her wake and might be voiceless today if she had not gone before them. And Mary Daly at least may well wear a reform program for men on their sleeve. But others who have followed her, and perhaps used less brusque rhetoric, wear a reform program for women next to their hearts.

I would like to pause for a moment to unpack just what it may mean to elevate anger to the status of a central discipline. And gender feminism, at least, does make an enterprise fueled by anger.

Every sin and passion in the Orthodox sense is both a miniature Hell, and a seed that will grow into Hell if it is unchecked. Different ages have different ideas of what is the worst sin. Victorians, at least in caricature, are thought to have made sexual sin the worst sin. In the New Testament, sexual sin is easily forgiven, but in an age where men have Internet porn at their fingertips, it would be helpful to remember that lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe: first nothing else is interesting, and then not even lust is interesting: there is misery. Getting drunk once might feel good, but the recovering alcoholic will tell you that being in thrall to alcohol and drunk all of the time is suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. Many people today think pride, the sin that cast an angel out of Heaven to be the Devil, is the worst sin and all of us have a stench to clean up here. And to the Church Fathers, to whom love was paramount, anger was perhaps the greatest danger. Today we say that holding a grudge is like drinking poison and hoping it will hurt the other person, or that 'anger' is one letter from 'danger'. The Fathers said, among other things, that it makes us more like the animals, and by implication less like what is noble and beautiful in the race of mankind. And it is one thing

to lose one's temper and find that dealing that with one particular person tries your patience. It is another thing entirely to walk a spiritual path that is fueled by the passion of anger. And this feminist choice is wrong. It is toxic, and we should have nothing to do with it.

Gender feminism may elevate anger to the status of central spiritual discipline, but to quote [Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women:](#)

Writers of both contemporary history and science texts, especially for the primary and secondary grades, make special efforts to provide "role models" for girls. Precollege texts now have an abundance of pictures; these now typically show women working in factories or looking through microscopes. A "stereotypical" picture of a woman with a baby is a frowned-upon rarity...

In an extensive study of the new textbooks written under feminist guidelines, New York University psychologist Paul Vitz could find no positive portrayal of romance, marriage or motherhood.

Although this is not directly a remark about feminism, something of my joy in *A Wind in the Door* was lost when I learned that Madeleine l'Engle viewed kything, the main supernatural element in the book, regarded it as literal fact. The idea that a reader is supposed to entertain a willing suspension of disbelief is not disturbed, but she meant, literally, that ordinary people should be able to send things directly, mind to mind. And what I took to be a beautiful metaphor (perhaps today I would say it needs to transcend in the noetic realm), made for an ugly literal claim. And the same thing happened when I

read Terry Pratchett's *The Wee Free Men*, which is presented as a novel of Discworld. It is not set in Ankh-Morpork, nor does any standard Discworld character or setting make more than one or two combined cameo appearances. So it is duplicitously called a novel of Discworld. And it is in fact not really centered on the *Wee Free Men*, who certainly make nice ornaments to the plot but never touch the story's beating heart. The story is Wiccan and advertises witchcraft; like Mary Daly, who gives a duplicitous acknowledgement of Christ's place (I parsed it and told the class point-blank, "I am more divine than her Christ"), argues for Wicca and witchcraft, tells how one may become a witch, and in her 'Original Reintroduction' written some decades after writes with a poetic and highly noetic character which drips with unnatural vice as much as Orthodox Liturgy drips with glory and Life. It was in reading *The Wee Free Men* that I first grasped why the Fathers called witchcraft unnatural vice. Never mind that witches deal in plants, and probably know a great more many details than the rest of us. There is a distinction like that of someone who studies available books on anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry, perhaps learning more than those in the medical profession, but to be an assassin ("If a sword blow hits the outside of the arm about a third of the way from the elbow to the shoulder, you can sever an artery and cause substantial bleeding."). The analogy is not exact; I believe it misses things. But the entire Wiccan use of plants constitutes unnatural vice.

And in the shadow of those following Mary Daly, there is never a reform program for men that leaves women untouched. Maybe the reforms for men may be more clear; but good old-fashioned chauvinist men are almost a distraction compared to women who resist feminist improvement.

## The Good Estate of Woman

Is it demeaning that the Bible says of the ambitious woman, [Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing?](#) Or is it not much more demeaning to say of the ambitious woman, "She shall be saved from childbearing?"

Women desire quite often simply motherhood. The very strength of the desire for romance, marriage, and motherhood in the face of gargantuan opposition says that what feminism is trying to free women from is an estate of happiness that women have yearned for from time immemorial. If it is prescribed hard enough that women will enter the workforce and work at some job wanted by men, she very well may do that—in addition to wanting children. Wendy Shalit in [A Return to Modesty](#):

"Just because you're a woman doesn't mean you can't be a doctor or a lawyer." Girls of my generation grew up on this expression. "Just because you're a woman." It was a motto like mother's milk to us, and now it is the philosophy behind Take Our Daughters to Work Day. "Just because you're a woman." In other words, being a woman is a kind of handicap that with hard work, one can overcome. Some are born deformed; others are born women; but be brave. I'm sure you'll make the best of it.

Yet now that we are free to be anything, doctors and lawyers, now that we've seen that women can be rational, and that men can cry, what we most want to know, and what we are not permitted to ask, is what does it mean to be a woman in the first place? Not in terms of what it won't prevent us from doing—we are not unaware of our bountiful options—but what is meaningful about being a woman? Rosie the Riveter was riveting only because she didn't usually rivet, and now that so many Rosies do, we most long to know what makes us unique again.

Two different women said to me, nervously, before graduation, What's wrong with me? I want to have children. One had landed a job with an investment banking firm; the other was supposed to land a job with an investment banking firm because that's what her father wanted, but the scouts who came to campus complained she wasn't aggressive enough. What's wrong with me? I want to have children...  
[emphasis original]

I think of a friend from college who was a powerful athlete, and for that matter was into boxing, and after college wanted to... settle down and be mother to a family, and a large one at that.

There is the [Calvin and Hobbes](#) strip where Hobbes says, "You can take the tiger out of the jungle, but you can't take the jungle out of the tiger." And what it seems is that women can be pushed to be androgynous or like men in so many ways, and yet you still can't take the jungle out of the tiger.

And perhaps women's happiness is found in cutting with the grain of motherhood than against it.

And perhaps in place of a spiritual

And on this point

discipline of anger that puts on feminist X-ray goggles and finds oppression and insult lurking around every corner and in the most innocent of acts, women might place such spiritual disciplines as thanksgiving.

The darker the situation, the more we need thanksgiving. In the last major ordeal I went through, what saved me from despair was counting my blessings, and being mindful and thankful for innumerable things and people, and telling other people how thankful I was for them. I don't know how else I could have had such joy at such a dark moment.

The properly traditional place for women is not exactly for men to be at work and women to be at home without adult company; the traditional placement for both men and women was to work in adult company, doing different work perhaps but doing hard work in adult company. Feminists have a point that the 1950's ideal of a woman alone without adult company all the worklong day can induce depression, and cutting with the grain of motherhood does not automatically mean reproducing the 50's. The perfect placement is for men to be with other

I would like to pause for what is for feminism the Right by Which Women's Rights Stand or Fall: the right to choose whether to have an, um, "uterine contents shower." An older generation of feminist called abortion the ultimate violation of a woman; but I wish to make another point here. If you want pro-choice, real pro-choice, dial 1-800-4-HOPE-4-1. There is counseling which does not make this choice for a woman, and which stands by women who choose abortion as well as those who do not. (And let's not get in to how many abortions women are pressured into, against their choice,

men doing the work of men and women to be with women doing the work of women, and that is denied to men as well as women. [The War Against Boys: How Misguided Policies Are Harming Young Men](#) attests that school has become girls' turf. My own experiences in schooling were that in almost all areas that truly interested me, I was self-taught. Working first in math, then in theology, there was something more than the naive outsider's question to academic theology: "Yes, I understand that we need to learn multiple languages, the history of theology, philosophy of religion, hermeneutics, and so on, but when are we going to study real theology?" This question is not in particular a man's question; it could just as plausibly have been spoken by a young woman. But work and school both place its members as neuters; there may be some places of schooling that may be 80% male (I've been there), and there may be places of schooling that may be 80% female (I've been there), but the traditional roles for men and women are not optional; they are taken off the table altogether, leaving those who would have traditional roles holding the short

who are pressured into it by "boyfriends" and men who have no desire to shoulder the responsibilities of a father to raise a child.) And this is decisively pro-choice compared to the "counseling" provided by an abortion clinic, which is essentially a five minute sales pitch presenting abortion as the only live option. And if you have had an abortion, and are hurting, recognize that what abortion clinics by law offer as post-abortion counseling is no more helpful than the pre-abortion counseling; again, dial 1-800-4-HOPE-4-1 and be connected with the healing power of counseling that

straw.

But to say that and stop is misleading. I remember when I asked an Orthodox literature professor for his advice on [a novella I was working that was a fantasy world based on the patristic Greek East instead of the medieval Latin West](#), and his advice, were I wise enough to listen to it (I wasn't), was simply, "If Orthodoxy is not to work for the here and now, it simply isn't worth very much." And Orthodoxy has fashioned men and women who have thrived under pagan antiquity, under Constantine, under the devious oppression of Julian the Apostate, under the fairy-like wonderland of nineteenth century Russia, under the Bolshevik Revolution, under centuries in the Byzantine Empire, under Muslim rule after Byzantium shrunk and finally modern era guns ended the walls erected by a Byzantine Emperor ages before, in France by those fleeing persecution, in America under parallel jurisdictions. In every age and at every time the Orthodox Church has found saints who chanted, as the hymn in preparation for Communion states, "Thou, who art every hour and in every place worshipped and

recognizes abortion as an experience that many have found traumatic. Counselors are complaining that political correctness is preventing them from adequately offering post-abortion counseling. And the "it's part of her body" is an illusion, a legal fiction. Nobody believes it, or at least women going through an abortion don't. Feminist landmarks like the sacrament of abortion, in a chapter called "the cure for guilt," advocate grieving that explains to the child why the separation is needed. It's not scraping away some unwanted tissue from a

glorified..." And if you think our world is too tangled to let God work his work, there is something big, or rather Someone Big, who is missing from your picture. [God harvested alike St. Zosima and St. Mary of Egypt](#). And it is not just true that God has fashioned and has continued to fashion real men in the intensely masculine atmosphere of a monastery of men; calling men's monasteries simply schools that make men is to focus on a minor key. Helping men be men, and channeling machismo into povdig or ascetical feats, is a matter of seeking the Kingdom of God and having other things be added as well. I have heard of one man be straightened out on Mount Athos from his addiction to pornography and then depart and be married; that may not be the usual path on Mount Athos, but the strong medicine offered on Mount Athos is sufficient to address the biggest attack on manhood this world offers, and it is a place of salvation.

What prescription would I suggest for women? To get a part-time job while children are at school? To homeschool, and have some team teaching? To just stay at home? All of these and more are possibilities, but the most

crucial suggestion is this:

Step out of Hell.

woman's body; it is striking a woman's motherhood, sort of a spiritual equivalent to kicking a man in the testicles.

Feminism is anti-woman, and perhaps the single greatest instance of this is that it supports the right of women, not to be mothers, but to have their motherhood injured.

It is a bit like claiming to be pro-man, and having the single greatest test of one's support for men be in his reproductive freedom, namely the inalienable right to opt-in to a hard kick in the groin.

In *From Russia, with Love: A Spiritual Guide to Surviving Political and Economic Disaster*, I wrote:

The Greek word hubris refers to pride that inescapably blinds, the pride that goes before a fall. And subjectivism is tied to pride. Subjectivism is trying, in any of many ways, to make yourself happy by being in your own reality instead of learning happiness in the God-given reality that you're in. Being in subjectivism is a start on being in Hell. Hell may not be what you think. Hell is light as it is experienced by people who would rather be in darkness. Hell is abundant health as experienced by people who would choose disease. Hell is freedom as experienced by those who will not stop clinging to spiritual chains. Hell is ten thousand other things: more pointedly, Hell is other people, as experienced by an existentialist. This Hell is Heaven as experienced through subjectivist narcissism, experiencing God's glory and wishing for glory on your own power. The gates of Hell are bolted and barred from the inside. God is love; he cannot but ultimately give Heaven to his creatures, but we can, if we wish, choose to experience Heaven as Hell. The beginning of Heaven is this life, but we can, if we wish, be subjectivists and wish for something else and experience what God has given us as the start of Hell.

Step out of Hell, pray, and accept what God gives you.

# Why Study Mathematics?

One question which is raised by many people is, "Why should I study mathematics?". The question is usually asked from a perspective that there is probably no good and desirable reason for the speaker to study mathematics, but he will tolerate the minimum required because he has to, and then get on to more valuable and important things.

I readily acknowledge that there are many math classes which are drudgery and a general waste of time, and that many people have had experiences with mathematics which give them good reason to hold a distaste for the discipline. However, it is my hope that I may provide readers with an insight that there is something more to mathematics, and that this something more may be worthwhile.

Let's begin by looking at the reasons that the reader may already have come across for why he should study mathematics:

- There are certain basic computational skills that are needed in life. People should be able to figure out whether a 24-pack of their favorite soda for \$3.89 is a better or worse deal than a 12-pack for \$1.99.
- It builds character. I suffered through mathematics for

such-and-such many years. So should you.

Of course, nobody explicitly says the second reason, but it may very well seem that way—like one of the hush-hushed truths that the Adult Conspiracy hides from students the same way it hides the fact that there is no Santa Claus from little children. And the first reason is something that many non-mathematical administrators believe.

But those are not the real reasons that a mathematician will give for why a nonmathematician should study mathematics, and what kind of mathematics a nonmathematician should study.

The first question which should be addressed is, "What is mathematics really about?"

The answer which many nonmathematicians may have is something along the lines of, "Mathematics, at its heart, is about learning and using formulas and things like that. In gradeschool, you learn the formulas and methods to add, subtract, multiply, and divide; then in middle school and high school it is on to bigger and better formulas, like the formula for the slope of a line passing through two points. Then in college, if your discipline unfortunately requires a little mathematics (such as the social sciences requiring statistics), you learn formulas that are even more complicated and harder to remember. The deeper you go into mathematics, the more formulas and rote methods you have to learn, and the worse it gets."

The best response I can think of to that question is to respond by analogy, and my response is along the following lines:

A child in school will be taught various grammatical rules, sentence diagramming, and so on. These will be drilled and studied for quite a long while, and it must be said that this is not the most interesting of areas to study.

An English teacher who is asked, "Is this what your discipline is really about?", will almost certainly answer, "No!". Perhaps the English student is proficient in grammar, but that's not what English is about. English is about literature—about stories, about ideas, about characters, about plots, about poetic description, about philosophy, about theology, about thinking, about life.

Grammar is not studied so that people can suffer through learning more pointless grammar; grammar is studied to provide students with a basic foundation from which they will be able to use the English language. It is a little drudgery which is worked through so that students may behold an object of great beauty.

This is the function of the formulas and rules of mathematics. Not rules and formulas so that the student is prepared for more rules and formulas, but rules and formulas which are studied so that the student can go past them to see what mathematics is really about.

And what is mathematics really about? Before I give a full answer, let me say that it is something like what English is about.

The one real glimpse that someone who has been through high school may have had of mathematics is in the study of geometry. There are a few things about high school geometry that I would like to point out:

- In geometry, one is given certain axioms and postulates (for example, the parallel postulate—given a line and a point not on the line, there is exactly one line through the given point which does not intersect the given line), definitions (a circle is the set of points equidistant (at an equal distance) from a given point), and undefined terms (point, line). From those axioms and postulates, definitions, and undefined terms, one begins to explore what they imply—theorems and lemmas.

- In geometry, rote memorization is not enough—and, in fact, is in and of itself one of the least effective approaches to take. It is necessary to understand—to get an intuitive grasp of the material. Learning comes from the "Aha!" when something clicks and fits together—then it is the idea that remains in the student's memory.
- Geometry builds upon itself. One starts with fundamentals (axioms, postulates, definitions, and undefined terms), and uses them to prove basic theorems, which are in turn used along with axioms and postulates to prove more elaborate theorems, and so on. It is like a building—once the foundation has been laid, beams and walls may be secured to the foundation, and then one may continue to build up from the foundation and from what has been secured to the foundation. Geometry is an edifice built on its fundamentals with logic, and the structure that is ultimately built is quite impressive.
- Geometry is an abstract and rigorous way of thinking. (More will be made of this later.)
- Geometry is about creative problem solving. The aforespoken edifice—or, more specifically, what is in that edifice—is used by the geometer as tools with which to solve problems. Problem solving—figuring out how to prove a theorem or do a construction (which is a special kind of theorem)—is a creative endeavor, as much as painting, musical improvisation, or writing (and I am writing as one who does mathematics, paints, improvises, and writes).

Imagine a dream where there are many pillars—some low, some high—all of which are too high to step up to, and all of which are wide enough to stand upon.

Now imagine someone dreaming this dream. That person looks at one of the pillars and asks, "Has anyone been on top of that pillar?" Then one of the Inhabitants of his dream answers, "No, nobody has been on top of that pillar." Then the person looks at another of the pillars, which has a set of stairs next to it, and asks, "Has anyone been on top of that pillar over there?". The answer is, "Yes, someone has, and has left behind a set of steps.

You may take those steps and climb up on top of the pillar yourself, if you wish."

And this person continues, and sees more pillars. Some of them stand alone, too high to step up to, and nobody has been to those. Others have had someone on top, and there is always a set of steps which the person left behind, by which he may climb up personally. And the steps go every which way—some go straight up, some go one way and then another, some seem to almost go sideways. Some are very strange. Some pillars have more than one set of steps. But all of them lead up to the top of the pillar.

The person dreaming may well have the impression that one gets atop a pillar by laying down one step, then another, then another, until one has assembled steps that reach to the top of the pillar. And, indeed, it is possible to climb the steps up to the pillars that others have gone to first.

But that impression is wrong.

And the person sees what really happens when the guide becomes very excited and says, "Look over there! There is a great athlete who is going to attempt a pillar that nobody has ever been atop!"

And the athlete runs, and jumps, and sails through the air, and lands on top of the pillar.

And when the athlete lands, there appears a set of stairs around the pillar. The athlete climbs up and down the stairs a

few times to tidy them up for other people, but the stairs were produced, not by laying down slabs of stone one atop another, but by jumping.

Then the guide explained to the dreamer that the athlete had learned to jump not only by looking at the steps that others had left, but by jumping to other pillars that already had steps, instead of using the steps.

Then the dreamer woke up.

What does the story mean?

The pillars are mathematical facts, some proven and some unproven.

The pillars that stand alone are mathematical facts that nobody has proven.

The pillars that stand with steps leading up to them are mathematical facts that have been proven.

The steps are the steps of proofs, the little assertions. As some of the steps are bizarre, so are some proofs. As some pillars have more than one path of steps, so some facts have more than one known proof.

The leap is a flash of intuition, by which the mathematician knows which of many steps will take him where he wants to go.

As the steps appeared when the leap was made, so the proof appears when the flash of intuition comes. The athlete then tidied up the steps, as the mathematician writes down and clarifies the proof, but the proof comes from jumping, not from building one step on another.

The athlete was the mathematician.

Finally, the athlete became an athlete not only by climbing up and down existing steps, but also by jumping up to pillars that already had steps—one becomes skilled at making intuitive leaps, not only by learning existing proofs, but also by solving already

proven problems as if there were no proof to read.

As one philosophy major commented to me, "Mathematicians do proofs, but they don't use them."

That flash of insight is the flash of inspiration that artists work under, and in this sense a mathematician is very similar to an artist. (What do a mathematician and an artist have in common? Both are pursuing beauty, to start with...)

This character of mathematics that is captured in geometry is true to geometry, but the actual form that it takes is largely irrelevant. Other branches of mathematics, properly taught, could accomplish just the same purpose, and for that matter could just as well replace geometry. Two other disciplines which draw heavily on applied mathematics, namely computer science and physics, have essentially the same strong points. I would hold no objections, for that matter, if high school geometry classes were replaced by strategy games like chess and go.

Mathematics is about puzzle solving; I would refer the reader to works such as Raymond Smullyan's *The Lady or the Tiger?* and Colin Adams's *The Knot Book: an Elementary Introduction to the Mathematical theory of Knots*. There are many people to whom mathematics is a recreation, consisting of the pleasure of solving puzzles. If mathematics is approached as memorizing incomprehensible formulas and hoping to have the good luck to guess the right formula at the right time, it will be a chore and a torture. If it is instead approached as puzzle solving, the activity will yield unexpected pleasure.

My father has a doctorate in physics and teaches computer science. He has said, more than once, that he would like for all of his students to take physics before taking his classes. There is a very important and simple reason for this. It is not because he wants his students to program physics simulators, or because there is some direct application of the mathematics in physics to

There is any direct application of the mathematics in physics to the computer science he teaches. There isn't. It is because of the problem solving, the manner of thinking. It is because someone who has learned how to think in a way that is effective in physics, will be able to think in a way that is effective in computer science.

This applies to other disciplines as well. Ancient Greek philosophers, and medieval European theologians, made the study of geometry a prerequisite to the study of their respective disciplines. It was not because the constructions or theorems would be directly useful in making claims about the nature of God. Like physics and computer science, there was no direct application. But in order to study geometry, one had to be able to think rigorously, analytically, critically, logically, and abstractly.

Thinking logically and abstractly is an important discipline in life and in other academic disciplines that consist of thinking—it has been said that if you can do mathematics, you can do almost anything. The main reason mathematics is valuable to the non-mathematician is as a form of weight lifting for the mind. Even when the knowledge has no application, the finesse that's learned can be useful.

To the non-mathematician, mathematics is a valuable discipline which offers practice in how to think well—both analytic thought and problem solving. Mathematics classes will most profitably be approached, not as "What is the formula I have to memorize," but with ideas such as those enumerated here. The nonmathematician who approaches a mathematics class as an opportunity for disciplined thought and problem solving will do better, profit more, and maybe, just maybe, enjoy the course.

It is my the hope that this essay have provided the nonmathematician with an inkling of why it is profitable for people who aren't going to be mathematicians to still study

people who aren't going to be mathematicians to still study mathematics.

# Why this Waste?

"Why this waste?" quoth the Thief,  
Missing a pageant unfold before his very eyes,  
One who sinned much, forgiven, for her great love,  
Broke open a priceless heirloom,  
An alabaster vessel of costly perfume,  
Costly chrism beyond all price anointing the Christ,  
Anointing the Christ unto life-giving death,  
Anointed unto life-giving death,  
A story ever told,  
In memory of her:

"Why this waste?" quoth also the Pious,  
Kings and Priest and Prophet one,  
Regarding in Heaven and earth a cornucopia great of blessing,  
Rank on rank of angelic host,  
Seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, powers, authorities,  
principalities, archangels and angels,  
Sapphire Heavens and an earth growing living emeralds,  
A sun of gold, a moon of silver,  
A Theotokos eternally reigning after Heaven kissed earth,  
The Son of God who opened the womb of death,  
Pageantry of uncreated God and creation made one with God,  
"Why this waste?" indeed.

"Why this waste?" quoth the Skeptic,  
A pageant missed, other else ignored,  
A hawk's eye opened to root out magical thinking in the Pious,  
A man's eye closed to his own magical thinking one must needs  
embrace,

Materialist or naturalist to be,

"I see no evidence of God or any spirit,"  
Quoth he through his spirit,  
With the breath of God.

"Why this waste?" quoth the Mother,  
A child borne in her womb,  
Soon become a corpse nestled in her bosom,  
Rejecting the empty consolation of lies that lie evil away,  
Facing the stark, hard truth,  
Of clay in the hands of the potter,  
Dust is she too,  
To dust also to return,  
The last word, this is not:

"Why this waste?" quoth not another Mother,  
Whose Son's death as a sword her heart pierced,  
And seeth the infant son lost,  
In no wise lost, but found on her Son's throne in Heaven.

"Why this waste?" quoth the Father Almighty,  
Seeing his creation enter sin, death, and decay,  
Then moved Heaven and earth, nay the two hands of his Son and  
Spirit,

To right things wrong, straighten all things bent,  
Until sinners should become saints,  
The physical body sown in dishonor raised in honor,  
Spiritual, incorruptible, imperishable, glorious,  
Every move Satan makes one step closer to God sealing

checkmate,  
The triumph of *God* using every attack of *Satan* in victory  
eternal.

"Why this waste?" quote you and I,  
Having lost some things in a global economic crisis,  
More losses to come, it would seem.

It would seem.

Fearing that the providence of *God*,  
Faileth us in a disaster.

"Why this waste?" quote we in error,  
Mistaking the limits of sight for those of faith itself.

Why this waste?

# Why Young Earthers Aren't Completely Crazy

This post was a followup to [The Evolution of a Personal Perspective on Creation and Origins](#), which should be read before this article. It was written for the same mailing list. This post has been edited slightly for clarity and privacy concerns. But I've still left it rather clunky.

When I was talking with some Wheaton science professors about origins questions and Wheaton's hint of an inquisition, in which there are four stated views (two of which are deemed acceptable), and they were complaining about the President thinking that everything fits into four neat pigeonholes: everybody must believe position one, two, three, or four. (So far as I know, none of the science faculty believe any of those positions — I don't.) Then one of them stated, for the sake of fairness, that Wheaton at least allowed four views, while the media only allowed two: either you're a young earth creationist, or you believe in Darwinian evolution, and that's the end of that.

I had hoped that the Megalist at least would be above this misconception, and it was with some sadness that I found this hope disappointed in the posts I've read (I'm offline; most

recent post was one about a \$1M donation to a young-earth museum).

[The following paragraph describes a perspective on Thomas Aquinas. This is not my own perspective; it is one I am describing in accounting for other people's beliefs.]

I have stated (or, more properly, implied) that young earth creationism is a marginal position among Evangelical scholars (I will not speak for Catholics or mainline Protestants, beyond to say that I expect them to be less inclined to young earth belief than Evangelicals). Augustine, who is portrayed by some Evangelicals as the good example of a solid Bible-believing pre-Protestant theologian, as contrasted to Aquinas's dilution of Biblical faith with Aristotelian and humanist doctrine, did not have access to scientific inquiry concerning the age of the universe or the origins of life. His beliefs concerning origins were as far in technical detail from a young-earth story as would be a theistic evolutionary perspective. At Darwin's time, Evangelicals were not generally young-earthers; a young earth perspective gained prominence for reasons to be discussed, but the old earth implied by evolutionary theory was not a surprising claim. I believe in an old earth; Johnson believes in an old earth; Behe believes in an old earth; Kenyon believes in an old earth. For that matter, the Scopes monkey trial's Bryan, who was a member of the American Academy for the Advancement of Sciences, was not a Biblical literalist and did not believe in a young earth.

That stated, I would like to give a fair treatment and (in some sense) explanation of young earth creationism, including its popularity among some devout Christians. This is not, and is not intended as, argument concerning origins questions, and readers who are looking for germane material that will inform considerations of origins questions can safely skip this note. It is

intended as painting a fuller and fairer picture, of there being something to these people's beliefs besides a vulgar belligerence towards science.

In the following argument, I will make multiple Biblical references; these references are not here intended as appeal to religious authority, but as historical documents giving insight into how a particular people thought.

Among those cultures that permit eating meat, there can be dietary codes concerning what meat is and is not permitted. The term 'dietary code' is often associated with Judaism, with abstinence from pork holding a symbolic meaning of ethnic and religious identity, but this is neither the only dietary code, nor the only meaning a dietary code can have.

Contemporary American culture has a dietary code, albeit an unwritten one (beyond general health practices, and health code regulations about serving food). To give three examples of these unwritten rules: most Americans will not eat much of anything with a head on it or other visible reminders that the food is in fact the carcass of a slaughtered animal, will not eat much of any of the animals that are used as pets, and will not eat much of anything land-based with an exoskeleton. There are occasional exceptions to these rules — sardines, goldfish swallowing, and chocolate covered ants — but the exceptions are in fact occasional exceptions to general rules.

These dietary restrictions are not thought of consciously, and when an American travelling abroad sees people eating meat in violation of such rules, his first reaction is not likely to be to think about how American he is by abstaining from such food, but more likely disgust that people are eating such sickening food.

The quality of this perspective is representative of the most

ancient Jewish attitude towards certain foods. The Torah lists a number of animals and tells people that they are to regard these animals as "unclean and detestable", and are not to eat them (and someone who did became temporarily unclean). Uncleanness was not the same as moral defilement, and there were certain (albeit few) contexts (albeit not munching) in which texts reflect a social and religious permission to make oneself unclean. To eat unclean food was something you shouldn't be doing, but it wasn't something that had the particular meaning of treachery to Judaism, moreso than stealing — probably less; the injunction against stealing made the big 10.

In Judges, one of the older post-Torah books, one that narrates the social and moral chaos before there was a king, the Nazirite Samson eats honey from the carcass of an unclean lion — maybe something a Jew shouldn't be doing in general, but quite particularly something a Nazirite shouldn't be doing at all.

This action forms part of the story of a morally flawed, intermittently obedient hero, but it is not interpreted as being particularly goyish, not moreso than the other actions he took that broke God's law.

In Daniel, one of the latter additions to the Jewish canon, three sharp young Jews are brought to the palace of the king and make a big deal of not eating any meat at all, instead of eating the palace's unclean food. On the evidence of the text alone, it is ambiguous whether eating unclean foods has acquired the symbolic meaning of goyishness, or whether it's a matter that these three men were so devout that in a foreign land they would not compromise on even the issue of food.

In IV Maccabees (not canonical to Jews or most Christians, but an ancient Jewish document that sheds light on the community), a Greek persecutor is trying to forcibly convert

Jews to Hellenistic life, and inflicts gruesome tortures on Jews who refuse to eat pork. Here abstinence from unclean foods has very clearly become a (perhaps the) symbol of Jewish faith, and it holds this crystallized meaning to Jewish martyr and Greek persecutor alike.

The near-total investment of dietary code with symbolic significance was not universal; one Jewish teacher said both "I have come not to abolish but fulfill the Tanakh," and "What makes a man unclean is not what goes into him, but what comes out;" his disciples did not perceive any puzzling contradiction, and the movement he ignited from within Judaism is in numerous ways very Jewish to this day, but does not retain the dietary code.

This has conditioned subsequent history; not all Jews today keep the dietary code, but there are some who are atheistic or agnostic and still keep kosher — which is to say that they are making a symbolic act that means much more than just a choice in food, that means an identity that they do not wish to disappear.

The choices of the Jews in IV Maccabees do not exactly represent a claim that temporary ceremonial uncleanness from eating pork is literally a fate worse than death — a claim which is (at very least) hard to justify from the Torah. They rather recognized the literal act as the tip of the iceberg — and dug in, full force.

Young earth creationism is not what it appears to be on the surface, namely a mere benighted refusal to open in the light of science. If it is viewed in isolation, on simply scientific grounds — including the \$1M gift to a young earth museum — it will necessarily appear more than a little looney, as is the choice of being tortured to death instead of eating a few bites of foreign

food. But it's not that at all. It is a symbolic act, one that is so thoroughly a part of these people that it would not occur to most of them to call it symbolic. They may have chosen the wrong literal point at which to dig in — I believe so, pending scientific support for a young earth besides records of bizarre ways to fool scientific dating techniques — and that is to their discredit. What I am much more hesitant to criticize them on is why they are digging in.

S.J. Gould paints a Pollyana-ish picture of the interaction between science and religion in his claim of non-overlapping magisterial areas — so that no scientific claim need have threatening implications for religion. To give a hint as to why this isn't the case...

Suppose (for the sake of argument) that mathematics is required to hold as axiomatic that pi is equal to  $22/7$ . It might be possible to pay lip service, claim pi to be  $22/7$  in certain circumstances, and otherwise get back to do serious mathematics. If that option were not taken, then the result would be a contradiction, from which anything would be provable (at least in certain fields of mathematics), from which point mathematics as we know it would be dead. Perhaps it might be possible to find some axiomatic revision of geometry that would produce a very different kind of mathematics in which there was something called a circle with a circumference:diameter ratio always equal to exactly  $22:7$ . The point I'm getting at is that holding pi to be  $22/7$  might work for some not-seriously-mathematical purposes — you have to use some approximation for most numerical calculations — but the change would have far more disruptive implications for mathematics itself than might be obvious to someone looking in from the outside.

Darwinian evolution is not just a theory concerning the origins

of life, in the sense of something that has little significant implication to other areas. William B. Provine, historian of science and evolutionary adherent, comments, "prominent evolutionists have joined with equally prominent theologians and religious leaders to sweep under the rug the incompatibilities of evolution and religion." Darwinism is on some accounts the cutting edge of the sword wielded by naturalism, and when young earthers dig in over the ostensible issue of origins, they are digging in out of concern for much larger issues. I will not here argue the case that Darwinism bears the implications it is believed to, but I will say that when these people assert a young earth, they are standing not only against the claim of an old earth but against the naturalism that hides behind "We're just teaching a well-established scientific theory." and its implication of "This is a neutral claim whose truth does not threaten your beliefs at all."

There was one point when I was talking with an astronomy professor at Wheaton, and he mentioned a student who had been threatened by the old universe perspective of the class (until he explained that students were not required to believe in an old universe, although the class would be taught from that perspective), and I suggested talking on the first day about the grounds on which Darwinian evolution may be challenged — so that the young earth/old earth question is not the fully symbolic question of divine creation versus mindless forces alone, but only the question of whether the universe is thousands or billions of years old. He liked my suggestion.

I have tried to give a sympathetic and respectful account of young earth creationists, not to persuade people that they are correct on the particular point they have chosen to dig in, but to suggest how something besides an insane aversion to listening to

science might lie behind their choice. Having stated that, I would also like to state quite specifically that I disagree with their position, and regard it as unfortunate. For those wishing a further account (and something that provides a historical description instead of an analogy designed to convey a basic insight), I would recommend Wheaton College Professor Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, which traces the reactive movement you have encountered. For historical-cultural reasons Noll traces, Evangelicalism does not always share in the Christian tradition's richer mental life, and among those who do not pursue the life of the mind, young-earth creationism seems a good way to assert God's creation against teachings that life is the meaningless by-product of an uncaring universe. Among those Evangelicals and other Christians who do pursue the life of the mind, it is quite rare.

For this reason, I would request that, when I bring up what Kenyon, or Johnson, or Behe, has said, and ask what your justifications for dismissing it are, please don't post a rebuttal to six-day, young earth creationism. A comparable response on my part, to back up a statement that evolution is flawed, would be to post an attack on [very passé] Lamarckian evolution and consider myself to have discredited "evolution". A non sequitur of that magnitude, on my part, could possibly destroy any chances I had of being taken seriously. Perhaps I am alone in looking at the question this way, but I want to respect my fellow Megalist members in this discussion, and it is awfully hard for me to maintain that respect when I see posts like some of the traffic in the recent past.

-Jonathan

**Post Script, May 5, 2003:** Since I posted this some time back, I have learned that leading members of the MegaList have

become increasingly involved in the Intelligent Design movement.

I do not believe I can take more than incidental credit for this; I believe they are persuaded, not by my eloquence in a small number of posts, but because the evidence itself suggests things which aren't well explained by a purely Darwinian account.

# Within the Steel Orb

The car pulled up on the dark cobblestones and stopped by the darker castle. The vehicle was silver-grey, low to the ground, and sleek. A—let us call him a man—opened the driver's door on the right, and stood up, tall, dark, clad in a robe the color of the sky at midnight. Around the car he went, opened the door for his passenger, and once the passenger stepped out, made one swift motion and had two bags on his shoulder. The bags were large, but he moved as if he were accustomed to carrying far heavier fare. It was starlight out, and the moon was visible as moonlight rippled across a pool.

The guest reached for the bags. "Those are heavy. Let me—" The host smiled darkly. "Do not worry about the weight of your bags."

The host opened a solid greyblack door, of unearthly smoothness, and walked swiftly down a granite hallway, allowing his guest to follow. "You've had a long day. Let me get you something to drink." He turned a door, poured something into two iridescent titanium mugs, and turned through another corridor and opened a door on its side. Inside the room were two deep armchairs and a low table.

"This is my first time traveling between worlds—how am I to

address you?"

The host smiled. "Why do you wish to know more of my name? It is enough for you to call me Oinos. Please enjoy our welcome."

The guest sipped his drink. "Cider?"

The host said, "You may call it that; it is a juice, which has not had artificial things done to make it taste like it just came out of its fruit regardless of how much it should have aged by the time you taste it. It is juice where time has been allowed to do its work." He was holding a steel orb. "You are welcome here, Art." Then—he barely seemed to move—there was a spark, and Oinos pulled a candle from the wall and set it on the table.

Art said, "Why not a fluorescent light to really light the room up?"

The host said, "For the same reason that you either do not offer your guests mocha at all, or else give them real mocha and not a mix of hot water, instant coffee, and hot cocoa powder. In our world, we can turn the room bright as day any time, but we do not often do so."

"Aah. We have a lot to learn from you about getting back to nature."

"Really? What do you mean by 'getting back to nature'? What do you do to try to 'get back to nature'?"

"Um, I don't know what to really do. Maybe try to be in touch with the trees, not being cooped up inside all the time, if I were doing a better job of it..."

"If that is getting back in touch with nature, then we pay little attention to getting in touch with nature. And nature, as we understand it, is about something fundamentally beyond dancing on hills or sitting and watching waves. I don't criticize you if you do them, but there is really something more. And I can talk with you about drinking juice without touching the natural processes

that make cider or what have you, and I can talk with you about natural cycles and why we don't have imitation daylight any time it would seem convenient. But I would like you to walk away with something more, and more interesting, than how we keep technology from being too disruptive to natural processes. That isn't really the point. It's almost what you might call a side effect."

"But you do an awfully impressive job of putting technology in its place and not getting too involved with it."

Oinos said, "Have you had enough chance to stretch out and rest and quench your thirst? Would you like to see something?"

"Yes."

Oinos stood, and led the way down some stairs to a room that seemed to be filled with odd devices. He pushed some things aside, then walked up to a device with a square in the center, and pushed one side. Chains and gears moved, and another square replaced it.

"This is my workshop, with various items that I have worked on. You can come over here and play with this little labyrinth; it's not completely working, but you can explore it if you take the time to figure it out. Come on over. It's what I've been working on most recently."

Art looked around, somewhat amazed, and walked over to the 'labyrinth.'

