

# **Fighting Dragons: Works of Theology and Polemics**

**From the "Major Works" series**

**CJS Hayward**

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# Preface

In U.S. politics people assume that if you are at all serious about what you believe, you will argue and defend it forcefully. Politics is important; Christianity is much more so, and polemical engagement falls under the heading, not of hate, but of love, or at least it should and often does do so.

The works included here address various controversies, not because the author enjoys controversy [he doesn't], but because these are questions of substance, connected to other questions of substance, and they *matter*. The author would gladly enjoy a world where there was no need for polemics, where one could always dig deeper from truth into deeper truth, but since the age of the Bible, caring about the truth has included polemical engagement.

The author offers these works in the hope that the engagement may be edifying.

# Creation and Holy Orthodoxy: Fundamentalism Is Not Enough

## Against (crypto-Protestant) "Orthodox" fundamentalism

If you read Genesis 1 and believe from Genesis 1 that the world was created in six days, I applaud you. That is a profound thing to believe in simplicity of faith.

However, if you wish to persuade me that Orthodox Christians should best believe in a young earth creation in six days, I am wary. *Every single time* an Orthodox Christian has tried to convince me that I should believe in a six day creation, I have been given recycled Protestant arguments, and for the moment the entire conversation has seemed like I was talking with a Protestant fundamentalist dressed up in Orthodox clothing. And if the other person claims to understand scientific data better than scientists who believe an old earth, and show that the scientific data instead support a *young* earth, this is a major red flag.

Now at least some Orthodox heirarchs have refused to decide for the faithful under their care what the faithful may believe: the faithful may be expected to believe God's hand was at work, but between young earth creationism, old earth creationism, and "God created life through evolution", or any other options, the heirarchs do not intervene. I am an old earth creationist; I came to my present beliefs on "How did different

life forms appear?" before becoming Orthodox, and I have called them into a question a few times but not yet found reason to revise them, either into young earth creation or theistic evolution. I would characterize my beliefs, after being reconsidered, as "not changed", *and not* "decisively confirmed": what I would suggest has improved in my beliefs is that I have become less interested in some Western fascinations, such as getting right the details of how the world was created, moving instead to what might be called "mystical theology" or "practical theology", and walking the Orthodox Way.

There is something that concerns me about Orthodox arguing young earth creationism like a Protestant fundamentalist. Is it that I think they are wrong about how the world came to be? *That is not the point*. If they are wrong about that, they are wrong in the company of excellent saints. If they merely hold another position in a dispute, that is one thing, but bringing Protestant fundamentalism into the Orthodox Church reaches beyond one position in a dispute. Perhaps I shouldn't be talking because I reached my present position before entering the Orthodox Church; or rather I haven't exactly *reversed* my position but de-emphasized it and woken up to the fact that there are bigger things out there. But I am concerned when I'm talking with an Orthodox Christian, and *every single time* someone tries to convince me of a young earth creationism, all of the sudden it seems like I'm not dealing with an Orthodox Christian any more, but with a Protestant fundamentalist who always includes arguments that came from Protestant fundamentalism. And what concerns me is an issue of *practical* theology. Believing in a six day creation is one thing. Believing in a six day creation like a Protestant fundamentalist is another matter *entirely*.

## A telling, telling line in the sand

In reading the Fathers, one encounters claims of a young earth. However, often (if not always) the claim is one among many disputes with Greek philosophers or what have you. To my knowledge there is no patristic text in which a young earth is *the* central claim, let alone even approach being "the article by which the Church stands or falls" (if I may borrow phrasing from Protestant fundamentalist cultural baggage).

But, you may say, Genesis 1 and some important Fathers said six days, literally. True enough, but may ask a counterquestion?

Are we obligated to believe that our bodies are composed of earth, air, fire and water, and not of molecules and atoms including carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen?

If that question seems to come out of the blue, let me quote St. Basil, *On the Six Days of Creation*, on a precursor to today's understanding of the chemistry of what everyday objects are made of:

Others imagined that atoms, and indivisible bodies, molecules and bonds, form, by their union, the nature of the visible world. Atoms reuniting or separating, produce births and deaths and the most durable bodies only owe their consistency to the strength of their mutual adhesion: a true spider's web woven by these writers who give to heaven, to earth, and to sea so weak an origin and so little consistency! It is because they knew not how to say "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Deceived by their inherent atheism it appeared to them that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and that was all was given up to chance.

At this point, belief in his day's closest equivalent to our atoms and molecules is called an absolutely unacceptable "spider's web" that is due to "inherent atheism." Would you call Orthodox Christians who believe in chemistry's molecules and atoms inherent atheists? St. Basil does provide an alternative:

"And the Spirit of God was borne upon the face of the waters." Does this spirit mean the diffusion of air? The sacred writer wishes to enumerate to you the elements of the world, to tell you that God created the heavens, the earth, water, and air and that the last was now diffused and in motion; or rather, that which is truer and confirmed by the authority of the ancients, by the Spirit of God, he means the Holy Spirit.

St. Basil rejected atoms and molecules, and believed in elements, not of carbon or hydrogen, but of earth, air, fire, and water. The basic belief is one Orthodoxy understands, and there are sporadic references in liturgical services to the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water, and so far as I know no references to modern chemistry. St. Basil seems clearly enough to endorse a six day creation, and likewise endorses an ancient view of elements while rejecting belief in atoms and molecules as implicit atheism.

Why then do Orthodox who were once Protestant fundamentalists dig their heels in at a literal six day creation and make no expectation that we dismiss chemistry to believe the elements are earth, air, fire, water, and possibly aether? The answer, so far as I can tell, has *nothing whatsoever* to do with Orthodoxy or any Orthodox Christians. It has to do with a line in the sand chosen by Protestants, the same line in the sand described in [Why Young Earthers Aren't Completely Crazy](#), a line in the sand that is understandable and was an attempt to address quite serious concerns, but still should not be imported from Protestant fundamentalism into Holy Orthodoxy.

## Leaving Western things behind

If you believe in a literal six day creation, it is not my specific wish to convince you to drop that belief. But I would have you drop fundamentalist Protestant "creation science" and its efforts to prove a young earth scientifically and show that it can interpret scientific findings better than the mainstream scientific community. And I would have you leave Western preoccupations behind. Perhaps you might believe St. Basil was right about six literal days. For that matter, you could believe he was right about rejecting atoms and molecules in favor of earth, air, fire, and water—or at least recognize that St. Basil makes *other* claims *besides* six literal days. But you might realize that really there are much more important things in the faith. Like how faith plays out in practice.

The fundamentalist idea of conversion is like flipping a light switch: one moment, a room is dark, then in an instant it is full of light. The Orthodox understanding is of *transformation*: discovering Orthodoxy is the work of a lifetime, and perhaps once a year there is a "falling off a cliff" experience where you realize you've missed something big about Orthodoxy, and you need to grow in that newly discovered dimension. Orthodoxy is not just the ideas and enthusiasm we have when we first come into the Church; there are big things we could never dream of and big things we could never consider we needed to repent of. And I would rather pointedly suggest that if a new convert's understanding of Orthodoxy is imperfect, much less of Orthodoxy can be understood from reading Protestant attacks on it. One of the basic lessons in Orthodoxy is that you understand Orthodoxy by walking the Orthodox Way, by attending the services and living a transformed life, and not by reading books. And if this goes for books written by Orthodox saints, it goes all the more for Protestant fundamentalist books attacking Orthodoxy.

Science won't save your soul, but science (like Orthodoxy) is something you understand by years of difficult work. Someone who has done that kind of work might be able to argue effectively that evolution does not account for the fossil record, let alone how the first organism could come to exist: but here I would recall *The Abolition of Man*: "It is

Paul, the Pharisee, the man 'perfect as touching the Law' who learns where and how that Law was deficient." Someone who has taken years of effort may rightly criticize evolution for its scientific merits. Someone who has just read fundamentalist Protestant attacks on evolution and tries to evangelize evolutionists and correct their scientific errors *will be just as annoying to an atheist who believes in evolution*, as a fundamentalist who comes to evangelize the unsaved Orthodox and "knows all about Orthodoxy" from polemical works written by other fundamentalists. I would rather pointedly suggest that if you care about secular evolutionists at all, pray for them, but don't set out to untangle their backwards understanding of the science of it all. If you introduce yourself as someone who will straighten out their backwards ideas about science, all you may really end up accomplishing is to push them away.

Conversion is a slow process. And letting go of Protestant approaches to creation may be one of those moments of "falling off a cliff."

# **Note to Orthodox Evolutionists**

## **Stop Trying to Retroactively ShanghaiRecruit the Fathers to Your Camp!**

**At least some bishops** explicitly allow their faithful flock to believe theistic evolution, young earth creation, or any of several other options.

This article is not meant to say you can't be Orthodox and believe in evolution. It is, however, meant to say that you can't be Orthodox and misrepresent Church Fathers as saying things more convenient to evolution than what they really said.

## Two examples of a telling symptom: Fishy, suspicious arguments

Alexander Kalomiros is perhaps a forerunner to Orthodox finding a profound harmony between the Church Fathers and evolution. To pick one of many examples, Kalomiros's [On the Six Days of Creation](#) cites St. Basil the Great as saying, "Therefore, if you say a day or an age, you express the same meaning" (homily 2 of St. Basil's *On the Six Days of Creation*). So Dr. Kalamiros cites St. Basil as clearly saying that "day" is a term with a rather elastic meaning, implying an indefinite length.

Something really piqued my curiosity, because a young earth Creationist cited the same saint, the same book, and even the same homily as Kalamiros, but as supporting the opposite conclusion: "one day" means "one day," period.

I honestly wondered, "Why on earth?" Why would the same text be cited as a proof-text for "days" of quite open-ended length, but also a proof text for precise twenty-four hour days? So I read [the homily of St. Basil that was in question](#). The result?

The young earther's claim is easier to explain: St. Basil does, in fact, quite plainly claim a young earth, and treats this belief as non-negotiable. And what Kalomiros cites? The text is talking about something else when St. Basil moves from discussing the Creation to matters of eternity and the Last Judgment. One of the names for eternity is "the eighth day," and in explaining the timelessness of eternity, St. Basil writes, "Thus whether you call it day, or whether you call it eternity, you express the same idea." Which is not exactly how Kalomiros quotes him, not *exactly*.

Kalomiros offers a quote out of context, and translates in a subtle but misleading wording, leading the reader to believe St. Basil clarified that a "day" [of Creation] can just as well be an "age" [of time]. This is sophistry. This is disingenuous. What is more, I cannot ever remember following one of Kalomiros's footnotes supporting evolution and find an appropriate and responsible use of the original text. When I check things out, little if any of it checks out. And that's a concern. When someone

out, little if any of it checks out. And that's a concern. When someone argues like that, the reader is being treated dishonestly, and deceptive argument is rarely the herald of truth.

Let me quote another of many examples celebrating a harmony between patristic Orthodoxy and evolution, Vladimir de Beer's [Genesis, Creation and Evolution](#). He writes:

The account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis is known as the *Hexaemeron* (Greek for 'six days'), on which a number of Greek and Latin Church fathers wrote commentaries. Some of them interpreted the six days of creation quite literally, like St Basil the Great who was much influenced by Aristotle's natural philosophy. Yet the same Cappadocian father insisted that the scriptural account of creation is not about science, and that there is no need to discuss the essence (ousias) of creation in its scientific sense.[1] Others followed a more allegorical approach, such as St Gregory of Nyssa who saw the *Hexaemeron* as a philosophy of the soul, with the perfected creature as the final goal of evolution.

It has been my experience that for a certain kind of author one of the cheapest ways to dismiss a Father is to say that they were heavily influenced by some kind of non-Orthodox philosophy. Usually they don't even give a footnote. *St. Basil the Great is a Church Father and one of the Three Hierarchy*s, and if you are going to downplay whether his position is one we should believe, you should be doing a lot more than due diligence than making a dismissive bare assertion that he was heavily influenced by non-Orthodox forces.

But at least de Beer is kind enough to allow St. Basil to believe in six literal days. I am rather mystified by his treatment of St. Gregory of Nyssa, [whose commentary On the Six Days of Creation is here](#). Are we referring to the same work?

St. Gregory's commentary is not a allegorical interpretation, such as St. Maximus the Confessor's way of finding allegory about asceticism and ascetical struggles in the details of the Gospel. It is if anything 90% a science lesson, or an Aristotelian science lesson at any rate, and at face

value St. Gregory owes much more of a debt to Aristotle than St. Basil does. (At *least* St. Gregory spends vastly more time talking about earth, air, fire, and water.) St. Gregory's [On the Six Days of Creation](#) assumes and asserts that the days of Creation were, in fact, literal days. And that's not the end. St. Gregory of Nyssa explicitly ascribes the highest authority and weight to St. Basil's work and would almost certainly be astonished to find his work treated as a *corrective* to St. Basil's problematically literal *On the Six Days of Creation*; St. Gregory's attitude appears to be, "St. Basil made an excellent foundation and I want to build on it!" On all counts I can tell, St. Gregory does **not** provide a precedent for treating young earth creation as negotiable. De Beers may well have a friend among the Fathers, but St. Gregory is not that friend. And if this is his choice of friends, maybe he isn't aware of many real, honest friends among the Fathers. St. Augustine may be his friend here, but if the Blessed Augustine is your only friend among the Fathers, you're on pretty shaky ground.

Examples could easily be multiplied, but after a point it becomes somewhat tedious checking out more harmonizers' footnotes and finding that, no indeed, they don't check out.

## Why it matters

Have you read much [creation science seeking to use science to prove a young earth?](#) The reason I'm asking is that *that's what scholars do when they use patristic resources to prove that Orthodoxy and evolution are in harmony*. The kind of distortion of facts that they wouldn't be caught dead in origins science is the kind of distortion of facts that is routine in those harmonizing Orthodoxy with evolution.

I wrote [a thesis calling to task a Biblical Egalitarian treatment of the Haustafel in Ephesians](#), and it is part of my research and experience to believe that sophistry matters, *because sophistry is how people seek to persuade when truth is against them*. And when I see misrepresentation of sources, that betrays a problem.

I myself do not believe in a young earth; I am an old earth creationist and have seriously entertained returning to belief in theistic evolution. I stand pretty much as far outside the patristic consensus as Orthodox evolutionists. **But I don't distort the Fathers to shanghai recruit them to my position.**

It may well be that with knowledge that wasn't available to St. Gregory and his fellow Fathers, the intellectual dishonesty and distortion needed to believe in a young earth may be greater than saying, "I know the Fathers' consensus and I remain outside of it." That's not ideal, but it is infinitely better than distorting the Fathers' consensus to agree with you.

It is better by far to acknowledge that you are outside the Fathers' consensus than make them agree with you. **If you are an Orthodox evolutionist, please stop shanghaiing recruiting ancient Fathers to your camp.**

## A helpful analogy: What are the elements?

Some Protestants made young-earth creationism almost "the article by which the Church stands or falls," and much of young-earth and old-earth creationism in Orthodoxy, *and evolution*, is shaped by that Protestant "article by which the Church stands or falls."

**Today's young-earth creationism and theistic evolution are merely positions on a ballot in single-issue voting, and single-issue voting that was unknown to the Fathers. [There are other issues.](#)**

*(What other issues are there, you ask?)*

Let me give my standard question in dealing with young-earth Orthodox who are being pests and perhaps insinuating that my Orthodoxy is impaired if I don't believe their position: "Are we obligated to believe that the elements are earth, air, fire, water, and maybe aether?"

If that question seems to come from out of the blue, let me explain:

St. Basil's *On the Six Days of Creation* takes a position we can relate to readily enough even if we disagree:

"And the evening and the morning were the first day." Evening is then the boundary common to day and night; and in the same way morning constitutes the approach of night to day... Why does Scripture say "one day the first day"? Before speaking to us of the second, the third, and the fourth days, would it not have been more natural to call that one the first which began the series? If it therefore says "one day," it is from a wish to determine the measure of day and night, and to combine the time that they contain. Now twenty-four hours fill up the space of one day—we mean of a day and of a night; and if, at the time of the solstices, they have not both an equal length, the time marked by Scripture does not the less circumscribe their duration. It is as though it said: twenty-four hours measure the space of a day, or that, in reality a day is the time that the heavens starting

from one point take to return there.

*That's on our radar.* What's not on our radar is how bluntly St. Basil treats his day's closest equivalent to modern chemistry, and please note that alchemy has nothing to do with this; he does not condemn [alchemy](#) as being occult, but *chemistry* as atheistic:

Others imagined that atoms, and indivisible bodies, molecules and [bonds], form, by their union, the nature of the visible world. Atoms reuniting or separating, produce births and deaths and the most durable bodies only owe their consistency to the strength of their mutual adhesion: a true spider's web woven by these writers who give to heaven, to earth, and to sea so weak an origin and so little consistency! It is because they knew not how to say "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Deceived by their inherent atheism it appeared to them that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and that was all was given up to chance.

The emphatic alternative he offers is a belief in the four or five elements, earth, air, fire, water, and possibly the aether. This is something he finds in Genesis:

"And the Spirit of God was borne upon the face of the waters." Does this spirit mean the diffusion of air? The sacred writer wishes to enumerate to you the elements of the world, to tell you that God created the heavens, the earth, water, and air and that the last was now diffused and in motion; or rather, that which is truer and confirmed by the authority of the ancients, by the Spirit of God, he means the Holy Spirit.

St. Basil takes the text to mean more than just that water exists; he takes it to mean that water is an element. Nor is St. Basil the only one to make such claims; as mentioned earlier, [St. Gregory's On the Six Days of Creation](#) is not in the business of condemning opposing views, but it not only assumes literal days for Creation, but the "science" of earth, air, fire, and water is writ large, and someone wishing to understand how ancients could see science and cosmology on those terms has an invaluable resource in [St. Basil's On the Six Days of Creation](#). Furthermore, the view

of the four elements is ensconced in Orthodox liturgy: the Vespers for Theophany, which is arguably the central text for Orthodox understanding of Creation, enumerates earth, air, fire, and water as the four elements. To my knowledge, no Orthodox liturgy ensconces the implicit atheism of modern chemistry.

What are we to make of this? Does this mean that modern chemistry is off-limits to Orthodox, and that Orthodox doctors should only prescribe such drugs as the ancient theory would justify? God forbid! I bring this point up to say that the obvious answer is, "Ok, there is a patristic consensus and I stand outside of it," *and that this answer can be given without shanghaiing recruiting the Fathers to endorse modern chemistry.* When science and astronomy were formed, someone was reported to say, "The Bible is a book about how to go to Heaven, not a book about how the Heavens go," and while it may be appropriate to say "On pain of worse intellectual dishonesty, I must accept an old earth and chemistry as worth my provisional assent," it is not appropriate to distort the Church Fathers into giving a rubber stamp to beliefs they would reject.

[Drawing a line in the sand at a young earth is a Protestant invention that has nothing to do with Orthodoxy](#), but casting the opposite vote of theistic evolution in a single-issue vote is *also* short of the Orthodox tradition. In reading the Fathers, one encounters claims of a young earth. However, often (if not always) the claim is one among many disputes with Greek philosophers or what have you. To my knowledge there is no patristic text in which a young earth is **the** central claim, let alone even approach being "the article by which the Church stands or falls." Single-issue voting here, *even for evolution*, is not an Orthodox phenomenon except as it has washed in from Protestant battle lines. If an Orthodox who questions the Orthodoxy of old-earthers is being (crypto-)Protestant, the Orthodox who cites the Fathers in favor of evolution is only slightly less so—and both distort the truth.

The young-earth Creation Science makes scientific evidence bow before its will. The Orthodox evolutionist makes the Church Fathers bow before his will. Which is the more serious offense? ["Religion and Science" Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution.](#)

## "When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me."

One Protestant friend said that I had a real knack for insulting analogies. The comment came after I said of mainstream Evangelical "Christian art" that it worked on the same communication principle as hard porn: "Make every point with a sledgehammer and leave nothing to the imagination but the plot." And I have used that ability here: I have said that Orthodox evolutionists writing of harmony between evolution and the Church Fathers are treating patristic texts the same way creation scientists treat scientific evidence. *Ouch*. The Orthodox-evolutionary harmonizers are playing the same single-issue politics game as their young-earth counterparts, and are only different by casting the opposite vote. **Ouch**.

Is there a method to this madness?

I cannot forbid origins questions altogether, for reasons not least of which I am not tonsured even as a reader, let alone being your heirarch or priest. At least some heirarchs have refused to decide for their flock what they may believe: perhaps people are expected to find God's hand at work in creation, but the exact mechanism of involvement, and time frame, are not decided. But I could wish something like the theology surrounding the holy mysteries, where in contrast to the detailed, point by point Roman account, the Orthodox Church simply says that at one point in the Divine Liturgy the gifts are only (blessed) bread and wine, and at a certain later point they have become the body and blood of Christ, and beyond that point speculation is not allowed.

There are some questions where having the right answer is less valuable than not asking the question at all. Origins questions in the scientific sense do not loom large in the Fathers, and what little there is appears not to match scientific data. But this is not a defect in the Fathers. It is, if anything, a cue that our society's preoccupation with science is not particularly Orthodox in spirit, and perhaps something that doesn't belong in Orthodoxy. Again, [Religion and Science Is Not Just](#)

## Intelligent Design vs. Evolution.

But for the interim, for people who need an answer and are good enough scientists to see through Creation Science, please do not ~~shanghai~~ recruit the Church Fathers to rubber stamp the present state of scientific speculation. For starters, science is less important than you may think. *But that's just for starters.*

# Our Crown of Thorns

I remember meeting a couple; the memory is not entirely pleasant. Almost the first thing they told me after being introduced was that their son was "an accident," and this was followed by telling me how hard it was to live their lives as they wanted when he was in the picture.

I do not doubt that they had no intent of conceiving a child, nor do I doubt that having their little boy hindered living their lives as they saw fit. But when I heard this, I wanted to almost scream to them that they should look at things differently. It was almost as if I was speaking with someone bright who had gotten a full ride scholarship to an excellent university, and was vociferously complaining about how much work the scholarship would require, and how cleanly it would cut them off from what they took for granted in their home town.

I did not think, at the time, about the boy as an icon of the Holy Trinity, not made by hands, or what it means to think of such an *icon* as "an accident." I was thinking mainly about a missed opportunity for growth. What I wanted to say was, "This boy was given to you for your deification! Why must you look on the means of your deification as a curse?"

Marriage and monasticism are opposites in many ways. But there are profound ways in which they provide the same thing, and not only by including a community. Marriage and monasticism both provide—in quite different ways—an opportunity to take up your cross and follow Christ, to grow into the I Corinthians 13 love that says, "When I became a

man, I put childish ways behind me"—words that belong in this hymn to love because love does not place its own desires at the center, but lives for something more. Those who are mature in love put the childish ways of living for themselves behind them, and love Christ through those others who are put in their lives. In marriage this is not just Hollywood-style exhilaration; on this point I recall words I heard from an older woman, that you don't know understand being in love when you're "a kid;" being in love is what you have when you've been married for decades. Hollywood promises a love that is about having your desires fulfilled; I did not ask that woman about what more there is to being in love, but it struck me as both beautiful and powerful that the one thing said by to me by an older woman, grieving the loss of her husband, was that there is much more to being in love than what you understand when you are young enough that marriage seems like a way to satisfy your desires.