Oinos said, "In your world, in classical Greek, the same word, 'techne,' means both 'art' and 'technology.' You misunderstand my kindred if you think we aren't especially interested in technology; we have a great interest in technology, as with other kinds of art. But just as you can travel a long distance to see the Mona Lisa without needing a mass-produced Mona Lisa to hang in your bathroom, we enjoy and appreciate technologies without

making them conveniences we need to have available every single day."

Art pressed a square and the labyrinth shifted. "Have I come here to see technologies?"

Oinos paused. "I would not advise it. You see our technologies, or how we use them, because that is what you are most ready to see. Visitors from some other worlds hardly notice them, even if they are astonished when they are pointed out."

Art said, "Then why don't we go back to the other room?"

Oinos turned. "Excellent." They went back, and Art sat down in his chair.

Art, after a long pause, said, "I still find it puzzling why, if you appreciate technology, you don't want to have more of it."

Oinos said, "Why do you find it so puzzling?"

"Technology does seem to add a lot to the body."

"That is a very misleading way to put it. The effect of most technologies that you think of as adding to the body is in fact to undercut the body. The technologies that you call 'space-conquering' might be appropriately called 'body-conquering.'"

"So the telephone is a body-conquering device? Does it make my body less real?"

"Once upon a time, long ago from your perspective, news and information could not really travel faster than a person could travel. If you were talking with a person, that person had to be pretty close, and it was awkward and inconvenient to communicate with those who were far away. That meant that the people you talked with were probably people from your local community."

"So you were deprived of easy access to people far away?"

"Let me put it this way. It mattered where you were, meaning where your body was. Now, on the telephone, or instant

messages, or the web, nothing and no one is really anywhere, and that means profound things for what communities are. And are not. You may have read about 'close-knit rural communities' which have become something exotic and esoteric to most of your world's city dwellers... but when space conquering technologies had not come in, and another space-conquering technology, modern roads allowing easy moving so that people would have to say goodbye to face-to-face friendships every few years... It's a very different way of relating. A close-knit rural community is exotic to you because it is a body-based community in ways that tend not to happen when people make heavy use of body-conquering, or space-conquering, or whatever you want to call them, technologies."

"But isn't there more than a lack of technologies to close-knit communities?"

"Yes, indeed... but... spiritual discipline is about much more than the body, but a lot of spiritual discipline can only shape people when people are running into the body's limitations. The disciplines—worship, prayer, fasting, silence, almsgiving, and so on—only mean something if there are bodily limits you are bumping into. If you can take a pill that takes away your body's discomfort in fasting, or standing through worship, then the body-conquering technology of that pill has cut you off from the spiritual benefit of that practice."

"Aren't spiritual practices about more than the body?"

"Yes indeed, but you won't get there if you have something less than the body."

Art sat back. "I'd be surprised if you're not a real scientist. I imagine that in your world you know things that our scientists will not know for centuries."

Oinos sat back and sat still for a time, closing his eyes. Then

he opened his eyes and said, "What have you learned from science?"

"I've spent a lot of time lately, wondering what Einstein's theory of relativity means for us today: even the 'hard' sciences are relative, and what 'reality' is, depends greatly on your own perspective. Even in the hardest sciences, it is fundamentally mistaken to be looking for absolute truth."

Oinos leaned forward, paused, and then tapped the table four different places. In front of Art appeared a gridlike object which Art recognized with a start as a scientific calculator like his son's. "Very well. Let me ask you a question. Relative to your frame of reference, an object of one kilogram rest mass is moving away from you at a speed of one tenth the speed of light. What, from your present frame of reference, is its effective mass?"

Art hesitated, and began to sit up.

Oinos said, "If you'd prefer, the table can be set to function as any major brand of calculator you're familiar with. Or would you prefer a computer with Matlab or Mathematica? The remainder of the table's surface can be used to browse the appropriate manuals."

Art shrunk slightly towards his chair.

Oinos said, "I'll give you hints. In the theory of relativity, objects can have an effective mass of above their rest mass, but never below it. Furthermore, most calculations of this type tend to have anything that changes, change by a factor of the inverse of the square root of the quantity: one minus the square of the object's speed divided by the square of the speed of light. Do you need me to explain the buttons on the calculator?"

Art shrunk into his chair. "I don't know all of those technical details, but I have spent a lot of time thinking about relativity."

Oinos said, "If you are unable to answer that question before I started dropping hints, let alone after I gave hints, you should not pose as having contemplated what relativity means for us today. I'm not trying to humiliate you. But the first question I asked is the kind of question a teacher would put on a quiz to see if students were awake and not playing video games for most of the first lecture. I know it's fashionable in your world to drop Einstein's name as someone you have deeply pondered. It is also extraordinarily silly. I have noticed that scientists who have a good understanding of relativity often work without presenting themselves as having these deep ponderings about what Einstein means for them today. Trying to deeply ponder Einstein without learning even the basics of relativistic physics is like trying to write the next Nobel prize-winning German novel without being bothered to learn even the most rudimentary German vocabulary and grammar."

"But don't you think that relativity makes a big difference?"

"On a poetic level, I think it is an interesting development in your world's history for a breakthrough in science, Einstein's theory of relativity, to say that what is absolute is not time, but light. Space and time bend before light. There is a poetic beauty to Einstein making an unprecedented absolute out of light. But let us leave poetic appreciation of Einstein's theory aside.

"You might be interested to know that the differences predicted by Einstein's theory of relativity are so minute that decades passed between Einstein making the theory of relativity and people being able to use a sensitive enough clock to measure the minute difference of the so-called 'twins paradox' by bringing an atomic clock on an airplane. The answer to the problem I gave you is that for a tenth the speed of light—which is faster than you can imagine, and well over a thousand times

the top speed of the fastest supersonic vehicle your world will ever make—is one half of one percent. It's a disappointingly small increase for a rather astounding speed. If the supersonic Skylon is ever built, would you care to guess the increase in effective mass as it travels at an astounding Mach 5.5?"

"Um, I don't know..."

"Can you guess? Half its mass? The mass of a car? Or just the mass of a normal-sized adult?"

"Is this a trick question? Fifty pounds?"

"The effective mass increases above the rest mass, for that massive vehicle running at about five times the speed of sound and almost twice the top speed of the SR-71 Blackbird, is something like the mass of a mosquito."

"A mosquito? You're joking, right?"

"No. It's an underwhelming, microscopic difference for what relativity says when the rumor mill has it that Einstein taught us that hard sciences are as fuzzy as anything else... or that perhaps, in Star Wars terms, 'Luke, you're going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on your own point of view.' Under Einstein, you will in fact **not** find that many of the observations that we cling to, depend greatly on your own frame of reference. You have to be doing something pretty exotic to have relativity make any measurable difference from the older physics at all."

"Would you explain relativity to me so that I can discuss its implications?"

"I really think there might be more productive ways to use your visit."

"But you have a scientist's understanding of relativity."

"I am not sure I'd say that."

"Why? You seem to understand relativity a lot more like a

scientist than I do."

"Let's talk about biology for a moment. Do you remember the theory of spontaneous generation? You know, the theory that life just emerges from appropriate material?"

"I think so."

"But your world's scientists haven't believed in spontaneous generation since over a century before you were born. Why would you be taught that theory—I'm assuming you learned this in a science class and not digging into history?"

"My science course explained the theory in covering historical background, even though scientists no longer believe that bread spontaneously generates mold."

"Let me ask what may seem like a non-sequitur. I assume you're familiar with people who are working to get even more of religion taken out of public schools?"

"Yes."

"They are very concerned about official prayers at school events, right? About having schools endorse even the occasional religious practice?"

"Yes."

"Ok. Let me ask what may seem like a strange question. Have these 'separation of Church and state' advocates also advocated that geometry be taken out of the classroom?"

Art closed his eyes, and then looked at Oinos as if he had two heads. "It seems you don't know everything about my world."

"I don't. But please understand that geometry did not originate as a secular technical practice. You might have heard this mentioned. Geometry began its life as a 'sacred science,' or a religious practice, and to its founders the idea that geometry does not have religious content would have struck them as worse than saying that prayer does not have religious content."

"Oh, I think I understand that. I think I understand that."

"OK, I think I remember that being mentioned. So to speak, my math teacher taught about geometry the 'sacred science' the way that my biology teacher taught about the past theory of spontaneous generation."

Oinos focused his eyes on Art. "In our schools, and in our training, physics, biology, and chemistry are 'taught' as 'secular sciences' the same way, in your school, spontaneous generation is taught as 'past science', or even better, the 'sacred science' of geometry is 'taught' in the course of getting on to a modern understanding of geometry."

Art said, "So the idea that the terrain we call 'biology' is to you—"

Oinos continued: "As much something peered at through a glass bell as the idea that the terrain of regular polygons belongs to a secularized mathematics."

"What is a sacred science?"

Oinos sat back. "If a science is about understanding something as self-contained whose explanations do not involve God, and it is an attempt to understand as physics understand, and the scientist understands as a detached observer, looking in through a window, then you have a secular science—the kind that reeks of the occult to us. Or that may sound strange, because in your world people proclaiming sacred sciences are proclaiming the occult. But let me deal with that later. A sacred science does not try to understand objects as something that can be explained without reference to God. A sacred science is first and foremost about God, not about objects. When it understands objects, it understands them out of God, and tries to see God shining through them. A sacred science has its home base in the understanding of God, not of inanimate matter, and its understanding of things bears the imprint of God. If you want

THE NATURE OF ITS KNOWING IN AN IMAGE, DO NOT THINK OF SOMEONE looking in and observing, detached, through a window, but someone drinking something in."

"Is everything a sacred science to you? And what is a sacred science? Astrology?"

"Something like that, except that I use the term 'sacred science' by way of accommodation. Our own term is one that has no good translation in your language. But let us turn to the stars."

"Astrology is right in this: a star is more than a ball of plasma. Even in the Bible there is not always such a distinction between the ranks of angels and the stars as someone raised on materialist science might think." He rose, and began to walk, gesturing for Art to follow him. In the passage, they turned and entered a door. Oinos lit a lamp next to an icon on the wall.

The icon looked like starlight. It showed angels praying at the left, and then the studded sapphiric canopy of the night sky behind a land with herbs shooting from the earth, and on the right an immense Man—if he was a Man—standing, his hand raised in benediction. All around the sapphire dome were some majestic figures, soaring aloft in two of their six wings. Art paused to drink it in.

"What are those symbols?"

"They are Greek letters. You are looking at an icon of the creation of the stars, but the text is not the text for that day; it is from another book, telling of the angels thunderously shouting for joy when the stars were created. So the stars are connected with the angels."

"Is this astrology?"

"No, because the stars and angels both point to God. The influences in astrology point beyond matter to something else, but they do not point far enough beyond themselves. To say so is

but they do not point far enough beyond themselves. If you can use something to make a forecast that way, it doesn't point far enough beyond itself."

"Why not?"

"One definition to distinguish religion from magic—one used by anthropologists—is that religion is trying to come into contact with the divine, and magic is trying to control the divine. God cannot be controlled, and there is something of control in trying to foretell a future that God holds in mystery. A real God cannot be pried into by a skill. Astrology departs from a science that can only see stars as so much plasma, but it doesn't go far enough to lead people to look into the stars and see a shadow of their Creator. To be a sacred science, it is not enough to point to something more than matter as secular science understands it; as the term is used in our language, one can only be a sacred science by pointing to God."

"Then what is a sacred science? Which branches of learning as you break them up? Can they even be translated into my language?"

"You seem to think that if astrology is not a sacred science then sacred sciences must be something much more hidden. Not so. Farming is a sacred science, as is hunting, or inventing, or writing. When a monk makes incense, it is not about how much incense he can make per unit of time; his making incense is the active part of living contemplatively, and his prayer shows itself in physical labor. His act is more than material production; it is a sacred science, or sacred art or sacred endeavor, and what goes into and what comes out of the activity is prayer. Nor is it simply a matter that he is praying while he acts; his prayers matter for the incense. There are many lands from your world's Desert Fathers to Mexico in your own day where people have a sense that it matters what state people cook in, and that cooking with

that it matters what state people cook in, and that cooking with love puts something into a dish that no money can buy. Perhaps you will not look at me askance when I say that not only monks in their monasteries exotically making incense for worship are performing a sacred science, but cooking, for people who may be low on the totem pole and who are not considered exotic, as much as for anyone else, can and should be a sacred science. Like the great work that will stay up with a sick child all night."

"Hmm..." Art said, and then finished his tankard. "Have you traveled much?"

"I have not reached one in five of the galaxies with inhabited worlds. I can introduce you to people who have some traveling experience, but I am not an experienced traveler. Still, I have met sites worth visiting. I have met, learned, worshiped. Traveling in this castle I have drunk the blood of gems. There are worlds where there is nothing to see, for all is music, and song does everything that words do for you. I have beheld a star as it formed, and I have been part of an invention that moves forward as a thousand races in their laboratories add their devices. I have read books, and what is more I have spoken with members of different worlds and races. There seems to be no shortage of wonders, and I have even been to your own world, with people who write fantasy that continues to astonish us—"

"My son-in-law is big into fantasy—he got me to see a Lord of the whatever-it-was movie—but I don't fancy them much myself."

"We know about Tolkein, but he is not considered a source of astonishing fantasy to us."

"Um..." Art took a long time to recall a name, and Oinos waited patiently. "Lewis?"

"If you're looking for names you would have heard of, Voltaire and Turgenev are two of the fantasy authors we consider essential."

and Jung are two of the fantasy authors we consider essential. Tolkein and Lewis are merely imaginative. It is Voltaire and Jung who are truly fantasy authors. But there are innumerable others in your world."

Art said, "Um... what do you mean by 'fantasy author'?"

Oinos turned. "I'm sorry; there is a discrepancy between how your language uses 'fantasy author' and ours. We have two separate words that your 'fantasy' translates, and the words stand for very different concepts. One refers to works of imagination that are set in another world that is not confused with reality. The other refers to a fundamental confusion that can cost a terrible price. Our world does not produce fiction; we do appreciate the fiction of other worlds, but we do not draw a particularly strong line between fiction where only the characters and events are imagined, and fiction where the whole world is imagined. But we do pay considerable attention to the second kind of fantasy, and our study of fantasy authors is not a study of imagination but a study of works that lead people into unreality. 'Fantasy author' is one of the more important terms in understanding your world and its history."

Art failed to conceal his reaction.

"Or perhaps I was being too blunt. But, unfashionable as it may be, there is such a thing as evil in your world, and the ways in which people live, including what they believe, has something to do with it. Not everything, but something."

Oinos waited for a time. Then, when Art remained silent, he said, "Come with me. I have something to show you." He opened a door on the other side of the room, and went into the next room.

The room was lit by diffuse moonlight, and there was a ledge around the room and water which Oinos stirred with his hand to light a phosphorescent glow. When Art had stepped in, Oinos stepped up, balancing on a steel cable, and stood silent for a

stepped up, balancing on a steel cable, and stood silent for a while. "Is there anything here that you can focus on?"

"What do you mean?"

"Step up on this cable and take my hand."

"What if I fall into the water?"

Art tried to balance, but it seemed even more difficult in the dark. For a while, he tried to keep his balance with Oinos's help, but he seemed barely up. He overcompensated twice in opposite directions, began flying into the water, and was stopped at last by Oinos's grip, strong as steel, on his arm.

"I can't do this," Art said.

"Very well." Oinos opened a door on the other side of the room, and slowly led him out. As they walked, Oinos started up a spiral staircase and sat down to rest after Art reached the top. Then Art looked up at the sky, and down to see what looked like a telescope.

"What is it?"

"A telescope, not too different from those of your world."

Oinos stood up, looked at it, and began some adjustments. Then he called Art over, and said, "Do you see that body?"

"What is it?"

"A small moon."

Oinos said, "I want you to look at it as closely as you can," and then pulled something on the telescope.

"It's moving out of sight."

"That's right; I just deactivated the tracking feature. You should be able to feel handles; you can move the telescope with them."

"Why do I need to move the telescope? Is the moon moving?"

"This planet is rotating: what the telescope sees will change as it rotates with the planet, and on a telescope you can see the rotation."

rotation.

Art moved the handles and found that it seemed either not to move at all or else move a lot when he put pressure on it.

Art said, "This is a hard telescope to control."

Oinos said, "The telescope is worth controlling."

"Can you turn the tracking back on?"

Oinos merely repeated, "The telescope is worth controlling."

The celestial body had moved out of view. Art made several movements, barely passed over the moon, and then found it. He tried to see what he could, then give a relatively violent shove when the moon reached the edge of his field of view, and see if he could observe the body that way. After several tries, he began to get the object consistently in view... and found that he was seeing the same things about it, not being settled enough between jolts to really focus on what was there.

Art tried to make a smooth, slow movement with his body, and found that a much taller order than it sounded. His movement, which he could have sworn was gentle and smooth, produced what seemed like erratic movement, and it was only with greatest difficulty that he held the moon in view.

"Is this badly lubricated? Or do you have lubrication in this world?"

"We do, on some of our less precise machines. This telescope is massive, but it's not something that moves roughly when it is pushed smoothly; the joints move so smoothly that putting oil or other lubricants that are familiar to you would make them move much more roughly."

"Then why is it moving roughly every time I push it smoothly?"

"Maybe you aren't pushing it as smoothly as you think you are?"

Art pushed back his irritation, and then found the moon again. And found, to his dismay, that when the telescope jerked, he had

and found, to his dismay, that when the telescope jerked, he had moved the slightest amount unevenly.

Art pushed observation of the moon to the back of his mind. He wanted to move the telescope smoothly enough that he wouldn't have to keep finding the moon again. After a while, he found that this was less difficult than he thought, and tried for something harder: keeping the moon in the center of what he could see in the telescope.

He found, after a while, that he could keep the moon in the center if he tried, and for periods was able to manage something even harder: keeping the moon from moving, or perhaps just moving slowly. And then, after a time, he found himself concentrating through the telescope on taking in the beauty of the moon.

It was breathtaking, and Art later could never remember a time he had looked on something with quite that fascination.

Then Art realized he was exhausted, and began to sit down; Oinos pulled him to a bench.

After closing his eyes for a while, Art said, "This was a magnificent break from your teaching."

"A break from teaching? What would you mean?"

Art sat, opened his mouth, and then closed it. After a while, he said, "I was thinking about what you said about fantasy authors... do you think there is anything that can help?"

Oinos said, "Let me show you." He led Art into a long corridor with smooth walls and a round arch at top. A faint blue glow followed them, vanishing at the edges. Art said, "Do you think it will be long before our world has full artificial intelligence?"

Oinos said, "Hmm... Programming artificial intelligence on a computer is not that much more complex than getting a stone to lay an egg."

Art said "But our scientists are making progress. Your

... said, "But our scientists are making progress. Your advanced world has artificial intelligence, right?"

Oinos said, "Why on earth would we be able to do that? Why would that even be a goal?"

"You have computers, right?"

"Yes, indeed; the table that I used to call up a scientific calculator works on the same principle as your world's computers. I could almost say that inventing a new kind of computer is a rite of passage among serious inventors, or at least that's the closest term your world would have."

"And your computer science is pretty advanced, right? Much more advanced than ours?"

"We know things that the trajectory of computer science in your world will never reach because it is not pointed in the right direction." Oinos tapped the wall and arcs of pale blue light spun out.

"Then you should be well beyond the point of making artificial intelligence."

"Why on a million, million worlds should we ever be able to do that? Or even think that is something we could accomplish?"

"Well, if I can be obvious, the brain is a computer, and the mind is its software."

"Is it?"

"What else could the mind be?"

"What else could the mind be? What about an altar at which to worship? A workshop? A bridge between Heaven and earth, a meeting place where eternity meets time? A treasury in which to gather riches? A spark of divine fire? A line in a strong grid? A river, ever flowing, ever full? A tree reaching to Heaven while its roots grasp the earth? A mountain made immovable for the greatest storm? A home in which to live and a ship by which to sail? A constellation of stars? A temple that sanctifies the

...a constellation of stars? A temple that sanctifies the earth? A force to draw things in? A captain directing a starship or a voyager who can travel without? A diamond forged over aeons from of old? A perpetual motion machine that is simply impossible but functions anyway? A faithful manuscript by which an ancient book passes on? A showcase of holy icons? A mirror, clear or clouded? A wind which can never be pinned down? A haunting moment? A home with which to welcome others, and a mouth with which to kiss? A strand of a web? An acrobat balancing for his whole life long on a slender crystalline prism between two chasms? A protecting veil and a concealing mist? An eye to glimpse the uncreated Light as the world moves on its way? A rift yawning into the depths of the earth? A kairometer, both primeval and young? A—"

"All right, all right! I get the idea, and that's some pretty lovely poetry. (What's a kairometer?) These are all very beautiful metaphors for the mind, but I am interested in what the mind is literally."

"Then it might interest you to hear that your world's computer is also a metaphor for the mind. A good and poetic metaphor, perhaps, but a metaphor, and one that is better to balance with other complementary metaphors. It is the habit of some in your world to understand the human mind through the metaphor of the latest technology for you to be infatuated with.

Today, the mind is a computer, or something like that. Before you had the computer, 'You're just wired that way' because the brain or the mind or whatever is a wired-up telephone exchange, the telephone exchange being your previous object of technological infatuation, before the computer. Admittedly, 'the mind is a computer' is an attractive metaphor. But there is some fundamental confusion in taking that metaphor literally and

assuming that, since the mind is a computer, all you have to do is make some more progress with technology and research and you can give a computer an intelligent mind."

"I know that computers don't have emotions yet, but they seem to have rationality down cold."

"Do they?"

"Are you actually going to tell me that computers, with their math and logic, aren't rational?"

"Let me ask you a question. Would you say that the thing you can hold, a thing that you call a book, can make an argument?"

"Yes; I've seen some pretty good ones."

"Really? How do paper and ink think out their position?"

Art hesitated, and said, "Um, if you're going to nitpick..."

"I'm not nitpicking. A book is a tool of intelligent communication, and they are part of how people read author's stories, or explanation of how to do things, or poetry, or ideas. But the physical thing is not thereby intelligent. However much you think of a book as making an argument, the book is incapable of knowing what an argument is, and for that matter the paper and ink have no idea of whether they contain the world's best classic, or something mediocre, or incoherent accusations that world leaders are secretly planning to turn your world to dog drool, or randomly generated material that is absolute gibberish. The book may be meaningful to you, but the paper with ink on it is not the sort of thing that can understand what you recognize through the book.

"This might ordinarily be nitpicking, but it says something important about computers. One of the most difficult things for computer science instructors in your world to pound through people's heads is that a computer does not get the gist of what you are asking it to do and overlook minor mistakes, because the

computer has no sense of what you are doing and no way to discern what were trying to get it to do from a mistake where you wrote in a bug by telling it to do something slightly different from what you meant. The computer has no sense that a programmer meant anything. A computer follows instructions, one after another, whether or not they make sense, and indeed without being able to wonder whether they make sense. To you, a program may be a tool that acts as an electronic shopping cart to let you order things through the web, but the web server no more understands that it is being used as a web server than a humor book understands that it is meant to make people laugh. Now most or all of the books you see are meant to say something —there's not much market for a paperback volume filled with random gibberish—but a computer can't understand that it is running a program written for a purpose any more than a book can understand that the ink on its pages is intended for people to read."

Art said, "You don't think artificial intelligence is making real progress? They seem to keep making new achievements."

Oinos said, "The rhetoric of 'We're making real breakthroughs now; we're on the verge of full artificial intelligence, and with what we're achieving, full artificial intelligence is just around the corner' is not new: people have been saying that full artificial intelligence is just around the corner since before you were born. But breeding a better and better kind of apple tree is not progress towards growing oranges. Computer science, and not just artificial intelligence, has gotten good at getting computers to function better as computers. But human intelligence is something else... and it is profoundly missing the point to only realize that the computer is missing a crucial ingredient of the most computer-like activity of

human rational analysis. Even if asking a computer to recognize a program's purpose reflects a fundamental error—you're barking up the wrong telephone pole. Some people from your world say that when you have a hammer, everything begins to look like a nail. The most interesting thing about the mind is not that it can do something more complete when it pounds in computer-style nails. It's something else entirely."

"But what?"

"When things are going well, the 'computer' that performs calculating analysis is like your moon: a satellite, that reflects light from something greater. Its light is useful, but there is something more to be had. The sun, as it were, is that the mind is like an altar, or even something better. It takes long struggles and work, but you need to understand that the heart of the mind is at once practical and spiritual, and that its greatest fruit comes not in speech but in silence."

Art was silent for a long time.

Oinos stopped, tapped a wall once, and waited as an opening appeared in the black stone. Inside an alcove was a small piece of rough hewn obsidian; Oinos reached in, took it, and turned it to reveal another side, finely machined, with a series of concentric ridged grooves centered around a tiny niche. "You asked what a kairometer was, and this is a kairometer, although it would take you some time to understand exactly what it is."

"Is it one of the other types of computers in your world?"

"Yes. I would call it information technology, although not like the information technology you know. It is something people come back to, something by which people get something more than they had, but it does this not so much according to its current state as to our state in the moment we are using it. It does not change." Oinos placed the object in Art's hands.

Art slowly turned it. "Will our world have anything like this?" Oinos took the kairometer back and returned it to its niche; when he withdrew his hand, the opening closed with a faint whine. "I will leave you to find that yourself."

Oinos began walking, and they soon reached the end of the corridor. Art followed Oinos through the doorway at the end and gasped.

Through the doorway was something that left Art trying to figure out whether or not it was a room. It was a massive place, lit by a crystalline blue light. As Art looked around, he began to make sense of his surroundings: there were some bright things, lower down, in an immense room with rounded arches and a dome at the top, made of pure glass. Starlight streamed in. Art stepped through the doorway and sunk down a couple of inches.

Oinos stooped for a moment, and then said, "Take off your shoes. They are not needed here." Art did so, and found that he was walking on a floor of velveteen softness. In the far heart of the room a thin plume of smoke arose. Art could not tell whether he smelled a fragrance, but he realized there was a piercing chant. Art asked, "What is the chant saying?"

Oinos did not answer.

What was the occasion? Art continued to look, to listen, and began trying to drink it in. It almost sounded as if they were preparing to receive a person of considerable importance. There was majesty in the air.

Oinos seemed to have slipped away.

Art turned and saw an icon behind him, hanging on the glass. There was something about it he couldn't describe. The icon was dark, and the colors were bright, almost luminous. A man lay dreaming at the bottom, and something reached up to a light hidden in the clouds—was it a ladder? Art told himself the

artistic effect was impressive, but there was something that seemed amiss in that way of looking at it.

What bothered him about saying the icon had good artistic effect? Was the artistry bad? That didn't seem to be it. He looked at a couple of areas of artistic technique, but it was difficult to do so; such analysis felt like a foreign intrusion. He thought about his mood, but that seemed to be the wrong place to look, and almost the same kind of intrusion. There seemed to be something shining through the icon; looking at it was like other things he had done in this world, only moreso. He was looking through the icon and not around it, but... Art had some sense of what it was, but it was not something he could fit into words.

After being absorbed in the icon, Art looked around. There must have been hundreds of icons around, and lights, and people; he saw what seemed like a sparse number of people—of Oinos's kind—spread out through the vast space. There was a chant of some kind that changed from time to time, but seemed to somehow be part of the same flow. Things seemed to move very slowly—or move in a different time, as if clock time were turned on its side, or perhaps as if he had known clock time as it was turned on its side and now it was right side up—but Art never had the sense of nothing going on. There seemed to always be something more going on than he could grasp.

Art shifted about, having stood for what seemed like too long, sat down for a time, and stood up. The place seemed chaotic, in a way cluttered, yet when he looked at the "clutter," there was something shining through, clean as ice, majestic as starlight, resonant as silence, full of life as the power beneath the surface of a river, and ordered with an order that no rectangular grid could match. He did not understand any of the

details of the brilliant dazzling darkness... but they spoke to him  
none the less.

After long hours of listening to the chant, Art realized with a start that the fingers of dawn had stolen all around him, and he saw stone and verdant forest about the glass walls until the sunlight began to blaze. He thought, he thought he could understand the song even as its words remained beyond his reach, and he wished the light would grow stronger so he could see more. There was a crescendo all about him, and—

Oinos was before him. Perhaps for some time.

"I almost understand it," Art said. "I have started to taste  
this world."

Oinos bowed deeply. "It is time for you to leave."

# A Wonderful Life

Peter never imagined that smashing his thumb in a car door would be the best thing to ever happened to him. But suddenly his plans to move in to the dorm were changed, and he waited a long time at the hospital before finally returning to the dorm and moving in.

Peter arrived for the second time well after check-in time, praying to be able to get in. After a few phone calls, a security officer came in, expressed sympathy about his bandaged thumb, and let him up to his room. The family moved his possessions from the car to his room and made his bed in a few minutes, and by the time it was down, the security guard had called the RA, who brought Peter his keys.

It was the wee hours of the morning when Peter looked at his new home for the second time, and tough as Peter was, the pain in his thumb kept him from falling asleep. He was in as much pain as he'd been in for a while.

He awoke when the light was ebbing, and after some preparations set out, wandering until he found the cafeteria. The pain seemed much when he sat down at a table. (It took him a while to find a seat because the cafeteria was crowded.)

A young man said, "Hi, I'm John." Peter began to extend his hand, then looked at his white bandaged thumb and said, "Excuse me for not shaking your hand. I am Peter."

A young woman said, "I'm Mary. I saw you earlier and was hoping to see you more."

Peter wondered about something, then said, "I'll drink for that," reached with his right hand, grabbed a glass of soda, and then winced in pain, spilling his drink on the table.

Everybody at the table moved. A couple of people dodged the flow of liquid; others stopped what they were doing, rushing to mop up the spill with napkins. Peter said, "I keep forgetting I need to be careful about my thumb," smiled, grabbed his glass of milk, and slipped again, spilling milk all over his food.

Peter stopped, sat back, and then laughed for a while. "This is an interesting beginning to my college education."

Mary said, "I noticed you managed to smash your thumb in a car door without saying any words you regret. What else has happened?"

Peter said, "Nothing great; I had to go to the ER, where I had to wait, before they could do something about my throbbing thumb. I got back at 4:00 AM and couldn't get to sleep for a long time because I was in so much pain. Then I overslept my alarm and woke up naturally in time for dinner. How about you?"

Mary thought for a second about the people she met. Peter could see the sympathy on her face.

John said, "Wow. That's nasty."

Peter said, "I wish we couldn't feel pain. Have you thought about how nice it would be to live without pain?"

Mary said, "I'd like that."

John said, "Um..."

Mary said, "What?"

John said, "Actually, there are people who don't feel pain, and there's a name for the condition. You've heard of it."

Peter said. "I haven't heard of that before."

John said, "Yes you have. It's called leprosy."

Peter said, "What do you mean by 'leprosy'? I thought leprosy was a disease that ravaged the body."

John said, "It is. But that is only because it destroys the ability to feel pain. The way it works is very simple. We all get little nicks and scratches, and because they hurt, we show extra sensitivity. Our feet start to hurt after a long walk, so without even thinking about it we... shift things a little, and keep anything really bad from happening. That pain you are feeling is your body's way of asking room to heal so that the smashed thumbnail (or whatever it is) that hurts so terribly now won't leave you permanently maimed. Back to feet, a leprosy patient will walk exactly the same way and get wounds we'd never even think of for taking a long walk. All the terrible injuries that make leprosy a feared disease happen only because leprosy keeps people from feeling pain."

Peter looked at his thumb, and his stomach growled.

John said, "I'm full. Let me get a drink for you, and then I'll help you drink it."

Mary said, "And I'll get you some dry food. We've already eaten; it must—"

Peter said, "Please, I've survived much worse. It's just a bit of pain."

John picked up a clump of wet napkins and threatened to throw it at Peter before standing up and walking to get something to drink. Mary followed him.

Peter sat back and just laughed.

John said, "We have some time free after dinner; let's just wander around campus."

They left the glass roofed building and began walking around, enjoying the grass and the scenery.

After some wandering, Peter and those he had just met looked at the castle-like Blanchard Hall, each one transported in his imagination to be in a more ancient era, and walked around the campus, looked at a fountain, listened to some music, and looked at a display of a giant mastodon which had died before the end of the last ice age, and whose bones had been unearthed in a nearby excavation. They got lost, but this was not a terrible concern; they were taking in the campus.

Their slow walk was interrupted when John looked at his watch and realized it was time for the "floor fellowship." and orientation games.

Between orientation games, Peter heard bits of conversation: "This has been a bummer; I've gotten two papercuts this week." "—and then I—" "What instruments do you—" "I'm from France too! Tu viens de Paris?" "Really? You—" Everybody seemed to be chattering, and Peter wished he could be in one of—actually, several of those conversations at once.

Paul's voice cut in and said, "For this next activity we are going to form a human circle. With your team, stand in a circle, and everybody reach in and grab another hand with each hand.

Then hold on tight; when I say, "Go," you want to untangle yourselves, without letting go. The first team to untangle themselves wins!"

Peter reached in, and found each of his hands clasped in a solid, masculine grip. Then the race began, and people jostled and tried to untangle themselves. This was a laborious process and, one by one, every other group freed itself, while Peter's group seemed stuck on—someone called and said, "I think we're knotted!" As people began to thin out, Paul looked with astonishment and saw that they were indeed knotted. "A special prize to them, too, for managing the best tangle!"

"And now, we'll have a three-legged race! Gather into pairs, and each two of you take a burlap sack. Then—" Paul continued, and with every game, the talk seemed to flow more. When the finale finished, Peter found himself again with John and Mary and heard the conversations flowing around him: "Really? You too?" "But you don't understand. Hicks have a slower pace of life; we enjoy things without all the things you city dwellers need for entertainment. And we learn resourceful ways to—" "—and only at Wheaton would the administration forbid dancing while requiring the games we just played and—" Then Peter lost himself in a conversation that continued long into the night. He expected to be up at night thinking about all the beloved people he left at home, but Peter was too busy thinking about John's and Mary's stories.

The next day Peter woke up his to the hideous sound of his alarm clock, and groggily trudged to the dining hall for coffee, and searched for his advisor.

Peter found the appropriate hallway, wandered around nervously until he found a door with a yellowed plaque that said "Julian Johnson," knocked once, and pushed the door open. A white-haired man said, "Peter Jones? How are you? Do come in... What can I do for you?"

Peter pulled out a sheet of paper, looked down at it for a moment and said, "I'm sorry I'm late. I need you to write what courses I should take and sign here. Then I can be out of your way."

The old man sat back, drew a deep breath, and relaxed into a fatherly smile. Peter began to wonder if his advisor was going to say anything at all. Then Prof. Johnson motioned towards an armchair, as rich and luxurious as his own, and then looked as if he remembered something and offered a bowl full of candy. "Sit

down, sit down, and make yourself comfortable. May I interest you in candy?" He picked up an engraved metal bowl and held it out while Peter grabbed a few Lifesavers.

Prof. Johnson sat back, silent for a moment, and said, "I'm sorry I'm out of butterscotch; that always seems to disappear. Please sit down, and tell me about yourself. We can get to that form in a minute. One of the privileges of this job is that I get to meet interesting people. Now, where are you from?"

Peter said, "I'm afraid there's not much that's interesting about me. I'm from a small town downstate that doesn't have anything to distinguish itself. My amusements have been reading, watching the cycle of the year, oh, and running. Not much interesting in that. Now which classes should I take?"

Prof. Johnson sat back and smiled, and Peter became a little less tense. "You run?"

Peter said, "Yes; I was hoping to run on the track this afternoon, after the lecture. I've always wanted to run on a real track."

The old man said, "You know, I used to run myself, before I became an official Old Geezer and my orthopaedist told me my knees couldn't take it. So I have to content myself with swimming now, which I've grown to love. Do you know about the Prairie Path?"

Peter said, "No, what's that?"

Prof. Johnson said, "Years ago, when I ran, I ran through the areas surrounding the College—there are a lot of beautiful houses. And, just south of the train tracks with the train you can hear now, there's a path before you even hit the street. You can run, or bike, or walk, on a path covered with fine white gravel, with trees and prairie plants on either side. It's a lovely view."

He paused, and said, "Any ideas what you want to do after

Wheaton?"

Peter said, "No. I don't even know what I want to major in."

Prof. Johnson said, "A lot of students don't know what they want to do. Are you familiar with Career Services? They can help you get an idea of what kinds of things you like to do."

Peter looked at his watch and said, "It's chapel time."

Prof. Johnson said, "Relax. I can write you a note." Peter began to relax again, and Prof. Johnson continued, "Now you like to read. What do you like to read?"

Peter said, "Newspapers and magazines, and I read this really cool book called *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Oh, and I like the Bible."

Prof. Johnson said, "I do too. What do you like about it most?"

"I like the stories in the Old Testament."

"One general tip: here at Wheaton, we have different kinds of professors—"

Peter said, "Which ones are best?"

Prof. Johnson said, "Different professors are best for different students. Throughout your tenure at Wheaton, ask your friends and learn which professors have teaching styles that you learn well with and mesh well with. Consider taking other courses from a professor you like. Now we have a lot of courses which we think expose you to new things and stretch you—people come back and see that these courses are best. Do you like science?"

"I like it; I especially liked a physics lab."

Prof. Johnson began to flip through the course catalogue. "Have you had calculus?" Prof. Johnson's mind wandered over the differences between from the grand, Utopian vision for "calculus" as it was first imagined and how different a conception

it had from anything that would be considered "mathematics" today. Or should he go into that? He wavered, and then realized Peter had answered his question. "Ok," Prof. Johnson said, "the lab physics class unfortunately requires that you've had calculus. Would you like to take calculus now? Have you had geometry, algebra, and trigonometry?"

Peter said, "Yes, I did, but I'd like a little break from that now. Maybe I could take calculus next semester."

"Fair enough. You said you liked to read."

"Magazines and newspapers."

"Those things deal with the unfolding human story. I wonder if you'd like to take world civilization now, or a political science course."

"History, but why study world history? Why can't I just study U.S. history?"

Prof. Johnson said, "The story of our country is intertwined with that of our world. I think you might find that some of the things in world history are a lot closer to home than you think—and we have some real storytellers in our history department."

"That sounds interesting. What else?"

"The Theology of Culture class is one many students find enjoyable, and it helps build a foundation for Old and New Testament courses. Would you be interested in taking it for A quad or B quad, the first or second half of the semester?"

"Could I do both?"

"I wish I could say yes, but this course only lasts half the semester. The other half you could take Foundations of Wellness—you could do running as homework!"