Marriage is not just an environment for children to grow up; it is also an environment for parents to grow up, and it does this as a crown of thorns.

The monastic crown of thorns includes an obedience to one's elder that is meant to be difficult. There would be some fundamental confusion in making that obedience optional, to give monastics more control and make things less difficult. The problem is not that it would fail to make a more pleasant, and less demanding, option than absolute obedience to a monastic elder. The problem is that when it was making things more pleasant and less demanding, it would break the spine of a lifegiving struggle—which is almost exactly what contraception promises.

Rearing children is not required of monastics, and monastic obedience is not required married faithful. But the spiritual struggle, the crown of thorns by which we take up our cross and follow Christ, by which we die to ourselves that we live in Christ, is not something we can improve our lives by escaping. The very thing we can escape by contraception, is what *all* of us—married, monastic, or anything else—need. The person who needs monastic obedience to be a crown of thorns is not the elder, but the monastic under obedience. Obedience is no more a mere aid to one's monastic elder than our medicines are something to

help our doctors. There is some error in thinking that some people will be freed to live better lives, if they can have marriage, but have it on their own terms, "a la carte."

What contraception helps people flee is a spiritual condition, a sharpening, a struggle, a proving grounds and a training arena, that all of us need. There is life in death. We find a rose atop the thorns, and the space which looks like a constricting prison from the outside, has the heavens' vast expanse once we view it from the inside. It is rather like the stable on Christmas' day: it looks on the outside like a terrible little place, but on the inside it holds a Treasure that is greater than all the world. But we need first to give up the illusion of living our own lives, and "practice dying" each day, dying to our ideas, our self-image, our self-will, having our way and our sense that the world will be better if we have our way—or even that we will be better if we have our way. Only when we have given up the illusion of living our own lives... will we be touched by the mystery and find ourselves living God's own life.

# Do We Have Rights?

As we [Paul and Silas] were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. She followed Paul and us, crying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the rulers; and when they had brought them to the magistrates they said, "These men are Jews and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs which it is not lawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

The crowd joined in attacking them; and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and

every one's fetters were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here."

And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, "Men, what must I do to be saved?"

And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God.

Acts 16:16-34, RSV

As he [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Silo'am" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is he"; others said, "No, but he is like him." He said, "I am the man."

They said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"

He answered, "The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Silo'am and wash'; so I went and washed and received my sight."

They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" There was a division among them.

So they again said to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight, and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?"

His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if any one should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age, ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner."

He answered, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see."

They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too want to become his disciples?"

And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from."

The man answered, "Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of man?"

He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"

Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you."

He said, "Lord, I believe"; and he worshiped him.

John 9:1-38, RSV

The Gospel today deals with physical blindness, but it is about much more than physical blindness. In this passage, the man who was blind from birth received his physical sight. That is an impressive gift, but there's more. The passage deals with the Pharisees' spiritual blindness, but the Church has chosen to end today's reading with the blind man

saying, "Lord, I believe," and worshipping Christ. When he did this, the blind man demonstrated that he had gained something far more valuable than physical sight. He had gained spiritual sight. The Bible actually gives a few more chilling words about the Pharisee's spiritual blindness, but the Church, following the Spirit, is attentive to spiritual sight and ends its reading with the man demonstrating his spiritual sight by adoring Christ in worship.

What is spiritual sight? We see a glimmer of it in the passage from Acts, where we read something astonishing. We read that Paul and Silas were stripped, savagely beaten, and thrown into what was probably a dungeon. And how do they respond to their "reward" for a mighty good deed? Do they say, "Why me?" Do they rail at God and tell him he's doing a lousy job at being God? Do they sink into despair?

In fact none of these happen; they pray and sing to God. Like the man born blind, they turn to God in worship. As should we.

That is advanced spiritual sight. I'm not there yet and you're probably not there either. But let me suggest some basic spiritual sight: Next time someone cuts you off on the road and you almost have an accident, instead of fuming and maybe thinking of evil things to do the other driver, why don't you thank God?

What do you have to be thankful for? Well, for starters, your eyes work and so do your driver's reflexes, you have a car, and your brakes work, and probably your horn. And God just saved you from a nasty scrape that would have caused you trouble. Can't you be thankful for some of that?

In the West, we think in terms of rights. Almost all of the ancient world worked without our concept of rights. People then, and some people now, believed in things we should or should not do—we should love others and we shouldn't steal, cheat, or murder—but then there was a queer shift to people thinking "I have an entitlement to this." "This is something the universe owes me." Now we tend to have a long list of things that we're entitled to (or we think God, or the universe, or someone "owes me"), and if someone violates our rights, boy do we get mad

But in fact God owes none of the things we take for granted. Not even our lives. One woman with breast cancer responded to what the women's breast cancer support group was named ("Why me?"), and suggested there should be a Christian support group for women with breast cancer called "Why not me?"

That isn't just a woman with a strong spirit speaking. That is the voice of spiritual sight. Spiritual sight recognizes that we have no right to things we take for granted. We have no right to exist, and God could have created us as rocks or fish, and that would have been generous. We have no right to be free of disease. If most of us see, that is God's generosity at work. He doesn't owe it to us. Those of us who live in the first world, with the first world's luxuries, do not have those luxuries as any sort of right.

I am thinking of one friend out of many who have been a blessing. I stop by his house, and he receives me hospitably. Usually he gives me a good conversation and I can hold his bunny Smudge on my lap and tell Smudge that my shirt is not edible. This is God's generosity and my friend's. Not one of these blessings is anything God owes me, or for that matter my friend owes me. Each visit is a gift.

It isn't just first world luxuries that none of us are entitled to. We have no right to live in a world where a sapphire sky is hung with a million constellations of diamonds. If there is a breathtaking night sky, God chose to create it in his goodness and generosity. Not only do I have no right to be a man instead of a butterfly or a bird (or to exist in the first place), I have no right to be in community with other people with friendships and family. God could have chosen to make me the only human in a lonely world. Instead, in his sovereignty, he chose to place me in a world of other people where his love would often come through them. I have no right to that. I'm not entitled to it. If I have friends and family, that is because God has given me something better than I have any right to. God isn't concerned with giving me the paltry things I have a right to. He is generous, and gives all of us things that are better than our rights. We have no right to join the seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, powers, authorities, principalities, archangels, and angels—rank upon rank of angels adoring God. Nor do we have any right to live in a world

think of angels adoring God. For do we have any right to live in a world that is both spiritual and material, where God who gives us a house of worship to worship him in, also truly meets us as we work, garden, play, visit with our friends, and go about the business of being human.

Isn't it terrible if we don't have rights? It's not terrible at all. It means that instead of having a long list of things we take for granted as "Here's what God, or the universe, or somebody owes me," we are free not to take it for granted and to rejoice at God's generosity and recognize that everything we could take for granted, from our living bodies to the possessions God has given us to God placing us at a particular point in place in time and choosing a here and now for us, with our own cultures, friendships, languages, homelands, sights and sounds, so that we live as much in a particular here and now as Christ, to a world carpeted with life that includes three hundred and fifty thousand species of beetles, to the possibility of rights. Every single one of these is an opportunity to turn back in praise and worship God. It is an opportunity for joy, as we were created for worship and we find our fullest joy in worshipping God and thanking him. Would you rather live in a world where you only have some of the things that can be taken for granted, or in a world where God has created for you so many more blessings than he or anyone else owes you?

There is, actually, one thing that we have a right to, and it's a strange thing to have a right to. Hell. We have a right to go to Hell; we've earned a ticket to Hell with our sins, and we've earned it so completely that it cost God the death of his Son to let us choose anyone else. But Hell is not only a place that God casts people into; it is also where he leaves people, with infinite reluctance, after he has spent a lifetime telling people, "Let go of Hell. Let go of what you think you have a right to, and let me give you something better." Hell is the place God reluctantly leaves people when they tell him, "You can't take my rights away from me," and the gates of Hell are barred and bolted from the inside by people who will not open their hands to the Lord's grace. The Lord is gracious, and if we allow him, he will give us something infinitely better than our rights. He will give us Heaven itself, and God himself, and he will give us the real beginnings of Heaven in this life. The good news of God is not that he gives us what we think we have a right to, but that he will pour out blessings that we will know we have no right to, and one of these blessings is spiritual sight that recognizes this communion as an opportunity for joyful thanksgiving and

recognizes this cornucopia as an opportunity for joyful thanksgiving and worship.

When I was preparing this homily, there's one word in the Greek text that stood out to me because I didn't recognize it. When the blind man says that Christ must be from God and have healed him as a "worshiper of God," the word translated "worshiper of God" is *theosebēs*, and it's a very rare word in the Orthodox Church's Greek Bible. Another form of the word appears in Acts but this is the only time this word appears in either the Gospels or the books John wrote. It is also rare in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. It occurs only four times: once in IV Maccabees 15:28 where the mother of seven martyred sons sees past even her maternal love "because of faith in God" (15:24) and is called "the daughter of God-fearing [*theosebēs*] Abraham," and three times in Job where the blameless Job is called a *theosebēs*, or "worshiper of God." In Job, this word occurs once in the book's opening verse, then Job is twice called a "worshiper of God" by God himself. The Maccabees' mother is not even called *theosebēs* herself, but "the daughter of *theosebēs* Abraham."

What does this mean? I'm not sure what it all means, but John didn't use very many unusual words. Unlike several New Testament authors, he used simple language. In the Greek Old Testament, this word is reserved for special occasions, it seems to be a powerful word, and it always occurs in relation to innocent suffering. Job is the very image of innocent suffering and the Maccabees mother shows monumental resolve in the face of innocent suffering—the text is very clear about what it means for a mother to watch her sons be tortured to death. The Gospel passage is about innocent suffering as well as spiritual sight. When the blind man calls Christ a "worshiper of God," he is speaking about a man who would suffer torture for a miracle, before Paul and Silas, and this little story helps move the Gospel towards the passion. But Christ says that the blind man suffered innocently, and I'm not sure that we recognize all of what that meant.

People believed then, as many people believe now, that sickness is a punishment for sin. The question, "Who sinned? Who caused this man's blindness?" was an obvious question to ask. And Jesus says explicitly that neither this man nor his parents sinned to bring on his blindness. Jesus

neither this man nor his parents sinned to bring on his blindness. Jesus, in other words, says that this man's suffering was innocent, and he was saying something shocking.

What does this have to do with spiritual sight?

Spiritual sight is not blind to evil. The Son of God came to destroy the Devil's work, and that includes sin, disease, and death. Sin, disease, and death are the work of the Devil. The woman who survived breast cancer who suggested there should be a Christian support group called "Why not me?" never suggested that cancer is a good thing, and would probably never tell a friend, "I wish you could have the sufferings of cancer." When Paul and Silas were beaten with rods, being spiritual didn't mean that they didn't feel pain. I believe the beatings hurt terribly. Sin is not good. Disease is not good. Death is not good. Spiritual sight neither ignores these things, nor pretends that they are blessings from God. Instead, God transforms them and makes them part of something larger. He transformed the suffering of Paul and Silas into a sharing of the sufferings of Christ, a sharing of the sufferings of Christ that is not only in the Bible but is written in Heaven. I've had sufferings that gave terrifying reality to what had always seemed a trite exaggeration that "Hell is a place you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy." My sufferings are something I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy, and it is terrifying to realize that Hell is worse. So why then is spiritual sight joyful?

C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce* describes a journey. This journey begins in an odd place, and one that is not terribly cheerful. Anyone can have anything physical he wants just by wishing, only it's not very good. The ever-expanding borders of this place are pushed out further and further as people flee from each other and try to get what they want.

A bus Driver takes anyone who wants into his bus, which ascends and ascends into a country that is painfully beautiful to look at, where not only are the colors bright and full but heavy, rich, and deep. It is painful to walk on the ground because the people who got off the bus are barely more than ghosts, devoid of weight and substance, and their feet are not real enough to bend the grass. This is in fact a trip from Hell to Heaven, where Hell is mediocre and insubstantial, and Heaven is real and hefty beyond measure not only beautiful and good but colorful and rich and

beyond measure, not only beautiful and good but colossal and rich and deep—and infinitely more real than Hell. One part that really struck me was that when Lewis's Heavenly guide (George MacDonald) explains why a woman in Heaven, whom MacDonald said had gone down as far as she could, did not go so far as descending to Hell:

"Look," he [MacDonald] said, and with the word he went down on his hands and knees. I did the same (how it hurt my knees!) and presently saw that he had plucked a blade of grass. Using its thin end as a pointer, he made me see, after I had looked very closely, a crack in the soil so small that I could not have identified it without his aid.

"I cannot be certain," he said, "that this is the crack ye came up through. But through a crack no bigger than that ye certainly came."

"But—but" I gasped with a feeling of bewilderment not unlike terror. "I saw an infinite abyss. And cliffs towering up and up. And then this country on top of the cliffs."

"Aye. But the voyage was not mere locomotion. That buss, and all you inside it, were increasing in size."

"Do you mean then that Hell—all that infinite empty town—is down some little crack like this?"

"Yes. All Hell is smaller than one pebble of your earthly world: but it is smaller than one atom of this world, the Real World. Look at yon butterfly. If it swallowed all Hell, Hell would not be big enough to do it any harm or have any taste."

"It seems big enough when you're in it, Sir."

"And yet all loneliness, angers, hatreds, envies and itchings that it contains, if rolled into one single experience and put into the scale against the least moment of the joy that is felt by the least in Heaven, would have no weight that could be registered at all. Bad cannot succeed even in being bad as truly as good is good."

Bad cannot succeed even in being bad as truly as good as good is good and spiritual sight knows this. To have spiritual sight is not to close

good, and spiritual sight knows this. To have spiritual sight is not to close your eyes so tight they don't even see evil, but to let God open your eyes wider. Our eyes can never open wide enough to see God as he truly is, but God can open our eyes wide enough to see a lot. Why were Paul and Silas able to turn from being viciously beaten and imprisoned to singing and praying to God? For the same reason a butterfly from Heaven could swallow all of Hell without it even registering. In that image of Heaven, not just the saints but the very birds and butterflies could swallow up Hell. This is just an image; the Real Place, real Heaven, is far more glorious.

Death is swallowed up in victory. Let us let spiritual blindness be swallowed up by spiritual sight that begins to see just how much God's generosity, grace, mercy, kindness, love, and 1001 other gifts we have to be thankful for. Let us worship God.

# How Shall I Tell an Alchemist?

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

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

To an alchemist,  
And even nothingness itself?

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

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

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

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

How shall I tell an alchemist?

# The Law of Attraction: A Dialogue with an Eastern Orthodox Christian Mystic

**Paidion:** I found some really interesting stuff about the Law of Attraction.

**Aneer:** What is it that you have found?

**Paidion:** This wonderful secret, the Law of Attraction, is a secret where if you understand how you attract what you think about... then you have the key to happiness!

**Aneer:** Have you seen what else the Law of Attraction could be?

**Paidion:** You mean the Law of Attraction could be more?

**Aneer:** Let me think about how to explain this...

**Paidion:** Did the Church Fathers say anything about the Law of Attraction? Or did the Bible?

**Aneer:** Where to start, where to start—the Law of Attraction says our thoughts are important, and that is true. Not just a little bit true, but deeper than a whale can dive. The Apostle writes:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true,

whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

**Paidion:** And there is something about "ask, seek, knock?"

**Aneer:** Yes, indeed:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

It is part of the [Sermon on the Mount](#). But there is something that you may be missing about what is in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), and something you may be missing about the Law of Attraction.

**Paidion:** Why? Is there anything relevant besides the [Sermon on the Mount](#)?

**Aneer:** Yes indeed, from the first pages of [Genesis](#):

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, "Yea, hath God said, "Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"

And the woman said unto the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."

And the serpent said unto the woman, "Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat,

The Law of Attraction is here. The very *heart* of the Law of Attraction is here. Have you read [The Magician's Nephew](#)?

**Paidion:** It is one of my favorite books.

**Aneer:** Do you remember what Jadis stole?

**Paidion:** How could Jadis steal anything? She was a queen!

**Aneer:** Then you have forgotten the verse when Jadis met a garden enclosed:

"Come in by the gold gates or not at all,  
Take of my fruit for others or forbear,  
For those who steal or those who climb my wall  
Shall find their heart's desire and find despair."

The story gives a glimpse of the Queen Jadis finding her heart's desire: undying years, and undying strength. She found everything the Law of Attraction promises. If the Law of Attraction does anything, you can see it unfold in Eve choosing to be attracted to the fruit, or Jadis.

But undying strength was not the only thing in the picture. When Jadis ate that apple, she might never age or die, but neither could she ever *live* again. She cheated death, perhaps, but at the expense of Life. Which is to say that she didn't really cheat Death at all. And she damned herself to a "living" death that was hollow compared to her previous life she so eagerly threw away.

**Paidion:** So you think Eve was like Jadis? Halfway to being a vampire?

**Aneer:** Paidion, you're big on imagining. I want you to imagine the Garden of Eden for just a moment. Adam and Eve have been created immortal, glorious, lord and lady of all nature, and Eve tastes an exhilarating rush that has something very vampiric about it: a moment passed, and the woman who had never known pain found the seed of death deep inside her. And in a flash of insight, she *realized* something.

**Paidion:** What is it she realized?

**Aneer:** She had the seed of death eating away at her. Nothing could stop her from dying. And her deathless husband would watch her die.

**Paidion:** A sad end to the story.

**Aneer:** What do you mean?

**Paidion:** But it's a tragedy!

**Aneer:** It may be tragic, but how is it an end to Adam's story?

Adam was still deathless. He would live on; did you assume he would be celibate, or that Eve envisioned God to never provide him a wife to share in blessed happiness?

**Paidion:** Look, this is all very impressive, but is any of this really part of the ancient story?

**Aneer:** I cut off the story before its usual end. The end goes surprisingly fast:

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, *and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

**Paidion:** Why? Is this just Eve's... solution... to... the... problem...

of... Adam's... [*shudder*]

**Aneer:** Do you think your generation is the first to invent jealousy?

**Paidion:** But can't the Law of Attraction be used for good?

**Aneer:** When people speak of the Law of Attraction, it always sounds like the unearthing of the key to happiness.

**Paidion:** But what else could it be once we are attracting the right thoughts?

**Aneer:** What, exactly, are the right thoughts might be something interesting to discuss someday. But for now let me suggest that the Law of Attraction might be something very different, at its core, from the key to happiness: it could be the bait to a trap.

The [Sermon on the Mount](#) truly *does* say,

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

but only after saying something that is cut from the same cloth:

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

The [Sermon on the Mount](#) finds it unworthy of the children of a loving and providing God to chase after food and clothing—or cars and iPods or whatever—as if they have to do so because their Heavenly Father has forgotten their needs. God knows our needs before we begin to ask, and it's a distraction for us to be so terribly concerned about the things that will be added to us if we put first things first and last things last.

**Paidion:** But what is wrong with wanting abundance?

**Aneer:** Have you read Plato's [Republic](#)?

**Paidion:** No.

**Aneer:** Did you know that royalty do not touch money?

**Paidion:** Why not? It would seem that a king should have the most right to touch money.

**Aneer:** Well, let us leave discussion of rights for another day. But there's something in the [Republic](#) where Plato knows something about gold, and it is the reason why royalty do not touch money.

**Paidion:** And that is?

**Aneer:** Plato is describing the guardians, the highest rulers of an ideal city. And what he says about them is that they have true gold in their character: they have a truer gold than gold itself, and they are set apart for something high enough that they would only be distracted by handling the kind of gold that is dug up from the earth like something dead.

**Paidion:** But kings have palaces and jewels and such!

**Aneer:** Not in Plato's [Republic](#) they don't. The life of a ruler, of a king, in Plato is something like the life of a monk. It's not about having palaces of gold any more than being President is all about being able to watch cartoons all day!

**Paidion:** Ok, but for the rest of us who may not be royalty, can't we at least want abundance as a consolation prize?

**Aneer:** "The rest of us who may not be royalty?"

What can you *possibly* mean?

**Paidion:** Um...

**Aneer:** *All* of us bear the royal bloodline of Lord Adam and Lady

Eve. All of us are created in the divine image, made to grow into the likeness of Christ and—

**Paidion:** So we are all made to rule as kings?

**Aneer:** Read the Fathers and you will find that the real rule of royalty is when we rule over God's creation as royal emblems, as the image of God. For people to rule other people is not just not the *only* kind of royal rule: it's almost like a necessary evil. Do you know of the ritual anointing of kings? In the Bible, a man is made king when he is anointed with oil. Such anointing still takes place in England, for instance. And when a person receives the responsibility for sacred work in the Orthodox Church, he is anointed—chrismated—and in this anointing, the Orthodox Church has always seen the sacred anointing of prophet, priest, and king.

**Paidion:** But this is just for priests, right?

**Aneer:** Paidion, every one of us is created for spiritual priesthood. Perhaps I wasn't clear: the anointing of prophet, priest, and king is for every faithful member of the Church, not just a few spiritual Marines. Chrismation, or royal anointing, is administered alongside baptism to all the faithful.

**Paidion:** And it's part of this royal dignity not to touch money?

**Aneer:** There is a very real sense in which Christians may not touch money. Not literally, perhaps; many Christians touch coins or other items, and so on and so forth. But there is a real sense in which Christians never have what you search for in abundance, because they have something better.

**Paidion:** Are you saying half a loaf is better than an *abundance* of loaves?

**Aneer:** I know a number of people who have found that an abundance of loaves is not the solution to all of life's problems.

Easy access to an abundance of loaves can lead to weight issues, or worse.

May I suggest what it is that you fear losing? It isn't exactly *abundance*, even if you think it is.

**Paidion:** So am I mistaken when I think I want shrimp and lobster as often as I wish?

**Aneer:** Maybe you are right that you want shrimp and lobster, but you don't *only* want shrimp and lobster. You want to be able to choose.

Remember in Star Wars, how Luke and Ben Kenobi are travelling in the Millennium Falcon, and Kenobi puts a helmet on Luke's head that has a large shield completely blocking his eyesight? And Luke protests and says, "With the blast shield down, I can't even see. How am I supposed to fight?" And then something happens, and Luke starts to learn that he can fight even without seeing what was in front of him, and Kenobi says, "You have taken your first step into a larger world."?

What you want is to have your ducks in a row and be able to see that you can have shrimp and lobster as often as you want.

What the [Sermon on the Mount](#) says is better than a way to do a better job of having your next meal right where you can see it. It says to put the blast shield down...

And take your first step into a larger world.

**Paidion:** I'm sure for a man of faith like you—

**Aneer:** Why call me a man of faith? I may not have all my ducks lined up in a row, but I have *always* known where my next meal is coming from.