"I think I'll do that first, and then Theology of Culture. That should be new," Peter said, oblivious to how tightly connected he was to theology and culture. "What else?"

Prof. Johnson said, "We have classes where people read things that a lot of people have found really interesting. Well, that could describe several classes, but I was thinking about Classics of Western Literature or Literature of the Modern World."

Peter said, "Um... Does Classics of Western Literature cover ancient and medieval literature, and Literature of the Modern World cover literature that isn't Western? Because if they do, I'm not sure I could connect with it."

Prof. Johnson relaxed into his seat. "You know, a lot of people think that. But you know what?"

Peter said, "What?"

"There is something human that crosses cultures. That is why the stories have been selected. Stories written long ago, and stories written far away, can have a lot to connect with."

"Ok. How many more courses should I take?"

"You're at 11 credits now; you probably want 15. Now you said that you like Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. I'm wondering if you would also like a philosophy course."

Peter said, "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance is... I don't suppose there are any classes that use that. Or are there?"

I've heard Pirsig isn't given his fair due by philosophers."

Prof. Johnson said, "If you approach one of our philosophy courses the way you approach Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, I think you'll profit from the encounter. I wonder if our Issues and Worldviews in Philosophy might interest you. I'm a big fan of thinking worldviewishly, and our philosophers have some pretty interesting things to say."

Peter asked, "What does 'worldviewishly' mean?"

Prof. Johnson searched for an appropriate simplification. "It means thinking in terms of worldviews. A worldview is the basic

philosophical framework that gives shape to how we view the world. Our philosophers will be able to help you understand the basic issues surrounding worldviews and craft your own Christian worldview. You may find this frees you from the Enlightenment's secularizing influence—and if you don't know what the Enlightenment is now, you will learn to understand it, and its problems, and how you can be somewhat freer of its chain."

Peter said, "Ok. Well, I'll take those classes. It was good to meet you."

Prof. Johnson looked at the class schedule and helped Peter choose class sections, then said, "I enjoyed talking with you. Please do take some more candy—put a handful in your pocket or something. I just want to make one more closing comment. I want to see you succeed. Wheaton wants to see you succeed. There are some rough points and problems along the way, and if you bring them to me I can work with them and try to help you. If you want to talk with your RA or our chaplain or someone else, that's fine, but please... my door is always open. And it was good to meet you too! Goodbye!"

Peter walked out, completely relaxed, and was soon to be energized in a scavenger hunt searching for things from a dog biscuit to a car bumper to a burning sheet of paper not lit by someone in his group, before again relaxing into the "brother-sister floor fellowship" which combined mediocre "7-11 praise songs" (so called because they have "7 words, repeated 11 times") with the light of another world shining through.

It was not long before the opening activities wound down and Peter began to settle into a regular routine.

Peter and Mary both loved to run, but for different reasons. Peter was training himself for various races; he had not joined track, as he did in high school, but there were other races. Mary

ran to feel the sun and wind and rain. And, without any conscious effort, they found themselves running together down the prairie path together, and Peter clumsily learning to match his speed to hers. And, as time passed, they talked, and talked, and talked, and talked, and their runs grew longer.

When the fall break came, they both joined a group going to the northwoods of Wisconsin for a program that was half-work and half-play. And each one wrote a letter home about the other. Then Peter began his theology of culture class, and said, "This is what I want to study." Mary did not have a favorite class, at least not that she realized, until Peter asked her what her favorite class was and she said, "Literature."

When Christmas came, they went to their respective homes and spent the break thinking about each other, and they talked about this when they returned. They ended the conversation, or at least they thought they did, and then each hurried back to catch the other and say one more thing, and then the conversation turned out to last much longer, and ended with a kiss.

Valentine's Day was syrupy. It was trite enough that their more romantically inclined friends groaned, but it did not seem at all trite or syrupy to them. As Peter's last name was Patrick, he called Mary's father and prayed that St. Patrick's Day would be a momentous day for both of them.

Peter and Mary took a slow run to a nearby village, and had dinner at an Irish pub. Amidst the din, they had some hearty laughs. The waitress asked Mary, "Is there anything else that would make this night memorable?" Then Mary saw Peter on his knee, opening a jewelry box with a ring: "I love you, Mary. Will you marry me?"

Mary cried for a good five minutes before she could answer.

And when she had answered, they sat in silence, a silence that overpowered the din. Then Mary wiped her eyes and they went outside.

It was cool outside, and the moon was shining brightly. Peter pulled a camera from his pocket, and said, "Stay where you are. Let me back up a bit. And hold your hand up. You look even more beautiful with that ring on your finger."

Peter's camera flashed as he took a picture, just as a drunk driver slammed into Mary. The sedan spun into a storefront, and Mary flew up into the air, landed, and broke a beer bottle with her face.

People began to come out, and in a few minutes the police and paramedics arrived. Peter somehow managed to answer the police officers' questions and to begin kicking himself for being too stunned to act.

When Peter left his room the next day, he looked for Prof. Johnson. Prof. Johnson asked, "May I give you a hug?" and then sat there, simply being with Peter in his pain. When Peter left, Prof. Johnson said, "I'm not just here for academics. I'm here for you." Peter went to chapel and his classes, feeling a burning rage that almost nothing could pierce. He kept going to the hospital, and watching Mary with casts on both legs and one arm, and many tiny stitches on her face, fluttering on the borders of consciousness. One time Prof. Johnson came to visit, and he said, "I can't finish my classes." Prof. Johnson looked at him and said, "The college will give you a full refund." Peter said, "Do you know of any way I can stay here to be with Mary?" Prof. Johnson said, "You can stay with me. And I believe a position with UPS would let you get some income, doing something physical. The position is open for you." Prof. Johnson didn't mention the calls he'd made, and Peter didn't think about them. He simply said, "Thank you."

A few days later, Mary began to be weakly conscious. Peter finally asked a nurse, "Why are there so many stitches on her face? Was she cut even more badly than—"

The nurse said, "There are a lot of stitches very close together because the emergency room had a cosmetic surgeon on duty. There will still be a permanent mark on her face, but some of the wound will heal without a scar."

Mary moved the left half of her mouth in half a smile. Peter said, "That was a kind of cute smile. How come she can smile like that?"

The nurse said, "One of the pieces of broken glass cut a nerve. It is unlikely she'll ever be able to move part of her face again."

Peter looked and touched Mary's hand. "I still think it's really quite cute."

Mary looked at him, and then passed out.

Peter spent a long couple of days training and attending to practical details. Then he came back to Mary.

Mary looked at Peter, and said, "It's a Monday. Don't you have classes now?"

Peter said, "No."

Mary said, "Why not?"

Peter said, "I want to be here with you."

Mary said, "I talked with one of the nurses, and she said that you dropped out of school so you could be with me.

"Is that true?" she said.

Peter said, "I hadn't really thought about it that way."

Mary closed her eyes, and when Peter started to leave because he decided she wanted to be left alone, she said, "Stop.

Come here."

Peter came to her bedside and knelt.

Mary said, "Take this ring off my finger."

Peter said, "Is it hurting you?"

Mary said, "No, and it is the greatest treasure I own. Take it off and take it back."

Peter looked at her, bewildered. "Do you not want to marry me?"

Mary said, "This may sting me less because I don't remember our engagement. I don't remember anything that happened near that time; I have only the stories others, even the nurses, tell me about a man who loves me very much."

Peter said, "But don't you love me?"

Mary forced back tears. "Yes, I love you, yes, I love you. And I know that you love me. You are young and strong, and have the love to make a happy marriage. You'll make some woman a very good husband. I thought that woman would be me.

"But I can see what you will not. You said I was beautiful, and I was. Do you know what my prognosis is? I will probably be able to stand. At least for short periods of time. If I'm fortunate, I may walk. With a walker. I will never be able to run again—Peter, I am nobody, and I have no future. Absolutely nobody. You are young and strong. Go and find a woman who is worth your love."

Mary and Peter both cried for a long time. Then Peter walked out, and paused in the doorway, crying. He felt torn inside, and then went in to say a couple of things to Mary. He said, "I believe in miracles."

Then Mary cried, and Peter said something else I'm not going to repeat. Mary said something. Then another conversation began.

The conversation ended with Mary saying, "You're stupid, Peter. You're really, really stupid. I love you. I don't deserve such love. You're making a mistake. I love you." Then Peter went

to kiss Mary, and as he bent down, he bent his mouth to meet the lips that he still saw as "really quite cute."

The stress did not stop. The physical therapists, after time, wondered that Mary had so much fight in her. But it stressed her, and Peter did his job without liking it. Mary and Peter quarreled and made up and quarreled and made up. Peter prayed for a miracle when they made up and sometimes when they quarreled. Were this not enough stress, there was an agonizingly long trial—and knowing that the drunk driver was behind bars didn't make things better. But Mary very slowly learned to walk again. After six months, if Peter helped her, she could walk 100 yards before the pain became too great to continue.

Peter hadn't been noticing that the stress diminished, but he did become aware of something he couldn't put his finger on. After a night of struggling, he got up, went to church, and was floored by the Bible reading of, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." and the idea that when you do or do not visit someone in prison, you are visiting or refusing to visit Christ. Peter absently went home, tried to think about other things, made several phone calls, and then forced himself to drive to one and only one prison.

He stopped in the parking lot, almost threw up, and then steeled himself to go inside. He found a man, Jacob, and... Jacob didn't know who Peter was, but he recognized him as looking familiar. It was an awkward meeting. Then he recognized him as the man whose now wife he had crippled. When Peter left, he vomited and felt like a failure. He talked about it with Mary...

That was the beginning of a friendship. Peter chose to love the man in prison, even if there was no pleasure in it. And that created something deeper than pleasure, something Peter

couldn't explain.

As Peter and Mary were planning the wedding, Mary said, "I want to enter with Peter next to me, no matter what the tradition says. It will be a miracle if I have the strength to stand for the whole wedding, and if I have to lean on someone I want it to be Peter. And I don't want to sit on a chair; I would rather spend my wedding night wracked by pain than go through my wedding supported by something lifeless!"

When the rehearsal came, Mary stood, and the others winced at the pain in her face. And she stood, and walked, for the entire rehearsal without touching Peter once. Then she said, "I can do it. I can go through the wedding on my own strength," and collapsed in pain.

At the wedding, she stood next to Peter, walking, her face so radiant with joy that some of the guests did not guess she was in exquisite pain. They walked next to each other, not touching, and Mary slowed down and stopped in the center of the church.

Peter looked at her, wondering what Mary was doing.

Then Mary's arm shot around Peter's neck, and Peter stood startled for a moment before he placed his arm around her, squeezed her tightly, and they walked together to the altar.

On the honeymoon, Mary told Peter, "You are the only person I need." This was the greatest bliss either of them had known, and the honeymoon's glow shined and shined.

Peter and Mary agreed to move somewhere less expensive to settle down, and were too absorbed in their wedded bliss and each other to remember promises they had made earlier, promises to seek a church community for support and friends.

And Peter continued working at an unglamorous job, and Mary continued fighting to walk and considered the housework she was capable of doing a badge of honor, and neither of them noticed

that the words, "I love you" were spoken ever so slightly less frequently, nor did they the venom and ice creeping into their words.

One night they exploded. What they fought about was not important. What was important was that Peter left, burning with rage. He drove, and drove, until he reached Wheaton, and at daybreak knocked on Prof. Johnson's door. There was anger in his voice when he asked, "Are you still my friend?"

Prof. Johnson got him something to eat and stayed with him when he fumed with rage, and said, "I don't care if I'm supposed to be with her, I can't go back!" Then Prof. Johnson said, "Will you make an agreement with me? I promise you I won't ever tell you to go back to her, or accept her, or accept what she does, or apologize to her, or forgive her, or in any way be reconciled. But I need you to trust me that I love you and will help you decide what is best to do."

Peter said, "Yes."

Prof. Johnson said, "Then stay with me. You need some rest. Take the day to rest. There's food in the fridge, and I have books and a nice back yard. There's iced tea in the—excuse me, there's Coke and 7 Up in the boxes next to the fridge. When I can come back, we can talk."

Peter relaxed, and he felt better. He told Prof. Johnson. Prof. Johnson said, "That's excellent. What I'd like you to do next is go in to work, with a lawyer I know. You can tell him what's going on, and he'll lead you to a courtroom to observe."

Peter went away to court the next day, and when he came back he was ashen. He said nothing to Prof. Johnson.

Then, after the next day, he came back looking even more disturbed. "The first day, the lawyer, George, took me into divorce court. I thought I saw the worst that divorce court

could get. Until I came back today. It was the same—this sickening scene where two people had become the most bitter enemies. I hope it doesn't come to this. This was atrocious. It was vile. It was more than vile. It was—"

Prof. Johnson sent him back for a third day. This time Peter said nothing besides, "I think I've been making a mistake."

After the fourth day, Peter said, "Help me! I've been making the biggest mistake of my life!"

After a full week had passed, Peter said, "Please, I beg you, don't send me back there."

Prof. Johnson sent Peter back to watch a divorce court for one more miserable, excruciating day. Then he said, "Now you can do whatever you want. What do you want to do?"

The conflict between Peter and Mary ended the next day.

Peter went home, begging Mary for forgiveness, and no sooner than he had begun his apology, a thousand things were reflected in Mary's face and she begged his forgiveness. Then they talked, and debated whether to go back to Wheaton, or stay where they were. Finally Mary said, "I really want to go back to Wheaton."

Peter began to shyly approach old friends. He later misquoted: "I came crawling with a thimble in the desperate hope that they'd give a few tiny drops of friendship and love. Had I known how they would respond, I would have come running with a bucket!"

Peter and Mary lived together for many years; they had many children and were supported by many friends.

The years passed and Peter and Mary grew into a blissfully happy marriage. Mary came to have increasing health problems as a result of the accident, and those around them were amazed at how their love had transformed the suffering the accident

created in both of their lives. At least those who knew them best saw the transformation. There were many others who could only see their happiness as a mirage.

As the years passed, Jacob grew to be a good friend. And when Peter began to be concerned that his wife might be... Jacob had also grown wealthy, very wealthy, and assembled a top-flight legal team (without taking a dime of Peter's money—over Peter's protests, of course), to prevent what the doctors would normally do in such a case, given recent shifts in the medical system.

And then Mary's health grew worse, much worse, and her suffering grew worse with it, and pain medications seemed to be having less and less effect. Those who didn't know Mary were astonished that someone in so much pain could enjoy life so much, nor the hours they spent gazing into each other's eyes, holding hands, when Mary's pain seemed to vanish. A second medical opinion, and a third, and a fourth, confirmed that Mary had little chance of recovery even to her more recent state. And whatever measures been taken, whatever testimony Peter and Mary could give about the joy of their lives, the court's decision still came:

The court wishes to briefly review the facts of the case. Subject is suffering increasingly severe effects from an injury that curtailed her life greatly as a young person. from which she has never recovered, and is causing increasingly complications now that she will never again have youth's ability to heal. No fewer than four medical opinions admitted as expert testimony substantially agree that subject is in extraordinary and excruciating pain; that said excruciating pain is increasing; that said excruciating pain is increasingly unresponsive to medication; that subject has fully lost

unresponsive to medication, that subject has fully lost autonomy and is dependent on her husband; that this dependence is profound, without choice, and causes her husband to be dependent without choice on others and exercise little autonomy; and the prognosis is only of progressively worse deterioration and increase in pain, with no question of recovery.

The court finds it entirely understandable that the subject, who has gone through such trauma, and is suffering increasingly severe complications, would be in a state of some denial. Although a number of positions could be taken, the court also finds it understandable that a husband would try to maintain a hold on what cannot exist, and needlessly prolong his wife's suffering. It is not, however, the court's position to judge whether this is selfish...

For all the impressive-sounding arguments that have been mounted, the court cannot accord a traumatized patient or her ostensibly well-meaning husband a privilege that the court itself does not claim. The court does not find that it has an interest in allowing this woman to continue in her severe and worsening state of suffering.

Peter was at her side, holding her hand and looking into his wife's eyes, The hospital doctor had come. Then Peter said, "I love you," and Mary said, "I love you," and they kissed.

Mary's kiss was still burning on Peter's lips when two nurses hooked Mary up to an IV and injected her with 5000 milligrams of sodium thiopental, then a saline flush followed by 100 milligrams of pancurium bromide, then a saline flush and 20 milligrams of potassium chloride.

A year later to the day, Peter died of a broken heart.

# **A Yoke that is Easy and a Burden that is Light**

O Lord, who hast said with thine own most pure lips, Without me you can do nothing, and My yoke is easy, and my burden is light, grant to me fortitude to cast down the iron yoke of passions which thou willest to work in me to destroy. Grant me courage and trust to accept the yoke that is easy and the burden that is light, like the birds of the air, like unto the lilies of the field, where even Solomon in all his glory mighteth not make a yoke strong enough to, overpowering, subdue.

Grant unto me a calm no storm hath shaken: or rather, grant me that peace wherein thou calledst forth, Peace! Be still! And if I be in fear after thou hast commanded so, let it be no more fear of wind and wave, but a terror of wonder at thou thyself, to whom all things in life must needs answer.

Free me from making iron yokes in my lack of trust, in my laziness. Free me to take on thy yoke thou it beseemeth madness and do thou break into pieces the idolatrous iron yoke I have tied to my back and not lifted a finger to release. Forgive my doubts. my lack of faith. my seeking a sovereign lordship and

control over the circumstances of my life. Give me easy circumstances, if thou wilt, or hard, and in either let me find a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light. Save me from trying to make a light yoke out of iron; do thou Carpenter, who hath never created an iron yoke, free me from my flight to escape the easy yoke and light burden which thou preparedst for me before the world was created, and ever summonest me to, whatever my fugue by which I flee from thy weal.

Do thou grant me this, together with thy Father of all Providence, and thine all-holy, ever-present, and life, bestowing Spirit. Amen.

# **Work-Mystic**

*Gentle Reader;*

**An intriguing book...**  
*found in questionable  
quarters*

I have found a watershed moment after a friend gave me a copy of Elder Thaddeus's [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#). I don't know that everybody will have a watershed moment; perhaps others will understand its central point much more naturally than I do. But I am very grateful to be given the book.

Before going further, and talking about "work-mysticism", there are some hesitancies I would like to mention. And I really don't know how to say this with due kindness and courtesy to fans of Fr. Seraphim (Rose), including one dearly loved member of my parish.

[Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) bears the "warning label" of the St. Herman of Alaska brotherhood Fr. Seraphim started. Let me blandly state that I have associated Fr. Seraphim's following with some harassment, and it has resonated with others when I've said Fr. Seraphim's following "tastes like Kool-Aid." [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#), like other titles from that movement, is exotic to the Western reader, really too exotic, almost as if works were chosen on unconscious, tacit criteria that included appearing sufficiently exotic to a certain kind of Western convert, and bears the mark of a rebellion against the common things of the West, where a more Orthodox

response would be to be alienated from Western things without expending the energy to constantly fight it. It is also characteristic, though not universal, to read texts associated with Fr. Seraphim and get the feeling of a magic spell falling over me: after praying and being comfortable with the decision I read the "Nine Enneads" of [Christ the Eternal Tao](#), but not more; my conscience felt almost like an instruction to "take two stiff drinks and stop cold."

One person who commented to me over email knew quite specifically that I was a member of ROCOR (quite probably the one Orthodox jurisdiction with the most nostalgia for nineteenth-century Russia), and tried to specifically make the point that nineteenth century Russia was no golden age. That much was not news to me; the priest who received me into the Church repeatedly emphasized, "There was never a golden age." He didn't mention nineteenth century Russia so much, but he talked about the Age of the Councils as being an Age when Ecumenical Councils were called because of how truly bad the problems and heresies were. But the other correspondent argued to me that nineteenth century Russia was a "Gnostic wonderland," with something for every idle curiosity, and in his opinion the worst century in Orthodox history, and this is a problem for Fr. Seraphim because Fr. Seraphim got his bearings in Orthodoxy primarily from nineteenth century Russia. [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) tells of an elder who answered questions by speaking out of the [Philokalia](#). I've read the [Philokalia](#) more than once, and [the ascetical homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian](#), and the [Bible](#) many times more, and everything that is interesting about [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) is something I have never picked up even a little from [the Bible](#), [St. Isaac](#), and the [Philokalia](#). Perhaps I haven't read them enough, or

grown enough, or something else enough, but I have not been able to pull a hint of Elder Thaddeus's main points in any of the older classics mentioned.

**With all that stated, [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) is a pearl.**

Perhaps one place to begin is to challenge the simplified psychology of "I have my thoughts going on in my head and you have your thoughts going on in your head." Someone who knows a bit of actual psychology may recognize something contagious about emotion, but let's wave this aside: psychology is basically about your self-contained mind.

Not so, according to Elder Thaddeus and the Orthodox Tradition. What the West speaks of today as "the seven deadly sins" was originally known as "the eight demons," demons who tempt us with particular temptations. A great deal of what we today classify as psychology has to do with the activity of demons intruding on our thoughts and experiences. Destructive thoughts may be something we make our own: but they are not our own, not from the beginning. They are stings where demons inject venom into our hearts. Now we do have a say in whether the injection succeeds: God help us if we had no defense or no say in the matter! [The Philokalia](#) works at length on the science of spiritual struggle and how "a stitch in time saves nine." To quote the rather technical definition of "temptation" in the English glossary to the [Philokalia](#):

TEMPTATION (πειρασμος — peirasmos): also translated in our version as 'trial' or 'test'. The word indicates, according to context: (i) a test or trial sent to man by God, so as to aid his progress on the spiritual way; (ii) a suggestion from the devil, enticing man to sin.

Using the word in sense (ii), the Greek Fathers employ a series of technical terms to describe the process of temptation. (See in particular Mark the Ascetic, *On the Spiritual Law*, 138-41, in vol. i of our translation, pp. 119-2-; John Klimakos, *Ladder*, Step 15, translated by Archimandrite Lazarus [op.cit., pp. 157-9; Maximos, *On Love*, i, 83-84, in vol. ii of our translation, pp. 62-63; John of Damaskos, *On the Virtues and vices*, also in vol. ii of our translation, pp. 337-8.) The basic distinction made by these fathers is between the demonic provocation and man's assent: the first lies outside of man's control, while for the second he is morally responsible. In detail, the chief terms employed are as follows:

(i) Provocation (προβολη — proslovi): the initial incitement to evil. Mark the Ascetic defines this as an 'image-free stimulation in the heart'; so long as the provocation is not accompanied by images, it does not involve man in any guilt. Such provocations, originating as the devil, assail man from the outside, and so he is not morally responsible for them. His liability to these provocations is not a consequence of the fall: even in paradise, Mark maintains, Adam was assailed by the devil's provocations. Man cannot prevent provocations from occurring; what does lie in his power, however, is to maintain constant watchfulness (q.v.) and so reject each provocation as soon as it emerges into his consciousness — that is to say, at its first appearance as a thought in his mind or intellect (μονολογιστος εμφασις — monologistos emphasis). If he does reject the provocation, the sequence is cut off and the process of temptation is terminated.

(ii) Momentary disturbance (παραρριπισμος — pararripismos) of the intellect, occurring 'without any

movement or working of bodily passion' (see Mark, Letter to Nicholas the Solitary: in our translation, vol. i, p. 153). This seems to be more than the 'first appearance' of a provocation described in stage (i) above; for, at a certain point of spiritual growth in this life, it is possible to be totally released from such 'momentary disturbance', whereas no one can expect to be altogether free from demonic provocations.

(iii) Communion (ομιλία — homilia); coupling (συνδυασμος — syndyasmos). Without as yet entirely assenting to the demonic provocation, a man may begin to 'entertain' it, to converse or parley with it, turning it over in his mind pleasurably, yet still hesitating whether or not to act upon it. At this stage, which is indicated by the terms 'communion' or 'coupling', the provocation is no longer 'image-free' but has become a logismos or thought (q.v.) and man is morally responsible for having allowed this to happen.

(iv) Assent (συγκαταθεσις — synkatathesis). This signifies a step beyond mere 'communion' or 'coupling'. No longer merely 'playing' with the evil suggestion, a man now resolves to act on it. There is now no doubt as to his moral culpability: even if circumstances prevent him from sinning outwardly, he is judged by God according to the intention in his heart.

(v) Prepossession (προληψις — prolipsis): defined by Mark as 'the involuntary presence of former sins in the memory'. This state of 'prepossession' or prejudice results from repeated acts of sin which predispose a man to yield to particular temptations. In principle he retains his free choice and can reject demonic provocations; but in practice the force of habit makes it more and more difficult for him to resist.

(vi) Passion (q.v.). If a man does not fight strenuously against a prepossession, it will develop into an evil passion.

To put the same in nontechnical language, if there is a smouldering spark where it doesn't belong, put it out as soon as you can. If you don't, and its smouldering set an armchair on fire, drop everything and use use a fire extinguisher as soon as you can. If you let the fire spread to your whole house, call the fire department as soon as you can: [there is a divine Fire Chief Who mightily rescued St. Mary of Egypt](#). However, the best portion by far is to be attentive and do whatever it takes to snuff out sparks when they're still only sparks.

## **Mysticism that relates quite directly to work**

"Save yourself, and ten thousand around you will be saved."

"Make peace with yourself, and Heaven and earth will make  
peace with you."

These words are tantalizing, and Elder Thaddeus's contribution in [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) may be to offer a big picture of a world in which our thoughts matter, and not simply for us. A great deal of human misery stems from our needlessly warring against others in our thoughts.

Before digging further into workplace applications, I would orient things with a vignette of Elder Thaddeus's biography:

In 1978 Fr. Thaddeus told G., one of his spiritual daughters, of another [rare] vision he had seen in a dream. "I had barely fallen asleep when I dreamt that I had died. Two young men led me into a room and had me stand on some sort of platform between them. To my right were the judges. Someone in the far left corner of the room was reading the charges against me. 'That's him! That's the one who cannot get along with anyone!' I stood there dumbfounded. The voice repeated the same accusation two more times. Then the young man standing on my right hand said to me, 'Do not be afraid! It is not true that you cannot get along with anyone. You just cannot get along with

get along with anyone. you just cannot get along with yourself!"

To take a work-related example of the basic issue, I remember feeling really sorry for a train conductor who said it made things easier to say that there was "**one Monday, then three 'Almost Fridays', and then Friday.**" My concern is not that this was a crutch; some crutches are legitimate and quite helpful. My concern was that this is not a crutch that makes work bearable at all; it is a crutch that makes work simply unbearable. It's a crutch that makes you relate to work as something you have to barely endure.

Now some jobs are barely endurable, or simply unendurable. In areas of the third world, there are sweatshops where women are expected to work fifteen hour days, seven days a week, even if they are violently ill, and rape is used as a mainstream disciplinary measure. On a lesser scale, I'm not sure I'd do well as a customer service doormat constantly dealing with verbally abusive customers. And I know that various grades of harassment exist in the first world as well. But beyond that, how many jobs in the U.S. really are beyond all endurance? I've left one job, not when my boss was rude to me and humiliated me in front of all my colleagues, but because the work was other than as advertised in a way that was increasingly impacting my health (and other attempts had failed to produce results), and I think that I may have been justified, but there are still things I would rather have handled differently. But even if "people don't stop working for companies; they stop working for bosses," the number of times it's the right thing to leave is rare compared to how quickly we do resign.

Let's look at this on a bit deeper level. The issue is not that

the situation does not need to improve; the work situation quite probably **does** need to improve. But not from the angle of what Alcoholics Anonymous calls "a geographical solution," moving in the hope that your problems will go away. Elder Thaddeus wrote:

4.5. If in each family there were just one person who served God zealously, what harmony there would be in the world! I often remember the story of Sister J. She used to come and talk to me often while I was still at the Tumane Monastery. Once she came, together with an organized group of pilgrims, and complained, saying, "I can't bear this any longer! People are so unkind to each other!" She went on to say that she was going to look for another job. I advised her against it, as there were few jobs and a high level of unemployment. I told her to stop the war she was fighting with her colleagues. "But I'm not fighting with anyone!" she said. I explained that, although she was not fighting physically, she was waging war with her colleagues in her thoughts by being dissatisfied with her position. She argued that it was beyond anyone's endurance. "Of course it is," I told her, "but you can't do it yourself. You need God's help. No one knows whether you are praying or not while you are at work. So, when they start offending you, do not return their offenses either with words or with negative thoughts. Try not to offend them even in your thoughts; pray to God that He may send them an angel of peace. Also ask that He not forget you. You will not be able to do this immediately, but if you always pray like that, you will see how things will change over time and how the people will change as well. In fact, you are going to change, too." At that time I did not know whether she was going to heed my advice.

This happened in the Lumane Monastery in 1980. In 1981 I was sent to the Vitovnica Monastery. I was standing underneath the quince tree when I noticed a group of pilgrims that had arrived. She was in the group and she came up to me to receive a blessing. And this is what she said to me, "Oh, Father, I had no idea that people were so good!" I asked her whether she was referring to her colleagues at work and she said she was. "They have changed so much, Father, it's unbelievable! No one offends me anymore, and I can see the change in myself, as well." I asked her whether she was at peace with everyone, and she answered that there was one person with whom she could not make peace for a long time. Then, as she read the Gospels, she came to the part where the Lord commands us to love our enemies. Then she said to herself, "You are going to love this person whether you want to or not, because this is what the Lord commands us to do." And now, you see, they are best friends!

There is, at least in the U.S, the issue of what is called "an instrumental view of labor." That is to say, work is a necessary evil we do to get money, and there would be no reason to work if we didn't need the money. And work has indeed been cursed and disfigured by the Fall, but not created in the curse of the Fall. And really the "thorns and thistles" affects all our work, not just agricultural workers. There is no job under the sun that is free of thorns and thistles. Some jobs may have a honeymoon period, but as with a real honeymoon, it stops at some point and lets the real work begin. Life may indeed be easier with the wisdom Elder Thaddeus puts forth, but Elder Thaddeus had a difficult life; one of the dimensions of holier living is that it is more of a crown of thorns the more closely you approach the Christ God Who

wore a Crown of Thorns en route to his crucifixion.

Returning to an instrumental view of labor, it treats the here and now that we are often to work in as the sort of thing that one endures, a negative to obtain a positive. And that much is fundamentally mistaken. We are created to work. Certain classes of work, such as a broad stretch of volunteering, activism, developing open source software, and also artistic activities like writing, musicianship, provide additional outlet to work beyond one's regular job. We really are **made** to work. An allergic reaction to the experience of (paid) work is part of the U.S. culture that need not be there, like finding waiting more than a few minutes to be unpleasant (there are cultures where people can wait an hour without being ruffled), and it is possible to enjoy working. And be at peace with oneself.

## Twelve Strategies

Here are twelve strategies drawn from [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) and the Orthodox spiritual Tradition:

- 1. Be grateful.**

Count your blessings and be aware of how many blessings you have. Does your body work? That's a blessing. I've studied several languages, and the more I've studied languages, the more I've become convinced that if you are knowing to know **one** word or phrase in your neighbor's language, it should be "Thank you:" Spaseba—Russian; Terima kasih—Malaysian/Indonesian; Sheh-sheh—Chinese; Muy muchas gracias—Spanish. ([See "Thank you" in many languages.](#))

When I've said "Thank you" to people in their own heart language, they've been surprised and delighted at the gesture. No one seems to be offended at my pronunciation. Ever. If anything, clumsy execution only makes the endeavor more endearing.

I'm not specifically suggesting that you learn languages, if that is not your thing. (For most people, it isn't.) But please, pretty please, by all means, learn to be grateful, to say "Thank you" in letter and in spirit.
- 2. Cultivate a deep respect for others with whom you cross**

## paths.

What can be respected about a mean boss or a crotchety co-worker? They are made in the image of God, and they are part of the royal family of the human race. There is something made for eternal glory that God himself respects in each person you meet. This doesn't mean it is always easy to respect others, but the holier a person is, the more he finds something to respect in each person he meets. Some people are wary of giving compliments that feed a person's vanity, but even then there is a lot of respect that can be given without inflicting needless temptation.

3. **Thirst for the cup of dishonor as if it were honor.** This is a difficult step, and I one I have not mastered well. I want the most glorious assignment, or the most interesting, or whatever else would be most attractive to me, but I endure those that are menial. But it is a stroke of the masters to want the most menial work, and then perhaps be pleasantly surprised when some of their work is not menial. One health-oriented poster said, "Take the worst parking spot!" because it means a scant minute or two more walking. But it would be better, spiritually as well, to pick the least attractive parking spot. This point is made in the Gospel,

[Luke 14:7-11](#):

And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, "When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, 'Give this man place;' and thou begin with shame to take the

lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, 'Friend, go up higher:' then shalt thou have veneration in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

4. **Be obedient, in thought and action.**

As far as it is not sin, obey your boss, however wrong he may be, and offer him obedience on as many spiritual levels as you can.

5. **Pray for your co-workers, especially the ones who are difficult.**

We should pray for everyone, but watchful prayer that quashes, as far as possible, the faintest thought of hostility is best.

6. **As far as you can, go the extra mile and turn the other cheek.**

There is only so much we can do, but the [Sermon on the Mount](#) is clear on this point and gives it attention. Also relevant are the words of [The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#): "[Humility] is to forestall one's neighbor at a contentious moment and to be the first to end a quarrel."

7. **Let the other person have the upper hand, be "higher."**

It seems entirely natural to establish the upper hand if one can, and so much of our conversation, even banter, has a thread of control. But if one can seek the lower room, you will be someone no-one struggles against.

8. **Forgive seven billion times.**

In a Biblical culture where most people could not count to twenty without taking off any shoes the strong rule was

twenty, without taking off any shoes, the strong man was  
"Three strikes, you're out!" St. Peter made a rather  
ludicrous question of the Savior: "Should I forgive seven  
times?" The Lord's answer was even more ludicrous: "Not  
seven, but seven times seventy [or, more accurately,  
seventy-seven]." He might as well have said seven billion.

We are to keep on forgiving.

9. **Beware the "demon of noonday".**

Today we speak of a "mid-afternoon slump" and perhaps "low  
blood sugar." The ancient monastic tradition spoke of a  
demon that tempts us to escape and makes the early  
afternoon something tedious that makes the here and now  
something intolerable, to escape. It is fought by rejecting  
escape as far as we can and by praying through it, until we  
realize God's Creation is not the sort of thing one rightly  
wants to escape from.

10. **Be watchful of your thoughts, especially warring thoughts  
or negative thoughts.**

Different times have had different ideas of the worst sin; in  
caricature at least, Victorians were imagined to have made  
sexual sin the ultimate sin, while contemporary  
Protestantism usually gives that place to pride. In ancient  
times, apparently echoed by Elder Thaddeus, the worst sin  
was anger.

One of the central themes that he keeps coming to is that  
we keep on holding warring thoughts, that if we would work  
on repenting and praying of, we would defuse a problematic  
situation, but we keep on holding onto our piece of the  
problem. Read [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) for all of  
the many things it says about the warring thoughts we are  
unaware of holding against our neighbors, including every

boss and co-worker.

11. **Blessed are the meek: Be meek!**

One repeated characteristic of martial artists is that those who are truly good tend to be the last person you would ever find in a fight, and the more likely to put up his hands and say, "You're the tough guy!"

I'm not specifically recommending martial arts, but if martial arts produce in its experts what the Tao Te Ching says as "A great warrior is not warlike," what then is to be expected of the true brothers and true sisters of the Prince of Peace? Quite a lot, in fact.

12. **Lastly, keep in touch with your priest or spiritual father, and do not engage in spiritual warfare above your strength.**

If following this advice would represent a basic change for you, then it is normally the sort of thing you should check in with your priest or spiritual father about. And there are some people you should, perhaps, leave alone, and there are some activities you should, perhaps, leave alone. Every spiritual father is different, but there have been a few specific situations where my spiritual father has advised me, appropriately under the circumstances as far as I can tell, not to try to mend fences. And if your priest or spiritual father does think this is helpful, you will have his blessing to boot!

## Quotes and broader context

If I could fairly quote all of [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) without threatening others' income or running afoul of the law, I would. However, here are a few gems from the collection. I am limiting myself to the first chapter, "On Thoughts:"

1.1. Our life depends on the kind of thoughts we nurture. If our thoughts are peaceful, calm, meek, and kind, then that is what our life is like. If our attention is turned to the circumstances in which we live, we are drawn into a whirlpool of thoughts and can have neither peace nor tranquility.

1.7. A man who has within him the Kingdom of Heaven radiates holy thoughts, divine thoughts. The Kingdom of Heaven creates within us an atmosphere of Heaven, as opposed to the atmosphere of hell that is radiated by a person when hades abides in his heart. The role of Christians in this world is to filter the atmosphere on earth and expand the atmosphere of the Kingdom of God.

We can keep guard over the whole world by keeping guard over the atmosphere of heaven within us, for if we lose the Kingdom of Heaven, we will save neither ourselves nor others. He who has the Kingdom of God in himself will imperceptibly pass it on to others. People will be attracted to the peace and warmth in us, and the atmosphere of

by the peace and warmth in us, and the atmosphere of heaven will gradually pass on to them. It is not even necessary to speak to people about this. The atmosphere of Heaven will radiate from us even when we keep silence or talk about ordinary things. It will radiate from us even though we may not be aware of it.

1.16. An old woman came to me and told me that her neighbor was bothering her. She said the other woman was constantly throwing things so she was at her wits' end. I asked her why she was always quarreling with her neighbor.

But the old woman said she never even spoke to her evil neighbor. I insisted that she quarreled with her every day. I said to her, "You are convinced that she is doing evil things to you, and you are constantly thinking about her. Let her do whatever she is doing; you just turn your thoughts to prayer, and you will see that it will stop bothering you."

1.19. Thoughts are planted in our minds all the time, from all sides and directions. Were it given us to see the radii of thoughts, we would see a real net of thoughts. Everyone has a "receiver" in his mind, one that is much more precise and sophisticated than a radio or television set. How wonderful is the mind of man! Unfortunately, we do not always appreciate this. We do not know how to unite ourselves with the Source of life and to feel joy...