**Paidion:** Well sure, but *that's*—

**Aneer:** Maybe everybody you know has that privilege, but a great many people in the world do not.

**Paidion:** That may be, but I still want abundance.

**Aneer:** May I suggest that you are reaching for abundance on a higher plane?

**Paidion:** Like what? What is this larger world?

**Aneer:** When you have the blast shield down over your eyes, what you receive is part of a life of communion with God. When you don't see where your next meal is coming from, and God still feeds you, you get a gift covered with God's fingerprints. You're living part of a dance and you are beckoned to reach for much deeper treasures. If you are asked to let go of treasures on earth, it is so your hands can open all the wider to grasp treasures in Heaven.

**Paidion:** Maybe for super-spiritual people like you, but when I've tried anything like that, I've only met disappointments.

**Aneer:** I've had a lot of disappointments. Like marriage, for instance.

**Paidion:** *You?* You've always seemed—

**Aneer:** My wife and I are very happily married. We've been married for years, and as the years turn into decades we are more happily married—more in love. But our marriage has been a disappointment on any number of counts.

G.K. Chesterton said, "The marriage succeeds because the honeymoon fails." Part of our marriage is that it's not just a honeymoon; my wife is not some bit of putty I can inflate to the contours of my fantasies about the perfect wife; she is a real person with real desires and real needs and real virtues and real flaws and a real story. She is infinitely more than some figment of my imagination. She has disappointed me time and time

again—*thank God!*—and God has given me something much better in her than if she was some piece of putty that somehow fit my imagination perfectly. By giving me a real woman—*what a woman!*—God is challenging me to dig deeper into being a real man.

**Paidion:** So all disappointments make for a happy marriage?  
Because...

**Aneer:** I'm not completely sure how to answer that. We miss something about life if we think we can only have a happy marriage when we don't get any disappointments. Read the Gospel and it seems that Christ himself dealt with disappointments; his life on earth built to the disappointment of the Cross which he could not escape no matter how hard he prayed. But the Apostle Paul wrote about this disappointment:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It is part of his glory.

If you have a disappointment, you have one problem. If you have a disappointment and you think that with such a disappointment you can't really be where you should be, you have two problems. Disappointments sting like ninety, but they can be drawn into something deeper and a richer life.

**Paidion:** So you'd rather be disappointed in life than get your way.

**Aneer:** Yes.

When I haven't gotten my way, that has been a stepping stone for a refinement on more than one level, a refinement in what I sought and what I wanted. I've gotten better things than if I always had a magic key that gave me what I thought I wanted. St. Paul said, "When I became a man, I put childish things behind me."

**Paidion:** Am I being childish if I wish the Law of Attraction could get me what I want? If I dream?

**Aneer:** What the Law of Attraction is a way to satisfy the kind of things childish people set their hearts on. Always getting your way is not an unattainable dream. Always getting your way is not a dream at all. Always getting your way is a nightmare. It is the nightmare of succeeding at being a spoiled brat where others have grown up in all the disappointments you hope to dodge.

**Paidion:** Is virtue its own reward?

Or is it just the consolation prize when you do the right thing even if you don't get a real reward?

**Aneer:** Let us return to Plato again.

Elsewhere in the [Republic](#), some people say some questionable things about goodness. Someone says, for instance, that what is good is whatever the stronger group wants, or something like that. And so someone asks if there's anything a good man has that the evil man does not.

Actually, the question is put much more strongly than that. We are asked to suppose that an evil man has every worldly benefit—a good name, wealth, good children, everything in life going his way. And let us suppose that the good man gets quite

the opposite: he is slandered and betrayed, loses everything, is tortured, and is finally crucified. Can we still say that the good man has *anything* the evil one does not?

**Paidion:** If *that* is the case, it's hard to see that the good man has *anything* valuable that the evil man does not.

**Aneer:** He has goodness.

**Paidion:** Well, yes, but *besides*—

**Aneer:** Paidion, how would you like to have all of the wealth in the world and the health with which to spend it?

**Paidion:** No thanks!

**Aneer:** Meaning that on *those* terms, no man in his right mind would choose *any* amount of wealth!

**Paidion:** Sure, if you have to spend all the money on doctor bills...

**Aneer:** All right.

Let's suppose you don't have to spend any of it on doctor bills. Suppose you're a billionaire with all kinds of free medical care, and with your billions of dollars comes the worst of health and the most atrocious suffering for the rest of your mercifully short life. Billions of dollars must be worth *that*, right?

**Paidion:** Does this relate to Plato?

**Aneer:** Yes—

**Paidion:** Are you saying that the evil man had bad health? You didn't mention that at first.

**Aneer:** Well, that depends on what you mean by health. Externally, he had the best of health, I suppose, and the good man had terrible diseases. But the condition of being evil is the spiritual

condition of being diseased, twisted, and shrunken. Even our English words like "twisted" and "sick" are signs of ancient recognition of evil as a spiritual disease. The evil man with worldly glory is the man who has all of the wealth in the world and the health with which to spend it—and the good man is the man who has nothing but his health. He has the one thing the evil man does not: his *health!*

**Paidion:** Is this about Heaven and Hell? Because however impressive they may be, we aren't there yet.

**Aneer:** Wrong. Heaven and Hell begin in this life. The eternal tree that forever stands in Heaven or Hell is planted and nourished in this life. The connection between this life and the next is a closer connection than you can imagine.

**Paidion:** All this sounds very wonderful, and I could wish it were true. For people like you who have faith, at least. I don't...

**Aneer:** Paidion, there was something that happened in [The Magician's Nephew](#), before Queen Jadis attracted to her the deathless strength that she desired. Something happened before then. Do you remember what?

**Paidion:** I'm not sure what.

**Aneer:** It's quite memorable, and it has quite a lot to do with the Law of Attraction.

**Paidion:** I am afraid to ask.

**Aneer:** Let me quote the Queen, then.

...That was the secret of secrets. It had long been known to the great kings of our race that there was a word which, if spoken with the proper ceremonies, would destroy all living things except the one who spoke it. But the ancient kings were weak and soft-hearted and bound themselves and all who should come after them with great

oaths never even to seek after the knowledge of that word. But I learned it in a secret place and paid a terrible price to learn it. I did not use it until she forced me to it. I fought to overcome her by every other means. I poured out the blood of my armies like water...

The last great battle raged for three days here in Charn itself. For three days I looked down upon it from this very spot. I did not use my power till the last of my soldiers had fallen, and the accursed woman, my sister, at the head of her rebels was halfway up those great stairs that led up from the city to the terrace. Then I waited till we were so close that we could not see one another's faces. She flashed her horrible, wicked eyes upon me and said, "Victory." "Yes," said I, "Victory, but not yours." Then I spoke the Deplorable Word. A moment later I was the only living thing beneath the sun.

**Paidion:** Are you saying that the Law of Attraction is like the Deplorable Word?

**Aneer:** The Law of Attraction is described in glowing terms but what is described so glowingly is that there's you, your thoughts, and a giant mirror called the universe... and that's it. Everything else is killed. Not literally, perhaps, but in a still very real sense. The reason you have not succeeded at getting what you want *couldn't* be because a powerful man, with his own thoughts and motives, is refusing something you want, much less that God loves you and knows that what you want isn't *really* in your best interests. The powerful man is just part of the great mirror, as is God, if there is anything to God besides you. The only possible reason for you to not have something, the only thing that is not killed, is your thoughts.

And how I wish you could enter a vast, vast world which is not a mirror focused on you, where even the people who meet and know you have many other concerns besides thinking about you, who have their own thoughts and wishes and which is

ruled by an infinitely transcendent God who is infinitely more than you even if you were made for the entire purpose of becoming divine, and perhaps even more divine than if you are the only thing you do not lump into the great mirror reflecting your thoughts.

**Paidion:** But how shall I then live? It seemed, for a moment, like things got better when I paid attention to my thoughts, and things in my life—

**Aneer:** If you think it seems like your thoughts matter, perhaps that's because your thoughts really *are* important, possibly more important than you can even dream of. Perhaps there are other things going on in the world, but it is your thoughts that stand at the root of everything you contribute to the tree that will stand eternally in Heaven or as Hell. I don't know how to tell you how important it is to attend to your thoughts, nor how to tell you that what you think of as morality is something which all the wise go upstream and deal with at the source, in the unseen warfare of vigilant attention to one's thoughts. Little thoughts build to big thoughts and big thoughts build to actions, and spiritual discipline or "asceticism" moves from the hard battle of actions to the harder battle of thoughts. And thoughts aren't just about concepts; when I've had trouble getting a thought of doing something I shouldn't out of my head, sometimes I've reminded myself that what is not truly desired doesn't really last long. [The Philokalia](#) there, my point is that it is a lifetime's endeavor to learn how to pay proper attention to one's thoughts.

**Paidion:** Um... uh... did you say I was made to be divine? Did you *mean* it?

**Aneer:** Paidion, if being divine just means that there isn't anything that much bigger than us, then that's a rather pathetic idea of the divine, and I wouldn't give twopence for it. But if we really and truly understand how utterly God dwarfs us, if we understand what it means that God is the Creator and we are his creatures, and the infinite chasm between Creator and

creature is *then* transcended so that we his creatures can become by grace what God is by nature—then that is really something and I would give my *life* for that way of being divine!

There is a hymn, of ancient age, that says, "Adam, wanting to be divine, failed to be divine. Christ became man that he might make Adam divine." Christ's life is an example of what it means to be divine: as a child he was a refugee, then grew up as a blue-collar worker, then lived as a homeless man, and died a slave's death so vile its name was a curse word. This is a tremendous clue-by-four about what true glory is. This is a divine clue-by-four about what Adam missed when he decided that reigning as immortal king and lord of paradise and following only one simple rule wasn't good enough for him.

And it is in this messy life we live, with so many situations beyond our control and so many things we would not choose, that God can transform us so that we become by grace what he is by nature.

**Paidion:** Aneer, can I ever enter the vast world you live in? It seems I have, well...

**Aneer:** Well?

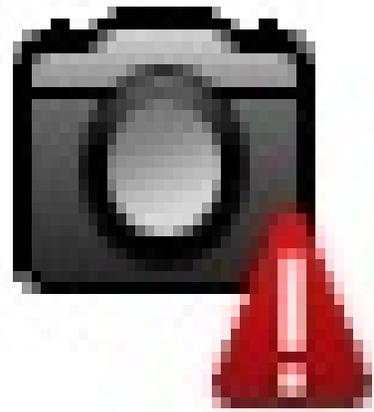
**Paidion:** Chosen to live in an awfully small world, thinking I was doing something big.

**Aneer:** *All* of us have. It's called *sin*. Not a popular word today, but realizing you are in sin is Heaven's best-kept secret. Before you repent, you are afraid to let go of something that seems, like the Ring to Gollum, "my precious." Afterwards you find that what you dropped was torment and Hell, and you are awakening to a larger world.

**Paidion:** But when can I do something this deep? My schedule this week is pretty full, and little of it meshes well with—

**Aneer:** The only time you can ever repent is *now*.

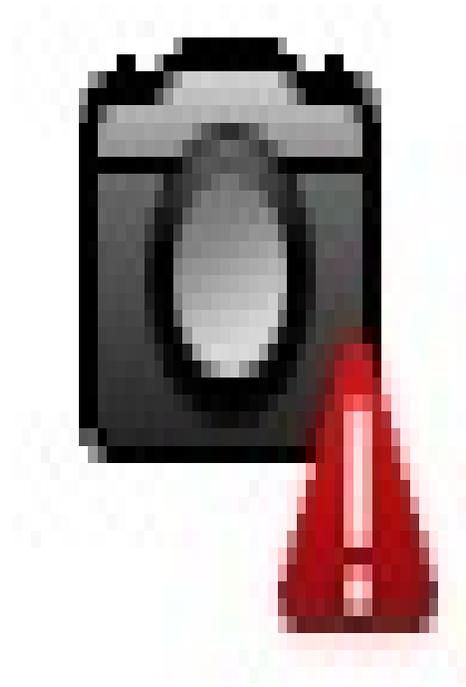
# **An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism**



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

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

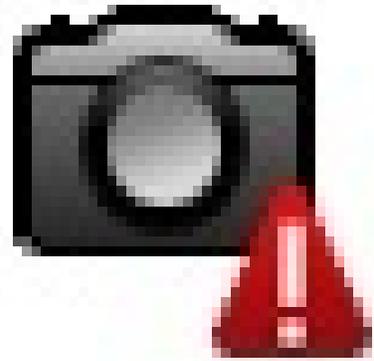
**OrthodoxCircle post:**



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

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

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



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

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

**skilled at NOT seeing  
it.**

## **What might be called "the Orthodox question"**

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

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

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

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

## **A conciliatory gesture (or so I was told)**

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

## **What Catholics never acknowledge**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **St. Dionysius the Areopagite, "The Mystical Theology"**

### **Rewritten in the scholastic style of Thomas Aquinas**

Again, as we climb higher  
we say this. It is not soul or  
mind, nor does it possess  
imagination, conviction, speech,  
or understanding. Nor is it

speech *per se*, understanding *per se*. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by

understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit, in the sense that we understand the term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or to any other being. It falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth—it is none of these. It is beyond every assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Lost in translation?

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

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

This is a basic issue with far-reaching implications.

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

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

## The Saint and the Activist

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Conclusion: are we at the eve of an explosion?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Twelve Quotes on Orthodoxy, Ecumenism, and Catholicism

1. *Ecumenism*: Invented by Protestants. Adapted by Catholics. Foisted on Orthodox. Won't you agree it smells fishy?
2. Many Protestants see Catholics generously, looking at them as basically equivalent to a Protestant. Catholics extend the same spirit of generosity to see Orthodox as essentially Catholic. But the differences are fundamentally deeper.
3. What Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant share is genuinely significant. There is really a lot in common. But there is also remarkably much in common between Christian, Hindu, and classical Taoist, even if there is less in common than what Christians hold in common. The commonalities are significant, but beyond the differences also being significant, Orthodox communion makes a profound difference. Looking at theological similarities and ignoring the point of communion is a way to strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.
4. The Church must breathe with both lungs. (And the sooner she starts breathing with the Western lung, the better.)
5. I've seen the shirts that say, "Orthodox Christian in communion with Rome" and wished to make, among other things, a shirt that says "Catholic Christian in communion with the [Archdruid of](#)

[Canterbury](#)." Trying to be Orthodox without being in communion with the Orthodox Church is like trying to be married without a spouse.

6. The Orthodox Church shares common ground. It has common ground in one dimension with Catholics and Protestants, and it has common ground in another dimension with Hindus and Buddhists, and you are missing the point if you say, "Yes, but other Christians share the *true* common ground." For all of this, the Orthodox Church is capable of sharing common ground and recognizing differences that exist. And there is a way for Catholics and Protestants, and Hindus and Buddhists as well, to receive full communion with Orthodoxy: *they can become Orthodox*.
7. In matters of ecumenism and especially intercommunion, Rome is Orthodox in her dealings with Protestants, and Protestant in her dealings with Orthodox. If you want to know why Orthodoxy refuses intercommunion with Rome, you might find a hint of the answer in why Rome refuses Protestant intercommunion. And if your immediate reaction is, "But our theology is equivalent," ponder this: that is also what ecumenist Protestants say to *you*. (And they say it in perfectly good faith.)
8. It would be strange for every pope from here on to be like Pope Benedict XVI and not Pope John XXIII. And under Pope John XXIII, the question, "Is the Pope Catholic?" might have best been answered, "Well, from a certain point of view..."
9. In the history that is common to Catholics and Orthodox, every time someone proposed a solution like ecumenism, the Church soundly rejected it. If we have reached a state where we can reject the ancient wisdom in these decisions, this is another reason why we have departed from Orthodoxy and another reason Orthodoxy should spurn our advances.
10. Christ prayed that we all may be one. But hearing "ecumenism" in that prayer is a bit like hearing a prayer that a room may be cleaned and pushing all the clutter under a bed. Christ's prayer that

his disciples may be one transcends the mere whitewash that ecumenism can only offer. (Christ's prayer that we may all be one is solid gold. Ecumenism is a rich vein, but only of fool's gold.)

11. In Catholic ecumenical advances, I have never heard anyone mention any of the concerns about things Rome has done that may be obstacles to restoring communion. What kind of healthy advance bowls over and ignores the other's reservations?
12. Good fences make good neighbors. Ecumenism tramples down fences and invites itself into others' homes. Orthodox can be good neighbors, but when they reject ecumenical advances, it is part of keeping good fences for good neighbors.

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

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

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

# A Calvinist Looks at Orthodoxy

**Jack D. Kinneer**

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

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

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

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

## **The Appeal of Orthodoxy**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **The Shortcomings of Orthodoxy**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **A Concluding Assessment**

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

from others where we need to learn.

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

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

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**I wrote the following reply:**

Dear Dr. Kinneer;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the Biblical teaching.

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

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

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

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

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

this was a terrible doomsday prophecy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# A Postmodern-Influenced Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article

## The reason for writing: "Buried treasure?"

Computer programmers often need to understand why programs behave as they do, and there are times when one is trying to explain a puzzle by understanding the source, and meets an arresting surprise. Programmer slang for this is "buried treasure," politely defined as,

A surprising piece of code found in some program. While usually not wrong, it tends to vary from [crufty](#) to [bletcherous](#), and has lain undiscovered only because it was functionally correct, however horrible it is. Used sarcastically, because what is found is anything \*but\* treasure. Buried treasure almost always needs to be dug up and removed. 'I just found that the scheduler sorts its queue using [the *mind-bogglingly* slow] [bubble sort](#)! Buried treasure!'"<sup>1</sup> ([source](#))

What I have found has me wondering if I've discovered theological "buried treasure," that may actually be wrong. Although my analysis is not exhaustive, I have tried to provide two documents that relate to the (possible) "buried treasure:" one treating the specific issue, contraception, in patristic and modern times, and one commentary on the document I have found that may qualify as "buried treasure."

the document I have found that may qualify as buried treasure.

## How to use this document

This document is broken into two parts besides this summary page.

The first part is taken from a paper written by an Orthodox grad student, with reference to Orthodoxy in patristic times and today. It sets a broad theological background, and provides the overall argument. One major conclusion is that one paper (Chrysostom Zaphiris, "Morality of Contraception: An Eastern Orthodox Opinion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, volume 11, number 4, fall 1974, 677-90) is important in a troubling shift in Orthodox theology.

The second part, motivated by the understanding that Zaphiris's paper is worth studying *in toto*, is a relatively brief commentary on Zaphiris's paper. If the initial paper provides good reason to believe that Zaphiris's paper may be worth studying, then it may be valuable to see the actual text of his paper. The commentary can be skipped, but it is intended to allow the reader to know just why the author believes Zaphiris is so much worth studying.

It is anticipated that some readers will want to read the first section without poring over the second, even though the argument in the first section may motivate one to read the second.

## Why the fuss?

The Orthodox Church appears to have begun allowing contraception, after previously condemning it, around the time of an article (Chrysostom Zaphiris, "Morality of Contraception: An Eastern Orthodox Opinion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, volume 11, number 4, fall 1974, 677-90) which may have given rise to the "new consensus." This article raises extremely serious concerns of questionable doctrine, questionable argument, and/or sophistry, and may be worth further studying.

A broader picture is portrayed in the earlier article about contraception as it appears in both patristic and modern views, which are profoundly different from each other.

Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward - [CJSHayward@pobox.com](mailto:CJSHayward@pobox.com) - [cshayward.com](http://cshayward.com)

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# **Patristic and Current Orthodoxy: on Contraception**

## **Introduction**

Patristic and contemporary Orthodoxy do not say exactly the same things about contraception. Any differences in what acts are permitted are less interesting than the contexts which are much more different than the differences that would show on a chart made to classify what acts are and are not formally permissible.

Much of what I attempt below looks at what is unquestionable today and asks, "How else could it be?" After two sections comparing the Patristic and modern circumstances, one will be able to appreciate that one would need to cross several lines to want contraception in Patristic Christianity while today some find it hard to understand why the Orthodox Church is being so picky about contraception, I look at how these considerations may influence positions regarding contraception.

## How are the Fathers valuable to us?

I assume that even when one criticizes Patristic sources, one is criticizing people who understand Christianity much better than we do, and I may provocatively say that the Fathers are most interesting, not when they eloquently give voice to our views, but precisely when they shock us. My interest in what seems shocking today is an interest in a cue to something big that we may be missing. This is for much the same reason scientists may say that the most exciting sound in science is not "Eureka," "I've found it," but "That's funny..." The reason for this enigmatic quote is that "Eureka" only announces the discovery of something one already knew to look for. "That's funny" is the hint that we may have tripped over something big that we didn't even know to look for, and may be so far outside of what we know we need that we try to explain it away. Such an intrusion—and it ordinarily feels like an *intrusion*—is difficult to welcome: hence the quotation attributed to Winston Churchill, "Man will occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of the time he will pick himself up and continue on."

Understanding Church Fathers on contraception can provide a moment of, "That's funny..."

## The Patristic era

My aim in this section is not so much to suggest what views should be held, than help the reader see how certain things do not follow from other things self-evidently. I would point out that in the Patristic world, not only were there condemnations of contraception as such, but more deeply, I would suggest that there was a mindset where the idea of freeing the goodness of sexual pleasure from any onerous fecundity would seem to represent a fundamental confusion of ideas.

We may be selling both the Fathers and ourselves short if we say that neo-Platonic distrust of the body made them misconstrue sex as evil except as a necessary evil excused as a means to something else, the generation of children. The sword of this kind of dismissal can cut two ways: one could make a reductive argument saying that the ambient neo-Gnosticism of our own day follows classical forms of Gnosticism in hostility to bodily goods that values sex precisely as an experience and despite unwanted capacity to generate children, and so due to our Gnostic influence we cannot value sex except as a way of getting pleasure that is unfortunately encumbered by the possibility of generating children whether they are wanted or not. This kind of dismissal is easy to make, difficult to refute, and not the most helpful way of advancing discussion.

In the Patristic era, some things that many today experience as the only way to understand the goodness of creation do not follow quite so straightforwardly, in particular that goodness to sex has its center of gravity in the experience rather than the fecundity. To Patristic Christians, it was far from self-evident that sex as it exists after the Fall is good without ambivalence, and it is even further from self-evident that the goodness of sex (if its fallen form is considered unambiguously good) centers around the experience of pleasure in coitus. Some contemporaries did hold that sexual experience was good. The goodness of sex consisted in the experience itself. Any generative consequences of the experience were evil, to be distanced from the experience. Gnostics in Irenaeus's day (John Noonan, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatments by Catholic Theologians and Canonists*, Cambridge: Harvard

University Press, 1986, 57, 64. *Unfortunately, not only is there no recent work of Orthodox scholarship that is comparable to Noonan, but there is little to no good Orthodox scholarship on the topic at all!*), Manichees in the days of Augustine (Noonan 1986, 124.), and for that matter medieval Cathars (Noonan 1986, 181-3.) would hold to the goodness of sex precisely as an experience, combined with holding to the evil of procreation. (I will not analyze the similarities and differences to wanting pleasure unencumbered by children today.) Notwithstanding those heretics' positions, Christianity held a stance, fierce by today's standards, in which children were desirable for those who were married but "marriage" would almost strike many people today as celibacy with shockingly little interaction between the sexes (*including* husband and wife), interrupted by just enough sex to generate children (For a treatment of this phenomenon as it continued in the Middle Ages, see Philip Grace, Aspects of Fatherhood in Thirteenth-Century Encyclopedias, Western Michigan University master's thesis, 2005, chapter 3, "Genealogy of Ideas," 35-6.). Men and women, including husbands and wives, lived in largely separate worlds, and the framing of love antedated both the exaltations of courtly and companionate love without which many Westerners today have any frame by which to understand goodness in marriage (See Stephen Clark, Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences, Ann Arbor: Servant 1980, Chapter 18, for a contrast between traditional and technological society.).

I would like to look at two quotations, the first from Augustine writing against the Manichees, and the second as an author today writes in reference to the first:

*Is it not you who used to counsel us to observe as much as possible the time when a woman, after her purification, is most likely to conceive, and to abstain from cohabitation at that time, lest the soul should be entangled in flesh?* This proves that you approve of having a wife, not for the procreation of children, but for the gratification of passion. In marriage, as the marriage law declares, the man and woman come together for the procreation of children. Therefore whoever makes the procreation of children a greater sin

than copulation, forbids marriage, and makes the woman not a wife, but a mistress, who for some gifts presented to her is joined to the man to gratify his passion. Where there is a wife there must be marriage. But there is no marriage where motherhood is not in view; therefore neither is there a wife. In this way you forbid marriage. Nor can you defend yourselves successfully from this charge, long ago brought against you prophetically by the Holy Spirit ([source](#); the Blessed Augustine is referring to [I Tim 4:1-3](#)).

There is irony here. "Natural family planning" is today sometimes presented as a fundamental opposite to artificial contraception. (The term refers to a calculated abstinence precisely at the point where a wife is naturally capable of the greatest desire, pleasure, and response.) Augustine here described natural family planning, as such, and condemns it in harsh terms. (I will discuss "natural family planning" in the next section. I would prefer to call it contraceptive timing for a couple of reasons.)

**Note:**

There is some irony in calling "'Natural' Family Planning" making a set of mathematical calculations and deliberately avoiding intercourse at the times when a woman is naturally endowed with the greatest capacity for desire, pleasure, and response.

Besides the immediate irony of Augustine criticizing the *form* of contraception to be heralded as "'Natural' Family Planning," (remember that "natural" family planning is a calculated abstinence when a wife is capable, naturally, of the greatest desire, pleasure, and response), Augustine's words are particularly significant because the method of contraception being discussed raised no question of contraception through recourse to the occult ("medicine man" *pharmakeia* potions) even in the Patristic world. There are various issues surrounding contraception: in the Patristic world, contraceptive and abortifacient potions were difficult to distinguish and were made by *pharmakoi* in whom magic and drugs were not sharply distinguished (Noonan 1986, 25.). But it would be an irresponsible reading to conclude from this that Patristic condemnations of contraceptive potions were only condemning

them for magic, for much the same reason as it would be irresponsible to conclude that recent papal documents condemning the contraceptive mindset are only condemning selfishness and not making any statement about contraception as such. Patristic condemnations of contraception could be quite forceful (Noonan 1986, 91.), although what I want to explore is not so much the condemnations as the environment which partly gave rise to them:

[L]et us sketch a marriage in every way most happy; illustrious birth, competent means, suitable ages, the very flower of the prime of life, deep affection, the very best that each can think of the other, that sweet rivalry of each wishing to surpass the other in loving; in addition, popularity, power, wide reputation, and everything else. But observe that even beneath this array of blessings the fire of an inevitable pain is smouldering... They are human all the time, things weak and perishing; they have to look upon the tombs of their progenitors; and so pain is inseparably bound up with their existence, if they have the least power of reflection. This continued expectancy of death, realized by no sure tokens, but hanging over them the terrible uncertainty of the future, disturbs their present joy, clouding it over with the fear of what is coming... Whenever the husband looks at the beloved face, that moment the fear of separation accompanies the look. If he listens to the sweet voice, the thought comes into his mind that some day he will not hear it. Whenever he is glad with gazing on her beauty, then he shudders most with the presentiment of mourning her loss. When he marks all those charms which to youth are so precious and which the thoughtless seek for, the bright eyes beneath the lids, the arching eyebrows, the cheek with its sweet and dimpling smile, the natural red that blooms upon the lips, the gold-bound hair shining in many-twisted masses on the head, and all that transient grace, then, though he may be little given to reflection, he must have this thought also in his inmost soul that some day all this beauty will melt away and become as nothing, turned after all this show into noisome and unsightly bones, which wear no trace, no memorial, no remnant of that living bloom. Can he live delighted when he thinks of that?

([source](#))

Let no one think however that herein we depreciate marriage as an institution. We are well aware that it is not a stranger to God's blessing. But since the common instincts of mankind can plead sufficiently on its behalf, instincts which prompt by a spontaneous bias to take the high road of marriage for the procreation of children, whereas Virginitly in a way thwarts this natural impulse, it is a superfluous task to compose formally an Exhortation to marriage. We put forward the pleasure of it instead, as a most doughty champion on its behalf... But our view of marriage is this; that, while the pursuit of heavenly things should be a man's first care, yet if he can use the advantages of marriage with sobriety and moderation, he need not despise this way of serving the state. An example might be found in the patriarch Isaac. He married Rebecca when he was past the flower of his age and his prime was well-nigh spent, so that his marriage was not the deed of passion, but because of God's blessing that should be upon his seed. He cohabited with her till the birth of her only children, and then, closing the channels of the senses, lived wholly for the Unseen... ([source](#))

This picture of a "moderate" view of marriage that does not "depreciate marriage as an institution" comes from St. Gregory of Nyssa's treatise *On Virginitly*, and allowances must be made for the fact that St. Gregory of Nyssa is contrasting virginitly, not with an easy opposite today, namely promiscuity or lust, but marriage, which he bitterly attacks in the context of this passage. The piece is not an attractive one today. However, that does not mean that what he says is not part of the picture. This bitter attack is part of a picture in which contraception could look very different from today, but that way of looking at contraception is not purely the cause of a rhetoric attacking marriage to praise virginitly. I present this not to analyze St. Gregory's exact view on marriage, but to give a taste of an answer to "How else could it be?" in comparison to what is unquestionable today.

Some attitudes today (arguably the basic assumption that motivates offense at the idea that one is condemning the goodness of the created order in treating sex as rightly ordered towards procreation) could be paraphrased, "We affirm the body as good, and we affirm sex in all its goodness. It is a source of pleasure; it is a way to bond; it is powerful as

few other things are. But it has a downside, and that is a certain biological survival: unless countermeasures are taken, along with its good features unwanted pregnancy can come. And properly affirming the goodness of sex means freeing it from the biological holdover that gives the good of sexual pleasure the side effect of potentially resulting in pregnancy even if it is pursued for another reason." To the Patristic Christian, this may well come across as saying something like, "Major surgery can be a wonderful thing. It is occasion for the skillful art of doctors, in many instances it is surrounded by an outflow of love by the patient's community, and the difficulties associated with the process can build a thicker spine and provide a powerful process of spiritual discipline. But it would be really nice if we could undergo surgery without attendant risks of unwanted improvements to our health."

It seems so natural today to affirm the goodness of the body or sex, and see as the only possible translation of that affirmation "the goodness of the pleasure in sexual experience," that different views are not even thinkable; I would like to mention briefly some other answers to the question, "How else could it be?" The ancient world, in many places, looked beyond the few minutes of treasure and found the basis for the maxim, "*Post coitum omne animal triste*" (after sex, every animal [including humans] is sad), and feared that sex could, among other things, fundamentally deplete virile energy (Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, New York: Random House 1985, 137): its goodness might be seen as a costly goodness involving the whole person, rather than simply being the goodness of "one more pleasure, only a very intense one, that is especially good because it is especially intense" or self-evidently being at the core of even a good marriage (Noonan 1986, 47-8).

This is not to suggest that Christians merely copied the surrounding views. Contraception, abortion, and infanticide were quite prevalent in the Roman world (Noonan 1986, 10-29). Whatever else Patristic Christianity can be criticized for in its strong stance on contraception, abortion, and infanticide, it is not an uncritical acceptance of whatever their neighbors would happen to be doing. And if St. Gregory of Nyssa holds up an example which he alleges is procreation that minimizes

pleasure, it might be better not to simply say that neo-Platonism tainted many of the Fathers with a dualistic view in which the body was evil, or some other form of, "His environment made him do it."

## **Modernity and "natural" family planning**

In the discussion which follows, I will use the term "contraceptive timing" in lieu of the somewhat euphemistic "natural family planning" or "the rhythm method." In my own experience, I have noticed Catholics consistently needing to explain why "natural family planning" is an opposite to contraception; invariably newcomers have difficulties seeing why decreasing the odds of conception through mathematical timing is a fundamentally different matter from decreasing the odds of conception through biological and chemical expedients. I would draw an analogy to firing a rifle down a rifle range, or walking down a rifle range to retrieve a target: either action, appropriately timed, is licit; changing the timing of an otherwise licit action by firing a rifle while others are retrieving their targets and walk in front of that gun is a use of timing that greatly affects the moral significance of an otherwise licit act. I will hereafter use the phrase "contraceptive timing."

## Orthodox implications

As Orthodox, I have somewhat grave concerns about my own Church, which condemned contraception before 1970 but in recent decades appears to have developed a "new consensus" more liberal than the Catholic position: abortifascient methods are excluded, there must be some openness to children, and it must be agreed with by a couple's spiritual father. This "new consensus," or at least what is called a new consensus in an article that acknowledges it as surrounded by controversy that has "various groups accusing each other of Western influence," which is, in Orthodox circles, a good cue that there is something interesting going on.

The one article I found on the topic was "lobbyist" scholarship that seemed to *avoid* giving a fuller picture (Zaphiris 1974.). This one article I found in the ATLA religion database matching the keywords "Orthodox" and "contraception" was an article that took a "new consensus" view and, most immediately, did not provide what I was hoping a "new consensus" article would provide: an explanation that can say, "We understand that the Fathers had grave reservations about contraception, but here is why it can be permissible." The article in fact made no reference to relevant information that can (at least today) be easily obtained from conservative Catholic analyses. There was no discussion of relevant but ambiguous matter such as Onan's sin (Noonan 1986, 34-6.) and New Testament condemnations of "medicine man" *pharmakeia* which would have included some contraception (Noonan 1986, 44-5.). There was not even the faintest passing mention of forceful denunciations of contraception by both Greek and Latin Fathers. John Chrysostom was mentioned, but only as support for distinguishing the good of sex from procreation: "The moral theologian *par excellence* of the Fathers, St. John Chrysostom, also does not stress the procreation of children as the goal of marriage." (Zaphiris 1974, 680) Possibly; St. Chrysostom Chrysostom may not have written anything like the incendiary material from St. Gregory above. But "the moral theologian *par excellence* of the Fathers" *did* write:

The [Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers](#) has at times a legendary bias

against against Rome (let alone against the Eastern Church), and renders Chrysostom as talking about abortion and infanticide but not obviously contraception. This is deliberate mistranslation. To pick out one example, In *Patrologia Graecae* 60.626 (the quotation spans PG 60.626-7), "*enqa polla ta atokia*," rendered "*ubi multae sunt herbae in sterilitatem?*" in the PG's Latin and "Where are the medicines of sterility?" by Noonan, appears in the NPNF as "where are there many efforts at abortion?" This is a deliberate under-translation.

[St. John Chrysostom:] *Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit? Where are the medicines of sterility? Where is there murder before birth? You do not even let a harlot remain only a harlot, but you make her a murderess as well. Do you see that from drunkenness comes fornication, from fornication adultery, from adultery murder? Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you condemn the gift of God, and fight with his laws? What is a curse, do you seek as though it were a blessing?... Do you teach the woman who is given to you for the procreation of offspring to perpetrate killing?... In this indifference of the married men there is greater evil filth; for then poisons are prepared, not against the womb of a prostitute, but against your injured wife.* (Homilies on Romans XXIV, Rom 13:14, as translated in Noonan 1986, 98.)

St. Chrysostom is not so quick as we are today to distinguish contraception from murder. Possibly, as Zaphiris writes, "there is not a defined statement on the morality of contraception within Orthodoxy." But this is a treacherous use of words.

Let me give an analogy to explain why. People consume both food and drink, by eating and drinking. But it is somewhat strange to point out that a person has never drunk a roast beef sandwich, particularly in an attempt to lead a third party to believe, incorrectly, that a person has never consumed that food item. The Church has "defined" statements relating to Trinitarian and Christological, and other doctrines ([source](#)), and formulated morally significant canon law. But she has never "defined" a statement in morals; that would be like drinking a roast beef

sandwich. And so for Zaphiris to point out that the Orthodox Church has never "defined" a statement about contraception—a point that would be obvious to someone knowing what sorts of things the Church does not "define;" "defining" a position against murder would, for some definitions of "define," be like drinking a sandwich—and lead the reader to believe that the Church has never issued a highly authoritative statement about contraception. The Orthodox Church has issued such statements more than once.

Saying that the Orthodox Church has never "defined" a position on a moral question is as silly and as pointless as saying that a man has never drunk a roast beef sandwich: it is technically true, but sheds no light on whether a person has consumed such a sandwich—or taken a stand on the moral question at hand. Zaphiris's "observation" is beginning to smell a lot like spin doctoring.

I have grave reservations about an article that gives the impression of covering relevant Patristic material to the question of contraception without hinting at the fact that it was condemned. Needless to say, the article did not go beyond the immediate condemnation to try to have a sympathetic understanding of why someone would find it sensible to make such condemnations. If I were trying to marshal Orthodox theological resources in the support of some use of contraception, I doubt if I could do better than Zaphiris. However, if the question is what Orthodox should believe in reading the Bible through the Fathers, submitting to the tradition in seeking what is licit, then this version of a "new consensus" theological treatment gives me even graver doubts about the faithfulness of the "new consensus" to Orthodox tradition. The Zaphiris article, if anything, seems to be an Orthodox document with influence, and red flags, that are comparable to *Humanae Vitae*.

There have been times before where the Orthodox Church has accepted something alien and come to purify herself in succeeding centuries. In that sense there would be a precedent for a change that would be later undone, and that provides one ready Orthodox classification. The Orthodox Wiki provides no history of the change in Orthodoxy, and a formal statement by the Orthodox Church in America (source), without specifically *praising* any form of contraception, attests

to the newer position and allows some use of reproductive technologies, but does not explain the change. I would be interested in seeing why the Orthodox Church in particular has brought itself into sudden agreement with cultural forces beyond what the Catholic Church has.

The Orthodox Church both affirms that Christ taught marriage to be indissoluble—excluding both divorce and remarriage after divorce—and allows by way of *oikonomia* (a concession or leniency in observing a rule) a second and third remarriage after divorce, not counting marriages before full reception into the Orthodox Church. However, there is a difference between observing a rule with *oikonomia* and saying that the rule does not apply. If a rule is observed with *oikonomia*, the rule is recognized even as it is not followed literally, much like choosing "the next best thing to being there," in lieu of personal presence, when one is invited to an occasion but cannot easily attend. By contrast, saying that the rule does not apply is a deeper rejection, like refusing a friend's invitation in a way that denies any duty or moral claim for that friend. There is a fundamental difference between sending a gift to a friend's wedding with regrets that one cannot attend, and treating the invitation itself with contempt. The rites for a second and third marriage are genuine observations of the fact that one is observing a rule with leniency: the rite for a second marriage is penitential, the rite for a third marriage even more so, and a firm line is drawn that rules out a fourth marriage: *oikonomia* has limits ([source](#)). If a second and third marriage is allowed, the concession recognizes the rule and, one might argue, the reality the rule recognizes. If one looks at jokes as an anthropologist would, as revealing profound assumptions about a culture, snipes about "A wife is only temporary; an ex-wife is forever" and "When two divorced people sleep together, four people are in the bed" are often told by people who would scoff at the idea of marriage as a sacred, permanent union... but the jokes themselves testify that there is something about a marriage that divorce cannot simply erase: a spouse can become an ex-spouse, but the marriage is too permanent to simply be dropped as something revocable that has no intrinsically permanent effects. And in that sense, an ex-spouse is closer to a spouse than to a friend that has never had romance. Which is to say that marriage bears witness both to an absolute and *oikonomia* in how that absolute is observed.

Even with noted exceptions, the Gospels give the indissolubility of marriage a forceful dominical saying backed by quotation from the heart of the Old Testament Scriptures. If something that forcefully put may legitimately be observed with oikonomia, then it would seem strange to me to say that what I have observed as Patristic attitudes, where thinking of contraception as desirable would appear seriously disturbed, dictate not only a suspicion towards contraception but a criterion that admits no oikonomia in its observation. Presumably some degree oikonomia is allowable, and perhaps one could not rule out the oikonomia could take the form of a new consensus's criterion allowing non-abortifascient contraception, in consultation with one's spiritual father, on condition of allowing children at some point during a marriage. *However*, even if that is the legitimate oikonomia, it is legitimate as the lenient observation of grave moral principles. And, in that sense, unless one is prepared to say that the Patristic consensus is wrong in viewing contraception with great suspicion, the oikonomia, like the rites for a second and third marriage, should be appropriate for an oikonomia in observing a moral concern that remains a necessary moral concern even as it is *observed* with leniency.

## Conclusion

I am left with a puzzle: why is it that Orthodox have adopted the current "new consensus"? My guess is that Zaphiris's quite provocative article was taken as simply giving a straight account of Orthodoxy and Patristic teaching as it relates to contraception. The OCA document more or less applies both his analysis and prescriptions. But, while I hesitate to say that no one could explain both why the Fathers would regard contraception as abhorrent and we should permit it in some cases, I will say that I have not yet encountered such an explanation. And I would present, if not anything like a last word, at least important information which should probably be considered in judging the rule and what is appropriate *oikonomia*. If Orthodoxy regards Patristic culture and philosophy as how Christ has become incarnate in the Orthodox Church, then neither condemnations of contraception, nor the reasons why those condemnations would be made in the first place, concern only antiquarians.

Would it be possible for there to be *another* "new consensus?"

## "Morality of Contraception: An Orthodox Opinion:" A commentary

The article published by Chrysostom Zaphiris, "Morality of Contraception: An Eastern Orthodox Opinion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, volume 11, number 4, fall 1974, 677-90, seems *extremely* significant. **It seems a lobbyist article, and in both content and timing the 1970's "new consensus" as articulated by the Orthodox Church in America is consistent with taking Zaphiris in good faith as simply stating the Orthodox position on contraception.** (This was the one article I found in an ATLA search for keywords "Orthodox" and "contraception" anywhere, on 13 May, 2007. A search for "Orthodoxy" and "contraception" on 14 May, 2007 turned up one additional result which seemed to be connected to queer theory.) I perceive in this faulty—or, more properly, deceptively *incomplete* data, questionable argument, and seductive sophistry which I wish to comment on.

I believe that Zaphiris's text is worth at least an informal commentary to draw arguments and certain features to the reader's attention. In this commentary, all footnotes will be Zaphiris's own; where I draw on other sources I will allude to the discussion above or add parenthetical references. I follow his footnote numbering, note page breaks by inserting the new page number, and reproduce some typographical features.

### Footnote from Zaphiris's text

Chrysostom Zaphiris (Orthodox) is a graduate of the Patriarchal Theological School of Halki, Turkey, and holds a doctorate with highest honors from the University of Strasbourg, where he studied with the Roman Catholic faculty. His 1970 thesis dealt with the "Text of the Gospel according to St. Matthew in Accordance with the Citations in Clement of Alexandria compared with Citations in the Greek Fathers and Theologians of the Second to Fifth Centuries." Dr. Zaphiris taught canon law and New Testament courses at Holy Cross

School of Theology (at Hellenic College), Brookline, MA, 1970-72. From 1972 to 1974, he was Vice Rector at the Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Studies, Tantur, Jerusalem.

\* This paper was originally presented during the discussion held for doctors of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and the surrounding area hosted by theologians of the Ecumenical Institute at Tantur on the question of the morality of contraception. At this point, I would like also to thank Br. James Hanson, C.S.C., for his help editing my English text.

## THE MORALITY OF CONTRACEPTION: AN EASTERN ORTHODOX OPINION\*

by

CHRYSOSTOM ZAPHIRIS

PRECIS

This discussion of the morality of contraception includes four basic points: the purpose of marriage as viewed scripturally and patristically, the official teachings of Orthodoxy concerning contraception, the moral issue from an Orthodox perspective, and "the Orthodox notion of synergism and its implications for the moral question of contraception."

It is possible through inference to determine that the Scriptures and the early Christian writers considered that, within marriage, sexual activity and procreation were not the same entity and that sexuality was to be practiced within marriage. These assertions are illustrated.

The official teaching of the Orthodox Church on contraception includes five points: a denunciation of intentional refusal to procreate within marriage, a condemnation of both abortion and infanticide, an absence of any commitment against contraception, and a reliance upon the medical profession to supply further information on the issue. The author offers a theological opinion on

the question of contraception allowing for contraception under certain circumstances.

Synergism is the final issue discussed. Synergism is defined as cooperation, co-creation, and co-legislation between humans and God. When people use their talents and faculties morally and creatively, they are acting in combination with God and expressing God's will. The Orthodox view of contraception is perceived within the dimensions of synergistic activity and serves as a contrast to the Roman Catholic view.

The essay concludes with some comments about contraception as a moral issue as perceived within the Eastern Orthodox Church. Allowing for individual freedom and responsibility, and in light of synergism, Orthodoxy avoids definitive pronouncements on such moral issues as contraception.

## I. INTRODUCTION.

Contraception is one of the most important aspects of human behavior and family life, and thus it is a part of life which cannot be ignored by theology itself. There can be no question of treating this moral question, but only of outlining the aspects which must be considered according to the Orthodox tradition.

I don't know an exact rule for "what must be considered for the Orthodox tradition," but besides of Biblical witness, the Patriarch of New Rome and one of three "hierarchy and ecumenical teachers" of the Orthodox Church, St. John Chrysostom, homilectically treating something as an abomination and calling it "worse than murder" would tend to be something I would include under "aspects which must be considered according to the Orthodox tradition."

One reaction which I would like to address in many readers, even though it is not properly commentary is, "Contraception is comparable to *homicide*? It's called "worse than *murder*"? Is this translated correctly? Is this gross exaggeration? Is it cultural weirdness, or some odd influence of Platonic thought that the Church has recovered from? Why on earth

would anybody say that?" This is a natural reaction, partly because the Fathers are articulating a position that is inconceivable today. So the temptation is to assume that this has some cause, perhaps historical, despite moral claims that cannot be taken seriously today.

I would like to provide a loose analogy, intended less to convince than convey how someone really could find a continuity between contraception and murder. Suppose that destroying a painting is always objectionable. Now consider the process of painting: a painting germinates in an artist's mind, is physically created and explored, and finally becomes something one hangs on a wall.

Now let me ask a question: if one tries to interrupt the process of artistic creation, perhaps by disrupting the creator's state of mind and scattering the paints, does that qualify as "destroying a painting"?