## Conclusion

It is my suggestion that Elder Thaddeus's mystical theology in [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) has every relevance to the world at work. It has relevance to other places as well; in passages not quoted, the author speaks emphatically about family life and Chapter 1, "On Thoughts," is followed up by Chapter 2, "On Family." But it is no diminution of Elder Thaddeus to look at what his wisdom and legacy spell out for success at work. Perhaps Christians are not called to worldly success in the sense of abundant wealth; the Bible includes very wealthy business owners like St. Abraham and St. Job the Much-Suffering, and very poor prophets like St. Elias (Elijah) and St. John the Baptist and Forerunner. But I think of my Aunt Gail talking about a conversation she had with her son about his business, and praying that he would always have "enough." And she was emphatic about "enough": although she did not use the terms "wants" or "needs", she was clearly praying that her son would enjoy the kind of success that was truly beneficial for him as a person. And usually that's not "as much money as you want."

But it is "enough."

And if this work-mysticism is not a door to abundant treasures on earth, at least not for all, it is a door to treasures in Heaven. It is an invitation to find treasure in difficulties as well as pleasant times, in conflict and dishonor as well as people

who are easy to get along with, a door to living the life of Heaven starting here on earth. The joy is intertwined with suffering— but the joy is deeper than the suffering.

Christ is risen! Truly he is risen!

Spaseba,  
Christos

# Yonder

The body continued running in the polished steel corridor, a corridor without doors and windows and without any hint of how far above and below the local planet's surface it was, if indeed it was connected with a planet. The corridor had a competition mixture of gases, gravity, temperature and pressure, and so on, and as the body had been running, lights turned on and then off so the body was at the center of a moving swathe of rather clinical light. The body was running erratically, and several times it had nearly fallen; the mind was having trouble keeping the control of the body due to the body being taxed to its limit. Then the body tripped. The mind made a few brief calculations and jacked out of the body.

The body fell, not having the mind to raise its arms to cushion the fall, and fractured bones in the face, skull, and ribs. The chest heaved in and out with each labored breath, after an exertion that would be lethal in itself. A trickle of blood oozed out from a wound. The life of the abandoned body slowly ebbed away, and the lights abruptly turned off.

It would be a while before a robot would come to clean it up and prepare the corridor for other uses.

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"And without further ado," another mind announced, "I would like to introduce the researcher who broke the record for a running body by more than 594789.34 microseconds. This body was a strictly biological body, with no cyberware besides a regulation mind-body interface, with no additional modifications. Adrenaline, for instance, came from the mind controlling the adrenal glands; it didn't even replace the brain with a chemical minifactory. The body had a magnificent athletic physique, clean and not encumbered by any reproductive system. And I still don't know how it kept the body alive and functioning, without external help, for the whole race. Here's Archon."

A sound came from a modular robot body at the center of the stage and was simultaneously transmitted over the net. "I see my cyborg utility body there; is that my Paidion wearing it? If so, I'm going to... no, wait. That would be harming my own body without having a good enough reason." A somewhat canned chuckle swept through the crowd. "I'm impressed; I didn't know that anyone would come if I called a physical conference, and I had no idea there were that many rental bodies within an appropriate radius." Some of the bodies winced. "But seriously, folks, I wanted to talk and answer some of your questions about how my body broke the record. It was more than generating nerve impulses to move the body to the maximum ability. And I would like to begin by talking about why I've called a physical conference in the first place.

"Scientific breakthroughs aren't scientific. When a mind solves a mathematical problem that hasn't been solved before, it does... not something impossible, but something that you will miss if you look for something possible. It conforms itself to the problem, does everything it can to permeate itself with the

problem. Look at the phenomenology and transcripts of every major mathematical problem that has been solved in the past  $1.7e18$  microseconds. Not one follows how one would scientifically attempt a scientific breakthrough. And somehow scientifically optimized applications of mind to problems repeat past success but never do anything new.

"What you desire so ravenously to know is how I extended the methodologies to optimize the running body and the running mind to fit a calculated whole. And the answer is simple. I didn't."

A mind interrupted through cyberspace. "What do you mean, you didn't? That's as absurd as claiming that you built the body out of software. That's—"

Archon interrupted. "And that's what I thought too. What I can tell you is this. When I grew and trained the body, I did nothing else. That was my body, my only body. I shut myself off from cyberspace—yes, that's why you couldn't get me—and did not leave a single training activity to another mind or an automatic process. I trained myself to the body as if it were a mathematics problem and tried to soak myself in it."

A rustle swept through the crowd.

"And I don't blame you if you think I'm a crackpot, or want to inspect me for hostile tampering. I submit to inspection. But I tried to be as close as possible to the body, and that's it. And I shaved more than 594789.34 microseconds off the record."

Archon continued after a momentary pause. "I specifically asked for bodily presences for this meeting; call me sentimental or crackpot or trying to achieve with your bodies what I failed to achieve in that body, but I will solicit questions from those who have a body here first, and address the network after everybody present has had its chance."

A flesh body stood up and flashed its face. "What are you

going to say next? Not only that you became like a body, but that the body became like a mind?"

Archon went into private mode, filtered through and rejected 3941 responses, and said, "I have not analyzed the body to see if it contained mind-like modifications and do not see how I would go about doing such a thing."

After several other questions, a robot said, "So what's next?"

Archon hesitated, and said, "I don't know." It hesitated again, and said, "I'm probably going to make a Riemannian 5-manifold of pleasure states. I plan on adding some subtle twists so not only will it be pleasurable; minds will have a real puzzle figuring out exactly what kind of space they're in. And I'm not telling what the manifold will be like, or even telling for sure that it will genuinely have only 5 dimensions."

The robot said, "No, you're not. You're not going to do that at all." Then the mind jacked out and the body fell over, inert.

Another voice, issuing from two standard issue cyborg bodies, said, "Has the body been preserved, and will it be available for internal examination?"

Archon heard the question, and answered it as if it were giving the question its full attention. But it could only give a token of its consciousness. The rest of its attention was on tracing the mind that had jacked out of the robot body. And it was a slippery mind. Archon was both frustrated and impressed when it found no trace.

It was skilled at stealth and tracing, having developed several methodologies for each, and something that could vanish without a trace—had the mind simply destroyed itself? That possibility bothered Archon, who continued tracing after it dismissed the assembly.

Archon looked for distractions, and finding nothing better it began trying to sound out how it might make the pleasure space. What should the topology be? The pleasures should be—Archon began looking at the kinds of pleasure, and found elegant ways to choose a vector space basis for less than four dimensions or well over eight, but why should it be a tall order to do exactly five? Archon was far from pleasure when a message came, "Not your next achievement, Archon?"

Archon thought it recognized something. "Have you tried a five dimensional pleasure manifold before? How did you know this would happen?"

"I didn't."

"Ployon!"

Ployon said, "It took you long enough! I'm surprised you needed the help."

Ployon continued, "And since there aren't going to be too many people taking you seriously—"

Archon sent a long stream of zeroes to Ployon.

Ployon failed to acknowledge the interruption. "—from now on, I thought you could use all the help you could get."

Archon sent another long stream of zeroes to Ployon.

When Ployon remained silent, Archon said, "Why did you contact me?"

Ployon said, "Since you're going to do something interesting, I wanted to see it live."

Archon said, "So what am I going to do?"

"I have no idea whatsoever, but I want to see it."

"Then how do you know it is interesting?"

"You said things that would destroy your credibility, and you gave an evasive answer. It's not every day I get to witness that."

Archon sent a long stream of zeroes to Ployon.

Ployon said, "I'm serious."

"Then what can I do now?"

"I have no idea whatsoever, but you might take a look at what you're evading."

"And what am I evading?"

"Try asking yourself. Reprocess the transcripts of that lecture. Your own private transcript."

Archon went through the file, disregarding one moment and then scanning everything else. "I find nothing."

"What did you just disregard?"

"Just one moment where I said too much."

"And?"

Archon reviewed that moment. "I don't know how to describe it. I can describe it three ways, all contradictory. I almost did it—I almost forged a connection between mind and matter. And yet I failed. And yet somehow the body ran further, and I don't think it was simply that I learned to control it better. What I achieved only underscored what I failed to achieve, like an optimization that needs to run for longer than the age of the universe before it starts saving time."

Archon paused before continuing, "So I guess what I'm going to do next is try to bridge the gap between mind and matter for real. Besides the mundane relationship, I mean, forge a real connection that will bridge the chasm."

Ployon said, "It can't be done. It's not possible. I don't even understand why your method of training the body will work. You seem to have made more of a connection than has ever been done before. I'm tempted to say that when you made your presentation, you ensured that no one else will do what you did.

But that's premature and probably wrong."

"Then what am I going to do next? How am I going to bridge

that gap?"

Ployon said, "I saw something pretty interesting in what you did achieve—you know, the part where you destroyed your credibility. That's probably more interesting than your breaking the record."

Ployon ran through some calculations before continuing, "And at any rate, you're trying to answer the wrong question."

Archon said, "Am I missing the interesting question? The question of how to forge a link across the chasm between matter and spirit is—"

"Not nearly as interesting as the question of what it would mean to bridge that chasm."

Archon stopped, reeling at the implication. "I think it's time for me to make a story in a virtual world."

Ployon said, "Goodbye now. You've got some thinking to do."

Archon began to delve. What would the world be like if you added to it the ability for minds to connect with bodies, not simply as it had controlled his racing body, but really? What would it be like if the chasm could be bridged? It searched through speculative fiction, and read a story where minds could become bodies—which made for a very good story, but when it seriously tried to follow its philosophical assumptions, it realized that the philosophical assumptions were not the focus. It read and found several stories where the chasm could be bridged, and

—

There was no chasm. Or would not be. And that meant not taking the real world and adding an ability to bridge a chasm, but a world where mind and matter were immanent. After rejecting a couple of possible worlds, Archon considered a world where there were only robots, and where each interfaced to the network as externally as to the physical world. Each mind was

firmware burned into the robot's circuits, and for some still to be worked out reason it couldn't be transferred. Yes, this way... no. Archon got some distance into this possible world before a crawling doubt caught up to it. It hadn't made minds and bodies connect; it'd only done a first-rate job of covering up the chasm. Maybe organic goo held promise. A world made only of slime? No, wait, that was... and then it thought—

Archon dug recursively deeper and deeper, explored, explored. It seemed to be bumping into something. Its thoughts grew strange; it calculated for billions and even trillions of microseconds, encountered something stranger than—

Something happened.

How much time had passed?

Archon said, "Ployon! Where are you?"

Ployon said, "Enjoying trying to trace your thoughts. Not much success. I've disconnected now."

"Imagine a mind and a body, except that you don't have a mind and a body, but a mind-body unity, and it—"

"Which do you mean by 'it'? The mind or the body? You're being careless."

"Humor me. I'm not being careless. When I said, 'it', I meant both—"

"Both the mind and the body? As in 'they'?"

"Humor me. As in, 'it.' As in a unity that doesn't exist in our world."

"Um... then how do you refer to just the mind or just the body? If you don't distinguish them..."

"You can distinguish the mind and the body, but you can never separate them. And even though you can refer to just the mind or just the body, normally you would talk about the unity. It's not enough to usually talk about 'they;' you need to usually talk

about 'it.'"

"How does it connect to the network?"

"There is a kind of network, but it can't genuinely connect to it."

"What does it do when its body is no longer serviceable."

"It doesn't—I haven't decided. But it can't jump into something else."

"So the mind simply functions on its own?"

"Ployon, you're bringing in cultural baggage. You're—"

"You're telling me this body is a prison! Next you're going to tell me that it can't even upgrade the body with better parts, and that the mind is like a real mind, only it's shut in on twenty sides. Are you describing a dystopia?"

"No. I'm describing what it means that the body is real to the mind, that it is not a mind that can use bodies but a mind-body unity. It can't experience any pleasure it can calculate, but its body can give it pleasure. It runs races, and not only does the mind control the body—or at least influence it; the body is real enough that the mind can't simply control it perfectly—but the body affects the mind. When I run a race, I am controlling the body, but I could be doing twenty other things as well and only have a token presence at the mind-body interface. It's very different; there is a very real sense in which the mind is running when the body is running a race.

"Let me guess. The mind is a little robot running around a racetrack hollowed out from the body's brain. And did you actually say, races, plural? Do they have nanotechnology that will bring a body back after its been run down? And would anyone actually want to race a body that had been patched that way?"

"No. I mean that because their bodies are part of them, they only hold races which they expect the racers to be able to live

through."

"That's a strange fetish. Don't they ever have a real race?"

"They have real races, real in a way that you or I could never experience. When they run, they aren't simply manipulating something foreign to the psyche. They experience pleasures they only experience running."

"Are you saying they only allow them to experience certain pleasures while running?"

"No. They—"

"Then why don't they allow the pleasures at other times?"

That's a stranger fetish than—"

"Because they can't. Their bodies produce certain pleasures in their minds when they're running, and they don't generate these pleasures unless the body is active."

"That raises a number of problems. It sounds like you're saying the body has a second mind, because it would take a mind to choose to let the 'real' mind experience pleasure. It—"

Archon said, "You're slipping our chasm between the body and mind back in, and it's a chasm that doesn't exist. The body produces pleasure the mind can't produce by itself, and that is only one of a thousand things that makes the race more real than them for us. Think about the achievements you yourself made when you memorized the map of the galaxy. Even if that was a straightforward achievement, that's something you yourself did, not something you caused an external memory bank to do.

Winning a race is as real for that mind-body as something it itself did as the memorization was for you. It's something it did, not simply something the mind caused the body to do. And if you want to make a causal diagram, don't draw something linear. In either direction. Make a reinforced web, like computing on a network."

Ployon said, "I still don't find it convincing."

Archon paused. "Ok, let's put that in the background. Let me approach that on a different scale. Time is more real. And no—this is not because they measure time more precisely. Their bodies are mortal, and this means that the community of mind-body unities is always changing, like a succession of liquids flowing through a pipe. And that means that it makes a difference where you are in time."

Archon continued. "I could say that their timeline is dynamic in a way that ours is not. There is a big change going on, a different liquid starting to flow through the pipe. It is the middle age, when a new order of society is being established and the old order is following away."

Ployon said, "So what's the old technology, and what's the new one?"

"It's deeper than that. Technological society is appearing. The old age is not an abandoned technology. It is organic life, and it is revealing itself as it is disintegrating."

"So cyborgs have—"

"There are no cyborgs, or very few."

"And let me guess. They're all cybernetic enhancements to originally biological things."

"It's beyond that. Cybernetic replacements are only used to remedy weak bodies."

"Wouldn't it be simpler to cull the—"

"The question of 'simpler' is irrelevant. Few of them even believe in culling their own kind. Most believe that it is —'inexpedient' isn't quite right—to destroy almost any body, and it's even more inadvisable to destroy one that is weak."

"In the whole network, why?"

"I'm still working that out. The easiest part to explain has to

do with their being mind-body unities. When you do something to a body, you're not just doing it to that body. You're doing it to part of a pair that interpenetrates in the most intimate fashion.

What you do to the body you do to the mind. It's not just forcibly causing a mind to jack out of a body; it's transferring the mind to a single processor and then severing the processor from the network."

"But who would... I can start to see how real their bodies would be to them, and I am starting to be amazed. What else is real to them?"

"I said earlier that most of them are hesitant to cull the weak, that they view it as inexpedient. But efficiency has nothing to do with it. It's connected to—it might in fact be more efficient, but there is something so much bigger than efficiency —"

Ployon cut it off. "Bigger than efficiency?"

Archon said, "There is something that is real to them that is not real to us that I am having trouble grasping myself. For want of a more proper label, I'll call it the 'organic'."

"Let's stop a minute. I'll give you a point for how things would be different if we were limited to one body, but you're hinting at something you want to call 'organic', which is very poorly defined, and your explanations seem to be strange when they are not simply hazy. Isn't this a red flag?"

"Where have you seen that red flag before?"

"When people were wildly wrong but refused to admit it."

"And?"

"That's pretty much it."

Archon was silent.

Ployon said, "And sometimes it happens when a researcher is on to something big... oh... so what exactly is this nexus of the

'organic'?"

"I can't tell you. At least, not directly. The mind-body unities are all connected to a vast (to them) biological network in which each has a physical place—"

"That's original! Come on; everybody's trivia archive includes the fact that all consciousness comes out of a specific subnet of physical processors, or some substitute for that computing machinery. I can probably zero in on where you're—hey! Stop jumping around from subnet to subnet—can I take that as an acknowledgment that I can find your location? I—"

"The location is not part of a trivia encyclopedia for them. It's something as inescapable as the flow of time—"

"Would you like me to jump into a virtual metaphysics where time doesn't flow?"

"—correction, more inescapable than the flow of time, and it has a million implications for the shape of life. Under the old order, the unities could connect only with other unities which had bodies in similar places—"

"So, not only is their 'network' a bunch of slime, but when they look for company they have to choose from the trillion or however many other unities whose bodies are on the same node?"

"Their communities are brilliant in a way we can never understand; they have infinitesimally less potential partners available.

"You mean their associations are forced on them."

"To adapt one of their sayings, in our network you connect with the minds you like; in their network you like the people you connect with. That collapses a rich and deeper maxim, but what is flattened out is more organic than you could imagine."

"And I suppose that in a way that is very deep, but you conveniently have trouble describing, their associations are

greater."

"We are fortunate to have found a way to link in our shared tastes. And we will disassociate when our tastes diverge—"

"And shared tastes have nothing to do with them? That's—"

"Shared tastes are big, but there is something else bigger. A great deal of the process of making unities into proper unities means making their minds something you can connect with."

"Their minds? Don't you mean the minds?"

"That locution captures something that—they are not minds that have a body as satellite. One can say, 'their' minds because they are mind-body unities. They become greater—in a way that we do not—by needing to be in association with people they could not choose."

"Pretty convenient how every time having a mind linked to a body means a limitation, that limitation makes them better."

"If you chose to look at it, you would find a clue there. But you don't find it strange when the best game players prosper within the limits of the game. What would game play be if players could do anything they wanted?"

"You've made a point."

"As I was going to say, their minds develop a beauty, strength, and discipline that we never have occasion to develop."

"Can you show me this beauty?"

"Here's a concrete illustration. One thing they do is take organisms which have been modified from their biological environment, and keep them in the artificial environments which you'd say they keep their bodies in. They—"

"So even though they're stuck with biological slime, they're trying to escape it and at least pretend it's not biological? That sounds sensible."

"Um, you may have a point, but that isn't where I was hoping

to go. Um... While killing another unity is something they really try to avoid, these modified organisms enjoy no such protection.

And yet—"

"What do they use them for? Do the enhancements make them surrogate industrial robots? Are they kept as emergency rations?"

"The modifications aren't what you'd consider enhancements; most of them couldn't even survive in their feral ancestors' environments, and they're not really suited to the environments they live in. Some turn out to serve some 'useful' purpose... but that's a side benefit, irrelevant to what I'm trying to let you see. And they're almost never used as food."

"Then what's the real reason? They must consume resources. Surely they must be used for something. What do they do with them?"

"I'm not sure how to explain this..."

"Be blunt."

"It won't sting, but it could lead to confusion that would take a long time to untangle."

"Ok..."

"They sense the organisms with their cameras, I mean eyes, and with the boundaries of their bodies, and maybe talk to them."

"Do the organisms give good advice?"

"They don't have sophisticated enough minds for that."

"Ok, so what else is there?"

"About all else is that they do physical activities for the organisms' benefit."

"Ok. And what's the real reason they keep them? There's got to be something pragmatic."

"That's related to why I brought it up. It has something to do

with the organic, something big, but I can't explain it."

"It seems like you can only explain a small part of the organic in terms of our world, and the part you can explain isn't very interesting."

"That's like saying that when a three-dimensional solid intersects a plane in two dimensions, the only part that can be detected in the plane is a two-dimensional cross-section (the three-dimensional doesn't fit in their frame of reference) so "three-dimensional" must not refer to anything real. The reason you can't make sense of the world I'm describing in terms of our world is because it contains real things that are utterly alien to us."

"Like what? Name one we haven't discussed."

"Seeing the trouble I had with the one concept, the organic, I'm not going to take on two at once."

"So the reason these unities keep organisms is so abstract and convoluted that it takes a top-flight mind to begin to grapple with."

"Not all of them keep organisms, but most of them find the reason—it's actually more of an assumption—so simple and straightforward that they would never think it was metaphysical."

"So I've found something normal about them! Their minds are of such an incredibly high caliber that—"

"No. Most of their minds are simpler than yours or mine, and furthermore, the ability to deal with abstractions doesn't enter the picture from their perspective."

"I don't know what to make of this."

"You understand to some degree how their bodies are real in a way we can never experience, and time and space are not just 'packaging' to what they do. Their keeping these organisms... the

failure of the obvious reasons should tell you something, like an uninteresting two-dimensional cross section of a three-dimensional solid. If the part we can understand does not justify the practice, there might be something big out of sight."

"But what am I to make of it now?"

"Nothing now, just a placeholder. I'm trying to convey what it means to be organic."

"Is the organic in some relation to normal technology?"

"The two aren't independent of each other."

"Is the organic defined by the absence of technology?"

"Yes... no... You're deceptively close to the truth."

"Do all unities have the same access to technology?"

"No. There are considerable differences. All have a technology of sorts, but it would take a while to explain why some of it is technology. Some of them don't even have electronic circuits—and no, they are not at an advanced enough biotechnology level to transcend electronic circuits. But if we speak of technology we would recognize, there are major differences. Some have access to no technology; some have access to the best."

"And the ones without access to technology are organic?"

"Yes. Even if they try to escape it, they are inescapably organic."

"But the ones which have the best technology are the least organic."

"Yes."

"Then maybe it was premature to define the organic by the absence of technology, but we can at least make a spectrum between the organic and the technological."

"Yes... no... You're even more deceptively close to the truth. And I emphasize, 'deceptively'. Some of the people who are

most organic have the best technology—"

"So the relationship breaks down? What if we disregard outliers?"

"But the root problem is that you're trying to define the organic with reference to technology. There is some relationship, but instead of starting with a concept of technology and using it to move towards a concept of the organic, it is better to start with the organic and move towards a concept of technology. Except that the concept of the organic doesn't lead to a concept of technology, not as we would explore it. The center of gravity is wrong. It's like saying that we have our thoughts so that certain processors can generate a stream of ones and zeroes. It's backwards enough that you won't find the truth by looking at its mirror image."

"Ok, let me process it another way. What's the difference between a truly organic consciousness, and the least organic consciousness on the net?"

"That's very simple. One exists and the other doesn't."

"So all the... wait a minute. Are you saying that the net doesn't have consciousness?"

"Excellent. You got that one right."

"In the whole of cyberspace, how? How does the net organize and care for itself if it doesn't contain consciousness?"

"It is not exactly true to say that they do have a net, and it is not exactly true to say that they do not have a net. What net they have, began as a way to connect mind-body unities—without any cyberware, I might add."

"Then how do they jack in?"

"They 'jack in' through hardware that generates stimulation for their sensory organs, and that they can manipulate so as to put data into machines."

"How does it maintain itself?"

"It doesn't and it can't. It's maintained by mind-body unities."

"That sounds like a network designed by minds that hate technology. Is the network some kind of joke? Or at least intentionally ironic? Or designed by people who hate technology and wanted to have as anti-technological of a network as they can?"

"No; the unities who designed it, and most of those using it, want as sophisticated technological access as they can have."

"Why? Next you're going to tell me that the network is not one single network, but a hodge podge of other things that have been retroactively reinterpreted as network technology and pressed into service."

"That's also true. But the reason I was mentioning this is that the network is shaped by the shadow of the organic."

"So the organic is about doing things as badly as you can?"

"No."

"Does it make minds incompetent?"

"No. Ployon, remember the last time you made a robot body for a race—and won. How well would that body have done if you tried to make it work as a factory?"

"Atrocious, because it was optimized for—are you saying that the designers were trying to optimize the network as something other than a network?"

"No; I'm saying that the organic was so deep in them that unities who could not care less for the organic, and were trying to think purely in terms of technology, still created with a thick organic accent."

"So this was their best attempt at letting minds disappear into cyberspace?"

"At least originally, no, although that is becoming true. The network was part of what they would consider 'space-conquering tools.' Meaning, although not all of them thought in these terms, tools that would destroy the reality of place for them. The term 'space-conquering tools' was more apt than they realized, at least more apt than they realized consciously; one recalls their saying, 'You cannot kill time without injuring eternity.'"

"What does 'eternity' mean?"

"I really don't want to get into that now. Superficially it means that there is something else that relativizes time, but if you look at it closely, you will see that it can't mean that we should escape time. The space-conquering tools in a very real sense conquered space, by making it less real. Before space-conquering tools, if you wanted to communicate with another unity, you had to somehow reach that unity's body. The position in space of that body, and therefore the body and space, were something you could not escape. Which is to say that the body and space were real—much more real than something you could look up. And to conquer space ultimately meant to destroy some of its reality."

"But the way they did this betrays that something is real to them. Even if you could even forget that other minds were attached to bodies, the space-conquering tools bear a heavy imprint from something outside of the most internally consistent way to conquer space. Even as the organic is disintegrating, it marks the way in which unities flee the organic."

"So the network was driving the organic away, at least partly."

"It would be more accurate to say that the disintegration of the organic helped create the network. There is feedback, but you've got the arrow of causality pointing the wrong way."

"Can you tell me a story?"

"Hmm... Remember the racer I mentioned earlier?"

"The mind-body unity who runs multiple races?"

"Indeed. Its favorite story runs like this—and I'll leave in the technical language. A hungry fox saw some plump, juicy green grapes hanging from a high cable. He tried to jump and eat them, and when he realized they were out of reach, he said, 'They were probably sour anyway!'"

"What's a grape?"

"Let me answer roughly as it would. A grape is a nutritional bribe to an organism to carry away its seed. It's a strategic reproductive organ."

"What does 'green' mean? I know what green electromagnetic radiation is, but why is that word being applied to a reproductive organ?"

"Some objects absorb most of a spectrum of what they call light, but emit a high proportion of light at that wavelength—"

"—which, I'm sure, is taken up by their cameras and converted to information in their consciousness. But why would such a trivial observation be included?"

"That is the mechanism by which green is delivered, but not the nature of what green is. And I don't know how to explain it, beyond saying that mechanically unities experience something from 'green' objects they don't experience from anything else. It's like a dimension, and there is something real to them I can't explain."

"What is a fox? Is 'fox' their word for a mind-body unity?"

"A fox is an organism that can move, but it is not considered a mind-body unity."

"Let me guess at 'hungry'. The fox needed nutrients, and the grapes would have given them."

"The grapes would have been indigestible to the fox's

physiology, but you've got the right idea."

"What separates a fox from a mind-body unity? They both seem awfully similar—they have bodily needs, and they can both talk. And, for that matter, the grape organism was employing a reproductive strategy. Does 'organic' mean that all organisms are recognized as mind-body unities?"

"Oh, I should have explained that. The story doesn't work that way; most unities believe there is a big difference between killing a unity and killing most other organisms; many would kill a moving organism to be able to eat its body, and for that matter many would kill a fox and waste the food. A good many unities, and certainly this one, believes there is a vast difference between unities and other organisms. They can be quite organic while killing organisms for food. Being organic isn't really an issue of treating other organisms just like mind-body unities."

Archon paused for a moment. "What I was going to say is that that's just a literary device, but I realize there is something there. The organic recognizes that there's something in different organisms, especially moving ones, that's closer to mind-body unities than something that's not alive."

"Like a computer processor?"

"That's complex, and it would be even more complex if they really had minds on a computer. But for now I'll say that unless they see computers through a fantasy—which many of them do—they experience computers as logic without life. And at any rate, there is a literary device that treats other things as having minds. I used it myself when saying the grape organism employed a strategy; it isn't sentient. But their willingness to employ that literary mechanism seems to reflect both that a fox isn't a unity and that a fox isn't too far from being a unity. Other life is similar, but not equal."

"What kind of cable was the grape organism on? Which part of the net was it used for?"

"That story is a survival from before the transition from organic to technological. Advanced technology focuses on information—"

"Where else would technology focus?"

"—less sophisticated technology performs manual tasks. That story was from before cables were used to carry data."

"Then what was the cable for?"

"To support the grape organism."

"Do they have any other technology that isn't real?"

"Do you mean, 'Do they have any other technology that doesn't push the envelope and expand what can be done with technology?'"

"Yes."

"Then your question shuts off the answer. Their technology doesn't exist to expand what technology can do; it exists to support a community in its organic life."

"Where's the room for progress in that?"

"It's a different focus. You don't need another answer; you need another question. And, at any rate, that is how this world tells the lesson of cognitive dissonance, that we devalue what is denied to us."

Ployon paused. "Ok; I need time to process that story—may I say, 'digest'?"

"Certainly."

"But one last question. Why did you refer to the fox as 'he'? Its supposed mind was—"

"In that world, a unity is always male ('he') or female ('she'). A neutered unity is extraordinarily rare, and a neutered male, a 'eunuch', is still called 'he.'"

"The eunuch is a unity, but it is not a unity of the same kind as the unity of the grape organism."

"I'm familiar enough with those details of biology, but why would such an insignificant detail—"

"Remember about being mind-body unities. And don't think of them as bodies that would ordinarily be neutered. That's how new unities come to be in that world, with almost no cloning and no uterine replicators—"

"They really are slime!"

"—and if you only understand the biology of it, you don't understand it."

"What don't I understand?"

"You're trying to understand a feature of language that magnifies something insignificant, and what would cause the language to do that. But you're looking for an explanation in the wrong place. Don't think that the bodies are the most sexual parts of them. They're the least sexual; the minds tied to those bodies are even more different than the bodies. The fact that the language shaped by unities for a long time distinguishes 'masculine' and 'feminine' enough to have the difference written into 'it', so that 'it' is 'he' or 'she' when speaking of mind-body unities."

"Hmm... Is this another dimension to their reality that is flattened out in ours? Are their minds always thinking about that act?"

"In some cases that's not too far from the truth. But you're looking for the big implication in the wrong place. This would have an influence if a unity never thought about that act, and it has influence before a unity has any concept of that act."

"Back up a bit. Different question. You said this was their way of explaining the theory of cognitive dissonance. But it isn't. It describes one event in which cognitive dissonance occurs. It doesn't articulate the theory; at most the theory can be

...extracted from it. And even if you treat it as explaining

extracted from it. And worse, if one treats it as explaining cognitive dissonance, it is highly ambiguous about where the boundaries of cognitive dissonance are. One single instance is very ambiguous about what is and is not another instance. This is an extraordinarily poor method of communication!"

"It is extraordinarily good, even classic, communication for minds that interpenetrate bodies. Most of them don't work with bare abstractions, at least not most of the time. They don't have simply disembodied minds that have been stuck into bodies. Their minds are astute in dealing with situations that mind-body unities will find themselves in. And think about it. If you're going to understand how they live, you're going to have to understand some very different, embodied ways of thought. No, more than that, if you still see the task of understanding ways of thought, you will not understand them."

"So these analyses do not help me in understanding your world."

"So far as you are learning through this kind of analysis, you will not understand... but this analysis is all you have for now."

"Are there any other stories that use an isomorphic element to this one?"

"I don't know. I've gotten deep enough into this world that I don't keep stories sorted by isomorphism class."

"Tell me another story the way that a storyteller there would tell it; there is something in it that eludes me."

Archon said, "Ok... The alarm clock chimed. It was a device such that few engineers alive fully understood its mechanisms, and no man could tell the full story of how it came to be, of the exotic places and activities needed to make all of its materials, or the logistics to assemble them, or the organization and infrastructure needed to bring together all the talent of those who designed, crafted, and maintained them, or any other of

who designed, crated, and maintained them, or any other of sundry details that would take a book to list. The man abruptly shifted from the vivid kaleidoscope of the dreaming world to being awake, and opened his eyes to a kaleidoscope of sunrise colors and a room with the song of birds and the song of crickets. Outside, the grass grew, the wind blew, a busy world was waking up, and the stars continued their ordered and graceful dance. He left the slumbering form of the love of his life, showered, and stepped out with his body fresh, clean, and beautifully adorned. He stopped to kiss the fruit of their love, a boy cooing in his crib, and drove past commuters, houses, pedestrians, and jaybirds with enough stories to tell that they could fill a library to overflowing.

Archon continued, "After the majestic and ordered dance on the freeway brought him to his destination safe, unharmed, on time, and focusing on his work, he spent a day negotiating the flow of the human treasure of language, talking, listening, joking, teasing, questioning, enjoying the community of his co-workers, and cooperating to make it possible for a certain number of families to now enter the homes of their dreams. In the middle of the day he stopped to eat, nourishing a body so intricate that the state of the art in engineering could not hold a candle to his smallest cell. This done, he continued to use a spirit immeasurably greater than his body to pursue his work. Needless to say, the universe, whose physics alone is beyond our current understanding, continued to work according to all of its ordered laws and the spiritual world continued to shine. The man's time at work passed quickly, with a pitter-patter of squirrels' feet on the roof of their office, and before long he entered the door and passed a collection with copies of most of the greatest music produced by Western civilization—available for him to listen to, any time he pleased. The man absently kissed his wife, and

any time he pleased. The man absently kissed his wife, and stepped away, breathing the breath of God.

"'Hi, Honey!' she said. 'How was your day?'"

"'Somewhat dull. Maybe something exciting will happen tomorrow.'"

Ployon said, "There's someone I want to meet who is free now, so I'll leave in a second... I'm not going to ask about all the technical vocabulary, but I wanted to ask: Is this story a farce? It describes a unity who has all these ludicrous resources, and then it—"

"—he—"

"—he says the most ludicrous thing."

"What you've said is true. The story is not a farce."

"But the story tells of things that are momentous."

"I know, but people in that world do not appreciate many of these things."

"Why? They seem to have enough access to these momentous resources."

"Yes, they certainly do. But most of the unities are bathed in such things and do not think that they are anything worth thinking of."

"And I suppose you're going to tell me that is part of their greatness."

"To them these things are just as boring as jacking into a robotically controlled factory and using the machines to assemble something."

"I see. At least I think I see. And I really need to be going now... but one more question. What is 'God'?"

"Please, not that. Please, any word but that. Don't ask about that."

"I'm not expected, and you've piqued my curiosity."

"Don't you need to be going now?"

Don't you need to be going now?

"You've piqued my curiosity."

Archon was silent.

Ployon was silent.

Archon said, "God is the being who made the world."

"Ok, so you are God."

"Yes... no. No! I am not God!"

"But you created this world?"

"Not like God did. I envisioned looking in on it, but to that world, I do not exist."

"But God exists?"

"Yes... no... It is false to say that God exists and it is false to say that God does not exist."

"So the world is self-contradictory? Or would it therefore be true to say that God both exists and does not exist?"

"No. Um... It is false to say that God exists and it is false to say that God exists as it is false to say that a square is a line and it is false to say that a square is a point. God is reflected everywhere in the world: not a spot in the entire cosmos is devoid of God's glory—"

"A couple of things. First, is this one more detail of the universe that you cannot explain but is going to have one more dimension than our world?"

"God is of higher dimension than that world."

"So our world is, say, two dimensional, that world is three dimensional, and yet it somehow contains God, who is four dimensional?"

"God is not the next step up."

"Then is he two steps up?"

"Um..."

"Three? Four? Fifty? Some massive power of two?"

"Do you mind if I ask you a question from that world?"

Do you mind if I ask you a question from that world?

"Go ahead."

"How many minds can be at a point in space?"

"If you mean, 'thinking about', there is no theoretical limit; the number is not limited in principle to two, three, or... Are you saying that God has an infinite number of dimensions?"

"You caught that quick; the question is a beautiful way of asking whether a finite or an infinite number of angels can dance on the head of a pin, in their picturesque language."

"That question is very rational. But returning to the topic, since God has an infinite number of dimensions—"

"In a certain sense. It also captures part of the truth to say that God is a single point—"

"Zero dimensions?"

"God is so great not as to need any other, not to need parts as we have. And, by the way, the world does not contain God. God contains the world."

"I'm struggling to find a mathematical model that will accommodate all of this."

"Why don't you do something easier, like find an atom that will hold a planet?"

"Ok. As to the second of my couple of things, what is glory?"

"It's like the honor that we seek, except that it is immeasurably full while our honors are hollow. As I was saying, not a place in the entire cosmos is devoid of his glory—"

"His? So God is a body?"

"That's beside the point. Whether or not God has a body, he—"

"—it—"

"—he—"

"—it... isn't a male life form..."

Anthon said "Plover, what if I told you that God, without

Archeron said, "Ployon, what if I told you that God, without changing, could become a male unity? But you're saying you can't project maleness up onto God, without understanding that maleness is the shadow of something in God. You have things upside down."

"But maleness has to do with a rather undignified method of creating organisms, laughable next to a good scientific generation center."

"His ways are not like your ways, Ployon. Or mine."

"Of course; this seems to be true of everything in the world."

"But it's even true of men in that world."

"So men have no resemblance to God?"

"No, there's—oh, no!"

"What?"

"Um... never mind, you're not going to let me get out of it. I said earlier that that world is trying to make itself more like this one. Actually, I didn't say that, but it's related to what I said. There has been a massive movement which is related to the move from organic to what is not organic, and part of it has to do with... In our world, a symbol is arbitrary. No connection. In that world, something about a symbol is deeply connected with what it represents. And the unities, every single one, are symbols of God in a very strong sense."

"Are they miniature copies? If God does not have parts, how do they have minds and bodies?"

"That's not looking at it the right way. They indeed have parts, as God does not, but they aren't a scale model of God. They're something much more. A unity is someone whose very existence is bound up with God, who walks as a moving... I'm not sure what to use as the noun, but a moving something of God's presence. And you cannot help or harm one of these unities without helping or harming God "

without helping or harming God.

"Is this symbol kind of a separate God?"

"The unities are not separate from God."

"Are the unities God?"

"I don't know how to answer that. It is a grave error for anyone to confuse himself with God. And at the same time, the entire purpose of being a unity is to receive a gift, and that gift is becoming what God is."

"So the minds will be freed from their bodies?"

"No, some of them hope that their bodies will be deepened, transformed, become everything that their bodies are now and much more. But unities who have received this gift will always, always, have their bodies. It will be part of their glory."

"I'm having trouble tracking with you. It seems that everything one could say about God is false."

"That is true."

"Think about it. What you just said is contradictory."

"God is so great that anything one could say about God falls short of the truth as a point falls short of being a line. But that does not mean that all statements are equal. Think about the statements, 'One is equal to infinity.' 'Two is equal to infinity.' 'Three is equal to infinity.' and 'Four is equal to infinity.' All of them are false. But some come closer to the truth than others. And so you have a ladder of statements from the truest to the falsest, and when we say something is false, we don't mean that it has no connection to the truth; we mean that it falls immeasurably short of capturing the truth. All statements fall immeasurably short of capturing the truth, and if we say, 'All statements fall immeasurably short of capturing the truth,' that falls immeasurably short of capturing the truth. Our usual ways of using logic tend to break down."