The answer to that question depends on what qualifies as "destroying a painting." If one disrupts the artist who is thinking about painting a painting, or scatters the paints and half-painted canvas, then in neither case has one destroyed a finished painting. You cannot point to a completed painting that was there before the interruption began, and say, "See? That is the painting that was destroyed." *However*, someone who is not being legalistic has good reason to pause before saying "This simply does not qualify as destroying a painting" A *completed* painting was not destroyed, but the process of artistic creation that produces a completed painting was destroyed. And in that sense, someone who interrupted Van Gogh and stopped him from painting "Starry Night" is doing the same sort of thing as someone today who would burn up the completed painting. The two acts are cut from the same cloth.

Now my intent is not to provide a precise and detailed allegory about what detail of the creation process represents conception, birth, etc. That is not the intent of the general illustration. My point is that talk about "destroying paintings" need not be construed only as destroying a completed painting in its final form. There is also the possibility of destroying a painting in the sense of willfully disrupting the process of an artist in the process of making a painting. And, perhaps, there is room for St. John Chrysostom's horrified, "*Indeed, it is something worse than*

*murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation."* Now is this rhetorical exaggeration? Quite possibly; Noonan studies various penitentials, all from before the Great Schism, and although there is not always a penance assigned for contraception by potion, two assign a lighter penance than for homicide, one assigns the same penance, and one actually assigns a penance of four years for homicide and *seven* for contraception. Contraception could bear a heavier penance than murder.

It is somewhat beside the point to work out if we *really* have to take St. John Chrysostom literally in saying that contraception is worse than homicide. I don't think that is necessary. But it is not beside the point that the Fathers seem to treat a great deal of continuity between contraception, abortion, and infanticide, and seem not to draw terribly sharp oppositions between them. Whether or not one assigns heavy-handed penalties from contraception, I can't think of a way to read the Fathers responsibly and categorically deny that contraception is cut from the same cloth as abortion and infanticide. The point is not exactly an exact calculus to measure the relative gravity of the sins. The point is that they are all connected in patristic writing.

First, we need to study the purpose of marriage as we find it in the Scriptures and in the writings of the Greek Fathers. Second, we will reflect on the official teaching authority of the Orthodox Church on this question of contraception. Third, we will offer a moral opinion as to the legitimacy of the practice of contraception from an Orthodox viewpoint. And finally, we will discuss the Orthodox notion of synergism and its implications for the moral question of contraception.

## II. THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE.

Although the purpose of marriage is never treated systematically in the Scriptures or in the Fathers according to our contemporary viewpoint and questions, it is possible to infer the thoughts of these classical authors on the purpose of marriage. In general, what we find is that there is the presupposition that human sexual activity within marriage and the procreation of children are not seen as completely the same reality. And furthermore, both

Scripture and the Fathers consistently counsel the faithful to live in such a way that human sexuality can be expressed within marriage.

The claim in the last sentence is true; more has been argued from St. John Chrysostom. But Orthodoxy does view celibacy and marriage as more compatible than some assume today. At least by the letter of the law, Orthodox are expected to be continent on fasting days and on days where the Eucharist is received, meaning a minimum of almost half days of the year, including one period approaching two months. I don't know what degree of *oikonomia* is common in pastoral application, but an Orthodox might want to drop another shoe besides saying "both Scripture and the Fathers consistently counsel the faithful to live in such a way that sexuality can be expressed in marriage."

The Scriptures present us with a Christian doctrine of marriage most clearly in Genesis and in the writings of St. Paul. In Genesis 2:18, God said that it was not good for man to be alone, but that he should have a helpmate which he then gave to Adam in the person of his wife, Eve. Is this help meant by God to be only social and religious?

Apparently the possibility that marriage could, as in the patristic world, be not only an affective matter of what people but a union of pragmatic *help* encompassing even the economic is not considered.

For a detailed answer to "How else could that be?" in terms of a relationship including quite significant pragmatic *help*, see Stephen Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences*, Ann Arbor: Servant 1980. To someone who has read and digested that book, there seem to be an awful lot of assumptions going into what marriage is allowed to be for the husband and wife.

Or is it also intended by God to be a physical help provided to a man in terms of sexual complementarity?

Does "physical help" simply boil down to the C-word, as Zaphiris

seems to imply? Are there no other possibilities? And why is "physical help" just something a wife gives a husband and not something a husband gives a wife? The euphemism sounds like the wife should be kind enough to join a pity party: "*It causes him so much pleasure, and it causes me so little pain.*" I would like to propose a much more excellent alternative: **making love.**

Perhaps it is also possible that "physical help" should also include assistance with errands, or provision, or getting work done as part of a working household? Besides Stephen Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor: Servant 1980), Proverbs 31:10-31 describes the ideal helpmate who perhaps has children but is not praised as for beauty or as a basic sex toy: she is praised, among other things, as a powerful and effective helpmeet. In the praises, physical beauty is mentioned only in order to deprecate its significance.

In reading Clark, it seems a natural thing to offer a wife the praises of the end of Proverbs. Zaphiris's presuppositions make that kind of thing look strange. But the defect is with Zaphiris.

However we answer these questions, one thing is certain: the question of procreation as such is not raised by the author. Yet, procreation itself is encouraged by the author of Genesis 1:28, when God orders human beings to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Just as the author of the Pentateuch never makes an explicit connection between the creation of Eve and the practice of human procreation, so likewise St. Paul in the New Testament never makes this connection.

In the case of St. Paul, it is a question of sexual relations of continence within marriage or of marriage as opposed to virginity, but never exactly the question of procreation in any of these cases. Paul considers marriage and virginity as charisms within the life of the Church. He exhorts believers to the practice of virginity if they have this charism; if not, he encourages them to marry. This raises a subsequent question: "Does St. Paul encourage marriage first of all to promote the procreation of children or rather make up for human

weakness which is experienced in sexual passion?" While I acknowledge that procreation of children is one of the reasons for marriage which Christian theology has consistently taught, it has never been the *only* reason for Christian marriage.

If we follow St. Paul closely, it is apparent that he encourages a man to marry, not simply to procreate children, but for other reasons, the most prominent of which would be to avoid fornication (cf. I Cor. 7:2). It is because human persons have the right

I would like to make a comment that sounds, at first, like nitpicking about word choice:

Rights-based moral calculus is prevalent in the modern world, sometimes so that people don't see how to do moral reasoning without seeing things in terms of rights. But the modern concept of a "right" is alien to Orthodoxy.

See Kenneth Himes (ed.) *et al.*, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations* (Washington: Georgetown University Press 2005), chapter 2 (41-71) for an historical discussion including how the concept of rights became incorporated into Catholic moral reasoning from the outside. The change was vigorously resisted as recently as Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), today the subject of embarrassed explanations, but what Catholics apologetically explain is often closer to Orthodoxy than the modern Catholic explanation of what Catholicism really teaches. Even in modern Catholicism, officially approved "rights" language is a relatively recent development, and there are attempts to use the concept differently from the secular West.

Armenian Orthodox author Vigen Guorian's *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1987, page number not available) briefly complains about the modern idea of placing human dignity on no deeper basis than rights; I would refer the reader to my homily "Do we have rights?" ([http://jonathanscorner.com/no\\_rights/](http://jonathanscorner.com/no_rights/)) for moral-ascetical reasoning that rejects the innovation.

The reason why I am "nitpicking" here is that there is a subtle difference, but a profound one, between saying that sex is good within marriage (or at least permissible), and saying that husband and wife have a right to sexual pleasure, and this entitlement is deep enough that if the sexual generation of children would be undesirable, the entitlement remains, along with a necessity of modifying sex so that the entitled sexual pleasure is delivered even if the sexual generation of children is stopped cold.

Zaphiris never develops the consequences of rights-based moral reasoning at length or makes it the explicit basis for arguing for an entitlement to sexual pleasure even if that means frustrating sexual generation. However, after asserting a married right to sex, he not only fails to discourage this reasoning, but reaches a conclusion identical with the one this reasoning would reach.

to be married and to perform sexual activity within that specific context that Jesus Christ and St. Paul have condemned explicitly the practice of fornication (cf. Mt 5:32, 19:9; Acts 15:20; I Cor. 5:1, 6, 13, 18). Thus, in our study of the Christian tradition on marriage and the possibility of contraceptive practices within marriage, we must keep clearly in view this particular function of marriage as an antidote to fornication.

We find a similar sensitivity in the writings of Paul to the human need for sexual gratification in marriage when he counsels Christian couples on the practice of continence within marriage. "The wife cannot claim her body as her own; it is her husband's. Equally, the husband cannot claim his body as his own; it is his wife's. Do not deny yourselves to one another, except when you agree upon a temporary abstinence in order to devote yourselves to prayer; afterwards, you may come together again; otherwise, for lack of self-control, you may be tempted by Satan" (I Cor. 7:4-5). In this passage, there is no question of procreation, but only of the social union between husband and wife within Christian marriage. While, on the positive side, Paul affirms that Christian marriage is a sign of the union between Jesus Christ and the Church and that the married couple participates in the unity and holiness of this union, more

negatively he also sees in marriage an antidote or outlet for the normal human sexual passions. In this context, St. Paul always counsels marriage as preferable to any possibility of falling into fornication.

In saying this, St. Paul is obviously not opposed to procreation as the end of marriage. The bearing of children was naturally expected to result from the practice of sexual intercourse within marriage as he counseled it. Abstinence from regular sexual intercourse was encouraged only to deepen the life of prayer for a given period of time. This limiting of abstinence to a specific period of time shows well Paul's sensitivity to the demands of human sexual passions and his elasticity of judgment in giving moral counsel. Thus, from the exegesis of Genesis of St. Paul, the whole contemporary question of the explicit connection between sexual intercourse within marriage and the procreation of children was simply not raised in the same form in which it is today.

I would like to take a moment to look at the story of Onan before posing a suggestion about exegesis.

I suggest that in the Bible, especially in portraying something meant to horrify the reader, there are often multiple elements to the horror. The story of Sodom portrays same-sex intercourse, gang rape, and extreme inhospitality. There is a profoundly naive assumption behind the question, "Of same-sex intercourse, gang rape, and extreme inhospitality, which *one* are we *really* supposed to think is the problem?" In this case, it seems all three contributed to something presented as superlatively horrifying, and it is the combined effect that precedes Sodom's judgment in fire and sulfur and subsequently becoming the Old Testament prophet's "poster city" for every single vice from idolatry and adultery to pride and cruelty to the poor. The story of Sodom is *written* to have multiple elements of horror.

There is one story where contraception is mentioned in the Bible, and it is one of few where Onan joins the company of Uzzah, Ananias, Sapphira, Herod (the one in Acts), and perhaps others in being the only people named in the Bible as being struck dead by God for their sins. This

is not an august company. Certainly Onan's story is not the story of a couple saying, "Let's just focus on the children we have," but a story *that* forceful in condemning Onan's sin, *whatever* the sin properly consisted in, has *prima facie* good claim to be included a Biblical text that factors into a Biblical view of contraception. The story is relevant, even if it is ambiguous for the concerns of this question.

Likewise, in something that is not translated clearly in most English translations, the New Testament (Gal 5:20, Rev 9:21) *pharmakoi* refers to "medicine men" who made, among other things, contraceptive and abortifascient potions, in a world that seemed not to really separate drugs from magic. English translations ordinarily follow the KJV in translating this only with reference to the occult sin, so that it does not come across clearly that the Bible is condemning the people you would go to for contraceptives. This is ambiguous evidence for this discussion: it is not clear whether it is only condemning the occult practices, condemning what the occult practices were used for, or condemning both at the same time, but the question is significant.

Granted, not every Biblical text touching marriage is evidence against contraception. There are other relevant passages like Gal 5:21-33 which discuss the love in marriage with no reference to fecundity, but if one wants to understand the Bible as it relates to contraception, it is surprising not to mention passages that directly impinge on it, ambiguously but raising the question of whether contraception is a grave sin.

### **Zaphiris's footnote:**

1. Cf. *Stromata*, III, 82, 4.

Turning from the writings of Paul to those of the Greek Fathers, we will see that there is a continuity of Orthodox tradition in this understanding of the purpose of marriage. First, let us consider the statement of Clement of Alexandria who raises this problem as a theologian and as a pastor of the faithful. When he comments on I Cor. 7:2, he uses neither the allegorical nor the spiritual method of exegesis, but rather the literal interpretation of this Pauline text.

Through this methodology, Clement, in spite of his usual idealism, recommends marriage over fornication and counsels sexual intercourse within marriage over the possibility of serving the temptor through fornication.[1]

### **Zaphiris's footnote**

2. See H. Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage selon Origène* (Paris-Bruges, 1963), pp. 80-133.

679 We find a similar line of thought in his successor, Origen. Although Origen accepts procreation as the end of marriage, he also sees in marriage the legitimate concession to human weakness in its sexual passions.[2]

Likewise Methodius of Olympus continues this interpretation of St. Paul in a very clear statement on the subject: "... The apostle did not grant these things unconditionally to all, but first laid down the reason on account of which he has led to this. For, having set forth that 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman' (I Cor. VII, 1) he added immediately 'nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife' (I Cor. VII, 2)—that is 'on account of the fornication which would arise from your being unable to restrain your passions.'..." Afterwards the author notes that Paul speaks "by permission" and "not of command," so that Methodius comments: "For he receives command respecting chastity and not touching of a woman, but permission respecting those who are unable to chasten their appetites."

### **Zaphiris's footnote**

3. Cf. *The Banquet of the Virgins*, III, 12.

Methodius applies similar logic to the possibility of the second marriage, in that he permits the second marriage, not specifically for the procreation of children, but "on account of the strength of animal passion, he [Paul] allows one who is in such condition may, 'by permission' contract a second marriage; not as though he expressed the opinion that a second marriage was in itself good, but judging it

better than burning . . ." According to Methodius, the apostle speaks here, first saying that he wished all were healthy and continent, as he also was, but afterwards allowing a second marriage to those who are burdened with the weaknesses of the passions, goaded on by the uncontrolled desires of the organs of generations for promiscuous intercourse, considering such a second marriage far preferable to burning and indecency.[3]

4. See A. Moulard, *Saint Jean Chrysostome, le défenseur du mariage et l'apôtre de la virginité* (Paris, 1923), pp. 72ff.

The moral theologian *par excellence* of the Fathers, St. John Chrysostom, also does not stress the procreation of children as the goal of marriage. On the contrary, he adheres to the Pauline texts and to the apologists for virginity and concludes that marriage does not have any other goal than that of hindering fornication.

"The moral theologian *par excellence* of the Fathers" wrote the passage cited in the paper above:

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

There is arguably a degree of ambiguity in the Church Fathers. However, the ambiguity is of a far lesser degree. The Fathers argued most vehemently against opponents who believed the procreation of

*any* children was morally wrong; contraception was seen as a duty in all intercourse, and not a personal choice for one's convenience. See Augustine as cited on page 6 above. Acknowledging that the Fathers addressed a different situation, this does not mean that, since the Fathers did not address the situation of a couple not wishing to be burdened by more children for now, the patristic arguments are inapplicable. An injunction against suicide may say something about self-mutilation even if, in the initial discussion, there was no question of mutilations that were nonlethal in character.

There is some element of something in the Fathers that can be used to support almost anything: hence Sarah Coakley's *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell 2002) teams up St. Gregory of Nyssa with Judith Butler, who is a lesbian deconstructionist and "bad writing" award winner, in pursuing the "gender fluidity" that is greatly sought after by queer theory and feminism (157-61). For that matter, I think there is a stronger case for Arianism, from the Bible, than Zaphiris makes from the Church Fathers on contraception, and it involves less "crossing fingers." For the record, I believe the conclusions of both arguments I have brought up are heresy, but there is a reason I brought them up. We are in trouble if we only expect the truth to be able to pull arguments from the Scripture and the Fathers, or believe that an argument that draws on the Scripture and the Fathers is therefore trustworthy. My point is not so much whether Zaphiris is right or wrong as the fact that there's something that can be pulled from the Fathers in support of everything, either right *or* wrong. His argument needs to be weighed on its merits. (Or demerits.)

There is some more complexity to the discussion; I have left many things out of the shorter article, but the much even of what I have left out would make the point more strongly. Hence Noonan discusses a view that sex during pregnancy is not licit because it will not be fruitful, discusses the Stoic protest of "even animals don't do this," mentions a third-century dissenter from this view (Lactantius) who allowed sex during pregnancy only as an ambivalent concession, and then the well-read researcher writes, "This... is the only opinion I have encountered in any Christian theologian before 1500 explicitly upholding the lawfulness of intercourse

in pregnancy" (Noonan 1986, 78.). Properly taken in context, this would support a much stronger position than I have argued, and one less attractive today.

Is the issue complex? There's a lot here to understand. Granted. But in this case, "complex" does not mean "nothing but shades of grey," and I am at a loss for a good, honest reason to claim to provide an overview Patristic theology as relevant to contraception, while at the same time failing to mention how it condemned contraception.

### III. THE OFFICIAL TEACHING OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH ON CONTRACEPTION

While there is not a defined statement on the morality of contraception within Orthodoxy,

To modify what I wrote above: I am not sure exactly what Zaphiris means by "defined." The Church is not considered to have "defined" *any* position on morals in the sense of infallibly pronounced doctrines. In Orthodoxy, the Seven Ecumenical Councils may create canons that are morally binding, but irreversible doctrinal declarations are mostly connected to Christology. Under that definition of "defined", the Orthodox Church would not have "defined" a ruling against contraception, *regardless* of its moral status. Neither would she have "defined" a ruling against rape, murder, or any other heinous offenses, even as she unambiguously condemns them.

This is one of several passages that raises questions of slippery rhetoric, perhaps of sophistry. Assuming that the above understanding of "defined" applies (a question which I am unsure of even if it seems that an affirmative answer would be consistent with the rest of the document), his claim is technically true. But it is presented so as to be interpreted as stating that the Orthodox Church has no real position on the matter, unlike other moral questions where the Orthodox Church would presumably have defined a position. This understandable inference is false. The Patristic witness, and arguably the Biblical witness, in fact do treat contraception as suspicious at best. If so, this is a case of Zaphiris saying something technically true in order to create an impression that is

the opposite of the truth. That is very well-done sophistry.

Zaphiris continues with a small, but telling, remark:

there is a body of moral tradition which has a bearing on this question.

This short claim is also true. More specifically, there is a body of moral tradition which has a bearing on this question and tends to view contraception negatively.

First, the Church vigorously denounces any obvious case of pure egotism as the motivating force in Christian sexuality within marriage. Any married couple within the Orthodox Church who want absolutely no children sins grievously against both the Christian dispensation and against the primordial purpose of human life which includes the procreation or, as the Greek Fathers prefer, the "immortality" of the human species.

It seems that Zaphiris may be, for reasons of rhetoric and persuasion, providing a limit to how much he claims, so as to be more readily accepted. Zaphiris provides no footnotes or reference to sources more specific than the "Greek Fathers" to buttress this claim, and does not provide an explanation for certain questions. One such question is why, if marriage is not morally required and celibates are *never* obligated to provide that specific support for the "immortality" of the human species, such obligation is binding on *all* married couples. Are all celibates exempt from "the primordial purpose of human life," and if so, why is it permissible to fail to meet such a foundational purpose of human life? I do not see why Zaphiris's logic justifies his making the more palatable claim that some openness towards children is mandatory.

This raises the question of whether he has a consistent position arising from his reading, or whether he is simply inventing a position and claiming he got it from the Greek Fathers.

According to the Greek Fathers, to refuse to transmit life to others is a grievous sin of pride in which the couple prefers to keep human life for themselves instead of sharing it with possible

offspring.

**Zaphiris's footnotes:**

5. See, e.g., *Didache*, II, i-3, V, 2, VI, 1-2; Pseudo-Barnabas, *Epist.*, XIX, 4-6, Saint Justin, 1 *Apolog.*, XXVII, 1-XXIX,1; Athenagoras, *Supplic.*, XXXV; *Epist. Ad Diogn.*, 5,6; Tertullian, *Apolog*, IX, 6-8; *Ad Nationes*, I, 15; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, XXX, 2; Lactance, *Divinarum Institutionum*, VI, 20.

6. In this regard, we should stress the fact that the Greek Fathers forbid every induced abortion of a human fetus because abortion involves tampering with a human soul. In fact, the soul is not the product of the sexual act of the parents, but is rather the manifestation of the love of God or the result of a special direct or indirect action of God (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VI. 135, *et Eclogae propheticae*, 50, 1-3). A study of the means of the transmission of the soul is beyond the scope of the present paper so that we do not try to explain it here. What is important is to emphasize that the parents cannot destroy any human life—even embryonic—because the embryo carries the soul which is transmitted by God.

7. We must stress the fact that a few non-Christian philosophers took issue with the pro-abortion majority and condemned abortion. Cf. Seneca, *De Consolatione ad Helviani*, XVI, 3; R. Musunius, p. 77; Desimus Junius Juvenalis, *Satire*, VI, 595f.; Philon of Alexandria, *Hypothetia*, VII, 7 (apud Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, VIII, 7, 7).

8. Among other Greek Fathers, see Clement of Alexandria, *Eclogae propheticae*, 50, 1-3.

Secondly, the Orthodox Church, following the teachings of the Fathers,[5] is totally opposed to any form of the abortion of unborn children. Human life belongs exclusively to God and neither the mother nor the father of the fetus has the right to destroy that life.[6] When the Fathers of the Church debated against the non-Christian philosophers[7] of the first centuries, they considered abortion as

philosophers[7] of the first centuries, they considered abortion as murder because the life of the fetus is animate being.[8]

(Note, for the closing claim, that the reason Zaphiris provides is articulated in a fashion which does not apply to contraception, at least not directly: destroying a painting is wrong precisely because an existing and completed painting is a work of art. What the rhetoric says, avoids saying, and leaves the reader to infer, seems to be exquisitely crafted sophistry.)

Thirdly, the Orthodox Church has universally condemned infanticide as immoral, following the same line of theological reasoning.

### **Zaphiris's footnote:**

6. In this regard, we should stress the fact that the Greek Fathers forbid every induced abortion of a human fetus because abortion involves tampering with a human soul. In fact, the soul is not the product of the sexual act of the parents, but is rather the manifestation of the love of God or the result of a special direct or indirect action of God (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VI. 135, *et Eclogae propheticae*, 50, 1-3). A study of the means of the transmission of the soul is beyond the scope of the present paper so that we do not try to explain it here. What is important is to emphasize that the parents cannot destroy any human life—even embryonic—because the embryo carries the soul which is transmitted by God.

Fourthly, it is important to stress that the Orthodox Church has not promulgated any solemn statements through its highest synods on the whole contemporary question of contraception. In general, I think it is accurate to say that, as long as a married couple is living in fidelity to one another and not allowing an immoral egotism to dominate their sexual relations, the particularities of their sexual life are left to the freedom of the spouses to decide.

Finally, it is important to note that the Orthodox Church looks to the medical profession itself to come to some unanimity in its

biological research on the effects of contraception for human health. At the moment, the world of science does not furnish the world of theology such a unanimous body of opinion as would allow the Church prudently to formulate unchangeable moral teaching on this point. 682

There is probably a higher class academic way of making this point, but there is a classic anecdote, rightly or wrongly attributed:

Winston Churchill to unknown woman: "Would you sleep with me for a million pounds?"