"And how does God relate to the interpenetration of mind and

...and how does God relate to the interpenetration of mind and matter?"

"Do you see that his world, with mind and matter interpenetrating, is deeper and fuller than ours, that it has something that ours does not, and that it is so big we have trouble grasping it?"

"I see... you said that God was its creator. And... there is something about it that is just outside my grasp."

"It's outside my grasp too."

"Talking about God has certainly been a mind stretcher. I would love to hear more about him."

"Talking about God for use as a mind stretcher is like buying a piece of art because you can use its components to make rocket fuel. Some people, er, unities in that world would have a low opinion of this conversation."

"Since God is so far from that world, I'd like to restrict our attention to relevant—"

Archon interrupted. "You misunderstood what I said. Or maybe you understood it and I could only hint at the lesser part of the truth. You cannot understand unities without reference to God."

"How would unities explain it?"

"That is complex. A great many unities do not believe in God —"

"So they don't understand what it means to be a unity."

"Yes. No. That is complex. There are a great many unities who vehemently deny that there is a God, or would dismiss 'Is there a God?' as a pointless rhetorical question, but these unities may have very deep insight into what it means to be a unity."

"But you said, 'You cannot understand—'"

Archon interrupted. "Yes, and it's true. You cannot

understand unities without reference to God."

Archon continued. "Ployon, there are mind-body unities who believe that they are living in our world, with mind and body absolutely separate and understandable without reference to each other. And yet if you attack their bodies, they will take it as if you had attacked their minds, as if you had hurt them.

When I described the strange custom of keeping organisms around which serve no utilitarian purpose worth the trouble of keeping them, know that this custom, which relates to their world's organic connection between mind and body, does not distinguish people who recognize that they are mind-body unities and people who believe they are minds which happen to be wrapped in bodies. Both groups do this. The tie between mind and body is too deep to expunge by believing it doesn't exist. And there are many of them who believe God doesn't exist, or it would be nice to know if God existed but unities could never know, or God is very different from what he in fact is, but they expunge so little of the pattern imprinted by God in the core of their being that they can understand what it means to be a unity at a very profound level, but not recognize God. But you cannot understand unities without reference to God."

Ployon said, "Which parts of unities, and what they do, are affected by God? At what point does God enter their experience?"

"Which parts of programs, and their behaviors, are affected by the fact that they run on a computer? When does a computer begin to be relevant?"

"Touché. But why is God relevant, if it makes no difference whether you believe in him?"

"I didn't say that it makes no difference. Earlier you may have gathered that the organic is something deeper than ways

we would imagine to try to be organic. If it is possible, as it is, to slaughter moving organisms for food and still be organic, that doesn't mean that the organic is so small it doesn't affect such killing; it means it is probably deeper than we can imagine. And it doesn't also mean that because one has been given a large organic capital and cannot liquidate it quickly, one's choices do not matter. The decisions a unity faces, whether or not to have relationships with other unities that fit the timeless pattern, whether to give work too central a place in the pursuit of technology and possessions or too little a place or its proper place, things they have talked about since time immemorial and things which their philosophers have assumed went without saying—the unity has momentous choices not only about whether to invest or squander their capital, but choices that affect how they will live."

"What about things like that custom you mentioned? I bet there are a lot of them."

"Looking at, and sensing, the organisms they keep has a place, if they have one. And so does moving about among many non-moving organisms. And so does slowly sipping a fluid that causes a pleasant mood while the mind is temporarily impaired and loosened. And so does rotating oneself so that one's sight is filled with clusters of moisture vapor above their planet's surface. And some of the unities urge these things because they sense the organic has been lost, and without reference to the tradition that urges deeper goods. And yes, I know that these activities probably sound strange—"

"I do not see what rational benefit these activities would have, but I see this may be a defect with me rather than a defect with the organic—"

"Know that it is a defect with you rather than a defect with

the organic."

"—but what is this about rotating oneself?"

"As one goes out from the center of their planet, the earth— if one could move, for the earth's core is impenetrable minerals —one would go through solid rock, then pass through the most rarefied boundary, then pass through gases briefly and be out in space. You would encounter neither subterranean passageways and buildings reaching to the center of the earth, and when you left you would find only the rarest vessel leaving the atmosphere —"

"Then where do they live?"

"At the boundary where space and planetary mass meet. All of them are priveleged to live at that meeting-place, a narrow strip or sphere rich in life. There are very few of them; it's a select club. Not even a trillion. And the only property they have is the best—a place teeming with life that would be impossible only a quarter of the planet's thickness above or below. A few of them build edifices reaching scant storeys into the sky; a few dig into the earth; there are so few of these that not being within a minute's travel from literally touching the planet's surface is exotic. But the unities, along with the rest of the planet's life, live in a tiny, priceless film adorned with the best resources they could ever know of."

Ployon was stunned. It thought of the cores of planets and asteroids it had been in. It thought of the ships and stations in space. Once it had had the privelege of working from a subnet hosted within a comparatively short distance of a planet's surface—it was a rare privilege, acquired through deft political maneuvering, and there were fewer than 130,982,539,813,209 other minds who had shared that privelege. And, basking in that luxury, it could only envy the minds which had bodies that walked

on the surface. Ployon was stunned and reeling at the privilege of

—

Ployon said, "How often do they travel to other planets?"

"There is only one planet so rich as to have them."

Ployon pondered the implications. It had travelled to half the spectrum of luxurious paradises. Had it been to even one this significant? Ployon reluctantly concluded that it had not. And that was not even considering what it meant for this golden plating to teem with life. And then Ployon realized that each of the unities had a body on that surface. It reeled in awe.

Archon said, "And you're not thinking about what it means that surface is home to the biological network, are you?"

Ployon was silent.

Archon said, "This organic biological network, in which they live and move and have their being—"

"Is God the organic?"

"Most of the things that the organic has, that are not to be found in our world, are reflections of God. But God is more. It is true that in God that they live and move and have their being, but it is truer. There is a significant minority that identifies the organic with God—"

Ployon interrupted, "—who are wrong—"

Archon interrupted, "—who are reacting against the destruction of the organic and seek the right thing in the wrong place—"

Ployon interrupted, "But how is God different from the organic?"

Archon sifted through a myriad of possible answers. "Hmm, this might be a good time for you to talk with that other mind you wanted to talk with."

"You know, you're good at piquing my curiosity."

"If you're looking for where they diverge, they don't. Or at least, some people would say they don't. Others who are deeply connected with God would say that the organic as we have been describing it is problematic—"

"But all unities are deeply connected with God, and disagreement is—"

"You're right, but that isn't where I was driving. And this relates to something messy, about disagreements when—"

"Aren't all unities able to calculate the truth from base axioms? Why would they disagree?"

Archon paused. "There are a myriad of real, not virtual disagreements—"

Ployon interrupted, "And it is part of a deeper reality to that world that—"

Archon interrupted. "No, no, or at best indirectly. There is something fractured about that world that—"

Ployon interrupted. "—is part of a tragic beauty, yes. Each thing that is artificially constricted in that world makes it greater. I'm waiting for the explanation."

"No. This does not make it greater."

"Then I'm waiting for the explanation of why this one limitation does not make it greater. But back to what you said about the real and the organic—"

"The differences between God and the organic are not differences of opposite directions. You are looking in the wrong place if you are looking for contradictions. It's more a difference like... if you knew what 'father' and 'mother' meant, male parent and female parent—"

Ployon interrupted, "—you know I have perfect details of male and female reproductive biology—"

Archon interrupted, "—and you think that if you knew the

formula for something called chicken soup, you would know what the taste of chicken soup is for them—"

Ployon continued, "—so now you're going to develop some intricate elaboration of what it means that there is only one possible 'mother's' contribution, while outside of a laboratory the 'father's' contribution is extraordinarily haphazard..."

Archon said, "A complete non sequitur. If you only understand reproductive biology, you do not understand what a father or mother is. Seeing as how we have no concept yet of father or mother, let us look at something that's different enough but aligns with father/mother in an interesting enough way that... never mind."

Archon continued, "Imagine on the one hand a virtual reality, and on the other hand the creator of that virtual reality. You don't have to choose between moving in the virtual reality and being the creator's guest; the way to be the creator's guest is to move in the virtual reality and the purpose of moving in the virtual reality is being the creator's guest. But that doesn't mean that the creator is the virtual reality, or the virtual reality is the creator. It's not just a philosophical error to confuse them, or else it's a philosophical error with ramifications well outside of philosophy."

"Why didn't you just say that the relationship between God and the organic is creator/creation? Or that the organic is the world that was created?"

"Because the relationship is not that, or at very least not just that. And the organic is not the world—that is a philosophical error almost as serious as saying that the creator is the virtual reality, if a very different error. I fear that I have given you a simplification that is all the more untrue because of how true it is. God is in the organic, and in the world, and in each person, but

not in the same way. How can I put it? If I say, 'God is in the organic,' it would be truer to say, 'The organic is not devoid of God,' because that is more ambiguous. If there were three boxes, and one contained a functional robot 'brain', and another contained a functional robot arm, and the third contained a non-functioning robot, it would be truer to say that each box contains something like a functioning robot than to say that each box contains a functioning robot. The ambiguity allows for being true in different ways in the different contexts, let alone something that words could not express even if we were discussing only one 'is in' or 'box'."

"Is there another way of expressing how their words would express it?"

"Their words are almost as weak as our words here."

"So they don't know about something this important?"

"Knowledge itself is different for them. To know something for us is to be able to analyze in a philosophical discussion. And this knowledge exists for them. But there is another root type of knowledge, a knowledge that—"

"Could you analyze the differences between the knowledge we use and the knowledge they use?"

"Yes, and it would be as useful to you as discussing biology. This knowledge is not entirely alien to us; when a mathematician 'soaks' in a problem, or I refused to connect with anything but the body, for a moment a chasm was crossed. But in that world the chasm doesn't exist... wait, that's too strong... a part of the chasm doesn't exist. Knowing is not with the mind alone, but the whole person—"

"What part of the knowing is stored in the bones?"

"Thank you for your flippancy, but people use the metaphor of knowledge being in their bones, or drinking, for this knowing."

"This sounds more like a physical process and some hankey-pankey that has been dignified by being called knowing. It almost sounds as if they don't have minds."

"They don't."

"What?"

"They don't, at least not as we know them. The mathematical analogy I would use is that they... never mind, I don't want to use a mathematical analogy. The computational analogy I would use is that we are elements of a computer simulation, and every now and then we break into a robot that controls the computer, and do something that transcends what elements of the computer simulation "should" be able to do. But they don't transcend the simulation because they were never elements of the simulation in the first place—they are real bodies, or real unities. And what I've called 'mind' in them is more properly understood as 'spirit', which is now a meaningless word to you, but is part of them that meets God whether they are aware of it or not. Speaking philosophically is a difficult discipline that few of them can do—"

"They are starting to sound mentally feeble."

"Yes, if you keep looking at them as an impoverished version of our world. It is hard to speak philosophically as it is hard for you to emulate a clock and do nothing else—because they need to drop out of several dimensions of their being to do it properly, and they live in those dimensions so naturally that it is an unnatural constriction for most of them to talk as if that was the only dimension of their being. And here I've been talking disappointingly about knowledge, making it sound more abstract than our knowing, when in fact it is much less so, and probably left you with the puzzle of how they manage to bridge gaps between mind, spirit, and body... but the difficulty of the

question lies in a false setup. They are unities which experience, interact with, know all of them as united. And the knowing is deep enough that they can speculate that there's no necessary link between their spirits and bodies, or minds and bodies, or what have you. And if I can't explain this, I can't explain something even more foundational, the fact that the greatest thing about God is not how inconceivably majestic he is, but how close."

"It sounds as if—wait, I think you've given me a basis for a decent analysis. Let me see if I can—"

"Stop there."

"Why?"

Archon said, "Let me tell you a little story."

Archon continued, "A philosopher, Berkeley, believed that the only real things are minds and ideas and experiences in those minds: hence a rock was equal to the sum of every mind's impression of it. You could say that a rock existed, but what that had to mean was that there were certain sense impressions and ideas in minds, including God's mind; it didn't mean that there was matter outside of minds."

"A lovely virtual metaphysics. I've simulated that metaphysics, and it's enjoyable for a time."

"Yes, but for Berkeley it meant something completely different. Berkeley was a bishop,"

"What's a bishop?"

"I can't explain all of that now, but part of a bishop is a leader who is responsible for a community that believes God became a man, and helping them to know God and be unities."

"How does that reconcile with that metaphysics?"

Archon said, "Ployon, stop interrupting. He believed that they were not only compatible, but the belief that God became a man

could only be preserved by his metaphysics. And he believed he was defending 'common sense', how most unities thought about the world.

Archon continued, "And after he wrote his theories, another man, Samuel Johnson, kicked a rock and said, 'I refute Berkeley thus!'"

Ployon said, "Ha ha! That's the way to score!"

"But he didn't score. Johnson established only one thing—"

"—how to defend against Berkeley—"

"—that he didn't understand Berkeley."

"Yes, he did."

"No, he didn't."

"But he did."

"Ployon, only the crudest understanding of Berkeley's ideas could mean that one could refute them by kicking a rock. Berkeley didn't make his ideas public until he could account for the sight of someone kicking a rock, or the experience of kicking it yourself, just as well as if there were matter outside of minds."

"I know."

"So now that we've established that—"

Ployon interrupted. "I know that Berkeley's ideas could account for kicking a rock as well as anything else. But kicking a rock is still an excellent way to refute Berkeley. If what you've said about this world has any coherence at all."

"What?"

"Well, Berkeley's ideas are airtight, right?"

"Ployon, there is no way they could be disproven. Not by argument, not by action."

"So it is in principle impossible to force someone out of Berkeley's ideas by argument."

"Absolutely."

"But you're missing something. What is it you've been talking to me about?"

"A world where mind and matter interpenetrate, and the organic, and there are many dimensions to life—"

"And if you're just falling further into a trap to logically argue, wouldn't it do something fundamentally unity-like to step into another dimension?"

Archon was silent.

Ployon said, "I understand that it would demonstrate a profound misunderstanding in our world... but wouldn't it say something equally profound in that world?"

Archon was stunned.

Ployon was silent for a long time.

Then Ployon said, "When are you going to refute Berkeley?"

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Since the dawn of time, those who have walked the earth have looked up into the starry sky and wondered. They have asked, "What is the universe, and who are we?" "What are the woods?" "Where did this all come from?" "Is there life after death?" "What is the meaning of our existence?" The march of time has brought civilization, and with that, science. And science allows us to answer these age-old human questions.

That, at least, is the account of it that people draw now. But the truth is much more interesting.

Science is an ingenious mechanism to test guesses about mechanisms and behavior of the universe, and it is phenomenally powerful in that arena. Science can try to explain how the Heavens move, but it isn't the sort of thing to explain why there are Heavens that move that way—science can also describe how the Heavens have moved and reached their present position, but not the "Why?" behind it. Science can describe how to make technology to make life more convenient, but not "What is the meaning of life?" Trying to ask science to answer "Why?" (or for that matter, "Who?" or any other truly interesting question besides "How?") is a bit like putting a book on a scale and asking the scale, "What does this book mean?" And there are indeed some people who will accept the scale's answer, 429.7425 grams, as the definitive answer to what the book means, and all the better because it is so precise.

But to say that much and then stop is to paint a deceptive picture. Very deceptive. Why?

Science at that point had progressed more than at any point in history, and its effects were being felt around the world. And science enjoyed both a profound prestige and a profound devotion. Many people did not know what "understanding nature"

could mean besides "learning scientific descriptions of nature," which was a bit like not knowing what "understanding your best friend" could mean besides "learning the biochemical building blocks of your friend's body."

All this and more is true, yet this is not the most important truth. This was the Middle Age between ancient and human society and the technological, and in fact it was the early Middle Age. People were beginning to develop real technologies, the seeds of technology we would recognize, and could in primitive fashion jack into such a network as existed then. But all of this was embraced in a society that was ancient, ancient beyond measure. As you may have guessed, it is an error to misunderstand that society as an inexplicably crude version of real technological society. It is a fundamental error.

To really understand this society, you need to understand not its technology, but the sense in which it was ancient. I will call it 'medieval', but you must understand that the ancient element in that society outweighs anything we would recognize.

And even this is deceptive, not because a single detail is wrong, but because it is abstract. I will tell you about certain parts in an abstract fashion, but you must understand that in this world's thinking the concrete comes before the abstract. I will do my best to tell a story—not as they would tell one, because that would conceal as much as it would reveal, but taking their way of telling stories and adapting it so we can see what is going on.

For all of their best efforts to spoil it, all of them live on an exquisite garden in the thin film where the emptiness of space meets the barrier of rock—there is a nest, a cradle where they are held tightly, and even if some of those who are most trying to be scientific want to flee into the barren wastes of space and

other planets hostile to their kind of life. And this garden itself has texture, an incredible spectrum of texture along its surface. Place is itself significant, and I cannot capture what this story would have been like had it been placed in Petaling Jaya in Malaysia, or Paris in France, or Cambridge in England. What are these? I don't know... I can say that Petaling Jaya, Paris, and Cambridge are cities, but that would leave you knowing as much as you knew 5 milliseconds before I told you. And Malaysia, France, and England are countries, and now you know little besides being able to guess that a country is somehow capable of containing a city. Which is barely more than you knew before; the fact is that there is something very different between Petaling Jaya, Paris, and Cambridge. They have different wildlife and different places with land and water, but that is not nearly so interesting as the difference in people. I could say that people learn different skills, if I wanted to be very awkward and uninformative, but... the best way of saying it is that in our world, because there is nothing keeping minds apart... In that world, people have been separate so they don't even speak the same language. They almost have separate worlds. There is something common to all medievals, beyond what technology may bring, and people in other cities could find deep bonds with this story, but... Oh, there are many more countries than those I listed, and these countries have so many cities that you could spend your whole life travelling between cities and never see all of them. No, our world doesn't have this wealth. Wealthy as it is, it doesn't come close.

Petaling Jaya is a place of warm rainstorms, torrents of water falling from the sky, a place where a little stream of unscented water flows by the road, even if such a beautiful "open sewer" is not appreciated. Petaling Jaya is a place where people are less

aware of time than in Cambridge or Paris and yet a place where people understand time better, because of reasons that are subtle and hard to understand. It draws people from three worlds in the grandeur that is Asia, and each of them brings treasures. The Chinese bring with them the practice of calling adults "Uncle" or "Aunt", my father's brother or my father's sister or my mother's brother or my mother's sister, which is to say, addresses them not only by saying that there is something great about them, but they are "tied by blood"—a bond that I do not know how to explain, save to say that ancestry and origins are not the mechanism of how they came to be, or at least not just the mechanism of how they came to be. Ancestry and origins tell of the substance of who they are, and that is one more depth that cannot exist in our world with matter and mind separate. The Indians and Bumi Putras—if it is really only them, which is far from true—live a life of friendship and hospitality, which are human treasures that shine in them. What is hospitality, you ask? That is hard to answer; it seems that anything I can say will be deceptive. It means that if you have a space, and if you allow someone in that space, you serve that person, caring for every of his needs. That is a strange virtue—and it will sound stranger when I say that this is not endured as inexpedient, but something where people want to call others. Is it an economic exchange? That is beside the point; these things are at once the shadow cast by real hospitality, and at the same time the substance of hospitality itself, and you need to understand men before you can understand it. What about friendship? Here I am truly at a loss. I can only say that in the story that I am about to tell, what happens is the highest form of friendship.

Paris is, or at least has been, a place with a liquid, a drug, that temporarily causes a pleasant mood while changing behavior and muddling a person's thoughts. But to say that misses what that liquid is, in Paris or much else. To some it is very destructive, and the drug is dangerous if it is handled improperly. But that is the hinge to something that—in our world, no pleasure is ever dangerous. You or I have experienced pleasures that these minds could scarcely dream of. We can have whatever pleasure we want at any time. And in a very real sense no pleasure means anything. But in their world, with its weaker pleasures, every pleasure is connected to something. And this liquid, this pleasure, if taken too far, destroys people—which is a hinge, a doorway to something. It means that they need to learn a self-mastery in using this liquid, and in using it many of them forge a beauty in themselves that affects all of life. And they live beautiful lives. Beautiful in many ways. They are like Norsemen of ages past, who sided with the good powers, not because the good powers were going to win, but because they wanted to side with the good powers and fight alongside them when the good powers lost and chaos ruled. It is a tragic beauty, and the tragedy is all the more real because it is unneeded, but it is beauty, and it is a beauty that could not exist if they knew the strength of good. And I have not spoken of the beauty of the language in Paris, with its melody and song, or of the artwork and statues, the Basilica of the Sacré-Coeur, or indeed of the tapestry that makes up the city.

Cambridge is what many of them would call a "medieval" village, meaning that it has stonework that looks to its members like the ancient world's architecture. To them this is a major difference; the ancient character of the buildings to them overwhelms the fact that they are buildings. To that medieval

world, both the newest buildings and the ones they considered "medieval" had doorways, stairwells, rooms, windows, and passages. You or I would be struck by the ancient character of the oldest and newest buildings and the ancient character of the life they serve. But to these medievals, the fact that a doorway was built out of machine-made materials instead of having long ago been shaped from stone takes the door—the door—from being ancient to being a new kind of thing! And so in the quaintest way the medievals consider Cambridge a "medieval" village, not because they were all medievals, but because the ancient dimension to architecture was more ancient to them than the equally ancient ways of constructing spaces that were reflected in the "new" buildings. There was more to it than that, but...

That was not the most interesting thing about them. I know you were going to criticize me for saying that hospitality was both a human treasure and something that contributed to the uniqueness of Petaling Jaya, but I need to do the same thing again. Politeness is... how can I describe it? Cynics describe politeness as being deceit, something where you learn a bunch of standard things to do and have to use them to hide the fact that you're offended, or bored, or want to leave, or don't like someone. And all of that is true—and deceptive. A conversation will politely begin with one person saying, "Hi, Barbara, how are you?" And Barbara will say, "Fine, George, how are you?" "Fine!" And the exact details seem almost arbitrary between cultures. This specific interaction is, on the surface, superficial and not necessarily true: people usually say they feel fine whether or not they really feel fine at all. And so politeness can be picked apart in this fashion, as if there's nothing else there, but there is. Saying "How are you?" opens a door, a door of concern. In one

sense, what is given is very small. But if a person says, "I feel rotten," the other person is likely to listen. Barbara might only "give" George a little bit of chatter, but if he were upset, she would comfort him; if he were physically injured, she would call an ambulance to give him medical help; if he were hungry, she might buy him something to eat. But he only wants a little chat, so she only gives him a little chat—which is not really a little thing at all, but I'm going to pretend that it's small. Politeness stems from a concern for others, and is in actuality quite deep. The superficial "Hi, how are you?" is really not superficial at all. It is connected to a much deeper concern, and the exterior of rules is connected to a heart of concern. And Cambridge, which is a place of learning, and has buildings more ancient than what these medieval people usually see, is perhaps most significantly distinguished by its politeness.

But I have not been telling you a story. These observations may not be completely worthless, but they are still not a dynamic story. The story I'm about to tell you is not in *Petaling Jaya*, nor in Paris, nor in Cambridge, nor in any of thousands of other worlds. And I would like to show you what the medieval society looks like in action. And so let's look at Peter.

Peter, after a long and arduous trek, opened the car door, got out, stretched, looked at the vast building before him, and listened as his father said, "We've done it! The rest should be easy, at least for today." Then Peter smiled, and smashed his right thumb in the car door.

Then suddenly they moved—their new plan was to get to a hospital. Not much later, Peter was in the Central DuPage Hospital emergency room, watching people who came in after him be treated before him—not because they had more clout, but because they had worse injuries. The building was immense—

something like one of our biological engineering centers, but instead of engineering bodies according to a mind's specification, this used science to restore bodies that had been injured and harmed, and reduce people's suffering. And it was incredibly primitive; at its best, it helped the bodies heal itself. But you must understand that even if these people were far wealthier than most others in their tiny garden, they had scant resources by our standard, and they made a major priority to restore people whose bodies had problems. (If you think about it, this tells something about how they view the value of each body.) Peter was a strong and healthy young man, and it had been a while since he'd been in a hospital. He was polite to the people who were helping him, even though he wished he were anywhere else.

You're wondering why he deliberately smashed his thumb? Peter didn't deliberately smash his thumb. He was paying attention to several other things and shoved the door close while his thumb was in its path. His body is not simply a device controlled by his mind; they interact, and his mind can't do anything he wishes it to do—he can't add power to it. He thinks by working with a mind that operates with real limitations and can overlook something in excitement—much like his body. If he achieves something, he doesn't just requisition additional mental power. He struggles within the capabilities of his own mind, and that means that when he achieves something with his mind, he achieves something. Yes, in a way that you or I cannot. Not only is his body in a very real sense more real to him than any of the bodies you or I have jacked into and swapped around, but his mind is more real. I'm not sure how to explain it.

Peter arrived for the second time well after check-in time, praying to be able to get in. After a few calls with a network

that let him connect with other minds while keeping his body intact, a security officer came in, expressed sympathy about his bandaged thumb—what does 'sympathy' mean? It means that you share in another person's pain and make it less—and let him up to his room. The family moved his possessions from the car to his room and made his bed in a few minutes, and by the time it was down, the security guard had called the RA, who brought Peter his keys.

It was the wee hours of the morning when Peter looked at his new home for the second time, and tough as Peter was, the pain in his thumb kept the weary man from falling asleep. He was in as much pain as he'd been in for a while. What? Which part do you want explained? Pain is when the mind is troubled because the body is injured; it is a warning that the body needs to be taken care of. No, he can't turn it off just because he thinks it's served his purpose; again, you're not understanding the intimate link between mind and body. And the other thing... sleep is... Their small globe orbits a little star, and it spins as it turns. At any time, part of the planet faces the star, the sun, and part faces away, and on the globe, it is as if a moving wall comes, and all is light, then another wall comes, and it is dark. The globe has a rhythm of light and dark, a rhythm of day and night, and people live in intimate attunement to this rhythm. The ancients moved about when it was light and slept when it was dark—to sleep, at its better moments, is to come fatigued and have body and mind rejuvenate themselves to awaken full of energy. The wealthier medievals have the ability to see by mechanical light, to awaken when they want and fall asleep when they want—and yet they are still attuned, profoundly attuned, to this natural cycle and all that goes with it. For that matter, Peter can stick a substance into his body that will push away the pain—and yet, for all these

artificial escapes, medievals feel pain and usually take care of their bodies by heeding it, and medievals wake more or less when it is light and sleep more or less when it is dark. And they don't think of pain as attunement to their bodies—most of them wish they couldn't feel pain, and certainly don't think of pain as good—nor do more than a few of them think in terms of waking and sleeping to a natural rhythm... but so much of the primeval way of being human is so difficult to dislodge for the medievals.

He awoke when the light was ebbing, and after some preparations set out, wandering this way and that until he found a place to eat. The pain was much duller, and he made his way to a selection of different foods—meant not only to nourish but provide a pleasant taste—and sat down at a table. There were many people about; he would not eat in a cell by himself, but at a table with others in a great hall.

A young man said, "Hi, I'm John." Peter began to extend his hand, then looked at his white bandaged thumb and said, "Excuse me for not shaking your hand. I am Peter."

A young woman said, "I'm Mary. I saw you earlier and was hoping to see you more."

Peter wondered about something, then said, "I'll drink for that," reached with his right hand, grabbed a glass vessel full of carbonated water with sugar, caffeine, and assorted unnatural ingredients, and then winced in pain, spilling the fluid on the table.

Everybody at the table moved. A couple of people dodged the flow of liquid; others stopped what they were doing, rushing to take earth toned objects made from the bodies of living trees (napkins), which absorbed the liquid and were then shipped to be preserved with other unwanted items. Peter said, "I keep forgetting I need to be careful about my thumb," smiled,

grabbed another glass with fluid cows had labored to create, until his wet left hand slipped and he spilled the organic fluid all over his food.

Peter stopped, sat back, and then laughed for a while. "This is an interesting beginning to my college education."

Mary said, "I noticed you managed to smash your thumb in a car door without saying any words you regret. What else has happened?"

Peter said, "Nothing great; I had to go to the ER, where I had to wait, before they could do something about my throbbing thumb. I got back at 4:00 AM and couldn't get to sleep for a long time because I was in so much pain. Then I overslept my alarm and woke up naturally in time for dinner. How about you?"

Mary thought for a second about the people she met. Peter could see the sympathy on her face.

John said, "Wow. That's nasty."

Peter said, "I wish we couldn't feel pain. Have you thought about how nice it would be to live without pain?"

Mary said, "I'd like that."

John said, "Um..."

Mary said, "What?"

John said, "Actually, there are people who don't feel pain, and there's a name for the condition. You've heard of it."

Peter said, "I haven't heard of that before."

John said, "Yes you have. It's called leprosy."

Peter said, "What do you mean by 'leprosy'? I thought leprosy was a disease that ravaged the body."

John said, "It is. But that is only because it destroys the ability to feel pain. The way it works is very simple. We all get little nicks and scratches, and because they hurt, we show extra sensitivity. Our feet start to hurt after a long walk, so without

even thinking about it we... shift things a little, and keep anything really bad from happening. That pain you are feeling is your body's way of asking room to heal so that the smashed thumbnail (or whatever it is) that hurts so terribly now won't leave you permanently maimed. Back to feet, a leprosy patient will walk exactly the same way and get wounds we'd never even think of for taking a long walk. All the terrible injuries that make leprosy a feared disease happen only because leprosy keeps people from feeling pain."

Peter looked at his thumb, and his stomach growled.

John said, "I'm full. Let me get a drink for you, and then I'll help you drink it."

Mary said, "And I'll get you some dry food. We've already eaten; it must—"

Peter said, "Please, I've survived much worse. It's just a bit of pain."

John picked up a clump of wet napkins and threatened to throw it at Peter before standing up and walking to get something to drink. Mary followed him.

Peter sat back and just laughed.

John said, "We have some time free after dinner; let's just wander around campus."

They left the glass roofed building and began walking around. There were vast open spaces between buildings. They went first to "Blanchard", a building they described as "looking like a castle." Blanchard, a tall ivory colored edifice, built of rough limestone, which overlooked a large expanse adorned with a carefully tended and living carpet, had been modelled after a building in a much older institution called Oxford, and... this is probably the time to explain certain things about this kind of organization.

You and I simply requisition skills. If I were to imagine what it would mean to educate those people—or at least give skills; the concept of 'education' is slightly different from either inserting skills or inserting knowledge into a mind, and I don't have the ability to explain exactly what the distinction is here, but I will say that it is significant—then the obvious way is to simply make a virtual place on the network where people can be exposed to knowledge. And that model would become phenomenally popular within a few years; people would pursue an education that was a niche on such a network as they had, and would be achieved by weaving in these computer activities with the rest of their lives.

But this place preserved an ancient model of education, where disciples would come to live in a single place, which was in a very real sense its own universe, and meet in ancient, face-to-face community with their mentors and be shaped in more than what they know and can do. Like so many other things, it was ancient, using computers here and there and even teaching people the way of computers while avoiding what we would assume comes with computers.

But these people liked that building, as contrasted to buildings that seemed more modern, because it seemed to convey an illusion of being in another time, and let you forget that you were in a modern era.

After some wandering, Peter and those he had just met looked at the building, each secretly pretending to be in a more ancient era, and went through an expanse with a fountain in the center, listened to some music, and ignored clouds, trees, clusters of people who were sharing stories, listening, thinking, joking, and missing home, in order to come to something exotic, namely a rotating platform with a mockup of a giant mastodon which had died before the end of the last ice age, and whose

bones had been unearthed in a nearby excavation. Happy to have seen something exotic, they ignored buildings which have a human-pleasing temperature the year round, other people excited to have seen new friends, toys which sailed through the air on the same principles as an airplane's wings, a place where artistic pieces were being drawn into being, a vast, stonehard pavement to walk, and a spectrum of artefacts for the weaving of music.

Their slow walk was interrupted when John looked at a number on a small machine he had attached to his wrist, and interpreted it to mean that it was time for the three of them to stop their leisured enjoyment of the summer night and move with discomfort and haste to one specific building—they all were supposed to go to the building called Fischer. After moving over and shifting emotionally from being relaxed and joyful to being bothered and stressed, they found that they were all on a brother and sister floor, and met their leaders.

Paul, now looking considerably more coherent than when he procured Peter's keys, announced, "Now, for the next exercise, I'll be passing out toothpicks. I want you to stand in two lines, guy-girl-guy-girl, and pass a lifesaver down the line. If your team passes the lifesaver to the end first, you win. Oh, and if you drop the lifesaver your team has to start over, so don't drop it."

People shuffled, and shortly Peter was standing in line, looking over the shoulder of a girl he didn't know, and silently wishing he weren't playing this game. He heard a voice say, "Go!" and then had an intermittent view of a tiny sugary torus passing down the line and the two faces close to each other trying simultaneously to get close enough to pass the lifesaver, and control the clumsy, five centimeter long toothpicks well enough to transfer the candy. Sooner than he expected the girl turned around, almost

losing the lifesaver on her toothpick, and then began a miniature dance as they clumsily tried to synchronize the ends of their toothpicks. This took unpleasantly long, and Peter quickly banished a thought of "This is almost kissing! That can't be what's intended." Then he turned around, trying both to rush and not to rush at the same time, and repeated the same dance with the young woman standing behind him—Mary! It was only after she turned away that Peter realized her skin had changed from its alabaster tone to pale rose.

Their team won, and there was a short break as the next game was organized. Peter heard bits of conversation: "This has been a bummer; I've gotten two papercuts this week." "—and then I—" "What instruments do you—" "I'm from France too! Tu viens de Paris?" "Really? You—" Everybody seemed to be chattering, and Peter wished he could be in one of—actually, several of those conversations at once.

Paul's voice cut in and said, "For this next activity we are going to form a human circle. With your team, stand in a circle, and everybody reach in and grab another hand with each hand. Then hold on tight; when I say, "Go," you want to untangle yourselves, without letting go. The first team to untangle themselves wins!"

Peter reached in, and found each of his hands clasped in a solid, masculine grip. Then the race began, and people jostled and tried to untangle themselves. This was a laborious process and, one by one, every other group freed itself, while Peter's group seemed stuck on—someone called and said, "I think we're knotted!" As people began to thin out, Paul looked with astonishment and saw that they were indeed knotted. "A special prize to them, too, for managing the best tangle!"

"And now, we'll have a three-legged race! Gather into pairs,

and each two of you take a burlap sack. Then—" Paul continued, and with every game, the talk seemed to flow more. When the finale finished, Peter found himself again with John and Mary and heard the conversations flowing around him: "Really? You too?" "But you don't understand. Hicks have a slower pace of life; we enjoy things without all the things you city dwellers need for entertainment. And we learn resourceful ways to—" "—and only at Wheaton would the administration forbid dancing while requiring the games we just played and—" Then Peter lost himself in a conversation that continued long into the night. He expected to be up at night thinking about all the beloved people he left at home, but Peter was too busy thinking about John's and Mary's stories.

The next day Peter woke up when his machine played a hideous sound, and groggily trudged to the dining hall to eat some chemically modified grains and drink water that had been infused with traditionally roasted beans. There were pills he could have taken that would have had the effect he was looking for, but he savored the beverage, and after sitting at a table without talking, bounced around from beautiful building to beautiful building, seeing sights for the first time, and wishing he could avoid all that to just get to his advisor.

Peter found the appropriate hallway, wandered around nervously until he found a door with a yellowed plaque that said "Julian Johnson," knocked once, and pushed the door open. A white-haired man said, "Peter Jones? How are you? Do come in... What can I do for you?"

Peter pulled out a sheet of paper, an organic surface used to retain colored trails and thus keep small amounts of information inscribed so that the "real" information is encoded in a personal way. No, they don't need to be trained to have their own

watermark in this encoding.

Peter looked down at the paper for a moment and said, "I'm sorry I'm late. I need you to write what courses I should take and sign here. Then I can be out of your way."

The old man sat back, drew a deep breath, and relaxed into a fatherly smile. Peter began to wonder if his advisor was going to say anything at all. Then Prof. Johnson motioned towards an armchair, as rich and luxurious as his own, and then looked as if he remembered something and offered a bowl full of candy. "Sit down, sit down, and make yourself comfortable. May I interest you in candy?" He picked up an engraved metal bowl and held it out while Peter grabbed a few Lifesavers.

Prof. Johnson sat back, silent for a moment, and said, "I'm sorry I'm out of butterscotch; that always seems to disappear. Please sit down, and tell me about yourself. We can get to that form in a minute. One of the privileges of this job is that I get to meet interesting people. Now, where are you from?"

Peter said, "I'm afraid there's not much that's interesting about me. I'm from a small town downstate that doesn't have anything to distinguish itself. My amusements have been reading, watching the cycle of the year, oh, and running. Not much interesting in that. Now which classes should I take?"

Prof. Johnson sat back and smiled, and Peter became a little less tense. "You run?"

Peter said, "Yes; I was hoping to run on the track this afternoon, after the lecture. I've always wanted to run on a real track."

The old man said, "You know, I used to run myself, before I became an official Old Geezer and my orthopaedist told me my knees couldn't take it. So I have to content myself with swimming now, which I've grown to love. Do you know about the

Prairie Path?"

Peter said, "No, what's that?"

Prof. Johnson said, "Years ago, when I ran, I ran through the areas surrounding the College—there are a lot of beautiful houses. And, just south of the train tracks with the train you can hear now, there's a path before you even hit the street. You can run, or bike, or walk, on a path covered with fine white gravel, with trees and prairie plants on either side. It's a lovely view."

He paused, and said, "Any ideas what you want to do after Wheaton?"

Peter said, "No. I don't even know what I want to major in."

Prof. Johnson said, "A lot of students don't know what they want to do. Are you familiar with Career Services? They can help you get an idea of what kinds of things you like to do."

Peter looked at his watch and said, "It's chapel time."

Prof. Johnson said, "Relax. I can write you a note." Peter began to relax again, and Prof. Johnson continued, "Now you like to read. What do you like to read?"

Peter said, "Newspapers and magazines, and I read this really cool book called *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Oh, and I like the Bible."

Prof. Johnson said, "I do too. What do you like about it most?"

"I like the stories in the Old Testament."

"One general tip: here at Wheaton, we have different kinds of professors—"

Peter said, "Which ones are best?"

Prof. Johnson said, "Different professors are best for different students. Throughout your tenure at Wheaton, ask your friends and learn which professors have teaching styles that you learn well with and mesh well with. Consider taking

other courses from a professor you like. Now we have a lot of courses which we think expose you to new things and stretch you —people come back and see that these courses are best. Do you like science?"

"I like it; I especially liked a physics lab."

Prof. Johnson took a small piece of paper from where it was attached to a stack with a strange adhesive that had "failed" as a solid adhesive, but provided a uniquely useful way to make paper that could be attached to a surface with a slight push and then be detached with a gentle pull, remarkably enough without damage to the paper or the surface. He began to think, and flip through a book, using a technology thousands of years old at its heart. "Have you had calculus?" Prof. Johnson restrained himself from launching into a discussion of the grand, Utopian vision for "calculus" as it was first imagined and how different a conception it had from anything that would be considered "mathematics" today. Or should he go into that? He wavered, and then realized Peter had answered his question. "Ok," Prof. Johnson said, "the lab physics class unfortunately requires that you've had calculus. Would you like to take calculus now? Have you had geometry, algebra, and trigonometry?"

Peter said, "Yes, I did, but I'd like a little break from that now. Maybe I could take calculus next semester."

"Fair enough. You said you liked to read."

"Magazines and newspapers."

"Those things deal with the unfolding human story. I wonder if you'd like to take world civilization now, or a political science course."

"History, but why study world history? Why can't I just study U.S. history?"

Prof. Johnson said, "The story of our country is intertwined

with that of our world. I think you might find that some of the things in world history are a lot closer to home than you think—and we have some real storytellers in our history department."

"That sounds interesting. What else?"

"The Theology of Culture class is one many students find enjoyable, and it helps build a foundation for Old and New Testament courses. Would you be interested in taking it for A quad or B quad, the first or second half of the semester?"

"Could I do both?"

"I wish I could say yes, but this course only lasts half the semester. The other half you could take Foundations of Wellness—you could do running as homework!"

"I think I'll do that first, and then Theology of Culture. That should be new," Peter said, oblivious to how tightly connected he was to theology and culture. "What else?"

Prof. Johnson said, "We have classes where people read things that a lot of people have found really interesting. Well, that could describe several classes, but I was thinking about Classics of Western Literature or Literature of the Modern World."

Peter said, "Um... Does Classics of Western Literature cover ancient and medieval literature, and Literature of the Modern World cover literature that isn't Western? Because if they do, I'm not sure I could connect with it."

Prof. Johnson relaxed into his seat, a movable support that met the contours of his body. Violating convention somewhat, he had a chair for Peter that was as pleasant to rest in as his own.

"You know, a lot of people think that. But you know what?"

Peter said, "What?"

"There is something human that crosses cultures. That is why the stories have been selected. Stories written long ago, and

stories written far away, can have a lot to connect with."

"Ok. How many more courses should I take?"

"You're at 11 credits now; you probably want 15. Now you said that you like Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. I'm wondering if you would also like a philosophy course."

Peter said, "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance is... I don't suppose there are any classes that use that. Or are there?"

I've heard Pirsig isn't given his fair due by philosophers."

Prof. Johnson said, "If you approach one of our philosophy courses the way you approach Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, I think you'll profit from the encounter. I wonder if our Issues and Worldviews in Philosophy might interest you. I'm a big fan of thinking worldviewishly, and our philosophers have some pretty interesting things to say."

Peter asked, "What does 'worldviewishly' mean?"

Prof. Johnson said, "It means thinking in terms of worldviews. A worldview is the basic philosophical framework that gives shape to how we view the world. Our philosophers will be able to help you understand the basic issues surrounding worldviews and craft your own Christian worldview. You may find this frees you from the Enlightenment's secularizing influence—and if you don't know what the Enlightenment is now, you will learn to understand it, and its problems, and how you can be free of them." He spoke with the same simplistic assurance of artificial intelligence researchers who, seeing the power of computers and recognizing how simple certain cognitive feats are for humans, assumed that it was only a matter of time that artificial intelligence would "bridge the gap"—failing to recognize the tar pit of the peaks of intelligence that seem so deceptively simple and easy to human phenomenology. For computers could often defeat the best human players at chess—as computerlike a

human skill as one might reasonably find—but deciphering the language of a children's book or walking through an unfamiliar room, so easy to humans, seemed more difficult for computers the more advanced research began. Some researchers believed that the artificial intelligence project had uncovered the non-obvious significance of a plethora of things humans take for granted—but the majority still believed that what seemed trivial for humans must be the sort of thinking a computer can do, because there is no other kind of thinking... and an isomorphic simplicity, an apparent and deceptive simplicity much like this one, made it seem as if ideas were all that really mattered: not all that existed, but all that had an important influence. Prof. Johnson did not consciously understand how the Enlightenment worldview—or, more accurately, the Enlightenment—created the possibility of seeing worldviews that way, nor did he see how strange the idea of crafting one's own worldview would seem to pre-Enlightenment Christians. He did not realize that his own kindness towards Peter was not simply because he agreed with certain beliefs, but because of a deep and many-faceted way in which he had walked for decades, and walked well. It was with perfect simplicity that he took this way for granted, as artificial intelligence researchers took for granted all the things which humans did so well they seemed to come naturally, and framed worldviewish thought as carrying with it everything he assumed from his way.

Peter said, "Ok. Well, I'll take those classes. It was good to meet you."

Prof. Johnson looked over a document that was the writeup of a sort of game, in which one had a number of different rooms that were of certain sizes, and certain classes had requirements about what kind of room they needed for how long, and the

solution involved not only solving the mathematical puzzle, but meeting with teachers and caring for their concerns, longstanding patterns, and a variety of human dimensions derisively labelled as "political." Prof. Johnson held in his hands the schedule with the official solution for that problem, and guided Peter to an allowable choice of class sections, taking several different actions that were considered "boring paperwork."

Prof. Johnson said, "I enjoyed talking with you. Please do take some more candy—put a handful in your pocket or something. I just want to make one more closing comment. I want to see you succeed. Wheaton wants to see you succeed. There are some rough points and problems along the way, and if you bring them to me I can work with them and try to help you. If you want to talk with your RA or our chaplain or someone else, that's fine, but please... my door is always open. And it was good to meet you too! Goodbye!"

Peter walked out, completely relaxed.

The next activity, besides nourishing himself with lunch (and eating, sleeping, and many other activities form a gentle background rhythm to the activities people are more conscious of. I will not describe each time Peter eats and sleeps, even though the 100th time in the story he eats with his new friends is as significant as the first, because I will be trying to help you see it their way), requires some explanation.

The term "quest," to the people here, is associated with an image of knights in armor, and a body of literature from writers like Chretien de Troyes and Sir Thomas Mallory who described King Arthur and his knights. In Chretien de Troyes, the knight goes off in various adventures, often quests where he is attempting different physical feats. In Sir Thomas Mallory, a

new understanding of quests is introduced, in the quest for the holy grail—a legendary treasure which I cannot here explain save to say that it profoundly altered the idea of a quest, and the quest took a large enough place in many people's consciousness that it is used as a metaphor of the almost unattainable object of an ultimate pursuit (so that physicists would say that a grand unified theory which crystallizes all physical laws into a few simple equations is the "holy grail of physics"), and that the holy grail is itself in the shadow of a greater treasure, and this treasure was one many people in fact had possessed (some after great struggle, while others had never known a time when they were without it). In Mallory in particular the quest can be more than a physical task; most of Arthur's knights could not reach the holy grail because of—they weren't physical blemishes and they weren't really mental blemishes either, but what they were is hard to say. The whole topic (knights, quests, the holy grail...) connects to something about that world that is beyond my ability to convey; suffice it to say that it is connected with one more dimension we don't have here.

Peter, along with another group of students, went out on a quest. The object of this quest was to acquire seven specific items, on conditions which I will explain below:

1. "A dog biscuit." In keeping with a deeply human trait, the food they prepare is not simply what they judge adequate to sustain the body, but meant to give pleasure, in a sense adorned, because eating is not to them simply a biological need. They would also get adorned food to give pleasure to organisms they kept, including dogs, which include many different breeds which in turn varied from being natural sentries protecting territories to a welcoming committee of

one which would give a visitor an exuberant greeting just because he was there.

2. "An M16 rifle's spent shell casing." That means the used remnant after... wait a little bit. I need to go a lot farther back to explain this one.

You will find something deceptively familiar in that in that universe, people strategically align resources and then attack their opponents, usually until a defeat is obvious. And if you look for what is deceptive, it will be a frustrating search, because even if the technologies involved are primitive, it is a match of strategy, tactics, and opposition.

What makes it different is that this is not a recreation or an art form, but something many of them consider the worst evil that can happen, or among the worst. The resources that are destroyed, the bodies—in our world, it is simply what is involved in the game, but many of them consider it an eternal loss.

Among the people we will be meeting, people may be broken down into "pacifists" who believe that war is always wrong, and people who instead of being pure pacifists try to have a practical way of pursuing pacifist goals: the disagreement is not whether one should have a war for amusement's sake (they both condemn that), but what one should do when not having a war looks even more destructive than having a war. And that does not do justice to either side of the debate, but what I want to emphasize that to both of them this is not simply a game or one form of recreation; it is something to avoid at almost any cost.

A knight was someone who engaged in combat, an elite soldier riding an animal called a horse. In Chretien de Troye's day and Mallory's day, the culture was such that

winning a fight was important, but fighting according to "chivalry" was more important. Among other things, chivalry meant that they would only use simple weapons based on mechanical principles—no poison—and they wouldn't even use weapons with projectiles, like arrows and (armor piercing) crossbow bolts. In practice that only meant rigid piercing and cutting weapons, normally swords and spears. And there was a lot more. A knight was to protect women and children. The form that chivalry took in Peter's day allowed projectile weapons, although poison was still not allowed, along with biological, thermonuclear, and other weapons which people did not wish to see in war, and the fight to disfigure the tradition's understanding women had accorded them meant that women could fight and be killed like men, although people worked to keep children out of warfare, and in any case the "Geneva Convention", as the code of chivalry was called, maintained a sharp distinction between combatants and non-combatants, the latter of which were to be protected.

The specific projectile weapon carried by most members of the local army was called an M16 rifle, which fired surprisingly small .22 bullets—I say "surprisingly" because if you were a person fighting against them and you were hit, you would be injured but quite probably not killed.

This was intentional. (Yes, they knew how to cause an immediate kill.)

Part of it is the smaller consideration that if you killed an enemy soldier immediately, you took one soldier out of action; on the other hand, if you wounded an enemy soldier, you took three soldiers out of action. But this isn't the whole reason. The much bigger part of the reason is that

their sense of chivalry (if it was really just chivalry; they loved their enemies) meant that even in their assaults they tried to subdue with as little killing as possible.

There were people training with the army in that community (no, not Peter; Peter was a pure pacifist) who trained, with M16 rifles, not because they wanted to fight, but as part of a not entirely realistic belief that if they trained hard enough, their achievement would deter people who would go to war. And the "Crusader battalion" (the Crusaders were a series of people who fought to defend Peter's spiritual ancestors from an encroaching threat that would have destroyed them) had a great sense of chivalry, even if none of them used the word "chivalry".

3. "A car bumper." A car bumper is a piece of armor placed on the front and back of cars so that they can sustain low-velocity collisions without damage. (At higher velocities, newer cars are designed to serve as a buffer so that "crumple zones" will be crushed, absorbing enough of the impact so that the "passenger cage" reduces injuries sustained by people inside; this is part of a broader cultural bent towards minimizing preventable death because of what they believe about one human life.) Not only is a car bumper an unusual item to give, it is heavy and awkward enough that people tend not to carry such things with them—even the wealthy ones tend to be extraordinarily lightly encumbered.
4. "An antique." It is said, "The problem with England is that they believe 100 miles is a long distance, and the problem with America is that they believe 100 years is a long time." An antique—giving the rule without all the special cases and exceptions, which is to say giving the rule as if it were not human—is something over 100 years old. To understand this,

you must appreciate that it does not include easily available rocks, many of which are millions or billions of years old, and it is not based on the elementary particles that compose something (one would have to search hard to find something not made out of elementary particles almost as old as the universe). The term "antique" connotes rarity, and in a sense something out of the ordinary; that people's way is concerned with "New! New! New!" and it is hard to find an artifact that was created more than 100 years ago, which is what was intended.

This quest is all the more interesting because there is an "unwritten rule" that items will be acquired by asking, not by theft or even purchase—and, as most antiques are valuable, it would be odd for someone you've just met—and therefore with whom you have only the general human bond but not the special bond of friendship—to give you such an item, even if most of the littler things in life are acquired economically while the larger things can only be acquired by asking.

5. "A note from a doctor, certifying that you do not have bubonic plague." Intended as a joke, this refers to a health, safeguarded by their medicine, which keeps them from a dreadful disease which tore apart societies some centuries ago: that sort of thing wasn't considered a live threat because of how successful their medicine was (which is why it could be considered humorous).
6. "A burning piece of paper which no one in your group lit. (Must be presented in front of Fischer and not brought into the building.)" This presents a physical challenge, in that there is no obvious way to transport a burning piece of paper—or what people characteristically envision as a burning piece of paper—from almost anywhere else to in front of

Fischer.

7. "A sheet of paper with a fingerpaint handprint from a kindergartener."

"Kindergarten" was the first year of their formal education, and a year of preparation before students were ready to enter their first grade. What did this society teach at its first, required year? Did it teach extraordinarily abstract equations, or cosmological theory, or literary archetypes, or how to use a lathe?

All of these could be taught later on, and for that matter there is reason to value all of them. But the very beginning held something different. It taught people to take their turn and share; it taught people "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," the Golden Rule by which their great Teachers crystallized so much wisdom. All of this work and play, some of the most advanced lessons they could learn, were placed, not at the end, but at the beginning of their education.

That is what kindergarten was. What was a kindergartener?

The true but uninformative answer would be "a person in kindergarten."

To get past that uninformative answer, I need to stress that their minds are bound up with organic life—they did not spring, fully formed, as you and I did. In most complex organisms, there is a process that transforms a genetically complete organism of just one cell to become a mature member of the species; among humans, that process is one of the longest and most complex. During that time their minds are developing as well as their bodies; in that regard they are not simply in harmony with the natural world this society believes it is separate from... but one of its best

examples.

But to say that alone is to flatten out something interesting... even more interesting than the process of biological mental development is the place that society has for something called "childhood". Not all cultures have that concept—and again I am saying "culture" without explaining what it means. I can't. Not all societies understand "childhood" as this society does; to many, a child is a smaller and less capable adult, or even worse, a nonentity. But in this culture, childhood is a distinctive time, and a child, including a kindergardener, is something special—almost a different species of mind. Their inability to healthily sustain themselves is met, not always with scorn, but with a giving of support and protection—and this is not always a grudging duty, but something that can bring joy. They are viewed as innocent, which is certainly not true, and something keeps many people from resenting them when they prove that they are not innocent by doing things that would not be tolerated if an adult did it. And the imperviousness of this belief to contrary experience is itself the shadow of the whole place of childhood as a time to play and learn and explore worlds of imagination and the things most adults take for granted. And many adults experience a special pleasure, and much more than a pleasure, from the company of children, a pleasure that is tied to something much deeper.

This pleasure shines through even a handprint left with "fingerprints," a way of doing art reserved for children, so that this physical object is itself a symbol of all that is special about childhood, and like symbols of that world carries with it what is evoked: seeing such a handprint is a little like seeing a kindergartener.

And they were off. They stopped for a brief break and annoyedly watched the spectacle of over a hundred linked metal carts carrying a vast quantity of material, and walked in and out of the surrounding neighborhoods. Their knocks on the door met a variety of warm replies. Before long, they had a handprint from a kindergartener, a dog biscuit (and some very enthusiastic attention from a kind dog!), a note from an off-duty doctor (who did not examine them, but simply said that if they had the bubonic plague there would be buboes bulging from them in an obvious way), a cigarette lighter and a sheet of paper (unlit), a twisted bumper (which Peter surprised people by flipping over his shoulder), and finally a spent shell casing from a military science professor. When they climbed up "Fischer beach," John handed the paper and lighter to his RA and said, "Would you light this?" It was with an exhausted satisfaction that they went to dinner and had entirely amiable conversation with other equally students who scant minutes ago had been their competitors.

When dinner was finished, Peter and Mary sat for a while in exhausted silence, before climbing up for the next scheduled activity—but I am at a loss for how to describe the next scheduled activity. To start with, I will give a deceptive description. If you can understand this activity, you will have understood a great deal more of what is in that world that doesn't fit in ours.

Do I have to give a deceptive description, in that any description in our terms will be more or less deceptive? I wasn't trying to make that kind of philosophical point; I wasn't trying to make a philosophical point at all. I am choosing a description of the next scheduled activity that is more deceptive than it needs to be.

When students studied an academic discipline called

"physics," the curriculum was an initiation into progressively stranger and more esoteric doctrines, presented at the level which students were able to receive them. Students were first taught "Newtonian mechanics" (which openly regarded as false), before being initiated into "Einstein's relativity" at the next level (which was also considered false, but was widely believed to be closer to the truth). Students experienced a "night and day" difference between Newtonian mechanics and all higher order mysteries. If you were mathematically adept enough to follow the mathematics, then Newton was easy because he agreed with good old common sense, and Einstein and even stranger mysteries were hard to understand because they turned common sense on its head. Newton was straightforward while the others were profoundly counterintuitive. So Einstein, unlike Newton, required a student to mentally engulf something quite alien to normal, common sense ways of thinking about the world around oneself. Hence one could find frustrated student remarks about, "And God said, 'Let there be light!' And there was Newton. Then the Devil howled, 'Let Einstein be!' and restored the status quo."

Under this way of experiencing physics, Newton simply added mathematical formality to what humans always knew: everything in space fit in one long and continuous three-dimensional grid, and time could be measured almost as if it were a line, and so Einstein was simply making things more difficult and further from humans' natural perceptions when his version of a fully mathematical model softened the boundaries of space and time so that one could no longer treat it as if it had a grid for a skeleton.

Someone acquainted with the history of science might make the observation that it was not so much that Newton's mechanics were a mathematically rigorous formalization of how

people experienced space and time, but that how people experienced space and time had become a hazy and non-mathematical paraphrase of Newtonian mechanics: in other words, some students some students learned Newtonian mechanics easily, not because Newtonian physics was based on common sense, but because their "common sense" had been profoundly shaped by Newtonian physics.

This seemingly pedantic distinction was deeply tied to how the organic was being extinguished in their society.

I suspect you are thinking, "What other mathematical model was it based on instead?" And that's why you're having trouble guessing the answer.

The answer is related to the organic. Someone who knew Newton and his colleagues, and what they were rebelling against, could get a sense of something very different even without understanding what besides mathematics would undergird what space meant to them. In a certain sense, Newton forcefully stated the truth, but in a deceptive way. He worked hard to forge a concept of cold matter, pointing out that nature was not human—and it was a philosophical error to think of nature as human, but it was not nearly so great as one might think. Newton and his colleagues powerfully stressed that humans were superior to the rest of the physical world (which was not human), that they were meant not simply to be a part of nature but to conquer and rule it. And in so doing they attacked an equally great truth, that not only other life but even "inanimate" matter was kin to humans—lesser kin, perhaps, but humans and the rest of the natural world formed a continuity. They obscured the wisdom that the lordship humans were to exercise was not of a despot controlling something worthless, but the mastery of the crowning jewel of a treasure they had been entrusted to them.

They introduced the concept of "raw material", something as foreign to their thinking as... I can't say what our equivalent would be, because everything surrounding "raw material" is so basic to us, and what they believed instead, their organic perception, is foreign to us. They caused people to forget that, while it would be a philosophical error to literally regard the world as human, it would be much graver to believe it is fundamentally described as inert, cold matter. And even when they had succeeded in profoundly influencing their cultures, so that people consciously believed in cold matter to a large degree, vestiges of the ancient experience survived in the medieval. It is perhaps not a coincidence that hundreds of years since Newton, in Newton's own "mother tongue" (English), the words for "matter" and "mother" both sprung from the same ancient root word.

The Newtonian conception of space had displaced to some degree the older conception of place, a conception which was less concerned with how far some place was from other different places, and more concerned with a sort of color or, to some extent, meaning. The older conception also had a place for some things which couldn't really be stated under the new conception: people would say, "You can't be in two places at once." What they meant by that was to a large degree something different, "Your body cannot be at two different spatial positions at the same time." This latter claim was deceptive, because it was true so far as it goes, but it was a very basic fact of life that people could be in two places at once. The entire point of the next scheduled activity was to be in two places at once.

Even without describing what the other place was (something which could barely be suggested even in that world) and acknowledging that the point of the activity was to be in two

places at once, this description of that activity would surprise many of the people there, and disturb those who could best sense the other place. The next scheduled activity was something completely ordinary to them, a matter of fact event that held some mystery, and something that would not occur to them as being in two places at once. The activity of being present in two or more places at once was carried on, on a tacit level, even when people had learned to conflate place with mathematical position. One such activity was confused with what we do when we remember: when we remember, we recall data from storage, while they cause the past to be present. The words, "This do in remembrance of me," from a story that was ancient but preserved in the early medieval period we are looking at, had an unquestioned meaning of, "Cause me to be present by doing this," but had suffered under a quite different experience of memory, so that to some people it meant simply to go over data about a person who had been present in the past but could not be present then.

But this activity was not remembering. Or at least, it was not just remembering. And this leaves open the difficulty of explaining how it was ordinary to them. It was theoretically in complete continuity with the rest of their lives, although it would be more accurate to say that the rest of their lives were theoretically in complete continuity with it. This activity was in a sense the most human, and the most organic, in that in it they led the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, the plants, the rocks, the mountains, and the seas in returning to the place they came from. This description would also likely astonish the people who were gathered in a painted brick room, sitting on carpet and on movable perches, and seeing through natural light mixed with flickering fluorescent lights.

Not one of them was thinking about "nature."

What went on there was in a very real sense mediocre. Each activity was broken down, vulgarized, compared to what it could be—which could not obliterate what was going on. When they were songs, they were what were called "7-11" songs, a pejorative term which meant songs with seven words repeated eleven times. There was a very real sense in which the event was diminished by the music, but even when you factor in every diminishing force, there was something going on there, something organic and more than organic, which you and I do not understand—for that matter, which many people in that world do not understand.

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Archon was silent for a long time.

Ployon said, "What is it?"

Archon said, "I can't do it. I can't explain this world. All I've really been doing is taking the pieces of that world that are a bit like ours. You've been able to understand much of it because I haven't tried to convey several things that are larger than our world. 'God' is still a curious and exotic appendage that isn't connected to anything, not really; I haven't been able to explain, really explain, what it is to be male and female unities, or what masculinity and femininity are. There are a thousand things, and... I've been explaining what three-dimensional substance is to a two-dimensional world, and the way I've been doing it is to squash it into two dimensions, and make it understandable by removing from it everything that makes it three dimensional. Or almost everything..."

"How would a three dimensional being, a person from that world, explain the story?"

"But it wouldn't. A three dimensional being wouldn't collapse a cube into a square to make it easier for itself to understand; that's something someone who couldn't free itself from reading two dimensional thinking into three dimensions would do. You're stuck in two dimensions. So am I. That's why I failed, utterly failed, to explain the "brother-sister floor fellowship", the next scheduled activity. And my failure is structural. It's like I've been setting out to copy a living, moving organism by sculpturing something that looks like it out of steel. And what I've been doing is making intricate copies of its every contour, and painting the skin and fur exactly the same color, and foolishly hoping it will come alive. And this is something I can't make by genetic engineering."

"But how would someone from that world explain the story?  
Even if I can't understand it, I want to know."

"But people from that world don't explain stories. A story isn't something you explain; it's something that may be told, shared, but usually it is a social error to explain a story, because a story participates in human life and telling a story connects one human to another. And so it's a fundamental error to think a story is something you convey by explaining it—like engineering a robotic body for an animal so you can allow it to have a body. I have failed because I was trying something a mind could only fail at."

"Then can you tell the story, like someone from that world would tell it?"

---

Peter and Mary both loved to run, but for different reasons. Peter was training himself for various races; he had not joined track, as he did in high school, but there were other races. Mary ran to feel the sun and wind and rain. And, without any conscious effort, they found themselves running together down the prairie path together, and Peter clumsily learning to match his speed to hers. And, as time passed, they talked, and talked, and talked, and talked, and their runs grew longer.

When the fall break came, they both joined a group going to the northwoods of Wisconsin for a program that was half-work and half-play. And each one wrote a letter home about the other. Then Peter began his theology of culture class, and said, "This is what I want to study." Mary did not have a favorite class, at least not that she realized, until Peter asked her what her favorite class was and she said, "Literature."

When Christmas came, they went to their respective homes and spent the break thinking about each other, and they talked about this when they returned. They ended the conversation, or at least they thought they did, and then each hurried back to catch the other and say one more thing, and then the conversation turned out to last much longer, and ended with a kiss.

Valentine's Day was syrupy. It was trite enough that their more romantically inclined friends groaned, but it did not seem at all trite or syrupy to them. As Peter's last name was Patrick, he called Mary's father and prayed that St. Patrick's Day would be a momentous day for both of them.

Peter and Mary took a slow run to a nearby village, and had dinner at an Irish pub. Amidst the din, they had some hearty laughs. The waitress asked Mary, "Is there anything else that

would make this night memorable?" Then Mary saw Peter on his knee, opening a jewelry box with a ring: "I love you, Mary. Will you marry me?"

Mary cried for a good five minutes before she could answer. And when she had answered, they sat in silence, a silence that overpowered the din. Then Mary wiped her eyes and they went outside.

It was cool outside, and the moon was shining brightly. Peter pulled a camera from his pocket, and said, "Stay where you are. Let me back up a bit. And hold your hand up. You look even more beautiful with that ring on your finger."

Peter's camera flashed as he took a picture, just as a drunk driver slammed into Mary. The sedan spun into a storefront, and Mary flew up into the air, landed, and broke a beer bottle with her face.

People began to come out, and in a few minutes the police and paramedics arrived. Peter somehow managed to answer the police officers' questions and to begin kicking himself for being too stunned to act.

When Peter left his room the next day, he looked for Prof. Johnson. Prof. Johnson asked, "May I give you a hug?" and then sat there, simply being with Peter in his pain. When Peter left, Prof. Johnson said, "I'm not just here for academics. I'm here for you." Peter went to chapel and his classes, feeling a burning rage that almost nothing could pierce. He kept going to the hospital, and watching Mary with casts on both legs and one arm, and many tiny stitches on her face, fluttering on the borders of consciousness. One time Prof. Johnson came to visit, and he said, "I can't finish my classes." Prof. Johnson looked at him and said, "The college will give you a full refund." Peter said, "Do you know of any way I can stay here to be with Mary?" Prof. Johnson said,

"You can stay with me. And I believe a position with UPS would let you get some income, doing something physical. The position is open for you." Prof. Johnson didn't mention the calls he'd made, and Peter didn't think about them. He simply said, "Thank you."

A few days later, Mary began to be weakly conscious. Peter finally asked a nurse, "Why are there so many stitches on her face? Was she cut even more badly than—"

The nurse said, "There are a lot of stitches very close together because the emergency room had a cosmetic surgeon on duty. There will still be a permanent mark on her face, but some of the wound will heal without a scar."

Mary moved the left half of her mouth in half a smile. Peter said, "That was a kind of cute smile. How come she can smile like that?"

The nurse said, "One of the pieces of broken glass cut a nerve. It is unlikely she'll ever be able to move part of her face again."

Peter looked and touched Mary's hand. "I still think it's really quite cute."

Mary looked at him, and then passed out.

Peter spent a long couple of days training and attending to practical details. Then he came back to Mary.

Mary looked at Peter, and said, "It's a Monday. Don't you have classes now?"

Peter said, "No."

Mary said, "Why not?"

Peter said, "I want to be here with you."

Mary said, "I talked with one of the nurses, and she said that you dropped out of school so you could be with me.

"Is that true?" she said.

Peter said, "I hadn't really thought about it that way."

Mary closed her eyes, and when Peter started to leave because he decided she wanted to be left alone, she said, "Stop. Come here."

Peter came to her bedside and knelt.

Mary said, "Take this ring off my finger."

Peter said, "Is it hurting you?"

Mary said, "No, and it is the greatest treasure I own. Take it off and take it back."

Peter looked at her, bewildered. "Do you not want to marry me?"

Mary said, "This may sting me less because I don't remember our engagement. I don't remember anything that happened near that time; I have only the stories others, even the nurses, tell me about a man who loves me very much."

Peter said, "But don't you love me?"

Mary forced back tears. "Yes, I love you, yes, I love you. And I know that you love me. You are young and strong, and have the love to make a happy marriage. You'll make some woman a very good husband. I thought that woman would be me.

"But I can see what you will not. You said I was beautiful, and I was. Do you know what my prognosis is? I will probably be able to stand. At least for short periods of time. If I'm fortunate, I may walk. With a walker. I will never be able to run again—Peter, I am nobody, and I have no future. Absolutely nobody. You are young and strong. Go and find a woman who is worth your love."

Mary and Peter both cried for a long time. Then Peter walked out, and paused in the doorway, crying. He felt torn inside, and then went in to say a couple of things to Mary. He said, "I believe in miracles."

Then Mary cried, and Peter said something else I'm not going to repeat. Mary said something. Then another conversation

began.

The conversation ended with Mary saying, "You're stupid, Peter. You're really, really stupid. I love you. I don't deserve such love. You're making a mistake. I love you." Then Peter went to kiss Mary, and as he bent down, he bent his mouth to meet the lips that he still saw as "really quite cute."

The stress did not stop. The physical therapists, after time, wondered that Mary had so much fight in her. But it stressed her, and Peter did his job without liking it. Mary and Peter quarreled and made up and quarreled and made up. Peter prayed for a miracle when they made up and sometimes when they quarreled. Were this not enough stress, there was an agonizingly long trial—and knowing that the drunk driver was behind bars surprisingly didn't make things better. But Mary very slowly learned to walk again. After six months, if Peter helped her, she could walk 100 yards before the pain became too great to continue.

Peter hadn't been noticing that the stress diminished, but he did become aware of something he couldn't put his finger on. After a night of struggling, he got up, went to church, and was floored by the Bible reading of, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." and the idea that when you do or do not visit someone in prison, you are visiting or refusing to visit Christ. Peter absently went home, tried to think about other things, made several phone calls, and then forced himself to drive to one and only one prison.

He stopped in the parking lot, almost threw up, and then steeled himself to go inside. He found a man, Jacob, and... Jacob didn't know who Peter was, but he recognized him as looking familiar. It was an awkward meeting. Then he recognized him as

the man whose now wife he had crippled. When Peter left, he vomited and felt like a failure. He talked about it with Mary...

That was the beginning of a friendship. Peter chose to love the man in prison, even if there was no pleasure in it. And that created something deeper than pleasure, something Peter couldn't explain.

As Peter and Mary were planning the wedding, Mary said, "I want to enter with Peter next to me, no matter what the tradition says. It will be a miracle if I have the strength to stand for the whole wedding, and if I have to lean on someone I want it to be Peter. And I don't want to sit on a chair; I would rather spend my wedding night wracked by pain than go through my wedding supported by something lifeless!"

When the rehearsal came, Mary stood, and the others winced at the pain in her face. And she stood, and walked, for the entire rehearsal without touching Peter once. Then she said, "I can do it. I can go through the wedding on my own strength," and collapsed in pain.

At the wedding, she stood next to Peter, walking, her face so radiant with joy that some of the guests did not guess she was in exquisite pain. They walked next to each other, not touching, and Mary slowed down and stopped in the center of the church.

Peter looked at her, wondering what Mary was doing.

Then Mary's arm shot around Peter's neck, and Peter stood startled for a moment before he placed his arm around her, squeezed her tightly, and they walked together to the altar.

On the honeymoon, Mary told Peter, "You are the only person I need." This was the greatest bliss either of them had known, and the honeymoon's glow shined and shined.

Peter and Mary agreed to move somewhere less expensive to settle down, and were too absorbed in their wedded bliss and

each other to remember promises they had made earlier, promises to seek a church community for support and friends.

And Peter continued working at an unglamorous job, and Mary continued fighting to walk and considered the housework she was capable of doing a badge of honor, and neither of them noticed that the words, "I love you" were spoken ever so slightly less frequently, nor did they the venom creeping into their words.

One night they exploded. What they fought about was not important. What was important was that Peter left, burning with rage. He drove, and drove, until he reached Wheaton, and at daybreak knocked on Prof. Johnson's door. There was anger in his voice when he asked, "Are you still my friend?"

Prof. Johnson got him something to eat and stayed with him when he fumed with rage, and said, "I don't care if I'm supposed to be with her, I can't go back!" Then Prof. Johnson said, "Will you make an agreement with me? I promise you I won't ever tell you to go back to her, or accept her, or accept what she does, or apologize to her, or forgive her, or in any way be reconciled. But I need you to trust me that I love you and will help you decide what is best to do."

Peter said, "Yes."

Prof. Johnson said, "Then stay with me. You need some rest. Take the day to rest. There's food in the fridge, and I have books and a nice back yard. There's iced tea in the—excuse me, there's Coke and 7 Up in the boxes next to the fridge. When I can come back, we can talk."

Peter relaxed, and he felt better. He told Prof. Johnson. Prof. Johnson said, "That's excellent. What I'd like you to do next is go in to work, with a lawyer I know. You can tell him what's going on, and he'll lead you to a courtroom to observe."

Peter went away to court the next day, and when he came

back he was ashen. He said nothing to Prof. Johnson.

Then, after the next day, he came back looking even more unhappy. "The first day, the lawyer, George, took me into divorce court. I thought I saw the worst that divorce court could get. Until I came back today. It was the same—this sickening scene where two people had become the most bitter enemies. I hope it doesn't come to this. This was atrocious. It was vile. It was more than vile. It was—"

Prof. Johnson sent him back for a third day. This time Peter said nothing besides, "I think I've been making a mistake."

After the fourth day, Peter said, "Help me! I've been making the biggest mistake of my life!"

After a full week had passed, Peter said, "Please, I beg you, don't send me back there."

Prof. Johnson sent Peter back to watch a divorce court for one more miserable, excruciating day. Then he said, "Now you can do whatever you want. What do you want to do?"

The conflict between Peter and Mary ended the next day.

Peter went home, begging Mary for forgiveness, and no sooner than he had begun his apology, a thousand things were reflected in Mary's face and she begged his forgiveness. Then they talked, and debated whether to go back to Wheaton, or stay where they were. Finally Mary said, "I really want to go back to Wheaton."

Peter began to shyly approach old friends. He later misquoted: "I came crawling with a thimble in the desperate hope that they'd give a few tiny drops of friendship and love. Had I known how they would respond, I would have come running with a bucket!"

Peter and Mary lived together for many years; they had many children and were supported by many friends.

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Ployon said, "I didn't follow every detail, but... there was something in that that stuck."

Archon said, "How long do you think it lasted?"

"A little shorter than the other one, I mean first part."

"Do you have any idea how many days were in each part?"

"About the same? I assume the planet had slowed down so that a year and a day were of roughly equal length."

"The first part took place during three days. The latter part spanned several thousand days—"

"I guess I didn't understand it—"

"—which is... a sign that you understood something quite significant... that you knew what to pay attention to and were paying attention to the right thing."

"But I didn't understand it. I had a sense that it was broken off before the end, and that was the end, right?"

Archon hesitated, and said, "There's more, but I'd rather not go into that."

Ployon said, "Are you sure?"

"You won't like it."

"Please."

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The years passed and Peter and Mary grew into a blissfully happy marriage. Mary came to have increasing health problems as a result of the accident, and those around them were amazed at how their love had transformed the suffering the accident created in both of their lives. At least those who knew them best saw the transformation. There were many others who could only see their happiness as a mirage.

As the years passed, Jacob grew to be a good friend. And when Peter began to be concerned that his wife might be... Jacob had also grown wealthy, very wealthy, and assembled a top-flight legal team (without taking a dime of Peter's money—over Peter's protests!), to prevent what the doctors would normally do in such a case, given recent shifts in the medical system.

And then Mary's health grew worse, much worse, and her suffering grew worse with it, and pain medications seemed to be having less and less effect. Those who didn't know Mary were astonished that someone in so much pain could enjoy life so much, nor the hours they spent gazing into each other's eyes, holding hands, when Mary's pain seemed to vanish. A second medical opinion, and a third, and a fourth, confirmed that Mary had little chance of recovery even to her more recent state. And whatever measures been taken, whatever testimony Peter and Mary could give about the joy of their lives, the court's decision still came:

The court wishes to briefly review the facts of the case. Subject is suffering increasingly severe effects from an injury that curtailed her life greatly as a young person. from which she has never recovered, and is causing increasingly

complications now that she will never again have youth's ability to heal. No fewer than four medical opinions admitted as expert testimony substantially agree that subject is in extraordinary and excruciating pain; that said excruciating pain is increasing; that said excruciating pain is increasingly unresponsive to medication; that subject has fully lost autonomy and is dependent on her husband; that this dependence is profound, without choice, and causes her husband to be dependent without choice on others and exercise little autonomy; and the prognosis is only of progressively worse deterioration and increase in pain, with no question of recovery.

The court finds it entirely understandable that the subject, who has gone through such trauma, and is suffering increasingly severe complications, would be in a state of some denial. Although a number of positions could be taken, the court also finds it understandable that a husband would try to maintain a hold on what cannot exist, and needlessly prolong his wife's suffering. It is not, however, the court's position to judge whether this is selfish...

For all the impressive-sounding arguments that have been mounted, the court cannot accord a traumatized patient or her ostensibly well-meaning husband a privilege that the court itself does not claim. The court does not find that it has an interest in allowing this woman to continue in her severe and worsening state of suffering.

Peter was at her side, holding her hand and looking into his wife's eyes, The hospital doctor had come. Then Peter said, "I love you," and Mary said, "I love you," and they kissed.

Mary's kiss was still burning on Peter's lips when two nurses hooked Mary up to an IV and injected her with 5000 milligrams

hooked Mary up to an IV and injected her with 5000 milligrams of sodium thiopental, then a saline flush followed by 100 milligrams of pancurium bromide, then a saline flush and 20 milligrams of potassium chloride.