Unknown woman: "Would I!"

Winston Churchill: "Would you sleep with me for five pounds?"

Unknown woman: "Exactly what kind of woman do you think I am?"

Winston Churchill: "We've already established that. We're just negotiating over the price."

This claim is not a claim that the theological status of contraception is to be determined by the medical profession. The paragraph quoted above means that the theological status of contraception has already been established, with the "price" left to the medical profession to work out.

#### IV. A THEOLOGICAL OPINION ON THE QUESTION OF CONTRACEPTION

##### **Zaphiris's footnote:**

10. Clement of Alexandria, e.g., probably due to the influence of Greek philosophy, defines marriage as "gamos oun esti synodos andros kai gynaikos e prote kata nomon epi gnesion teknon sporai," i.e. marriage is primarily the union of a man and a woman according to the law in order to procreate legitimate children (cf. *Stromata*, II, 137, 1).

From the material we have surveyed above, it should be obvious that there can be no question of entering into marriage without the intention of procreating children as part of the marriage and still remain faithful to the Orthodox moral tradition.[10]

Pay very, *very* close attention to footnote 10, immediately above. When a Church Father says that marriage is for the procreation of legitimate children, Zaphiris mentions this only in a footnote and immediately *apologizes* for it, explaining it away it as "probably due to the influence of Greek philosophy." Are we really talking about the same "Greek philosophy" as Zaphiris describes above as only rarely having people speak out against abortion?

### **Zaphiris's footnote:**

11. When the patristic theologians comment on the Pauline doctrine of I Cor. 7:4-5, they consistently stress the temporary character of the sexual abstinence which was permitted by St. Paul to the marriage partners. This temporary period would be all that a husband and wife should agree to in order to avoid the temptation to evil (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 79, 1).

However, it seems to me that a different question is raised when we consider the case of a couple who already have three or four children and cannot realistically face the possibility of begetting more children and providing adequately for their upbringing and education. Either they can act fairly irresponsibly and beget more children or they can abstain from sexual intercourse with the constant threat that Satan may tempt the couple to some form of adultery.

I see plenty of precedent for this kind of heart-rending plea in Margaret Sanger's wake. Ordinarily when I see such a line of argument, it is to some degree connected with one of the causes Margaret Sanger worked to advance. I am more nebulous on whether the Fathers would have seen such "compassion" as how compassion is most truly understood; they were compassionate, but the framework that gave their compassion concrete shape is different from this model.

I might comment that it is almost invariably first-world people enjoying a first-world income who find that they cannot afford any more children. Are they really that much less able than people in the third-world to feed children, or is it simply that they cannot afford more children *and* keep up their present standard of living? If this choice is interpreted to mean that more children are out of the question, then what that means is, with apologies to St. John Chrysostom, a decision that luxuries and inherited wealth make a better legacy for one's children than brothers and sisters.

If the first practice of continued sexual intercourse is pursued, there is the likelihood of an unwanted pregnancy in which case the child ceases to be a sign of their shared love, but risks being a burden which causes only anxiety and even hostility. It is not common that people in this situation of despondency opt for the clearly immoral act of abortion. If this radical action is avoided, and the parents go through with the birth of an unwanted child, there is still the danger that they will subsequently seek a divorce.

Apart from economic or possible emotional problems which accompany economic pressures in family life, there is the equally concrete problem that the health of one of the parents or the health of the possible child might be jeopardized should conception occur.

To limit as far as possible the moral, religious, social, economic, cultural, and psychological problems which arise with the arrival of an unwanted child—both for the parents and for the larger community—I believe that the use of contraceptives would be, if not the best solution, at least the only solution we have at our disposal today. I cannot distinguish between natural and artificial means because the morality of both is the same. If someone uses either a natural or an artificial means of birth control, the intention is the same, i.e., to prevent an unwanted pregnancy. The use of contraceptives can facilitate a sexual life which enjoys a minimum of anxiety.

With these reflections on the current situation of family life and based on the above understanding of St. Paul and the Fathers, I ask

myself what is better: to practice abstinence from the act of sexual intercourse, an act made holy by the blessing of God, or to practice a controlled sexual life within marriage and avoid the temptation of Satan? As we know, sexual intimacy within marriage is a very important aspect of the relationship between husband and wife. With the use of contraceptives this sexual intimacy can be practiced without fear of unwanted pregnancy or without the danger of adultery which may result from the practice of abstinence.

Here contraceptives appear to "save the day" in terms of marital intimacy, and the question of whether they have drawbacks is not brought to the reader's attention. Zaphiris is interested, apparently, in answering the question, "What can be made attractive about contraception?" There are other ways of looking at it.

There was one time I met Fr. Richard John Neuhaus; it was a pleasure, and very different from the stereotypes I keep hearing about neoconservatives here at my more liberal Catholic school, Fordham.

At that evening, over beer and (for the others) cigars I asked about the idea that I had been mulling over. The insight is that concepts ideas and positions having practical conclusions that may not be stated in any form. I asked Fr. Neuhaus for his response to the suggestion that the practice of ordaining women is a fundamental step that may ripple out and have other consequences. I said, "It would be an interesting matter to make a chart, for mainline Protestant denominations, of the date they accepted the ordination of women and the date when they accepted same-sex unions. My suspicion is that it would not be too many years."

He responded by suggesting that I push the observation further back: it would be interesting to make a chart for American denominations of the date when they allowed contraception, and the more nebulous date when they started to allow divorce.

Fr. Neuhaus's response raises an interesting question for this discussion. There might be greater value than Zaphiris provides in answering the question, "What are the practical effects, both positive and negative, for sexual intimacy that happen when a couple uses

contraception?" There is room to argue that intimacy premised on shutting down that aspect of sharing may have some rather unpleasant effects surfacing in odd places. Fr. Neuhaus seemed to think before suggesting a connection between contraception and divorce. But this is *not* the question Zaphiris is answering; the question he seems to be answering is, "How can we present contraception as potentially a savior to some couples' marital intimacy?" This is fundamentally the wrong question to ask.

### **Zaphiris's foonote:**

12. This spiritual union and the physical union are not opposed to one another, but are complementary. As an Orthodox theologian, I cannot treat physical union and spiritual union as dialectically opposed realities, which would result from an opposition between matter and spirit. Rather than getting trapped in this typically Western problem, I follow the theological stress of Orthodoxy; this opposition between matter and spirit is resolved through the Logis, and matter and spirit are affirmed to be in extraordinary accord and synergy.

The use of contraceptives can contribute to the possibility of a couple's having a permanent physical and spiritual union. The practice of contraception can contribute to the harmony between the man and wife which is the *sine qua non* of their union. Furthermore, the practice of contraception can facilitate a balance between demographic expansion on our planet and cultivation of its natural resources. This is absolutely essential if we are to prevent future misery and human degradation for future generations. Furthermore, the church itself, which always desires to promote the economic, social, educational, psychological, and religious well-being of its members and of all persons, should permit the practice of contraception among its faithful if it is to be true to its own task.

There was one webpage I saw long ago, comparing the 1950's and 1990's and asking whether it was still possible to make ends meet. The author, after comparing one or two of other rules of thumb, compared what was in a 1950's kitchen with what was in a 1990's kitchen, and

concluded, "We're not keeping up with the Joneses any more.... We're keeping up with the Trumps."

St. John Chrysostom was cited in an academic presentation I heard, as presenting an interesting argument for almsgiving: in response to the objection of "I have many children and cannot afford too much almsgiving," said that having more children was a reason to give *more* alms, because almsgiving has salvific power, and more children have more need for the spiritual benefit of parental almsgiving.

Besides finding the argument interesting, there is something that I would like to underscore, and it is *not* simply because this would be a family size with contraception forbidden. This is in the context of what would today be considered a third world economy—what we know as first world economy did not exist until the West discovered unprecedentedly productive ways of framing an economy. An hour's work would not buy a burger and fries; a day's work might buy a reasonable amount of bread, and meat was a rarity. Those whom St. Chrysostom was advising to give more alms since they had more children, were living in what would be considered squalor today. Or in the West the year of Zaphiris' publication, or perhaps before that.

Why is it that today, in such a historically productive economy, we have suddenly been faced with the difficulty of providing for a large family? Why does the first world present us with the (new?) issue of providing for as many children as a couple generates? My suspicion is that it is because we have an expected baseline that would appear to others as "keeping up with the Trumps." The question in Zaphiris is apparently not so much whether children can be fed, whether with a first world diet or with straight bread, as whether they can be given a college education, because, in a variation of Socrates' maxim, a life without letters after one's name is not worth living.

I would raise rather sharply the conception of what is good for human beings: as Luke 12:15 says, a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. The Orthodox ascetical tradition has any number of resources for a well-lived life. There are more resources than most of us will ever succeed in using. The Orthodox ascetical tradition is

not only for people who consider themselves rich. Is contraception *really* justified just because the average middle-class family cannot afford to bring up more than a few children in the lifestyle of keeping up with the Trumps?

This personal theological-moral opinion which I have outlined and which suggests that we take active human measures regarding family life and the future of society does not at all imply that I reject the full importance of the action of divine providence as important—it is probably the most important factor in the human future. On the contrary, I want to suggest the cooperation of human reason with divine providence; for the Greek Fathers, human reason itself is a participation in the divine revelation. The discoveries and inventions of humankind are themselves permitted by God who governs the human spirit through the Logos without suppressing human freedom.

Furthermore, we must not forget that the physiology of the woman is itself a kind of preventative to the occurrence of pregnancy. During her menstrual cycle, as is well known, she is fertile only part of the time. On the side of the male physiology, it is only by chance, and certainly not the result of every ejaculation of semen, that one of the millions of sperm swims to the ovum with final success so that conception occurs. I believe that the physical make-up of the reproductive system of both female and male shows that God did not intend that every act of human sexual intercourse should result in a pregnancy. Consequently, I believe that the contraceptive pill does not produce an abnormal state in woman, but rather prolongs the non-fecund period which comes from God.

Having arrived at this moral opinion which would allow the use of contraceptives by Orthodox couples, it is important to conclude by underscoring several basic points. First, as an Orthodox theologian, I feel that I must respect the freedom of a married couple to ultimately make the decision themselves after I have done my best to school them in the sacredness of marriage, the importance of their union within the saving Mystery of Jesus Christ, and their role in peopling the communion of saints.

684 Secondly, it is important, from an Orthodox point of view, to recognize in the practice of sexual continence a primarily spiritual reality. That is, sexual continence should be practiced only when a couple feels that this is being asked of them by God as a moment within their mutual growth in holiness and spirituality. Any imposition of continence as a physical discipline entered into for baser motives such as fear is not the kind of continence which is counseled to us by the Gospel.

This makes an amusing, if perhaps ironic, contrast to *Humanae Vitae*. Here Zaphiris more or less says that "continence" for the sake of having sexual pleasure unencumbered by children is not *really* continence. Which I would agree with. Zaphiris says that the pill (abortifascient, incidentally, on some accounts today) is merely regulating a natural cycle, while crying "foul!" at the Catholic claim that contraceptive timing is a spiritually commendable "continence." The Catholic position is the mirror image of this, rejecting the idea that the pill (even if it were not abortifascient) is merely regulating a natural cycle, and classifying the pill among what Catholic canon law calls "poisons of sterility." Both *Humanae Vitae* and Zaphiris make a shoddy argument for one of these two methods of contraception and cry "Foul!" about shoddy argument on the other side.

Despite the fact that Zaphiris presents himself as hostile to *Humanae Vitae* and rising above its faults, the two documents seem to be almost mirror images, more similar than different.

### **Zaphiris's footnotes:**

13. As we know, the Encratites (e.g. Tatian, Cassien, and Carpocrates) condemned marriage because they considered every act of sexual intercourse as sinful. It was sinful because it did not come from God (cf. Epiphanius of Salamine, *Adv. Haer.*, I, III, 46). For them, sexuality was also condemned because of its supposed relationship to original sin. The fleshly union allowed by marriage only further propagated this original sin in the offspring. Thus, because sexuality was not divine, Jesus Christ came to suppress it

(cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 91, 1; 92, 1). In their doctrine, through the suppression of the fleshly union, Jesus Christ opposed the Gospel of the New Testament to the Law of the Old Testament which had allowed sexual intercourse in marriage. The followers of the encratic movement said that they did not accept sexuality, marriage, or procreation because they did not feel that they should introduce other human beings into the world and in their stead as their immediate successors in the human race since they would only endure suffering and provide food for death (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 45, 1).

14. Cf. Joseph Fletcher, *Moral Responsibility, Situation Ethics at Wori*, (London, 1967), especially pp. 34ff.

Thirdly, I want to make it quite clear that I am not proposing a complete and unqualified endorsement of the practice of contraception. Rather I am trying to find that same kind of middle ground which the ancient church followed in condemning both the extremes of sexual puritanism among the Encratites,[13] who found in sex something contrary to the holiness of God, and the opposite extreme of pagan debauchery which sought to find all human meaning in the practices of sexual excess. Within this Christian context, I exhort doctors to be faithful to the individual holiness of every Christian man and woman and to shun any irresponsible practice of automatically counseling the use of contraceptives in every situation for the sake of mere convenience and dehumanizing utilitarianism. Also, I want to make it quite clear that I in no way support the "new morality" with its ethic of sexual activity outside the bounds of matrimony, which is sometimes facilitated by doctors who furnish contraceptives quite freely to the young and uninstructed.

## V. THE QUESTION OF CONTRACEPTION IN RELATION TO HUMANS' ROLE AS CO-LEGISLATORS WITH GOD IN THE WORLD

The roots of the Orthodox teaching on marriage are to be found in St. Paul's statement about the love between Christ and the church,

and St. John Chrysostom's view that marriage should be likened to a small church which, like the great church of 684 God, is "one, holy, universal and apostolic." The relationship between husband and wife parallels the earthly church and the eternal church, or the relationship between the visible and the invisible church. These are not two different churches; on the contrary, there is one church with two dimensions: earthly or terrestrial, and eternal or celestial. The two are inextricably linked. Similarly, marriage constitutes for the Orthodox faith both a terrestrial and a celestial reality, for marriage is both a work of human love and a sacramental means of salvation. Moreover, insofar as every divinely created being, including man and woman, is created according to the Logos, marriage reflects the Divine Logos.

For Paul, marriage is a striking manifestation (exteriorization) of the union between Jesus Christ and his church (Eph. 5:21-33). The Old Testament prophets saw marriage as a dimension of God's covenant with the people. A husband's relationship with his wife is the same as the creature's relationship with the Creator; faithfulness in one is faithfulness in the other and, as with the faithfulness (cf. Hos. 1:1-3, 5; Jer. 3:1ff.; Ezek. 16:1ff., 23:1ff.; Isa. 50:1ff., 54:1ff.), so too Paul, in the New Testament, pronounced marriage a holy means (*mysterion* or sacrament) of Christ's grace. The marriage of man and woman participates in the marriage of Christ and the church.

Eastern Orthodox theologians view the relationship between God and human beings as a creative collaboration. It is our freedom that makes us co-creators with God in the world, and co-legislators with God in the moral order. As creatures, we are obliged to obey the law set down by the Creator, but insofar as our obedience is an expression of our freedom, we are not passive objects of God's law, but rather creative agents of it. Our reason is joined to God through the Logos (the Divine Reason). When we choose to exercise our reason in the moral life, we cooperate with God's creative work on earth. This cooperation or collaboration the Greek Fathers spoke of as synergism (*synergeia*). The person and work of Jesus Christ is the fullest embodiment of this synergistic union of God and humanity.

It is in the light of the synergistic union between God and humanity that the Eastern church understands and resolves the problems of contraceptives, especially the use of the pill.

I could interrupt more to ask many more questions like, "Is this what the Eastern Church should teach to be faithful to her tradition, or what Zaphiris wants the framing metaphor for the Eastern teaching to be as a change to its prior tradition?"

The question we should ask now is: Does our freedom to devise and employ contraceptives, including the pill, violate "natural law" as Roman Catholic teaching states? We are compelled to answer that the encyclical of Pope Paul VI (*Humanae vitae*) is lacking because it does not acknowledge the role of man and woman as God's co-creators and co-legislators on earth. The Eastern Orthodox view of contraception, unlike that of the Latin church, is that our capacity to control procreation is an expression of our powers of freedom and reason to collaborate with God in the moral order. A human being is viewed not only as a subject which receives passively the "natural law," but also as a person who plays an active role in its formulation. Thus the natural law, according to Eastern Orthodox thinkers, is not a code imposed by God on human beings, but rather a rule of life set forth by divine inspiration and by our responses to it in freedom and reason. This view does not permit the Eastern Orthodox Church to conclude that the pill, and artificial contraceptives generally, are in violation of natural law.

There are a couple of things that are significant here.

First the argument being made about being co-legislators is a point of cardinal importance and one that should *ideally* be supported by at least *one* footnote. There is an *absolute* lack of footnotes or even mention of names of authors or titles of text in this section's quite significant assertions about the Eastern Church. (This raises to me some questions about the refereeing here. My teachers usually complain and lower my grade when I make sweeping claims without adding footnotes.)

Second, to employ a Western image, Christian freedom is

comparable to a sonnet: total freedom within boundaries. Hence, in a slightly paraphrased version of one of the sayings of the Desert Fathers, "A brother asked an old monk, 'What is a good thing to do, that I may do it and live?' The old monk said, 'God alone knows what is good. Yet I have heard that someone questioned a great monk, and asked, "What good work shall I do?" And he answered, "There is no single good work. The Bible says that Abraham was hospitable, and God was with him. And Elijah loved quiet, and God was with him. And David was humble, and God was with him. Therefore, find the desire God has placed in your heart, and do that, and guard your heart.'" ( [http://jonathanscorner.com/christmas\\_tales/christmas\\_tales10.html](http://jonathanscorner.com/christmas_tales/christmas_tales10.html) , as seen on 14 May, 2007) There is great freedom in Orthodoxy, but freedom within bounds. Things such as "Do not murder," "Do not commit adultery," and "Do not steal," are boundaries absolutely consistent with the Desert Fathers saying above. There is great freedom within boundaries, and in fact the boundaries *increase* our freedom.

What Zaphiris presents is a great, stirring, poetic hymn to our cooperation with the Creator as co-creators, presented as a reason not to require a certain bound. (It is my experience that sophistry is often presented more poetically than honest arguments.) Perhaps this would be a valid move if there were no serious issues surrounding contraception, but as it is, it follows the logical fallacy of "begging the question": in technical usage, "begging the question" is not about *raising* a question, but improperly taking something for granted: more specifically, presenting an argument that assumes the very point that it is supposed to prove. It is begging the question to answer the question, "Why is contraception permissible?" by eloquently proclaiming, "Contraception is a *magnificent* exercise of Orthodox freedom, because Orthodox freedom is magnificent and contraception is permissible within the bounds of that freedom." The whole point at issue is whether contraception is permissible; to argue this way as a way of answering that question is sophistry.

**(I might suggest that it is an "interesting" exercise of our status as co-creators with God to try hard to shut down the creative powers God built into sex. Perhaps the suggestion is not**

indefensible, but it is in *need* of being defended, and Zaphiris never acknowledges that *this* interpretation of our status as co-creators needs to be defended, or buttress his specific interpretation.)

686 The conception of natural law in *Humanae vitae* contains a deterministic understanding of human marital and sexual life. According to this understanding, any and every human (or artificial) intervention into the biological processes of human being constitutes a violation of God's law for humanity. Hence, contraception as an artificial interruption or prevention of the natural event of procreation is inherently a violation of God's law. *Humanae vitae*, moreover, goes on to state that each act of coitus is, according to the law of nature, an "actus per se aptus ad generation."

While the Eastern Orthodox Church fully acknowledges the role of procreation in the marital sexual act, it does not share the deterministic understanding of this act as expressed by *Humanae vitae*, which ignores love as a dimension of great value in sexual intercourse between husband and wife. Indeed, this love is viewed by the Eastern church as the marriage partners' own response to the love of God for human beings, a human love as the marriage partners' own response to the love of God for human beings, a human love which is also a paradigm of Christ's love for the church. Finally, one must say that the deterministic Roman Catholic conception of marital sexuality, rooted as it is in scholastic medieval teaching, cannot very well deal with crucial contemporary problems such as over-population, food shortage, poverty, and insufficient medical resources.

The Roman Catholic position on human sexuality and procreation is based on the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas, and these in turn are decisively influenced by Aristotle's philosophy. Aristotle's view was that every object in the physical universe possesses an intelligible structure, a form which is composed of an intrinsic end and the means or "drive" to realize that end. When a thing is behaving, or being used, according to its end—as a frying pan used to fry fish—then that thing is acting properly or "naturally"; however, when a thing is not acting, or being used, according to its

intrinsic end—as when a frying pan is used to prop open a faulty window—then that object is acting, or being used, improperly or "unnaturally."

There is a much bigger problem than a singularly unflattering illustration of the distinction between natural and unnatural use.

Unless one counts Zaphiris's example above of a theologian saying that marriage is intended for procreation, with footnoted clarification that this is "probably due to the influence of Greek philosophy," the surrounding passage (about Thomas Aquinas's discussion of whether contraception is unnatural) is the first time that Zaphiris mentions a theologian presenting an argument against contraception. And it is a Latin after the Great Schism interpreted in terms of Scholastic influence.

The following inference is not stated in so many words, but the trusting reader who is trying to be sympathetic will naturally draw an understandably wrong conclusion: "Arguments that contraception enter the picture when Aquinas as a Latin Scholastic imported Aristotelian philosophy." Again, this is not stated explicitly, but much of sophistry, including this, is the impression that is created without technically saying anything false. (This is how sophistry works.)

This will lead the trusting reader to expect another further conclusion: since (so it appears) arguments against contraception, and especially the idea of contraception being unnatural, *enter* the picture with Latin Scholasticism, any Orthodox who brings such argument against contraception is under Western influence. People who have fallen under Western influence should perhaps be answered gently and charitably, but the Western influence is not something one should listen to and accept. Again, this is *not* stated in so many words, but it is precise the rhetoric appears to be aimed at.

Incidentally, whatever Aquinas may have gotten from Aristotle, the Greek Fathers had ideas of unnatural vice *without* the help of Latin Scholasticism. There is a firmly embedded concept of unnatural vices, including witchcraft as well as "unnatural vice." Jude 7 charges the men of Sodom with unnatural lust (*sarkos heteras*). The salient question is

not whether the Greek Fathers have an understanding of *some* sins as unnatural, but whether contraception is a sin and, if so, whether it is among the sins classified as unnatural. But it is *not* automatically due to Western influence for an Orthodox to make claims about unnatural sin.

St. Thomas attempted to synthesize Aristotle's logic of means-ends with the biblical story of the divine creator of the universe. For Aquinas, God is the author of the intelligible structure present in each finite or earthly object. When a finite being behaves according to its intrinsic end, it acts "naturally" as Aristotle thought, but according to Aquinas it also acts in accord with the divine will for that creaturely being. So it is with human sexuality and procreation. Aquinas believed that the intrinsic end of all sexuality (human and non-human) is procreation. Procreation may not necessarily result from each act of coitus, but this does not mean that the sexual (human) partners have disobeyed God for, if their aim in sexual union was procreation, they have behaved in accord with the divine will governing this creaturely reality. But if that intrinsic aim of sexuality-procreation is subverted, either by substituting pleasure for procreation as the aim, or by introducing artificial devices or means to inhibit or prevent procreation, then sexuality is practiced "unnaturally" or sinfully, and God is disobeyed.

The wedding of Aristotle's means-ends logic to the biblical Creator meant for Aquinas that sexuality, as every other earthly vitality, is governed by laws setting forth God's intention for each creaturely being, which are knowable to every creature for 686 the proper conduct of its life on earth. When the law governing sexuality and procreation is disobeyed, then, according to Aquinas' theology, the Creation itself is undermined and God's own creative will is defied.

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If a fuller anthropological understanding of human beings is advanced, such that people are viewed as free, rationally and spiritually, as well as biologically, a different judgment on contraception must then be made, one certainly different from that

of the Roman Catholic Church.

Zaphiris is driving his persuasive effect further. He is driving home further the impression that if a misguided fellow Orthodox tells you that contraception is sin, he is presumably one of those poor saps, an Orthodox who has fallen under Western influence, and if this misguided fellow Orthodox perhaps specifies that this is because contraception frustrates the purpose of sex, this is someone under the spell of the Roman Church, who is to be dealt with as one ordinarily deals with the pseudomorphosis of Western influence yet again corrupting Orthodoxy.

It is the belief of Eastern Orthodox theology that only such an anthropology is consistent with the dignity the Bible bestows on humans as *imago Dei*.

Note that earlier some of what Zaphiris said *earlier* was presented as a "theological opinion," not necessarily binding on the consciences of other Orthodox Christians even if he was trying to make a case for it. But here we seem to have shifted to something that is binding on all Orthodox Christians: "It is the belief of Eastern Orthodox theology that only such an anthropology," apparently meaning the anthropology implied in the last section which makes at least one sweeping claim without footnotes or even the name of an author or text, that is binding on the consciences of Orthodox Christians. Earlier, perhaps the view of St. John Chrysostom might have been acceptable, at least as a theological opinion. Here it begins to look like a blunt declaration implying that Chrysostom's position is heretical. Is the implication, "If anybody disagrees with this, let him be anathema?"

This dignity is revealed afresh by Jesus Christ who, as both divine and human in freedom, reason, spirit, and flesh, incarnates the complex anthropology of all human beings.

Speaking from this anthropological conception of humanity, we should distinguish three principle aspects in the use of contraceptives—the psychological, the medical, and the moral. From the psychological point of view, contraceptives are permissible only when their use is the result of a common decision reached by both partners. The imposition of contraceptives by one partner in the

partners. The imposition of contraceptives by one partner in the sexual act must be regarded as immoral inasmuch as it abridges the freedom and possibly violates the conscience of the other partner. Any use of contraceptives which does not respect the psychological condition of both partners and of the sexual act itself must be judged immoral. What should guide sexual partners in the use or non-use of contraceptives is their freedom and reason, their spiritual dignity as creatures of God.

**Zaphiris's footnote:**

15. [Footnote not recorded in my copy.]

From the medical point of view, we have mentioned above the conditions under which contraceptives are permissible. It is important to emphasize here that moral questions are not part of the technical judgments made by medical doctors about the use or non-use of contraceptives.[15] As we have said, the use of the pill is not a permanent sterilization but a temporary state of sterility induced for reasons that may be social or economic or psychological or demographic or physiological.

Contrary to Roman Catholic teaching, the pill does not violate natural law. Its function is not to bring about a permanent state of sterilization but rather a temporary suspension of fertility. And this decision to suspend fertility, when made by both marital partners with reason and freedom and spirit, is a decision made perfectly consistent with God's will for human beings on earth.

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688 There is an authentic moral question in the use and non-use of contraceptives. It is no less true that marriage as a sacramental mystery contains a powerful moral dimension. When marital partners engage in contraception, the Orthodox Church believes that they must do so with the full understanding that the goal God assigns to marriage is both the creation of new life and the expression of deeply felt love.

Note: Love is something you deeply *feel*. I do not find this notion in the Bible nearly so much as in the literature of courtly love. This conception of love is (one infers from Zaphiris) not only permissible but mandatory.

Moreover, the Orthodox Church believes that the relationship of man and woman in marriage is essentially a relationship of persons. This means that sexual life must be guided by the meaning of relationship and personhood.

Though it is obvious that procreation is a physical phenomenon, the Eastern church understands the decision of the married couple to have a child to be a moral, even more, a spiritual decision. The Pope's encyclical, *Humanae vitae*, in our judgment, committed a significant error. The authors of the encyclical sought to distinguish our procreative power from all other powers that make us human but, in fact, they isolate our procreateness and set it apart from the human personality. Such an isolation does little justice to the complexity. If conjugality has as its goal *per se aptitude for procreation*, then this is a virtual denial that sexual is permissible during a woman's infertile periods. We have said, and now repeat, that conjugality can and should continue, whether or not procreation is a practical possibility. In contrast to *Humanae vitae*, Orthodox thinkers do not believe that human beings are subjects bound by "natural law" in the deterministic Roman Catholic sense, but rather persons living and acting freely in the natural world.

It now appears, at least to the uninitiate or those liable to misconstrue things, that existentialist personalism is the teaching of the Orthodox Church. And apparently not just a theological opinion: one is bound to subscribe to it.

\* \* \*

### **Zaphiris's footnote:**

16. For one Orthodox discussion of the question of insemination, see the excellent book of Prof. Chrysostomos

Constantinidis, *Technete Gonipoiesis kai Theologia in Orthodoxia*, XXXIII (1958), 66-79, 174-90, 329-335, 451-468; XXXIV (1959), 36-52, 212-230.

Eastern Orthodoxy recognizes that men and women can only truly be God's co-creators on earth through the responsible use of freedom and reason. The question of responsibility becomes crucial in such cases as permanent sterilization, artificial insemination,[16] and euthanasia. The Eastern Orthodox Church cannot and will not legislate vis-à-vis the enormously important and complicated questions raised by these cases.

I'm at this point imagining the Battle Hymn of the Republic playing in the background: "Glory, glory, Hallelujah! His truth goes marching on!" This is very stirring rhetoric, but sits ill with some of my sources and seems to be something he doesn't document well.

These questions are regarded by the Orthodox Church as *theologoumena*, that is, theologically discussable issues. The Eastern church seeks always to respect one's freedom of decision, but it also seeks through its own ethical inquiry to guide people in making responsible decisions.

There is a lot of great rhetoric for this perspective in Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*. I am suspicious of this rhetorical version of growing to autonomous adult responsibility in its Catholic forms, and I don't see why it needs to be incorporated into Orthodoxy.

The Eastern church's refusal to provide specific answers to some concrete moral questions is based on a fundamental theological principle—the belief that no one can specify where human freedom ends and divine will begins.

Notwithstanding that Zaphiris has done *precisely* that, *not* by forbidding contraception altogether, but by specifying multiple lines which contraception may not pass. And, apparently, specified a line where Orthodox condemnation of contraception may not pass. But this is impressive rhetoric none the less.

Synergism means the collaboration of human beings with God in the continuing creation of the world. We must struggle to understand the right and wrong uses of our freedom, guided by the divine spirit. Our freedom is a mystery of God's own will and freedom. Therefore, no theologian—Eastern Orthodox 689 or otherwise—can specify what finally constitutes the divine-human collaboration. Practically speaking, we can know when any given act, having taken place we can never be certain of the responsible and creative use of our freedom. We cannot determine *a priori* the movement of the human spirit any more than we can determine *a priori* the movement of the divine spirit. It is certain that, unless we recognize continually the Lordship of God in the world—the Creator judging all the actions of the creatures, we cannot speak truly of a divine-human synergism.

The church is an instrument of the work of the Holy Spirit on earth, and must seek to relate the scriptural revelation of God to the moral situation in life which we constantly confront. When the church accepts this responsibility, it enables the participation of human beings in the on-going history of salvation. In this fashion, the church witnesses simultaneously to the sacred will of God and to the urgency of human moral life. Thereby the church avoids both antinomianism on the one side and the moral reductionism of "situation ethics" on the other side.

Many ethical approaches are presented as meant to steer a middle course between problematic extremes, including ones we might like and ones we might not. See an attempted middle road between forcing queer positions onto the Biblical text and forcing conservative positions onto the Biblical text in Patricia Beattie Jung, "The Promise of Postmodern Hermeneutics for the Biblical Renewal of Moral Theology," in Patricia Beattie Jung (ed.), *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press 2001. I haven't seen this phenomenon before in Orthodoxy, but it is common in the liberal Catholic dissent I've read. The dissenter adopts a rhetorical pose of being eager to seek a measured middle course that doesn't do something extreme, and does not give unfair advantage to any position.

But this is done in the course of agitating for change on a point where the Catholic teaching is unambiguous. Jung, for instance hopes for a versions Catholic ethics more congenial to lesbian wishes, but she always takes the rhetoric of moderate and reasonable efforts that will respect Scripture and Catholic Tradition. (Again, I am comparing Zaphiris to Catholic dissent because I have not seen what he is doing here in Orthodoxy before, but have seen it *repeatedly* in liberal Catholic dissent.)

### **Zaphiris's footnote:**

17. This is an expression used by Nicholas Cabasilas, an Eastern Orthodox theologian of the Byzantine era. The notion of God's *maniakos eros* is discussed by Paul Evdokimov, *L'amour fou de Dieu* (Paris, 1973).

We must conclude here by saying that God's fantastic love for human beings—*maniakos eros*[17]—has divinised all creation. With this divinisation, God achieves the purpose of bringing all beings to God's own self. We play a role in this great work of salvation through the creativeness and freedom which God has bestowed on us. These dynamic capacities of our being cannot finally be identified and understood outside the scope of the Christian doctrines of humanity (anthropology), of Christ (Christology), and of salvation (soteriology). The ultimate purpose of our synergistic relation to God is our own regeneration, as the New Testament states (cf. Rom. 8:28; Phil. 2:13; I Cor. 3:9).

### **Zaphiris's footnotes:**

[18](#) I Cor 2:7.

[19](#) Rom 12:2.

Moreover, synergism has an ecclesiological dimension, and secondarily a moral dimension. Our role as co-legislators on earth with God can only fully be exercised in relationship to the church, which is the instrument of the communication of the Holy Spirit to humans in their creativeness. This means for Eastern Orthodoxy that the legislative and creative actions of men and women are a liturgy of

the legislative and creative actions of men and women are a liturgy of the church itself. When we live in relation to the church's body, we live within "God's wisdom: a mysterious and hidden wisdom framed from the very beginning to bring us to our full glory." [18] The ecclesio-anthropo-soteriological value of this human liturgy is contained in the relation which exists between God's revelation and our activity. The harmonious cooperation between God and humans makes it possible for our legislative and creative acts to be "what is good, acceptable, and perfect." [19]

We have offered these remarks in the hope that they can contribute to a common basis for an ecumenical discussion on the contemporary human problem of contraception.

Orthodox who are concerned with ecumenism may wish to take note of this statement of authorial intent.

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### **Study and discussion questions**

1. What view concerning marriage and sexuality do we find in the Scriptures? In the early Christian writers?
2. Discuss the author's interpretation of the biblical and patristic views of marriage, sexuality, and procreation.
3. What implication concerning contraception can be derived from biblical and patristic concepts of marriage, sexuality, and procreation?
4. What are the official teachings of the Orthodox Church on contraception?
5. How do these teachings compare with Protestant and Roman Catholic teachings?
6. Under what circumstances does the author believe contraception to be theologically permissible? Discuss.

7. What is synergism?
8. How is contraception linked with synergism?
9. How is the resulting view of contraception within Orthodoxy a contrast to the Roman Catholic view?
10. Why does the Eastern Orthodox Church avoid concrete and decisive answers to problems such as contraception?

I have never seen Bible study/book discussions questions posed like this in a refereed journal before. I suspect that these will lead people to say things that will help cement the belief that the truth is more or less what has been presented in this account. This seems in keeping with other red flags that this is doing more than just providing a scholarly account of what Orthodox believe. Perhaps this is part of why this paper's label as a "theological opinion"—about as close as Orthodoxy gets to the idea of "agreeing to disagree" on spiritual matters—has been accepted as a statement of what the Orthodox Church believes, period.

I believe this document has problems, and if as I expect it is a major influence in the "new consensus" allowing some contraception in the Orthodox Church, this constitutes major reason to re-evaluate the "new consensus."

There could conceivably be good reasons to change the ancient tradition of the Orthodox Church from time immemorial to almost the present day. *Maybe*. But this is not it. (And if these are the best reasons Zaphiris found to change the immemorial tradition of the Church, perhaps it would be better not to do so.)

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

## A rude awakening

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## A first response

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dead silence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What about the second law of thermodynamics?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Pondering Einstein, or at least dropping his name

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

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

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

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

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

Art hesitated, and began to sit up.

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

Art shrunk slightly towards his chair.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Is this a trick question? Fifty pounds?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*What aspect of yourself do you know with?*

They should train

They should train students to

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

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

mother.

theologian  
retelling this story

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

*How much  
emphasis  
do you  
place on  
creativity?*

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Where does your discipline place its empiricism?*

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

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

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

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

## Origins questions: can we dig deeper?

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

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

### **Genesis**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is an Dilbert strip which goes as follows:

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

class on Cobol on Thursday.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

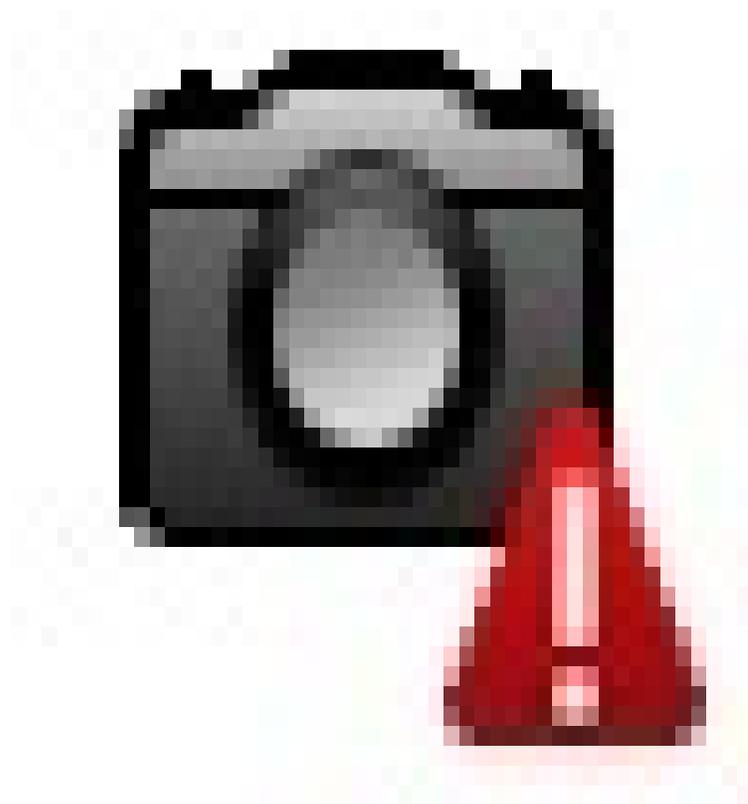
Adam fell and dragged down the whole realm of nature. God had and has every authority to repudiate Adam, to destroy him, but in fact God did something different. He called Noah, Abraham,

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

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

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

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



An icon of the Resurrection.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Compareth to thy worth.

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

The Glory for whom all glory is named,

The Treasure for whom treasures are named,

The Light for whom all light is named,

The Love for whom all love is named,

The Eternal by whom all may glimpse eternity,

The Being by whom all beings exist,

יהוה,

Ο ΩΝ.

The King of Kings and Lord of Lords,

Who art eternally praised,

Who art all that thou canst be,

Greater than aught else that may be thought,

Greater than can be thought.

In thee is light,

In thee is honour,

In thee is mercy,

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

For good itself is named after thee,

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

What mighteth compare to thee?

What praise equalleth thee?

If I be fearfully and wonderfully made,

Only can it be,

Wherewith thou art fearful and wonderful,

And ten thousand things besides,

Thou who art One,

Eternally beyond time,

So wholly One,

That thou mayest be called infinite,

Timeless beyond time thou art,

The One who is greater than infinity art thou.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

The Three who are One,

No more bound by numbers than by word,

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

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

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

## Monty Python and Christian theology

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

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

**Arthur:** Sorry—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

theology.

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

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

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

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

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

## A journey of repentance

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

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

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

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

Let us ever seek the theology of living faith!

# The Patriarchy We Object To

Tell me what kind of patriarchy you object to. As Orthodox, we probably object to that kind of patriarchy as well.

There was one chaplain at a university who, whenever a student would come in and say, "I don't believe in God," would answer, "Tell me what kind of God you don't believe in. I probably don't believe in that kind of God either." And he really had something in common with them. He didn't believe in a God who was a vindictive judge, or a God who was responsible for all the evil in this world, or a God who was arbitrary and damned people for never hearing of him. And the chaplain wasn't just making a rhetorical exercise; he didn't believe in many kinds of "God" any more than the students who were kind enough to come and tell him they didn't believe in God. He really had something in common with them.

There was one book I was reading which was trying to recover women's wisdom from patriarchy. I was amazed when I was reading it, as it talked about the holistic, united character of women's knowing, and how women's knowledge is relational, how women know by participating. What amazed me was how much it had in common with Orthodox description of knowledge, because the Orthodox understanding of knowledge is based off an essential unity and knows by relating, participating, drinking, rather than by analyzing and taking apart and knowing things by keeping track of a systematic map.

What Orthodoxy in the West would seek to recover from the West looks a lot like what feminism would like to recover from patriarchy. Part

of what may confuse the issue is that feminism lumps together two very different forces as "patriarchy." One of these forces is classical tradition, and the other is something funny that's been going on for several hundred years in which certain men have defaced society by despising it and trying to make it manly.

The reason that women's holistic, connected knowledge is countercultural is something we'll miss if we only use the category of "patriarchy". The educational system, for instance, makes very little use of this knowledge, not because patriarchy has always devalued women's ways of knowing, but something very different. The reason that there's something countercultural to women's holistic, connected knowledge is that that is a basic human way of knowing, and men can be separated from it more easily than women, but it's a distortion of manhood to marginalize that way of knowing. And there has been a massive effort, macho in the worst way, that despised how society used to work, assumed that something is traditional it must be the women's despicable way of doing things, and taken one feature of masculine knowledge and used it to uproot the the places for other ways of knowing that are important to both *men* and women. There are two quite different forces lumped together in the category of "patriarchy." One is the tradition proper, and the other is "masculism" (or at least I call it that), and what feminism sees as patriarchy is what's left over of the tradition after masculism has defaced it by trying to make it "masculine," on the assumption that if something was in the tradition, that was all you needed to know, in order to attack it as being unfit for men. *"Masculism" is what happens when you cross immature masculinity with the effort to destroy whatever you need to make room for your version of Utopia.* What is left of the tradition today, and what feminism knows as "patriarchy," is a bit like what's left of a house after it's been burned down.

With apologies to G.K. Chesterton, the Orthodox and feminists only ask to get their heads into the Heavens. It is the masculists who try to fit the Heavens into their heads, and it is their heads that split. This basic difference between knowing as exaltation and expansion, participating in something and allowing one's head to be raised in the Heavens, and domination and mastery that compresses the Heavens so they will fit in one's head, is the difference between what "knowing" means to both

feminists and Orthodox, and what it means to masculinists.

The difference between Orthodoxy and feminism is this. Orthodoxy has to a very large measure preserved the tradition. When it objects to masculinism, it is objecting to an intrusion that affects something it is keeping. It is a guard trying to protect a treasure. Where Orthodoxy is a guard trying to protect a treasure, feminism is a treasure hunter trying to find something that world has lost. It is a scout rather than a guard. (And yes, I'm pulling images from my masculine mind.) Feminism is shaped by masculinism, and I'd like to clarify what I mean by this. I don't mean in *any* sense that feminism wants to serve as a rubber stamp committee for masculinism. The feminist struggle is largely a struggle to address the problems created by masculinism. that's pretty foundational. But people that rebel against something tend to keep a lot of that something's assumptions, and feminism is a lot like masculinism because in a culture as deeply affected by masculinism as much of the West, masculinism is the air people breathe. (People can't stop breathing their air, whatever culture they're in.) For one example of this, masculinism assumed that anything in the tradition was womanish and therefore unfit for men, and feminism inherited a basic approach from masculinism when it assumed that anything in tradition was patriarchal and therefore unfit for women. It's a masculinist rather than traditional way of approaching society. Orthodoxy has been affected by masculinism to some degree, but it's trying to preserve the Orthodox faith, where feminism has been shaped by masculinism to a much greater degree and is trying to rebel against the air its members breathe. Feminism is a progressive series of attempts to reform masculinism for women; if you look at its first form, it said, "Women should be treated better. They should be treated like men." Later forms of feminism have seen that there are problems with that approach, but they have been reacting to a composite of masculinism and earlier versions of feminism. Feminism has been a scout, rather than a guard.

I say that feminism has been a scout rather than a guard, not to criticize, but to suggest that Orthodoxy has been given something that feminism reaches for, but does not have in full. It is a bit like the difference between maintaining a car and trying to go through a junkyard with the wrecks of many magnificent things and reconstruct a working vehicle. In a junkyard, one sees the imprint of many things; one sees the

vehicle. In a junkyard, one sees the imprint of many things, one sees the twisted remains of quite a few items that would be good to have. And one can probably assemble things, get some measure of functionality, perhaps hobble together a working bicycle. And if one does not have a working car, there is something very impressive about doing one's best to assemble something workable from the wreckage. It is perhaps not the best manners to criticize someone who has combined parts to make a genuinely working bicycle and say, "But you were not given a working car!"

But in Orthodoxy, there is a very different use of time. Orthodox do not simply spend time filling the gas tank (there are many necessities in faith like filling a gas tank) and maintaining the car (which we periodically break), necessary as those may be. Having a car is primarily about living life as it is lived when you can drive. It is about being able to travel and visit people. It is about having more jobs open to you. If a car isn't working, dealing with the car means trying to do whatever you can to get it working. It means thinking about how to fix it. And feminism is trying to correct masculism. If a car *is* working, dealing with the car is about what it can let you do. It's like how when you're sick, your mind is on getting well and on your health. If you're healthy, you don't think about your health unless you choose to. You're free to *enjoy* your health by focusing on non-health-related pursuits.

What does Orthodoxy have to contribute to feminism? To begin with, it's not simply a project by men. Feminist tends to assume that whatever is in patriarchy is there because all-powerful men have imposed it on women, or to put things in unflattering terms women have contributed little of substance to patriarchal society. That may have truth as regards masculism, but Orthodoxy is the property of both men and women (and boys and girls), and it is a gross mischaracterization to only look at the people who hold positions of power.