A year later to the day, Peter died of a broken heart.

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Ployon was silent for a long time, and Archon was silent for an even longer time. Ployon said, "I guess part of our world is present in that world. Is that what you mean by being in two places at once?"

Archon was silent for a long time.

Ployon said, "It seems that that world's problems and failings are somehow greater than our achievements. I wish that world could exist, and that we could somehow visit it."

Archon said, "Do you envy them that much?"

Ployon said, "Yes. We envy them as—"

Archon said, "—as—" and searched through his world's images.

Ployon said, "—as that world's eunuchs envy men."

Archon was silent.

Ployon was silent.

# ***Your Fast Track to Becoming a Bishop!***

**Dear Valued Orthodox;**

Have you ever thought about being a bishop? Have you thought how special that office would be?

Have you thought it was beyond you?

It doesn't need to be. Being a bishop is very easy, if only you know how.

How is it possible? Well, really, there's a method that's right at your fingertips. And it's almost two thousand years old.

Jesus didn't start out with a Church under him. What he did instead was start with twelve disciples, who in turn disciplined others. When he set the ball in motion, it grew and grew and grew.

Would you like to be a bishop? Let me explain how it's done. Then you'll see how many people you can have under you. All you have to do is edit the following list, then send it out to twelve people and the contact person at the bottom of the list. That's it! See, you have a list:

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Write your name and email in the slot immediately above your rank, pushing others down to make room. For instance, if you're a layman, you put your name in the 'reader' slot, push everyone down, making the 'bishop' the 'contact bishop' below the list.

Then send the updated list to the new contact bishop, who will make arrangements for tonsures, ordinations, and consecrations.

**Reader:** Lawrence Town, lite@fastmail.fm

**Subdeacon:** Sdn. John Clough, jfc92847@aol.com

**Deacon:** Fr. Dn. John Cloud, john@johncloud.com

**Priest:** Fr. Andrew Costello, costello@pobox.com

**Bishop:** His Grace ANTHYMUS, anthymus@auth.gr

Contact Bishop (for tonsures/ordinations/consecrations):

THOMAS, orthodoxthomas@x.com

Needs monastic tonsure (check one):  Yes /  No.

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That's it! What happens now is that you will have twelve people below you, and if each of them has twelve people below them, then the number of people will shoot up, growing at a geometric rate like an intelligent computer in a bad science fiction movie! Just look at this chart, if you're a layman now, and I say now, because you don't need to be a layman for long!

Your Rank	Followers
Reader	12
Subdeacon	156
Deacon	1,884
Priest	22,620
Bishop	271,452

That's more than a quarter of a million followers when you're a bishop! And best of all, the opportunity doesn't stop there. As your own followers become deacons and then priests, you become an archbishop and a metropolitan. The sky is the limit!

It really works! I was a layman who found out this opportunity only three weeks ago, and now I'm His All Holiness THOMAS, The Patriarch of Xanadu! Think about it! All you have to do is a little editing, and then forward this email! Can you afford to wait?

Do it now!

**Cordially Yours,**

**X His All Holiness THOMAS, the Patriarch of Xanadu**

# Your Own, Personal Hell

One Depeche Mode album gave a song which has been partially censored in some online lyrics collections, [Your Own Personal Jesus](#):

Reach out and touch faith  
Your own Personal Jesus  
Someone to hear your prayers  
Someone who cares  
Your own Personal Jesus  
Someone to hear your prayers  
Someone who's there  
Feeling's unknown and you're all alone  
Flesh and bone by the telephone  
Lift up the receiver  
I'll make you believer  
Take second best  
Put me to the test  
Things on your chest  
You need to confess  
I will deliver  
You know I'm a forgiver

Reach out and touch faith  
Your own Personal Jesus  
Feeling's unknown and you're all alone  
Flesh and bone by the telephone  
Lift up the receiver  
I'll make you believer  
I will deliver  
You know I'm a forgiver  
Reach out and touch faith  
Your own Personal Jesus  
Reach out and touch faith

One should perhaps not be too quick to classify and identify undergirding characteristics to things one does not understand well, but after a couple of listens to it, the song is an Evangelical-style parody of Evangelical televangelism and what is connected to it. Evangelicals will speak of 'receiving Christ as personal Lord and Savior,' and while the terms 'Lord' and 'Savior' are New Testament bedrock, the term 'personal' is not applied in the New Testament to (in Protestant terms) one's relationship with Jesus. 'Personal' in the Evangelical context means that one makes one's own a submission and acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior. The Depeche Mode plays an ambiguity in the term 'personal' and speaks of your own 'Personal' Jesus as an apparent private possession. This song is part of Depeche Mode's 'Violator' album, and there is a spiritual dimension to parts of the album, but outside that song I do not find identifiable attempts to engage Christianity.

And in that sense having a Personal Jesus is nonsense; the satire, if I am understanding it correctly, satirizes the 'personal' that Evangelicals have added to Jesus Christ as 'Lord and Savior' and perhaps one dimension of the satire stems from

...and perhaps one dimension of the same theme is...  
the fact that however Depeche Mode may have looked on  
Evangelicals, they knew full well that Jesus is not meant to be  
one's private, 'personal' possession, even to Evangelicals who use  
the term.

And I would underscore that you cannot have 'Your own  
Personal Jesus' ...

...but you can have 'Your own Personal Hell.'

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We may speak of gentle Jesus, meek and mild, and that may be true: he chastised the disciple who defended him with a sword, and he did not even try to defend himself with words when he was on trial. However, we would do well to remember that gentle Jesus, meek and mild, spoke of Hell four to five times as often as he spoke of Heaven, and that the Fathers have said

that we owe more to Hell than to Heaven because more people have come to the truth through fear of the torments of Hell than through hope of the mercies of Heaven.

I would like to place two images of Hell alongside each other; both are the treasure of the Orthodox Church, even though they are very different from each other. One image speaks of Hell as having 'dark fire': in other words, fire that delivers torment but does not deliver light such as the fire the Fathers knew as the only source of artificial light when the sun had set. The other image says that the fire of Hell and the light of Heaven are the same thing, the light of Heaven being the light as experienced by those who embrace it, and Hell being the light of Heaven as experienced by those who reject it. As I wrote in [From Russia](#)

[With Love](#):

The Greek word hubris refers to pride that inescapably blinds, the pride that goes before a fall. And subjectivism is tied to pride. Subjectivism is trying, in any of many ways, to make yourself happy by being in your own reality instead of learning happiness in the God-given reality that you're in.

...for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Being in subjectivism is a start on being in Hell. Hell may not be what you think. Hell is light as it is experienced by people who would rather be in darkness. Hell is abundant health as experienced by people who would choose disease. Hell is freedom as experienced by those who will not stop clinging to spiritual chains. Hell is ten thousand other things: more pointedly, Hell is other people, as experienced by an existentialist. This Hell is Heaven as experienced through subjectivist narcissism, experiencing God's glory and wishing for glory on your own power. The gates of Hell are bolted and barred from the inside. God is love; he cannot but ultimately give Heaven to his creatures, but we can, if we wish, choose to experience Heaven as Hell.

Regarding the question of people who have never heard of Jesus, my New Testament professor at Wheaton said that we are not called to save souls [and provide guilt for those who reject the Gospel], but called to draw people further into a relationship with Christ. Now the Orthodox may not see things in terms of a modern-style relationship with Christ, but regarding people who have never heard of Christ, [Romans 1](#) gives something of an answer by saying that God is not without witness even in people who have never heard the Gospel. But a more important answer is given in this: God does not arbitrarily damn people to Hell. Hell is infinitely self-chosen. Alike among people who have heard of Christ and people who haven't, the choice of life and death remains open, and people will be judged by what they do with what they have where they are. I as someone at a point where Orthodoxy is chaotic and ancient canons are applied with unusual leniency, will stand judged by what I did with what I had where I was. The choice between Heaven and Hell is not dictated

by whether Orthodoxy was in a solid state where I was; the choice between Heaven and Hell is for me dictated by whether I choose to embrace Heaven, or fall back on Hell.

And I might add that this choice is particularly salient because I have thought of myself as an Orthodox faithful who would automatically go to Heaven. There was a time when, partly due to a doctor making questionable choices, I was approaching death rather than (God forbid!) one of my medications making my hands permanently shaky. And, amidst throwing up or dry heaves dozens of times per day, and becoming increasingly dehydrated, yet finding drinking water to be a repulsive chore, the spirit world grew close and I found temptation unlike anything I have seen before. I experienced temptation, which one I will not name, and while I never went through to commit any of the the temptation in action, it is very clear to me that in my heart I chose Hell in that experience. Now that is not the end of the story; and there was another time God allowed me to experience similar temptation and soundly reject it, choosing Heaven. But none the less it is clear to me that I once faced the ultimate decision, and in that decision I chose Hell. God has since been merciful to me, but I

It has been said that the two thoughts that we must fear: 'I am saved' and 'I will never be saved:' as St. Silouan the Athonite said, 'Understand two thoughts, and fear them. One says, "You are a saint," the other, "You won't be saved." Both of these thoughts are from the enemy, and there is no truth in them. But think this way: "I am a great sinner, but the Lord is merciful. He loves people very much, and He will forgive my sins.'" God is loving and forgiving.

recognize that I may never this side of the final Judgment say, 'I am a pious Orthodox; I am going to Heaven.' The story is told of one saint who at the end of his life drew one foot into Heaven, and the demons said, 'Glory to you, you have defeated us,' and he said, 'Not yet I haven't,' and drew the other foot into Heaven. God has allowed what I consider a very powerful corrective to saying 'I am so Orthodox I will automatically be saved.'

(There was another time, later on, where I experienced similar temptations and rejected them, and I was weak and ill just long enough for me to recognize that I have a choice in the matter, that I can choose between Heaven and Hell and reject Hell.)

The opportunity to create your own, personal Hell is almost as old as the hills. It has been available from the ages. But technologies—not all of them new—offer the opportunity to go off into your own little world, and that is a step towards creating your own, personal Hell.

What are these portable Hells? Let me mention a few of them. One roommate discussed how pedestrians at a crosswalk in winter have their little zone of warmth and are not aware of their surroundings enough to notice cars that they'd notice in warmer weather that did not warrant a coat. I carry a Swiss Army Knife, and that is a portable self-sufficiency, or at least the illusion of portable self-sufficiency: I have a pen, a magnifying glass, a scissors and pliers, half a dozen proper blades, and over a dozen screwdrivers and Torx wrenches, excluding a small jeweller's screwdriver nestled in the corkscrew. And it happened at work that my boss said, 'I'm having trouble with my glasses; does anybody have a blade?' And I said, 'I have several blades, but would a jeweler's screwdriver

help?' And indeed, once he had used the jeweler's screwdriver he said he had no need for a blade.

I mention this as somewhat banal; if we look properly at what are my needs as a human being, precisely none of them hinge on carrying a Swiss Army Knife. Now there is a strong 'guy appeal factor' to a Swiss Army Knife, and I do like, for instance, knowing exactly where a can opener is and not having to search.

But when I look at myself, I realize that most of what I get from my Swiss Army Knife is not its admittedly convenient utility wherever and whenever I happen to be carrying it, but something like what I have pejoratively called 'sacramental shopping alike when others do it and when I do it; wWhat I call 'sacramental shopping' is an ersatz sacrament of something vaguely akin to alchemy, trying to achieve a better internal state through having something physical. I have an attachment to my pocketknife; a woman might perhaps buy clothing when there is no need for additional clothing stemming from modesty, protection, or foresight.

That is a dilute image of Hell. There is a stronger image afforded by consumer electronics: in my childhood, Walkmans and perhaps walkie-talkies made the here and now optional. (As did cars, preceded by still other older technologies: some people have called the establishment of national steam engine railways the nineteenth century equivalent of the Internet, and indeed the nineteenth century sense of invention is actively imitated in steampunk circles today.) My grandfather on my mother's side was an accomplished ham radio operator, and while I do not want to diminish his skill and accomplishment, I recognize precursors to the computers offering something like a command-line social network that I helped administer as a high schooler, and the MUDs, variably called 'Multi-User Dungeons' and 'Multi-User

Dimensions' (I remember my boss as a system administrator, saying in reference to DikuMUDs, "DikuLoser"... I like the term,' and then having him explain to me that that was off the record) that are the precursors to World of Warcraft.

I don't want to fixate on one specific technology, and I see no final singularity to today's technologies, unless economic collapse stomps down the process of new technologies. But what

I will say is that we have progressively stronger personal, portable Hells. I have not played World of Warcraft, and I have not seen it played since my little brothers played a basically two-dimensional version. But I would recognize in it a stronger distillation of what drew me into MUDs. I drank port, so to speak; teens now are drinking regular rum; 151 proof appears to be on the way.

I quote the beginning of [Paul Graham, The Acceleration of Addiction](#):

What hard liquor, cigarettes, heroin, and crack have in common is that they're all more concentrated forms of less addictive predecessors. Most if not all the things we describe as addictive are. And the scary thing is, the process that created them is accelerating.

We wouldn't want to stop it. It's the same process that cures diseases: technological progress. Technological progress means making things do more of what we want. When the thing we want is something we want to want, we consider technological progress good. If some new technique makes solar cells x% more efficient, that seems strictly better. When progress concentrates something we don't want to want—when it transforms opium into heroin—it seems bad. But it's the same process at work.

No one doubts this process is accelerating, which means increasing numbers of things we like will be transformed into things we like too much.

As far as I know there's no word for something we like too much. The closest is the colloquial sense of 'addictive.'

That usage has become increasingly common during my lifetime. And it's clear why: there are an increasing number of things we need it for. At the extreme end of the spectrum are crack and meth. Food has been transformed by a combination of factory farming and innovations in food processing into something with way more immediate bang for the buck, and you can see the results in any town in America. Checkers and solitaire have been replaced by World of Warcraft and FarmVille. TV has become much more engaging, and even so it can't compete with Facebook.

[emphasis added]

The world is more addictive than it was 40 years ago. And unless the forms of technological progress that produced these things are subject to different laws than technological progress in general, the world will get more addictive in the next 40 years than it did in the last 40....

Now I have named one plausible cause for the acceleration of addictiveness to fail: global economic collapse. [The damned backswing may make a future much less engaging than today's addictive offerings.](#) Which does not refute Graham's point; this is less like a rebuttal of his insight than saying that some deus ex machina forces may elephant stomp on the process of acceleration of addiction. He is welcome to read this work, but I hope he takes no rebuttal to his basic insight.

My concern is that all of these addictive things make it easier

to have your own personal Hell. It used to take years of (perverted) effort to be so completely wrapped up in yourself that your hubris blinds you to anything interesting that is around you. Now—even if it is not true in exactly the same sense—consumer electronics such as a smartphone or tablet let you enter an analogous state of Nerdvana in minutes. I don't want to downplay the skill and strategy in World of Warcraft, but its marketing proposition is an alternative to the here and now. And 'an alternative to the here and now,' which have always been around and we have much more of, is another name for Hell: your own, Personal Hell. There is something in porn that disenchant the entire universe; magic's marketing proposition is (besides power) an alternative to presence in the here and now; pride is blinding to the outside world and the deformities inside; nursing a grudge blinds the eye to opportunities for happiness; some or all the vices seem, with long practice, to take one's attention away from the here and now. But even if one ignores the hard porn that is the #1 sin young men bring to confession today, and the soft porn characteristics of music videos which Alexander Solzhenitsyn called 'the liquid manure of Western culture,' and various other contexts where standard dress is at least somewhat provocative, there is something in the most sexless of how viral phenomena on the Internet work. It's a sort of technological analogue to chemical highs. Not that this makes any technological pleasure forbidden. It is possible to drink alcohol in healthy moderation; there are apparently societies where people smoked without it governing their lives, and portrayal of tobacco in Robinson Crusoe show no lesson learned from experience that tobacco is addictive and blasts your lungs out if you smoke too much. Caffeine, now available in caffeine pills, guarana-powered energy drinks, and the like, greatly exceeds the strength of

coffee and tea when first introduced, and in England people tried to ban caffeine as being the same sort of thing as today's street drugs. And energy drinks can understate their caffeine content by documenting caffeine from some sources (i.e. coffee beans) but not others (i.e. guarana). And even the most sexless of internet offerings, if it is popular enough to go viral, is stimulating in a powerful way. Maybe it isn't necessarily sexual, and maybe it's not the same sort of thing as a chemical high, but technological highs have been getting stronger, and as Graham says, faster and faster.

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[Jerry Mander's Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television](#) is four decades old, and much of it could be plagiarized with little effort today as fresh observations. Written by a former advertising executive, the author came to realize that what he was doing in advertising and in television was spiritually polluting the landscape. When I first read it, some of the numbers he gave, for when 'technical events' (to be explained momentarily) occurred in public television, then in commercial television, then in advertisements, had been exceeded substantially, and now they have been exceeded more. But this does not disprove his point; if anything, it proves a point that has a lot in common with 'The Acceleration of Addictiveness'. He discusses 'technical events' as a way of creating addictive 'artificial unusuality.'

If I may pause for a moment to define these terms, both of which connect to the acceleration of addictiveness:

#### Technical events

A moment in television (or, presumably, other media) when there is a screen cut, or music is added, or something else. Today the list would include computer animation.

#### Artificial unusuality

The use of technical effects and any other effects to create television (or other media) where television is made more engaging by adding artificially unusual effects. If I may draw an analogy, it is a bit like taking dull text and trying to make it seem exciting by going through and artificially adding bold and italics, and changing the grammar to short sentences, frequently punctuated by exclamation points and other more forceful punctuation. The text is not

in and of itself more interesting, but it is given an artificial stress that renders artificial unusuality to the text.

And there are some other related points; I believe Mander observes that real conversation has troughs and peaks, an ebb and flow, where on television the conversation is as stimulating as possible. Mander observes—and this is one point on which his text is dated—that television has low, unengaging quality of video and audio, and it 'needs' artificial unusuality to compensate for its weakness: an experiment showing a video camera of waves lapping against a shore had very low viewership and even lower sustained viewership. And in that sense Mander does not describe high definition television. However, producers for high definition television seem to not be about to give up on artificial unusuality: what makes the television of four decades more engaging also makes the high-definition television of today more engaging. And on the point of artificial unusuality, television seems to be meant to be as engaging as possible; 'Calvin and Hobbes' says, in apparent reference to screen cuts and the like, that TV commercials acknowledge that the fifteen second TV commercial exceeds the viewer's attention span by fourteen seconds. (And again, 'even so, it can't compete with Facebook.')

Graham goes on to say, 'Already someone trying to live well would seem eccentrically abstemious in most of the US. That phenomenon is only going to become more pronounced.' In [Bridge to Terabithia](#), the rural hero makes friends with a girl from a liberal, wealthy family who purchase a rural home to go on furlough. One of the ways the girl's family is made to stand out is that they do not own a television: I may suggest that someone 'trying to live well' in Graham's words is probably either very liberal or very conservative: at any rate, further enough from

the political mainstream that 'non-negotiable' technologies, and in Wittgenstein's term, 'forms of life,' are genuinely and truly negotiable. Organic food is becoming mainstream, but it used to be true that only the very liberal or the very conservative would go out of their way and perhaps pay Whole Foods prices (or join a local co-op) to obtain organic food.

The book [Everyday Saints](#) describes, true to its title, saints from close to us, but one of its sadder chapters describes an apparent hermit, an Augustine, who was in fact not a monastic but a crook posing as a displaced hermit. At one point the host family says that they were corrupting him: he would eat as much ice cream as was available to him, and he used a tape recorder to play quite a lot of Beatles rock and roll. (But what came out later was that he was corrupt to begin with.) In some ways this is an instance of 'the more things change, the more they stay the same:' someone absorbed in media will presumably have a stronger distillation than a tape recorder playing the Beatles, but change a few technological details and the sad story could be told today. I don't want to fixate on individual technologies as they will change: but the tape recorder, the television, and the tablet all provide an accelerating addictiveness.

And with these technologies, there is in fact a piper to pay. One friend talked about how he had to go to work, his wife was sick and having to take care of a baby, and they had an older child who they were able to have watch television. And at first this seemed like the perfect solution: the television provided an 'electronic babysitter,' and my friend was very clear that it helped out at a dark hour. But then they noticed, for instance, that when their older daughter wasn't watching television, she was staring at the wall. And the electronic babysitter, they realized, was costing them things they weren't willing to pay. At

the time I visited them, there was no television in sight, and their daughter was more prone to engage usual childhood activities. They had joined the ranks of those who had made an intentional decision about television. That they said 'no' is not my exact point; one book, about which I was initially skeptical, said that there is a place to watching television, and then suggested that families watch one or two carefully chosen shows and then have the parents debrief the children afterwards and ask provoking questions. I don't entirely agree with the latter, but it struck me as better than just limiting the time watching television.

And this is a matter where we are invited to our own, Personal Hell. I will not further belabor television; with computers I personally have made an attempt to limit my checking email to once per hour if I am not in a situation, such as a job, that dictates my checking it more frequently. I also limit Facebook time, often to the amount of engagement necessary to post a link. And still there is a piper to pay; perhaps not the toll of spending hours on Facebook per day, but I notice in myself a struggle not to do the equivalent of my friend's daughter staring at the wall. Perhaps that may be a part of detoxification: but I find myself at times doing nothing when there are a world of interesting things, and in that sense I have embraced my own personal Hell. Perhaps I am rejecting it: but for the time being, there is still something warped.

I remember one friend talking about how a friend of hers, and an acquaintance of mine, was living 'Internet life', a life absorbed in the Internet, and her friend seemed to her to be subject to a temptation that was not live for her. And I remember watching with some fascination as she interacted with a (different) teenaged girl, as a matter of giving her full, loving

attention to whatever person she was with. And that is, if anything, a live alternative to the acceleration of addictiveness.

(Although she did close out her Facebook account, out of a decision of, 'This is not helpful.') Neil Postman, in [Technopoly](#), spoke of, as per his book's title, 'the surrender of culture to technology,' but when he gave recommendations, he didn't talk about abstaining from technology so much as getting married and staying married.

There is a place for asking, 'Do I need this technology, or is this a manufactured 'need'?' and treating all technologies as negotiable. I wrote in [Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony with Nature](#):

One can almost imagine a dialogue between God and Adam:

**Adam:** I'm not content.

**God:** What do you want me to do?

**Adam:** I want you to make me contented.

**God:** Ok, how do you want me to do that?

**Adam:** First of all, I don't want to have to engage in ardent, strenuous labor like most people. I don't want to do that kind of work at all.

**God:** Ok.

**Adam:** And that's not all. I want to have enough bread to feel full.

**God:** Ok.

**Adam:** Scratch that. I want as much meat as I want.

**God:** Ok, as much meat as you want.

**Adam:** And sweet stuff like ice cream.

**God:** Ok, I'll give you Splenda ice cream so it won't show up on your waistline.

**Adam:** And I don't like to be subject to the weather and the elements you made. I want a home which will be cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

**God:** Sure. And I'll give you hot and cold running water, too!

**Adam:** Speaking of that, I don't like how my body smells—could we do something to hide that?

**God:** I'll let you bathe. Each day. In as much water as you want. And I'll give you deodorant to boot!

**Adam:** Oh, and by the way, I want to make my own surroundings—not just a home. I want electronics to put me in another world.

[Now we're getting nowhere in a hurry!]

The sense that we have something wrong is not new; as I have quoted elsewhere,

'Tolkien once remarked to me that the feeling about home must have been quite different in the days when a family had fed on the produce of the same few miles of country for six generations, and that perhaps this was why they saw nymphs in the fountains and dryads in the woods - they were not mistaken for there was in a sense a real (not metaphorical) connection between them and the countryside. What had been earth and air & later [grain], and later still bread, really was in them.

'We of course who live on a standardised international diet (you may have had Canadian flour, English meat, Scotch oatmeal, African oranges, & Australian wine to day) are really artificial beings and have no connection (save in sentiment) with any place on earth. We are synthetic men, unrooted. The strength of the hills is not ours.'

uprooted. The strength of the hills is not ours.

—C.S. Lewis in a letter to Arthur Greeves, 22 June 1930

Confucius and Lao Tzu, around 500 BC, sensed that a primal simplicity had been lost and there was something wrong and tangled in their day. Their solutions and approaches differed, but their diagnosis not so much, and even their goals not so much. This could be chalked up to a perennial tendency to say that the old days were better, as indeed Homer also found, but to someone sensitive to Paleo concerns and aware that humans have been around for a million or two years and all but the last eyeblink as hunter-gatherers, it may make a lot of sense to say that in the time of Confucius and Lao Tze the greatest sages sensed that we were in some pathological way uprooted from our roots.

'We are synthetic men, uprooted.' Now it may be in fashion in certain circles to be a localist and buy local where possible; but we are further along the synthetic route than when Lewis wrote. Lewis was legitimately concerned about diet; we have greater concerns to face, and to adapt a saint, 'Would that Lewis's concerns were our own.' We have enough ways to make our own, personal world, in our own, Personal Hell.

But this need not be the last word.

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Hell has always been close at hand but it need never be the last word. Repentance has been called the most terrifying experience there is; but once we enter it we can step into a larger world. Repentance is one of Heaven's best-kept secrets. Repentance is letting go of Hell and opening hands that God can fill with Heaven. And it is open to all of us.

The saints' lives occur in all manner of conditions: troubled times, easy times, quiet times, tumultuous times. One tends not to notice this directly because the saints' lives are not primarily to document what times the saints lived in: they are meant to tell of God's power as manifest in his saints. And this God is King and Lord, *God the Spiritual Father: for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'* However much we may bolt and bar the gates inside our own Personal Hell, God is very nearby and answers all that repent. And however much we hold onto Hell as the only home within our grasp, Heaven is our true Home and the heart's deepest longing. We can dig and dig into our own personal Hell; all the while God beckons us to step out into Heaven.

Recently I visited Wheaton College and saw what was above the fold in The Record, the campus's student newspaper. There were two black mimelike shirts, and in them two people, one of them holding a sign saying something like, 'Would you love me if I was gay?' and the other saying, 'Jesus would and I would too.' Now of course Jesus does love gays, as he loves everyone under the sun; so did Paul, who wrote, *'Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor*

revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. **'And such were some of you:'** St. Paul knew and loved people who faced that specific struggle and loved them as much as those who faced other struggles. But the Wheaton Record article was not about a Christ whose death is strong enough to wipe out every sin, and who died for the whole world, but a group called 'Refuge' to provide an affirming environment to people who know that struggle or are questioning, and who either do not know or do not want to believe that the true Coming Out is stepping out of Hell Our Way, of our cherished Personal Hell, and opening the door whose doorknob is repentance. When I studied at Wheaton, there was a place that was precious to me, Gold Star Chapel, a tiny gem with a sort of altar covered by little slips of paper, where people would place their prayer requests, and others would come and write the dates they prayed for the concerns. And people brought concerns and spiritual struggles, including homosexual sins, and these were answered by loving prayers by fellow sinners struggling to repent of their own sins. I do not ever recall seeing a single harsh word written on those notes: only a few words of kindness and the dates of loving prayers offered by sinners struggling with their own struggles and knocking on the doors of Heaven with their own repentance. (How I miss that anonymous, silent meetingplace of penitent sinners.)

The specific concept of 'coming out' as we know it is not a matter of being straightforward about the struggles we face: at one church I attended, the chief pastor said quite emphatically in a homily, 'If you don't know me, hi, my name is Lyle, and I'm an alcoholic.' He might have been sober for almost as long as I'd

been alive; he still shares a struggle with other recovering alcoholics who don't do as well. And in a deeper sense he Came Out with those words: I do not say 'came out' in the usual sense, which would be to have 'alcoholic pride' in destroying himself and others by drinking, but Came Out in the sense of stepping out of Hell: of rejecting bondage to alcohol and stepping into the broader place that is reached by sobriety, as it is reached by humility, as it is reached by penitence from sexual sin (which is more often committed today by using porn than queer sex). The concept of 'coming out' is that you will come into a broader, more honest and freer-in-yourself place if you drop the charade of being made for chastity or true, heterosexual marriage, and build your own Personal Hell of an identity built on embracing your sexual deviance as right and proper. 'Come Out' is not something invented by the lesbian / bisexual / gay / transgendered / queer / questioning undergoing active recruitment coalition: long before any of that coalition said 'come out of pretending you're built to be straight and try to be honest by embracing your different sexuality,' God said, summons, beckons, invites, 'Come Out of all of your own personal Hell! Come Out of using alcohol for your primary mood management, and denying that this is a problem. Come Out of your narcissism where you cannot see and enjoy the good that is outside of you. Come Out of lying, and thinking that you have more options when telling the truth is optional; Come Out into the power of a character that people can and will trust. Come Out of thinking there are infinitely many alternatives to God's design of chaste celibacy or faithful marriage—and of losing sight of the Ethics of Elfland and the universal voice of the Bible and Catholic and Protestant Tradition as well as Orthodoxy. And open your hearts to the unwanted and unsought truth of every

survey that tries to find which maverick deviants have the best sex lives, only to discover that traditional marriage has bar none the best sex life with it. Come Out of whatever sin it is that comprises your own personal Hell; repent of it, confess it to a priest, and enter a larger world.' It's not just that today's concept of coming out is a step into a smaller world; it's that all of us have been building our own private, Personal Hells, and are afraid to let go of them, afraid to relax the grip on what seems some shining part of ourselves, and perhaps not even guessing the larger Heaven to which we are summoned in the words,

'Come Out!'

As Lazarus was summoned from the grave, 'Come Out from the grave! Come Out from every form of death, decay, destruction. Come Out of your cramped tomb in which to personally rot forever! Come Out into abundant life and have it to the full! Come Out!'

**The gateway to Heaven forever lies open.**

# Your Site's Missing Error Page

I looked through my search logs and decided to put in a custom-made redirect for "porn" or "xxx". This decision was, to put it politely, motivated by data. Decisively motivated by data. [N.B.: This has since been on my site when I migrated to a search solution that doesn't provide that flexibility.]

Looking  
for porn?

My site has so far as I can tell zero SEO to advertise porn, unless you count sporadic uses of the word "porn", which should appear waaaaaay down the search results list compared to real porn sites, but...

I would tentatively suggest that handling of searches for porn be treated like professional 404 / 500 / ... pages on sites run by people who care about people trapped by porn, and people assaulted by people trapped by porn. (You're welcome to [check out my 404 page](#), but that's beside the point of this email.) In the abstract, coding for every search for porn and only searches for porn is probably as hard as [solving the artificial intelligence problem](#), but in the concrete it's easy. Someone searching for

"xxx" is not **really** searching for a letter signed with kisses!  
You'll catch much more than 90% of attempts to search for porn  
simply by filtering for "**porn**" or "**xxx**", and less than 1% of  
people genuinely searching your site (who could still possibly be  
accommodated by this "missing error page.")

So if you're running a website, do your best to have an  
appropriate error page for people searching it for porn.

Feel free to forward this on to other webmasters who care  
about possibly reaching a few of the people searching for porn on  
their sites. Those visitors are in a **deep** trap.

# Zeitgeist and Giftedness

## The issue of fame

Leonard Nimoy, in [I Am Spock](#), states that there were teachers in Hollywood for practically any additional skill an actor would need to portray a character in a movie. I don't remember exactly what his list was, but this would include riding horseback, handling an ancient or modern weapon, using some particular musical instrument, speaking in some particular accent correctly, juggling or illusionist skills, various trades, some approach to singing and dancing not already known to the performer, and so on and so forth: I got the impression was that pretty much every skill you could name was covered, and a number of skills you wouldn't think to name.

With one exception.

Nimoy said that there was one thing that was needed in Hollywood but did not have a single teacher: **handling fame**.

He talked, for instance, about creative ways of sneaking into a restaurant through the kitchen because a public commotion

would happen if one person saw Spock trying to quietly walk into a restaurant's front door. I've heard it said of one cast member of Mystery Science Theatre 3000 that he dresses and acts flamboyantly and strikingly in front of the camera as he should, but consciously turns that off and acts much more nondescriptly in public is usually not noticed. But Mystery Science Theatre 3000 has a smaller audience and is less mainstream; I'm no student of fashion history but [a Google image search for Spock](#) shows a consistent haircut, and one that looks to me like it was meant to be distinctive. (One would suspect that TV producers using humans to portray alien races would want actors to sport a distinctive look.)

## "Fame Lite"

I might suggest that my own experience is of having some degree of fame, but to a degree that has mostly been a privilege where a much greater amount of fame would bring much more obnoxious difficulties.

I've had someone call out, "That's Jonathan Hayward!" Like a TV actor. Once.

I also have paper and Kindle books on Amazon that bring me a symbolic level of monthly income. It's not on par with the income for working part-time flipping burgers, but it is still more than most authors ever see.

I've also repeatedly encountered people who knew me by my writing.

This might be called "sheltered fame," or "mini-fame", or "fame lite", or "fame à la carte", and I am glad I don't enjoy a far greater degree of fame. If I were more famous, I might be able to support myself just by writing, but I regard that as being beside the point: I am seeking monasticism on the Holy Mountain, where my job will be to pray and do the obediences assigned by an Elder and be challenged at the level of parents of a first newborn. Or more. The obediences will be meant to free me from my weaknesses: but I will in a very sense not be my own man, even if my Elder's entire goal in dealing with me is to do whatever is necessary to make me my own God-man in a fuller

sense than I could possibly get on my own.

For a last detail of my miniature fame, I receive correspondence from readers, and so far I have been fortunate to be able to respond to every reader email I really can. C.S.

Lewis may not have been Orthodox, and he may sound very faithful to the Greek Fathers until you recognize that Mere Christianity marks him as one of the major architects of the ecumenism as we know it today, and ecumenism was formally anathematized by several bishops in the eighties and some serious Orthodox have called ecumenism the ecclesiological heresy of our day. But I want to single out one point about C.S. Lewis's personal life that is relevant: he made a practice of answering every reader who wrote him, even though that resulted him spending much of his later life answering essentially pastoral correspondence. And on that point I consider myself particularly privileged to be entrusted with some correspondence, but not need nearly enough interactions to the point that it is a heavy asceticism to answer people who write me.

All of this says that I may share in fame in one sense, but I really do not know in the sense that stems from direct personal experience what fame is to household names. I believe that this may be changing. But for now I would like to distance myself from claims to insider status as far as extreme fame goes. My degree of fame, as privilege, is comparable in giftedness to being somewhere a bit below the lower boundary of the range of socially optimal intelligence.

## The reason for this piece: Everyman

There is a medieval play, which I have read of but not read, called [Everyman](#). The character is not an individual "me, myself, and I" as is much more common in today's novels, but a representative of all that is human.

That basic approach to writing was fairly mainstream; perhaps the most famous tale of Everyman is [Pilgrim's Progress](#), which is a tale of the only way Everyman can be saved. The pilgrim is not characterized as an individual with individual tastes, interests, hobbies (though perhaps expecting hobbies would be anachronistic). He represents in a sort of abstracted form the common story of how one may be saved as understood in the Reformation.

Today that basic approach has mostly fallen out of fashion (or perhaps has some revival I do not know about), but it is not quite dead and perhaps can never die. The assumption in an Amazon review of consumer electronics is that the review should not be about "me, myself, and I" so much as a "what's ahead" notice to Everyman, meaning other consumers, who are contemplating purchasing that item. Reviews are ideally written from Everyman to Everyman.

This work is intended to be written by and to Everyman, even if that Everyman represents a narrower demographic than the

whole of humanity. Significant, and in large measure unique, details are included on the theory that "History does not repeat itself, but it does rhyme." The assumption is that a specific picture in living color exposes the rhyme much more readily than a colorless abstraction that is propositionally true for all it treats, but lacks a pulse. It is an established finding in psychology that people are recognized more quickly from a sketched caricature than from an accurate photograph. I do not knowingly offer caricature in this work as such, but I do try to avoid bleeding out colors into abstraction, however correct, unless there are privacy concerns.

## ***Danger! Beware of pedestal.***

There is a quotation I've heard attributed to Gandhi, running something like, "First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win." At a brief check Snopes marks this as misattributed, and speaking as someone who spent considerable time perusing [All Men Are Brothers: Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, as Told In His Own Words](#), this simply doesn't sound like something Gandhi would have ever said; its presence in the chapter "Ahimse or the way of nonviolence" would have been as obtrusive as Gandhi taking a brief moment to endorse some particular brand of toothpaste. Note that decent people do make attributions that are wrong; my Uncle Mark was a tremendously well-loved and respected schoolteacher, and more specifically a history teacher. He would open the day with some particular thought, from eclectic sources ranging over the Bible, Ben Franklin, and other historical figures, and after his passing, one student who had written down these thoughts posted pictures of her notes, and they were really quite a treasure. But one of them attributed "Denial ain't just a river in Egypt" to Mark Twain. Sorry, but No. Without looking up exact dates, I believe Mark Twain's lifetime overlapped those of the founders of modern psychology. The "shock-denial-blah-blah-blah-resignation-acceptance" grieving process could conceivably have

been formulated in the nineteenth century, although it doesn't sound like Freud to me, or any other nineteenth century psychologist I'm aware of. Kind of like how Freud's various complexes don't sound like something a behaviorist like Skinner would develop. However, even if we ascribe The Grieving Process to 19th century psychologists, these are technical terms in an obscure discipline, and would have been less-well-known than unconventional approaches to pig breeding or knowledge of how the results different knot techniques vary with different kinds of rope. The Grieving Process of "shock-denial-blah-blah-blah-resignation-acceptance" could absolutely not have been a lapidary part of pop culture that pops up in a remark by an unruly six-year-old boy in [Calvin and Hobbes](#), or where saying "Denial ain't just a river in Egypt" instantly telegraphs its intended meaning.

But let's return to the pseudo-Ghandian quotation regardless of source: "First they ignore you. Then they ridicule you. Then they fight you. Then you win." As a sloppy sketch, this might be true, but there is a caveat that eviscerates the whole triumphalist: The last step might not be, "You win." The last step might be, "They install you on a pedestal." The difference between winning and being installed on a pedestal is the difference between diamond and diamond-**back**.

There is a source I read decades back; the book title and even the name of the figure escapes me beyond that he was a scholar of Confucius and perhaps others, Chinese by nationality, and he meticulously documented how, after "First they ignore you. Then they ridicule you. Then they fight you.", the last step was "Then they install you on a pedestal." And he documented how for a figure he studied how people went from hindering and hampering him by opposing him, to hindering and hampering him by launching him on a high pedestal. And the front matter, from

a Western scholar and/or translator, said that the pedestal effect he documented in fact played out in the scholar's own life; he spent the rest of his life trying to achieve constructive results despite the pedestal that he was forever stuck with.

## Fr. Seraphim's unwanted pedestal

I've personally raised serious concerns about Fr. Seraphim of Plantina, and it is my considered judgment that he has been harmful and a cause of arrested spiritual development among his Western convert followers. (He is also deeply respected in some Orthodox lands, but I get the impression that a Russian or Greek admirer has a more balanced diet of spiritual reading.) Do Western followers, of the kind who relate to all outsiders as superiors guiding subordinates and often teaching humility first of all, distort Fr. Seraphim? My suspicion is that they fail to live up to Fr. Seraphim's guidance on some point, and on other points show problems that are 100% faithful to his trajectory. One of the central tenets of what has been called "Orthodox fundamentalism" is that the world is literally about 6,000 years old, and a "Creation Science" lifted from Protestants of yesteryear who were not scientists is the true and final science that proves that. That deeply entrenched feature is one where they are following the Master's lead. I've read Fr. Seraphim charge his readers to straighten out the backwards scientific misunderstandings of people who believe in an ancient universe and either evolution or progressive creation. If this is a pattern, it is not a simple case of ideological hijacking; practically all I have critiqued in [The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and](#)

[His Axe-Wielding Western Converts: A Glimpse into the Soul of Orthodox Fundamentalism](#) remains faithful to the Master's guidance. Possibly they exaggerate the importance of Fr. Seraphim's position on origins; somehow God comes out second banana next to Young Earth Creationism, but if they exaggerated, they took something big and made it even bigger. Whether or not they pushed things further than they should, for to have someone who is a nonscientist (and, at least as I've found, wouldn't recognize even an unsubtle scientific argument at all, even if it bit him on the arse!), diplomatically and gently offer to straighten out a biology PhD's backwards understanding of science (perhaps by dropping Einsteins' name and giving an example of how [pilots experience time differently when they're traveling above the speed of sound](#)"; one friend, on hearing this "example," winced, slowly gulped, and said, "That's not even wrong.") is following in the Master's footsteps and living up to his exhortation.

There are other points where no matter what harassment I have met from his evangelists, I believe they weren't faithful to Fr. Seraphim, or at least weren't faithful to what he hoped for. Probably the kindest remark to him that I can genuinely respect is, "Fr Seraphim (Rose) is included in the mix of folks who tried to explain to folks they were sinners, but were still put on a pedestal anyway." I have not seriously investigated the contours of Fr. Seraphim as regards guruism, but my understanding is that he would had a very simple answer: "No." Or maybe he wrote at length about why guruism is toxic. At any rate, he now stands on a very cruel pedestal for a monastic who tried to free people from the idolatry of inordinately focusing on a single charismatic personality. And it seems that there is cruelty to Fr. Seraphim himself, of the sort one would associate with vengeful,

schadenfreude-laden claims of poetic justice, except that it was quite the opposite of poetic justice: he challenged guruism, and did his best to dodge it, but his standing today is that of a **polestar** of a guru who serves as a primary orienting figure to a significant following of Orthodox Christians (you can call them "Orthodox fundamentalists") where the sun rises and sets on the Master's teachings.

This is a cruel pedestal, as it would be cruel to celebrate an environmentalist hero by starting many forest fires (in non-pyrogenic ecosystems) to celebrate by the beauty of great leaping flames. I have not read what Fr. Seraphim's response to his pedestal actually was, but the image comes to mind of Francis of Assisi returning to his movement's apparent success and being a lone dissent who was utterly aghast that the "success" that had been achieved was his followers' desertion of his, and their, ever-faithful Lady Poverty.

**"An invasion of armies  
can be resisted, but not an  
idea whose time has  
come."**

I would like to modify a position I strongly endorsed, albeit in a way some might call superficial.

Dorothy Sayers wrote about how, in recent centuries in the West, there has been a belief that "ideas grow rust like machines and need to be replaced." And that deliberately crude image spoke to me. Ideas may be wrong from the very beginning and need to be replaced; but the quote "an idea whose time has come" embodies something very strange. The doctrine of progress is tied to this, so that each new idea whose time has come improves the overall picture.

That much I still hold fast to, but with a caveat. I do not believe in progress (one friend summarized the academy as saying "We've progressed enough not to believe in progress"), but I do believe that fashion exists and can sometimes have a spooky effect. Mathematicians are well-advised, if they find a solution to a major unsolved problem, to submit it as soon as possible. The core reason is that it is a historically common phenomenon for a question in mathematics to be unsolved for quite some time, and then be solved by several mathematicians

independently. And on this count, mathematics would be expected to be perhaps the least Zeitgeist-shaken academic discipline. There are some things that change over time; the standard of mathematical rigor was rising when I was studying it, and the history of the parallel postulate in geometry shows a now-respected mathematician as working out an entirely valid non-Euclidean geometry and then publishing work under the title *Euclid Freed From Every Flaw*, is not today's mindset. However, as a general rule, theorems do not go out of fashion. And still mathematics, relatively free from Zeitgeist fashions as it might be, manifests a phenomenon where major problems remain unsolved for a considerable time and then simultaneously be solved by multiple mathematicians. The same has been observed in other areas as well; Nobel Prizes are given to two or three people who make the same discovery almost simultaneously, and independently.

The question of when the automobile was invented is messy and is not "Why, Henry Ford!" even if Henry Ford invented a mass production that drastically reduced the price of an automobile. There is a similar simultaneity, and I've read an author enumerate a dozen mechanical inventions, all of them an automobile or something like an automobile, in the West over a short period of time. Questions come into play of, "Where do you draw the line?" and there are what might be called shades of grey or judgment calls. I'm not saying that there can be no decisive resolution to these questions, but unless you settle on the oldest, incomplete candidate, answering "When was the automobile invented?" in a responsible hinges on looking at several vehicles or devices, that were automotive at least in part, and were invented in a surprisingly close interval of time.

## Fashions

I would like to illustrate a particular point, and clarify what modification I mean to a standard trope. Phrases like "An idea whose time have come" partly describe a pattern of trends and partly frames things in terms of progress: "An idea whose time has come" is always a gain and never a loss. By contrast, I have come to share belief in the pattern of trends, but in place of framing things as progress, I suggest they be framed in terms of fashion. **No one seems to consider that "an idea whose time has come" might be a bad idea that is worse than whatever it replaces.** Nor am I the first or only one to frame things in terms of fashion (though my hybrid position might be new, for all I know).

One psychiatrist recounted how the professional community once believed that divorce was so terrible to children that except in the worst and most pathological cases it was worth keeping an very unhappy marriage together so as to avoid inflicting the pain of divorce on the children. Then the psychological community said it progressed to believing that really if a marriage is Hell on earth, the children are really better off with a divorce however nasty divorce may be. Then they claimed to have progressed to realize that an unhappy marriage was horrid, but however horrid it might be on the kids, it really is best to keep the marriage together if possible. His

point in this tale of heroism and magic was that the shifts that occurred, both ones he agreed with and ones he didn't, didn't represent progress. They represented fashion, and I could envisage him using a term I heard from a quite different figure: "the herd of free thinkers." Progress, or what at least is labeled as progress, is really more accurately understood as current trends within "the herd of free thinkers."

## An example of my own

When I was at Cambridge and my pre-master's diploma was winding down, I was looking for a topic for a master's thesis. I wanted to study the holy kiss, and my advisor ridiculed the question and me with it. He asked sarcastic rhetorical questions like "Can we find justification to only kiss the pretty people at church?" When I persisted, he consulted with another scholar and came back, without ridicule, saying the question was understudied. (This is, by the way, an extreme rarity in academic theology; usually scholars try to find some vestige of unexplored turf and when they fail at that, write things like rehabilitating a founder of heresy, as the [Archdruid of Canterbury](#) has done with Arius the father of all heretics.) Furthermore, things never sat well with the department, which kept pushing my work into the pigeonhole of what German scholars called *Realia*, meaning physical details (other examples of questions of *Realia* might be what kind of arms and armor a first Christian would have seen a Roman soldier carry, and would have given shape to [the words by which St. Paul closes the letter to the Ephesians](#), or what kind of house would provide the backdrop to Christ's words in the [Sermon on the Mount](#) about putting a lamp where it will illuminate the whole house. I am not aware of any Cambridge faculty member who was open to the idea that the "divine kiss" (as St. Dionysius the Areopagite called it) might be studied

under the rubric of liturgical or sacramental theology.

My desire and interest was a doctrinal study, and my advisor there, who was Orthodox, kept pushing what I was doing into an unedifying sociological study of kissing that involved a great deal of Too Much Information, with lowlights such as the assigned Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*. I tried to draw a line in the sand, saying that I wanted to do "a doctrinal study." He immediately laid down the law: "The best way to do that is to do a cultural study and let any doctrines arise." Other help that he offered was to suggest that narrowing scope would be helpful, and suggested that it would be a good bailiwick to study "differences between Christian and Jewish understanding of kissing in the Song of Songs." I held my tongue at saying, "That's impressive. Not only is that not what I wanted, but that doesn't overlap with what I wanted." And then, two thirds of the way through the year, the department decided that my study of the holy kiss was off-topic for the Philosophy of Religion seminar that had been selected for me, and I pulled out all the stops to write, as was demanded, a vastly different [Artificial Intelligence as an Arena for Magical Thinking Among Skeptics](#) that left all my prior thesis work as wasted.

## So what's out there? What did my research turn up?

What kind of doctrines did I pull up? Someone, perhaps with wishful thinking, who wanted the holy kiss to be important might try to attach it somewhere under the rubric of Holy Communion. The last prayer before Holy Communion does the opposite: it places Holy Communion under the heading of the holy kiss. How? "Neither like Judas will I give Thee a kiss:" neither like Judas will I give you a hollow kiss, betraying this kiss and you yourself by receiving the Holy Mysteries and then not even try to live a holy life.

Incidentally, although there are ancient precursors, it is remarkably recent, 20th century or possibly 19th if I recall correctly, that the ethical concern represented by "a kiss can be seductive" appears in Orthodox theology. In the [Ante-Nicene Fathers and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers collections](#), the kiss that is wrong is pre-eminently a kiss like that of Judas, the kiss of betrayal which Orthodox remember by fasting on Wednesdays, and was a double-layered betrayal: a betrayal of the Lord first of all, and with it a betrayal of everything a kiss, of all things, should be. In patristic times the holy kiss was a kiss on the mouth, and this is doctrinally significant. A Psalm prayed in preparation for Communion says, "Who is this King of Glory? The Lord,

strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in war. Lift up your gates, O ye princes; and be lifted up, ye everlasting gates, and the Lord, the King of Glory, shall enter in." St. John Chrysostom drives home the implication: "But about this holy kiss somewhat else may yet be said. To what effect? We are the temple of Christ; we kiss then the porch and entrance of the temple when we kiss each other." If, in my present locale, the holy kiss is three kisses on alternate cheeks, the underlying reality is unchanged: a liturgical kiss, on the cheek, is always by implication a kiss on the mouth, on the gates that receive the Lord. And indeed [St. Ambrose pushes further in his remarkable letter to his sister](#), discussing how we can kiss Christ: part of the unfolding truth is, "We kiss Christ, then, with the kiss of communion." There is a very tight tie between the holy kiss and Holy Communion, and while there may be much greater laxity about a closed holy kiss than a closed Chalice, according to strict interpretation of the rules a holy kiss is only ever between two canonical Orthodox Christians. In ancient times the closed holy kiss represented an additional boundary besides a closed Communion after the catechumens actually departed. But even today I have heard a priest lightheartedly say after a convert's chrismation, "You may kiss the convert." Something of that essence is here, even though nobody I have met makes a big deal about the enforcement of that rule. One last note here, which may be most of benefit to Catholics: In Rome, there is a sharp "do not cross" line between between the sacraments, including Holy Communion, and what are called "sacramentals", which include the holy kiss. Sacraments are something that Christ might as well have personally etched in diamond; sacramentals are things

the Church worked out that are a different sort of thing that is far below Christ's sacraments. The Orthodox usually list seven sacraments, and they are in general recognizable in relation to the Roman list of sacraments (overall but not in every detail), but the difference between a sacrament and a sacramental is only a difference of degree, not of kind, and people can say things like, "You can say there is only one sacrament, or that there are a million of them." If there is one sacrament, it is a Holy Communion where nothing else comes close, but the sacramental of the holy kiss is tied to Holy Communion in multiple ways and participates in its essence. My main, brief work on this topic was in fact called [The Eighth Sacrament](#). The title is provocative, but not daring. For one final point on the holy kiss, at least one aspect of a Protestant framing on worship is that worship is something you do with your spirit; there's a fairly strong association between worship and singing, or worship and listening to a pastor, perhaps, but worship is contained by the spirit alone. The Orthodox understanding, besides recognizing that it is not a slight to Christ to show reverence to His Mother, refers to an act of adoration that is done with spirit and body alike. As to what the act of adoration that encompasses the body, there are variations and some ambiguity, but the Greek *προσκew* refers to bowing or kissing, usually with some ambiguity as to which physical act completes the adoration. The worship due to the Lord is in some measure to kiss him, and there is a profound tie, even if there are important differences too, between worship of Christ expressed by kissing his icon, and worship of Christ expressed by kissing a fellow Orthodox Christian as so much an icon of Christ that he is defined as being built

in the image of the whole Trinity. (I find such things as these loads more interested than sociological investigation of kissing as such.)

(Some people may find an irony between my efforts to study the holy kiss that Judas betrayed, and Cambridge University's constant "improvements" to how I was approaching that study.)

What it was that I pulled up eventually found a home in fiction in [The Sign of the Grail](#), which is presently one of my top-selling titles on Amazon and top fictional work. I will not attempt to reproduce the material here, beyond saying that it is in fact a doctrinal study, that a number of primary sources can be found in [a brief search of the Ante-Nicene and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers collections](#), and to the person who read [The Eighth Sacrament](#) and asked didn't I know there was more, I said that there was much more but that represented my attempt to crystallize something in a tight format.

But what I would point to is this: I am not, to my knowledge, a cardinal influencer in what happened. I presumably influenced someone, somewhere, but what was met with repeated hostility became something mainstream. I don't think that I was a primary influence in that I met with people who never seemed to recognize me as a pioneer or having already made serious investigation. My suspicion is that had I never touched the matter, it would have still been explored; I may have been the first person to publicly note one particular point, that the holy kiss is the only act the Bible calls holy, but had I never investigated the topic at all, other people would have, and my suspicion is that without me the holy kiss is still a sacramental that would have been studied as doctrinally significant and seen in continuity with sacramental and liturgical theology, and that

none of the dubious help I received at Cambridge (such as classifying the holy kiss as Realia and therefore not rightfully subject to direct doctrinal investigations) would have been the last word. I think my inbox has been quiet on this topic for a few years, but when I was getting people contacting me and wanting to inform me about the holy kiss, we were usually on the same page. (I do not recall any nonscholar trying to steer the conversation to fit under the heading of Realia.)

And I would suggest that this basic plot and pattern of events are more or less generic. First I was rudely dismissed, then people kept more rudely pushing my work away from what I asked explicitly, and then some years later when I had practically forgotten the discussion, I was caught off guard by people opening up conversations about the holy kiss. And I may not have "won" in the sense of acquiring a pedestal (good riddance!), but the subject was no longer met with hostility such as was first faced, and some people found it to be of interest. (I have never gotten a disrespectful response on the topic after the point where people started to contact me on the topic.)

It is my general experience that gifted and profoundly gifted people are not, in fact, unaffected by the Zeitgeist. Often they may want to challenge the Zeitgeist, but it is not characteristic to rise above it, and the more common pattern is to concentrate the Zeitgeist and to run ahead of it, perhaps getting into the game when it is greeted with hostility. In this case, I was disappointed when I realized the topic of the holy kiss had reached the status of being more or less fashionable. I felt, if anything, violated that I had channelled the Zeitgeist, a Zeitgeist that had spoken through my mouth.

While the classification is essentially as irrefutable as Berkeley's arguments, famously said to "admit no answer and

produce no conviction," I don't find it helpful to say, "If your birthday falls before this year, you are ancient; if your birthday falls in this range, you are medieval; if your birthday falls in this range, you are a modern; if your birthday falls after that range, you are a postmodern." Some people have noted that not only are engineers modern, but they probably do not know a postmodern, even though postmodern students are easily enough found in other fields. Speaking personally, I've been wary of postmodernism, but I have recognized points of overlap. I have been interested in thick description for more than a decade before I heard the term, and what I most want to know in history is "the way it really was," which is a boilerplate postmodern desire as far as history goes. The postmodern figures I know could justifiably regard me as making an undue claim to insider status if I claimed to also be a postmodern, but I see more continuities now than I would like, or that I did before.

(I might briefly point out that "thick description" and "the way it really was" remains fundamental and guiding principles in the endeavor of this article, where a synopsis would be much easier to write, much briefer, and much easier to read. I could simply state that I pursued scholarly research into the holy kiss years before it was fashionable to do so, and that I sought a doctrinal, and sacramental or liturgical, study of the holy kiss where a respected Orthodox scholar only saw legitimate room for a secular history of kissing. That much is true, but it is a sketched outline where my hope is to portray something in depth and full living color.)

## Other examples

One friend talked about how a boy entered an Orthodox altar to serve as an acolyte, and the priest brusquely told him to unvest, leave the altar, take off his tie, and come back without his tie; the stated reason was, "You are not a slave!"

This was presented as counter-cultural, and it may have been such at some point. However, it fits with another conversation where a business owner had individual contributors wear ties, managers wear a suit and tie, and the owner wore a suit and no tie. Last I seriously checked in, the professional jobseeker fashion was for men not to wear ties.

I might mention, by the way, that when something is taking credit for being countercultural, it's usually a mainstream fashion before too long.

Last example for now: it is presented that violin-making is a "fossil trade." This trade may be mostly or exclusively practiced by violinists; I doubt I could produce a decent violin personally unless I had enough exposure to recognize good and bad-quality violins. Possibly I could learn enough to be a luthier without developing the level of skill appropriate to public performance; but I rather guess that takes less practice to be able to perform well in public than to be in a position to make a good violin. And on that score, I met or heard of one luthier, introducing violin-making as a "fossil trade", and then the count quickly escalated

to something like half a dozen. On which point I suggest that it's a turn in fashion, and the number of people embracing the new fashion is chiefly limited by the fact that most people have never been trained to play a violin. (I've never, to my recollection, heard a musician say, "I play the violin but I am not interested in becoming a luthier.")

## Icon and Idol

There is something about the theology of icons in Orthodoxy that looms so large that I missed something.

In one passage that I have never heard Orthodox quote, Herod dressed royally, gave a stunningly good speech, and the people who were listening shouted "The voice of a god and not a man!" and when he accepts this praise and fails to give God glory, God infests him with worms and kills him.

This is as good a place as any I see to introduce the distinction between an icon and an idol. And please do not see the distinction in terms of "If an Orthodox Christian makes it with paint and gold on wood it is an icon, and if a Hindu makes it a statue with many arms it is an idol." I don't remember what they are, but I've heard from Hindus some very nuanced thoughts about god(s) and idols. For that matter, I don't especially wish to discuss idols in relation to Graeco-Roman paganism, even though they, and Old Testament ancestors, form the basis for the universal Orthodox condemnation of idolatry. I wish to articulate a distinction, not from comparative religion as such, but as a distinction within Christianity.

Probably the #1 metaphorical name for icons is "windows to Heaven", and the theology that St. John the Damascene among others articulated is that the honor paid to an icon passes on to the prototype. Honor to an icon of a saint honors the saint;

honoring the saint honors Christ. While I am not aware of people using the term "icon" in reference to the saints' lives, reading the saints' lives is strongly encouraged for beginner and expert alike, and what it is that's really worth reading in saints' lives is that you see to a small degree the face of Christ, otherwise it's not worth reading. This theology undergirds structures, and supports an understanding of the human person as made in the image of God, which I have not seen disowned in Western Christianity, but it grows on poor soil. Although terms like 'icon' and 'image' are not used in this specific passage, looking on and treating people as the image of Christ is given a chillingly sharp edge in [Matthew 25](#):

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?" And the King shall answer and say unto them,

“Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, “Depart from me, ye who are damned, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.” Then shall they also answer him, saying, “Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not serve thee?” Then shall he answer them, saying, “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.”

The damned are damned because they failed to love and honor the icon of Christ, and the insult might have as well been made to Christ personally. That's how he felt it.

With all of these things said, and I am really not trying to shoehorn a place to save the Greek fathers' teaching that we should become divine, Herod was not destroyed because he allowed himself to divine honor. He was destroyed because, receiving divine honor, he failed to pass it on to God whom it properly belonged to. Given the choice between letting honor pass on through him to the creator, and keeping it to himself, he chose to stop the honor from rising higher, and that is the difference between being an icon and being an idol.

Orthodox who like me (or for that matter Orthodox who don't like me, but are choosing to be polite) pay a respect whose contours are set by the Orthodox theology of icon and image: I

am respected for being made in the image of God, not for being godlike on my own. Respect for my writing has drawn, if I may mention my most-cherished compliment, "You write verbal icons!" The respect paid to my writing is a subordinate respect to works that salute One greater than them, and the respect paid to me is a subordinate respect that salutes One greater than me. I am respected for being to some degree divine by grace (people wanting a Biblical proof-text may cite 2 Peter 1:4 which dares to call us "partakers of the divine nature"); I am not in any sense honored as being a god in some sense independent of the Creator or stopping with me instead of referring glory to the Creator. Evangelicals often like my works, and while they may not have the doctrine of the image of God defined in such articulate and sharp contours, there is some continuity in respect I have received. Specifically, it is practically always a subordinate respect, and my works are praised as drawing them to God. There is a tale, true or apocryphal, of a visiting African pastor who came to the U.S., and after observing things, said, "It is amazing what you can do without the Holy Spirit!" Evangelicals have never praised me for being great without needing God's help, and if they did it would most likely be sarcasm or a stinging rebuke, almost on par with saying that something is "more important than God." Among both Orthodox and Evangelicals, whatever the differences may be, to be great is to be permeated by God's grace.

I will comment briefly, for the sake of completeness, on one point where I am just a beginner. The saints do not seek ordinate human honor; they usually try to dodge all human honor at all whether or not that honor is ultimately referred to God, and some among them have immediately left town, without any sort of modern vehicle, if that is what it took to dodge human honor

after their gifts had been discovered. I am not at the stature to do that, at least not yet. However, hostility and abuse come quickly nipping at the heels of honor, and I am trying to progressively restrain searching for human honor or accepting unsought human honor. [My author bio](#) has become progressively shorter, and at present the main glory I claim is that of a member of the royal human race. The more time passes, the more I think that seeking human honor is a fundamental error, a way of "drinking out of the toilet" that deserves a section in [A Pet Owner's Rules](#) as something that, if you know what you're doing, you really, really don't want to do. On that score, I count myself fortunate that, while I was a forerunner who ran ahead of the Zeitgeist in study of the holy kiss as a legitimate matter of doctrinal study, I didn't acquire a pedestal in reward for my endeavors. That's about as much winning as I'd ask.

And there is one other point to mention: usually, people who have respected me have respected me like some minor icon. I had guessed, with excusable but near-disastrous naïvete, that if in the future I am put on a pedestal, I will receive more of the same and I will serve as an icon in not the best position. Now I believe it far more likely for me to put on a pedestal as an idol rather than an icon. The Church does legitimately place people on pedestals as icons; I believe that the practice of choosing bishops from the pool of monks is, without judgement against the married, a good monastic may have a fighting chance of surviving and functioning effectively in an ordeal where the title of "Bishop" has a job description of, "Whole burnt-offering without remainder."

The Orthodox Church can, at least sometimes, put an icon on a pedestal...

...but the Zeitgeist only knows one trick: putting an idol on a

pedestal, adapting an icon to function as an idol if need be.

## **A cloud the size of a man's hand**

St. James, the brother of the Lord, wrote, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." This is extraordinarily terse compared to the Old Testament narrative, albeit completely faithful. But I would like to give just one vignette not unfolded in this shorthand reminder about the story: it has been a long time since it rained, and there is a deep famine, and there has been an ongoing rivalry with multiple dimensions between the wicked King Ahab and St. Elias. There is the great contest with the prophets of Ba'al; St. Elias, who has suggested that (in modern terms) "Maybe Ba'al isn't answering your hours of frenzied prayer because he just can't come into the phone now," asks that his one prophet's sacrifice to the God of Israel be drenched with excessive /mounts of water. (Saltwater, perhaps: freshwater may have been extremely hard to come by, and rare enough to make a terrible famine, but any time during the famine you could go to the Red Sea and take as much particularly salty saltwater as you could carry.) After Ba'al had already failed to get off his porcelain throne, St. Elias makes one single prayer and calls down fire from Heaven that

consumes his entire dripping sacrifice.

That story is famous; but there is a slightly less famous dramatic detail that is worth noting. St. Elias told his servant to go and look out by the sea. The servant comes back, and says, "I see nothing." St. Elias, who had told the servants to pour water on his sacrifice again after it was already quite wet, and then for good measure asked for water to be poured a third time on already drenched it again. But for the servant, he goes six times reporting nothing, and the seventh time he barely says, "I see a cloud the size of a man's hand." At that point St. Elias sends his servant to tell King Ahab to get in his chariot and get back to his castle before he would be trapped in mire by the deluge.

If you are profoundly gifted, and you think of or take a position that is attacked and ridiculed beyond due measure (and, honestly, make a good allowance for due measure), it is my suspicion that the opinion you are ridiculed for will be the fashion in 5-10 years, or longer if it's something profound. I try to respectfully welcome visitors to my website, although some people have clearly stated that I have failed in that measure, but I pay particular attention to profoundly gifted who contact me, not because they are better than other visitors, but out of survival instinct (and recognition of a shared experience, a bit like another actor who had the cumbersome side of equal fame would be on the same page as Leonard Nimoy about sneaking into restaurants by the kitchen, and that I had better therefore try to listen hospitably). Those emails usually provide an advisory that's a bit like insider trading, though I have never made a financial decision that was influenced by the outcome of such conversation. They, in essence, by running ahead of the Zeitgeist, let you know what's coming. And the profoundly gifted I meet usually see something that I don't.

Chris Langan, considered the most gifted member in almost all ultra-high-IQ society (or some might give that accolade to Paul Cooijmans), has worked on a CTMU or "Cognitive-Theoretic Model of the Universe", pronounced "cat-moo" by insiders, with homepage at [CTMU.org](http://CTMU.org), which I don't agree with: one conversation helped me see the need to write works such as ["Religion and Science" Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution](#) after I left him flabbergasted by saying I was not interested in cosmology. (Note: In the years after I wrote ["Religion and Science" Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution](#), things have shifted almost to a point that alleging some opponent of "scientism" is in and of itself halfway there to, "A hit, a very palpable hit!" And again I am not a prime actor.) However, I am inclined to regard Chris Langan's CTMU as significant on the evidence by how hard people fight against it alone. I know that some profoundly gifted individuals suffer from mental illness, and in fact I believe mental illness is significantly more likely among the profoundly gifted than otherwise. He is called a crackpot, but meeting him face-to-face and conversing via email do not give me any reason for agreeing with the label about him as a person. Every interaction I've had with him has had him looking brilliant and in touch with reality. It's possible enough to be brilliant, in touch with reality, and wrong, but I have not heard of any critic recognize one point which is consensus under the tail end of the high-IQ community: that he is bright such as few people ever set eyes on. Characteristic of the reception of the CTMU is that its main page on Wikipedia was deleted, but its [CTMU Wikipedia talk page](#) is still there. Possibly the CTMU does not lend itself to experimental investigation: but we live in a time where superstring theory is very much in vogue, and where we are very hard-pressed to find a feasible or even infeasible

experiment where superstring theory predicts a measurably different outcome from the best predecessor theories, and it is genuinely provocative to say "Physics is an empirical, hard science and as such is not validly practiced without claims being accountable to being tested by experiment." And maybe we should remember, "People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones." If we are going to join in the euphoria about superstring theory, perhaps we would do well to give the Cognitive-Theoretic Model of the Universe a fair hearing. The main reason I believe it is significant is that it is ridiculed well beyond the hostility that greeted my study of the holy kiss. He is consistently and repeatedly dismissed as a sheer crackpot, but people do not spend anywhere near that much energy dismissing genuine crackpots as crackpots. I continue to believe in the conceptual framework's significance even if I do not subscribe to it.

Not all clouds in the sky are tied to giftedness. I saw a major step towards Nazification in Amazon, and then Apple, drop anything bearing a confederate flag faster than a hot potato. Fr. Richard John Neuhaus made quite an opposite point in saying that if a Klu Klux Klansman wanted to injure black America, he could scarcely do better than promote Afrocentrism. Here, it may be said that white racism has had a bad name for quite a long time. That doesn't mean that it was ever nonexistent, but most whites at least tried to not be racist, or become less racist. Here it might be said that if you want "white nationalism" (great job on the layer of whitewash, but befriend a "white nationalist" on Facebook and your feed will have Nazi flags and news articles with comments fantasizing about "[insert alternate spelling of the N-word]" criminals being lynched) to attract droves of new followers, and make white racism respectable in many places where it is not at all respectable now, you can scarcely do better

than to continue flipping the bird at white descendents of the Confederacy. The significance of Amazon dropping displays of the Confederate flag is not that some goods were delisted or that the censorship affected some people's income; the significance is essentially an announcement of a new direction in policy, as illustrated in a very first installment. I don't know who's safe as this enlightening policy goes; I have serious difficulties believing it will remain confined to black-white relations in race, or that purges will remain only in the South. I don't consider myself safe, and I honestly am not sure that even people trying to be politically correct are safe. At the French Revolution, there was serious scope creep in the public enemies who were sent to the guillotine, a monstrosity that at the end was killing cleaning maids and children seven or eight years old with people standing by the foot of the guillotine to be sprayed by the enemies of states' blood and eat their still-living flesh. And this happened in an educated Republic. The present removal of venerated public statues is not a final installment; it is if anything a reminder that the overhaul is just beginning. But there was a cloud in the sky the size of a man's hand when Amazon dropped the Confederate flag. I have come to believe some non-Southern perspectives, that yes, the Confederacy was fighting for States' rights, but the States' rights were chiefly the right to maintain slavery. But the moral I take is not that white Southerners are being asked to make a few adjustments; the moral I take is that we would be well advised to read "The Cold Within" and that those of us who are not white Southerners should not say "This does not concern us." The classic poem "The Cold Within" reads:

### **THE COLD WITHIN**

Six humans trapped by happenstance  
In bleak and bitter cold.  
Each one possessed a stick of wood  
Or so the story's told.  
Their dying fire in need of logs  
The first man held his back  
For of the faces round the fire  
He noticed one was black.  
The next man looking across the way  
Saw one not of his church  
And couldn't bring himself to give  
The fire his stick of birch.  
The third one sat in tattered clothes.  
He gave his coat a hitch.  
Why should his log be put to use  
To warm the idle rich?  
The rich man just sat back and thought  
Of the wealth he had in store  
And how to keep what he had earned  
From the lazy shiftless poor.  
The black man's face bespoke revenge  
As the fire passed from his sight.  
For all he saw in his stick of wood  
Was a chance to spite the white.  
The last man of this forlorn group  
Did nought except for gain.  
Giving only to those who gave  
Was how he played the game.  
Their logs held tight in death's still hands  
Was proof of human sin.  
They didn't die from the cold without

They died from the cold within.

It's not often that I quote an ecumenist poem as authoritative. In this case the point is universally human, and while I believe in an Orthodox closed communion, I believe that nothing that is truly human should be foreign to me.

## A change in experience

It was sometime in the past few months that I began asking pastoral questions about what to do with someone who is in awe of me.

The motivation and intended nuance, which I did not end up making clear, could be outlined as follows. Years back, my Mom invited neighbors across the street to some minor social function. They hesitantly said, "No," not because the suggestion was unwelcome but because it would create a scheduling conflict, and they wanted to know, in effect, whether their "No" had alienated her. She was pretty quick to answer, "This is valuable!"

She explained that now that she knew they would be willing to say "No" to a suggestion that would be less than ideal for them, or a scheduling conflict, or... Now part of this was politeness or a gracious response, but I believe she genuinely meant what she said about knowing they would be willing to say "No" when they should say "No," and she was genuinely grateful for a safety-net of "I can extend an invitation and not worry about whether they'll give a 'Yes' they shouldn't be giving." And in that framework, I was motivated by a difficulty. Most visitors have and maintain boundaries. Not that everything is perfect, but my visitors have been willing both to say "Yes" and "No," and in general do not seem to worry about dealing a capital insult if they happen to say "No."

Boundaries matter, even if I've voiced serious objections to [Cloud and Townsend](#), and I felt myself in the uncomfortable position of negotiating with someone who was defenseless before me, who was too far below me in his conception to express a boundary, who would only answer "Yes" no matter how destructive a "Yes" would be, and where any knowledge that I sometimes sin and I am sometimes wrong exists only on a purely academic plane. I know there are cultures where this kind of dynamic is normal and something people can deal with, but I felt really uncomfortable and really at a loss.

The pastoral advice I received was helpful, particularly in a reminder that people that, to a one, shout "Hosanna!" and spread palm branches are entirely capable of shouting, to a one, "Crucify him!" five days later. And in Christ's case the earlier accolades were accurate, and higher accolades would have been justified. In my case the "Hosanna!" is in fact not justified, and as I was reminded of the toxic nature of all human praise. (I am looking forward to the possibility in monasticism of being under the authority of an Abbot who treats everyone with deep respect, but might not give a single compliment, or at least not to me.)

And things like this, though varied and though I wish to refrain from providing thick description's details out of concern for others' privacy, have become a consistent fixture. Though varied in detail, the attempt is to place me on some minor pedestal, on terms that are unreal to me, and probably unreal to me because they are unreal to God. I regard it as very fortunate that the inundations of compliments have, by God's grace, appeared utterly unreal to me. Future temptations will probably be more subtle.

## Clearing away a distraction: NF goggles

David Kiersey's [Please Understand Me](#) (I prefer the first edition to the more than the second) is one introduction to classical temperament theory. The book has hypocrisy as well as strengths; it is eminently nonjudgmental in describing one temperament's liability to promiscuity, or another doing whatever their system of ideas calls for, or another's doing what their spiritual path calls for, but when one temperament tends towards chastity or fidelity, it is described in language that is at once clinical, and the most degrading language in the entire book: metaphors are used as a basis to this temperament with seeing sex as basically a merely economic commodity, or something like being physically dirty or clean. Classic postmodern hypocrisy here.

However, there is one particular point that I wanted to pull: the "iNtuitive Feeling" or "NF" type, which is ascribed what might be the most striking characteristic in the book: they appear to other people, without any effort on their part to cause this, to be whatever the other person would most like them to be. People look at them through rosy "NF goggles," if you will. I think I can usually detect NF's, albeit indirectly: I am drawn to another person, especially women, to a degree that is out of step with that person's attractiveness and the social setting, even

though there is very little I have directly observed as signs of what is going on (the one cue I notice is that about half the time they appear close to crying). My guess is that this boils down to a layer of nonverbal communication that is possibly very subtle, even if it is still very effective and does not apply, or applies far less, to email and other basic electronic communication that flattens nonverbal signals beyond emoticons.

A question might be raised of, "How little or much of an NF are you?" Before Orthodoxy I considered myself to be at the boundary between "NT" ("iNtuitive Thinking") and NF, called NX, and wanting to shift towards NF. In Orthodoxy I found that silence that I desired personally was not my particular personal trait, but something normative, and the Orthodox Church's hesychasm or silence is bigger than what I had. Similarly, the Orthodox Church out-NFed me by making normative observations like, "The longest journey we will ever take is the journey from our mind to our heart." In both cases the Orthodox Church's answer was to challenge me to go further. And that raises at very least the possibility that I am close enough to (or far enough into) NF territory that some people see me through NF goggles.

I admit this as a possibility, and furthermore a possibility I think is at least probable. There is always some ambiguity and I do misunderstand some social setting, but there have been face-to-face encounters where someone seemed to really like me as something I wasn't. I've worked hard to write well and I've received some very rosy compliments, but usually the reader and I are on the same page about what a particular work is doing. (Most strands of criticism are also usually something I can recognize as a response to something I wrote.) My writing is usually not taken to be whatever the reader would like it to be.

So while I admit a likely NF layer to people drawn to me in person, the majority of the encounters where I've been offered a pedestal have been online, with people who have not met me face-to-face, or electronic communication that preserves nonverbal information such as Skype's offerings. So the question of whether my nonverbal communication is enchanting is largely beside the point. Whether the answer is true or false, the question is irrelevant.

## A tentative conclusion

I remember thinking, "My website hasn't really changed; why is the response to it changing?" And then I came to a "Yes, but..." answer. Most of what I consider the best works are relatively old, at least a couple of years; the only one I would consider "inspired" (in a broad and secular sense) is [Eight-Year-Old Boy Diagnosed With Machiavellian Syndrome By Proxy \(MSBP\)](#), which I would genuinely place alongside [Evangelical Converts Trying to Be Orthodox](#) and [Pope Makes Historic Ecumenical Bid to Woo Eastern Rite Catholics](#) for quality. The previous [Monasticism for Protestants](#) and this work itself I consider to serve a legitimate purpose not served by anything else among my posts, but they are not classics.

So why, if my website hasn't grown any major new features for quite some time, why would it be drawing fundamentally different response? The answer is simple, and one I should have predicted: I've run ahead of the Zeitgeist, whether I had the faintest intent of doing so or not. Whether or not it's the same article, some of what I wrote may draw people more effectively now than when they were fresh and new.

And the question of a pedestal weighs on my mind. Advertisements run repeatedly because people don't fall for a product the first time they see an advertisement targeted to them; they fall after repeated familiarity. Only humility can pass

through certain snares: and I am scarcely humble. I see the possibility that, some time after I have seen five or so clouds the size of a man's hand, a deluge will break forth. And I would really prefer the storm hit me when I am on Mount Athos, as a novice under the authority of an Elder, who does not care how smart I am and who sees that I have the same needs as many other novices, such as humility and obediences that build humility. Possibly I will not escape the deluge by getting to Mount Athos before it breaks: but I'll take my chances with a loving Elder rather than my own wisdom.

**(Would you be willing to help me reach the Holy Mountain?)**

**C.J.S. Hayward**