Feminists have made bitter criticism of Prozac being used to mask the depression caused by many housewives' loneliness and isolation. Housewives who do not work outside the home have much more than housework to deal with; they have loneliness and isolation from adult company. And perhaps, feminists may icily say, if a woman under those

conditions is depressed, this does not necessarily mean Prozac is appropriate. Maybe, just maybe, the icy voice tells us, the solution is to change those conditions instead of misusing antidepressants to mask the quite *natural* depression those conditions create. Feminists are offended that women are confined to a place outside of society's real life and doing housework in solitary confinement. One of the most offensive things you can say, if there is no irony or humor in your voice, is, "*A woman's place is in the house!*" (and not add, "and in the Senate!")

But Orthodoxy looks at it differently, or at least Orthodox culture tends to work out differently. And, like many alien cultures, things have a very different meaning. The home has a different meaning. When people say "family" today, we think of a nuclear family. Then it was extended family, and thinking of an extended family without a nuclear family would have been as odd to people then as it would be odd today to take your favorite food and then be completely unable to eat anything else. Traditional society, *real* traditional society, did not ask women to work in isolation. Both men and women worked in adult company. And the home itself... In traditional society, the home was the primary place where economic activity occurred. In traditional society, the home was the primary place where charitable work occurred. In traditional society, the home took care of what we would now call insurance. In traditional society, the home was the primary place where education occurred. Masculism has stripped away layer after layer of what the home was. In Orthodox culture, in truly Orthodox culture that has treasures that have been dismantled in the West, a woman's place really *is* in the home, but it means something totally different from what a feminist cringes at in the words, "A woman's place is in the house!"

America has largely failed to distinguish between what feminism says and women's interests, so people think that if you are for women, you must agree with feminism. Saying "I oppose feminism because I am for women's interests" seems not only false but a contradiction in terms, like saying "I'm expanding the text of this webpage so it will be more concise." It's not like more thoughtful Catholics today, who say, "I have thought, and I understand why many people distinguish or even oppose the teachings of the Catholic Church with God's truth. But my considered judgment is that God reveals his truth through the living magisterium of

the Catholic Church." It's more like what the Reformers faced, where people could not see what on earth you meant if you said that God's truth and the Catholic Church's teaching were not automatically the same thing.

In this culture, someone who is trying to be pro-woman will ordinarily reach for feminism as the proper vehicle, just as someone who wants to understand the natural world will reach for science as the proper vehicle for that desire; "understanding the human body" is invariably read as "learning scientific theories about the body's work," and not "take a massage/dance/martial arts class", or "learn what religions and cultures have seen in the meaning of the human body." A great many societies pursued a deep understanding of the human body without expressing that desire the way Western science pursues it. They taught people to come to a better knowledge **of** their bodies—and I mean "of," not just "about"—the kind of relational, drinking knowledge that feminists and Orthodox value, and not just a list of abstract propositions from dissecting a cadaver (a practice which some cultures regard as "impious and disgusting"—C.S. Lewis). They taught people to develop, nurture, and discipline their bodies so that there was a right relationship between body and spirit. They taught people to see the body as belonging a world of meaning, symbol, and spiritual depth—cultures where "How does it work?" takes a back seat to a deeper question: "Why? What does it mean?" Orthodoxy at its best still *does* teach these things. But Western culture has absorbed the scientific spirit that most people genuinely cannot see what "understanding the body" could mean besides "learning scientific theories about the body." And, in this context, it seems like a deceitful sleight of hand when someone says, "I want to help you understand the body" and then offers help in ways of moving one's body.

But I want to talk about some things that are missed within this set of assumptions. Feminism *can* speak for women's interests. It normally claims to. And women are ill-served by an arrangement when people assume that criticism of feminism is at the expense of women's interests. We need to open a door that American culture does not open. We need to open the possibility of being willing to challenge feminism in order to further women's interests. Not on all points, but if we never open that

door, disturbing things can happen.

If you ask someone outside of feminism who "the enemy" is to feminists, the common misunderstanding is, "Nonfeminist men." And that's certainly part of the problem and not part of the solution, but the real vitriol feeds into jokes like "How many men does it take to open a beer?—She should have it open when she brings it to him." The real vitriol is reserved for the contented housewife who wants to be married, have children, and make a home, and not have a professional career because of what she values in homemaking itself.

Feminism is against "patriarchy." That means that much that is positive in the tradition is attacked along with masculism. That means that whatever the tradition provided for women is interpreted as harmful to women, even if it benefits women. Wendy Shalit makes an interesting argument in [A Return to Modesty](#) that sexual modesty is not something men have imposed on women against their nature for men's benefit; it is first and foremost a womanly virtue that protects women. We now have a defaced version of traditional society, but to start by assuming that almost everything in the culture is a patriarchal imposition that benefits only men, sets the stage for throwing out a great many things that are important for women. It sets the stage, in fact, for completing the attack that masculism began. (The effect of throwing out things that strike you as patriarchal on a culture has much the same effect as killing off species in an ecosystem because you find them unpleasant. It is an interconnected, interdependent, and organic whole that all its members need. That's not quite the right way of saying it, but this image has a grain of truth.) Masculism scorned the traditional place for men, and was masculine only in that it rebelled against perceivedly feminine virtue. Feminism does not include a large number of women's voices in America and an even larger number worldwide—because feminism lumps them all together in "The Enemy." At times feminism can look anti-woman.

So everything will be OK if we resist feminism? No. First, if the tradition is right—let us say, in the controversial point that associates women with the home—that doesn't make much sense of today's options that don't really let women be women and don't let men be men. What is the closest equivalent to women reigning in one of society's most

important institutions? Is it to be a housewife with a lunchtime discussion group, which seems to work wonders for depression caused by loneliness? Is it for women to keep house and work part time? Is it to work full time, and find an appropriate division of labor with their husbands? I have trouble telling which of these is best, and it doesn't help matters to choose an option just because it bothers feminists. I think that women (and, for that matter, men) have an impoverished set of options today. Unfortunately, some of the most practical questions are also the ones that are hardest to answer.

Second and more importantly, reacting against feminism, or much of anything else, is intrinsically dangerous. If feminism has problems, we would be well advised to remember that heresies often start when people react against other heresies and say that the truth is so important they should resist that heresy as much as they can. Reactions against heresy are often heresy.

Let me explain how not to respond to feminism's picture of what men should be. You could say that feminism wants women to be more like men and men to be more like women, and that has a significant amount of truth. But if you dig in and say that men should be rugged and independent and say, "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul!", and women should be weak, passive creatures that are always in a swoon, there are several major problems.

The phrase "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul!" is something that nobody but God should say. Someone greater than us is the master of our fate, and someone greater than us is the master of our soul, and that is our glory. To be a man is to be under authority. Perhaps it irks feminists that the Bible tells wives to submit to their husbands as well as telling husbands to love their wives with the greatest and most costly love. (I've heard some first class citizens pointing out that the Bible requires something much heftier of husbands than mere submission—loving *and loving* their wives on the model of Christ going so far as to give up his life for the Church.) But the tradition *absolutely does not* say "Women are to be second-class citizens because they are under men's authority and men are to be first-class citizens because they have the really good position of being free from authority." To be a man is to be

under authority, to be a woman is to be under authority, and to be human is to be under authority. To masculism this looks demeaning because immature masculinity resists being under authority or being in community or any other thing that men embrace when they grow up. But Orthodoxy is a call to grow up, and it is a call to men to be contributing members of a community and to be under authority. To tell men, "Be independent!" is to tell them, "Refuse to grow up!"

What about women? Shouldn't they be passive and dependent? Let's look at one of the Bible's most complete treatments of what a woman should be like. I'll give my own slightly free translation from the Greek version of Proverbs (31:10-31):

Who can find a valorous wife?

She is more precious than precious stones.

Her husband wholeheartedly trusts her, and will have no lack of treasures.

Her whole life works good for her husband.

She gathers wool and linen and weaves with her hands.

She has become like a trading ship from afar, and she gathers her living.

She rises at night, and gives food to her house, and assigns work to her maids.

She examines and buys a farm, and plants a vineyard with the fruit of her hands.

She girds her loins with strength and strengthens her arms for work.

She tastes how good it is to work, and her candle stays lit the whole night long.

She reaches her hands to collective work, and applies her hands to the spindle.

She opens her hands to the needy, and extends fruit to the poor.

Her husband does not worry about the men at home when he spends time abroad;

All her household has clothing.

She makes double weight clothing for her husband,

And linen and scarlet for herself.

Her husband is respected when he engages in important business at the City Hall.

When he is seated in council with the elders of the land.  
She makes fine linens and sells belts to the Canaanites.  
She opens her mouth with heedfulness and order, and is in control of her tongue.  
She clothes herself in strength and honor, and rejoices in the future.  
The ways of her household are secure, and she does not eat the bread of idleness.  
She opens her mouth with wisdom, according to the deep law.  
Her mercy for her children prepares them, and they grow rich, and her husband praises her.  
Many daughters have obtained wealth, and many have worked valiantly, but you have surpassed them all.  
Charm is false, and a woman's [physical] beauty is shallow:  
For a wise woman is blessed, and let her praise the fear of the Lord.  
Give her the fruit of her labors, and let her husband be praised at the City Hall.

I have several things to say about this text. To open with, I'll understand if you say this is an intimidating standard to be held up against, but if you say this affirms the ideal of women as passive and delicate, I'm going to have to ask what on earth you mean. Second, if you read the text closely, you can see hints of how important homes were to business and charity. Most business and charity were based in the home. Third, most translations use not quite the right word when they say, "Who can find a good wife?" The word used is not just "good". It's a word one could use of a powerful soldier. Fourth, at the risk of sounding snide, the words about not measuring womanhood by physical beauty beat body image feminism to the punch by about three thousand years. Fifth and finally, the text talks about this woman as a lot of things—as strong, as doing business, as farming, as manufacturing. But there's one thing it does not say. It does not interpret "woman" in terms of "victim."

There is something somewhat strange going on. If we ask what is the wealthiest nation on earth, it's the U.S.A. If we ask what nation wields the most political clout on earth, it's the U.S.A. And if we ask some slightly different questions, and ask what nation feminism has had the most success reforming the culture, the U.S. might not be at the very top, but

it's at least *near* the top. The same is true if we ask what nation women hold the most political clout in: the U.S. is either at the top or near the top. If we ask what nations women hold the most civil rights, and have most successfully entered traditionally male occupations, the U.S. is probably near the top. Now let us turn to still another kind of question: what are the women in the most powerful, and one of the most feminist-reformed, nations in the world, doing? If we're talking about uneducated and lower-class women, the answer is simply living life as women. But if we look at educated, middle-class women, the answer tends to be simple but quite different: they are fighting in the fray for the lowest rung on the ladder of victimization.

To be fair to feminists, I must hastily add that it's a fray because it has a lot of participants besides feminists. The handicapped, gay, and racial minorities are also fighting, and it seems that everybody wants in. For that matter, a good many able-bodied, straight, white men also want in on the action; many middle-aged white applicants complain that affirmative action has biased the hiring process against them. To many of those who do not belong to an easily recognized victim's group, the cry is, "When can I be a victim so I can get some rights?" It seems that fighting for the lowest rung on the ladder of victimization has become the American national sport.

It seems like I'm mentioning a lot of paradoxes about feminism. Let me mention something else that concerns me. The term "consciousness raising" sounds like something everybody should support—after all, what could be wrong with enhancing someone's consciousness? But what does this term mean? To be somewhat blunt, "consciousness raising" means taking women who are often happy and well-adjusted members of society and making them hurt and miserable, not to mention alienated. Among feminists today, the more a woman identifies with the feminist movement, the more hurt and angry she is, the more she seems to be able to see past appearances and uncover a world that is unspeakably hostile to women. For that matter, historically the more feminism has developed and the more success feminism has had reforming society, the more women, or at least feminists, are sure the world is grinding an invisible, or if you prefer, highly visible, axe against women. Are there alternatives

to this? What about feminists who say that going back isn't an option? I'm not going to try to unravel whether there is an escape; I'm focusing on a different question, whether "consciousness raising" contributes to living in joy. If an animal's leg is caught in a steel trap, the only game in town may be to gnaw off its own leg. The question of, "Is it necessary?" is one question, but I'm focusing on the question of, "Is it basically good?" For the animal, chewing off its own leg is *not* good, even if it's the only game in town, and taking women who are happy and making them miserable is *not* good. You can argue that it is the only game in town, but if it's a necessary evil, it is still an evil, and naming this process "consciousness raising" is a bit like taking a piece of unconstitutional legislation that rescinds our civil liberties and naming it the "USA Patriot Act." It's a really cool name hiding something that's not so cool. The issue of whether there is anything better is one issue (I believe Orthodoxy is a better alternative), but there are two different issue going on here, and it is not clear that "consciousness raising" benefits women.

I've raised some unsettling points about feminism. And at this point I would like to suggest that Orthodoxy is what feminism is reaching for. What do I mean? There are a lot of points of contact between feminism's indictment of what is wrong with patriarchy and Orthodoxy's indictment of what is wrong in the West. (Both are also kook magnets, but we won't go into that.) I mentioned one thing that feminism and Orthodoxy have in common; there are a great many more, and some of them are deep. But there are also differences. Orthodoxy doesn't deliver women who are hurt and angry; Orthodoxy has a place for women to be women, and for women to enjoy life. Feminism tries to be pro-woman, but ends up giving its most vitriolic treatment to women who disagree with it: we do not have the sisterhood of all women, as feminism should be, but a limited sisterhood that only includes feminists. Orthodoxy has its own vitriol, but there is also a great tradition of not judging; even in our worship people are doing different things and nobody cares about what the next person is doing. We don't believe salvation ends at our church doors, and in general we don't tell God who can and cannot be saved. Feminism is a deep question, and Orthodoxy is a deep answer.

That is at least a simplistic picture; it's complex, but I cannot help feeling I've done violence to my subject matter. It seems my treatment

has combined the power and strength of a nimble housecat with the agility and grace of a mighty elephant. I would like to close with something related to what I said in the beginning, about knowing.

Christiane Northrup's *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom* talks about how women do not always feel the need to rush and get to the point, not because they are doing a bad job of getting that task out of the way (as necessary but unpleasant), but because to women things are interconnected, and the things a woman says before "the point" are things she sees as connected that add something to the point. This article has some of the qualities *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom* finds in women, and I see things as interconnected. Beyond analysis, there is synthesis. If this article discusses many things that are connected to the point, that is not because I am trying to write like a woman would. It's not something extra that I've decided to add; in fact it would be difficult for me to uproot this from how I communicate. And it's *not* because I am trying to balance out my masculinity by being more feminine, or be androgynous, or because I'm trying to be woman-like out of a guilt factor. There are other reasons why, but I would suggest that it's an example of Orthodox manhood at work. Not the only example, and certainly not the best, but my point is that there is an important sense in which Orthodoxy is what feminism is reaching for. But to immediately get to the point would give an impression that is strange and deceptive, and almost completely fail to convey what is meant by the claim. That is why I've been spending my time exploring a web of interconnections that help show what that claim means.

Orthodoxy is about helping us to be fully human, and that includes divinely inspired support for both men and women. It is other things as well, but part of why I became Orthodox was that I realized there were problems with being a man in Western Christianity. Orthodoxy is the most gender balanced Christian confession in terms of numbers, and I came to ask the rather abrasive question, "Does Orthodoxy draw more men than Evangelicalism because Orthodoxy understands sanctification as deification and Evangelicalism understands sanctification as a close personal relationship with another man?" I never got much of an answer to that question (besides "Yes"). And even though I'm looking for more in Orthodoxy than help being a man, one of the reasons I became Orthodox

Orthodoxy than help being a man, one of the reasons I became Orthodox was that it is the best environment for being a man that I found. And I'm coming to realize that men are only half the picture in Orthodoxy.

Because everything is connected, if you hurt men, women get hurt, and if you hurt women, men get hurt... and if you think about what this means, it means that you cannot make an environment that is healthy for men but is destructive to women. Nor can you make an environment that is healthy for women but destructive to men. Orthodoxy's being good for men is not something that is stolen from women. It is good for men because God instituted it as a gift to the whole human race, not only for men.

There are things that are deeply wrong with Western culture. Would you rather be working on an analysis of the problem, or learn to grow into its solution?

# The Fulfillment of Feminism

There was one time when I was sitting in Danada Convenient Care, waiting for a blood draw. A mother led in a little girl who was bawling, sat her down in the waiting area, and began to attend to all the little details: sign in on a clipboard, speak with the office staff, sign a waiver, present an insurance card. The girl was bawling because she had apparently slammed her thumbnail in a door. After a little while I came over and began talking with her. I asked her what her favorite color was. I asked, "What kind of musical instrument does a dog play?" (answer: a trombone). I tried to get her talking, but most of what I said went over her head. After a while, I realized two things. First, I was failing rather miserably to engage her in conversation; I literally could not think of many things to say that a child of that age could respond to. And second, she stopped crying. Completely. I was struck by the near-total lack of pain in her face as she looked at me.

Eventually, I was called in for my blood draw. When I came out, things were totally different. The mother was sitting next to her daughter, and paying attention to her. The daughter was drawn into her mother's attention. I said goodbye and left.

On another occasion, I was at a dinner at someone's house, and my eyes were drawn to a goldfish in a fishbowl. I asked the hostess how old the goldfish was, and her answer was followed shortly by my asking how she managed to keep a goldfish for that long. And I remember vividly her answer. She said, "I talk to it," and then stooped down and began talking to the fish like it was a small child. The fish began eagerly swimming

towards her, as if it were trying to swim through the glass to meet her.

Love is a spiritual force, and I thought her answer was looney then because I didn't understand that there are more than material forces that can affect whether a fish is healthy. I thought that the idea of love or hate affecting how a plant grows made a great exotic feature in fantasy, but in the real world science accounts for all the factors in how long a fish lives. Of course it matters that the hostess fed the goldfish and kept the fishbowl clean, but the reason the fish was alive and healthy was because she loved it. (And she's a woman with a *big* heart.) And it matters, no doubt, that I made eye contact with the little girl and squatted to try to be at eye level. But the reason I was able to draw her out of intense pain was the power that love has. I can count on my fingers the times I've been in worse pain than smashing my thumbnails as a child; her pain was atrocious. What was strong enough to pull her out of that pain wasn't my posture, or anything suave at my clumsy failures to say things that were age-appropriate. What pulled her out of her deep pain was love, and I was delighted to see her mother, who had been so busy with a thousand necessary details, giving her attention and love to her now comforted daughter. The mother told me as I said goodbye, "You have a very gentle way about you," and I hold that story in my heart as one of my triumphs.

It's hard to pick out a theme more foundational to feminist ethics, and perhaps the whole of feminism, than caring. Many feminists understand feminism as trying to move from a world dominated by male aggression to a world nurtured through motherly love and caring. And I would like to talk about love in Orthodoxy after talking about aggression.

The term "male aggression" is used a lot. The word "aggression" has a double meaning. Narrowly, "aggression" means "unprovoked violence," a violence that is evil. But there is another meaning to "aggressive," when a doctor pursues an "aggressive" treatment, for instance. Here "aggressive" does not literally mean violence and need not be at all evil... but there is a connection between the two. There is a real reason why we speak of an "aggressive" business plan as well as an "aggressive" assault. Why does "aggressive" sometimes mean "energetically active," something that can be good, when the "main" usage is for something despicable?

Men are more likely to be aggressive than women. In which sense? Actually, both, and there's a link between the two senses that offers insight into what it means to be a man. Talking about "male aggression" is not simply man-bashing, even if it is often done in exactly that fashion. There is something spirited and something fiery that is part of manhood, something that can be very destructive, but something that can be channeled. I don't think any of us need to be told that masculine aggressiveness can be destructive. But that is not the full story of masculine energy. Channeled properly, male aggressive energy means projects. It means adventures and exploration. It means building buildings, questing after discoveries, giving vision to a community. The same thing that can be very destructive can also energize a man's gifts to society. It can be transformed.

I would pose the question: If masculine aggression can be transformed in this manner, what about feminine and motherly caring?

Love is big in Orthodoxy. God is love. God is light, and other things can also be said, but he is love. The entirety of ethics and moral law is about loving God and one's neighbor. The entirety of spiritual discipline, which Orthodoxy as well as feminist spirituality recognize as important for sustained growth, is a spiritual support not simply to one's salvation, but to love. If my spiritual discipline does not turn me in love towards you, it is fundamentally incomplete. Spiritual discipline without love for others is self-contradictory as a friendship without another person.

What's the relationship between love and caring? Are they synonyms? There is a deep connection, but I believe that an important difference shows up in the question of abortion.

"My body, my choice!" makes a powerful and easy-to-remember political slogan. But nobody believes it, or at least people who have abortions don't believe it. Post-abortion is not about assuring women that it was just a surgery that removed something unwanted, but quite to the contrary is about helping women grieve the loss of a child. You may be able to make a legal argument that the child is part of the mother's body, or say it's just a *potential* life that was stopped. But trying to use that in post-abortion counseling is like telling someone who's drinking milk that

has gone bad that the milk is really quite fresh. You might be able to convince *other* people that the milk is really quite fresh, but not the person who's actually *drinking* it. And women who have abortions are the ones who are drinking the rancid milk. In coffee table discussions you can deny that the death of a child is involved and say it's just unwanted tissue. If you're not drinking the milk, you can be conned into believing it's still fresh. But if you're *drinking* it? Post-abortion counseling helps women grieve the loss of a child, and for that reason cannot say "It was just a *potential* life!"

If women who have abortions don't believe the rhetoric, then why does abortion take place? Quite often, these women feel stuck between a rock and a hard place in which there seem to simply be no good options. This is part of why the pro-life movement has made a major shift to offering compassion and practical help to people in that position. It's a difficult position, and feminists will often argue that abortion is the most caring way out. It is not caring, the line goes, to bring a child into a situation where it will not be cared for, and women should be caring to themselves by not saddling themselves with too much responsibility. And so the ethics of caring sometimes finds abortion the appropriate choice.

In many ethical frameworks you can get away with saying that a mother's love is one love among others. That simply doesn't fly here. In feminism, a mother's love is considered the most intimate love and a mother's caring is meant to be the foundation of a better way of living. It is feminists who have given motherly caring the greatest emphasis and the most central place, and feminists who most fervently defend what any woman who's had an abortion knows and grieves as the loss of a child. It's almost as if a coalition of historians and archivists were the ones most fervently defending the practice of burning old documents.

My reason for mentioning this is not simply irony. My reason for pointing this out is to suggest that something's wrong, and maybe motherly caring isn't strong enough to support the weight feminism asks it to bear. Part of this odd picture is surely rationalization: part of what feminists want is the freedom to live a certain way but not deal with its consequences: be sexually active and not deal with children when they don't want to, and if killing, or in today's carefully chosen terms,

"reproductive choice," is the necessary price for freedom on those terms, they accept that price. Part of this is rationalization, but not all. Part of this is the weakness of caring when it is asked to do what feminists hope it will do. Asking motherly caring to do what feminists want is kind of like trying to drive a top-notch car engine to work. It may be a very good engine, and an engine may be *indispensible* to any functioning car, but things go much better if we have the whole car. I'm not just saying that abortion is wrong. I'm saying that if the people who bear the banner of "mother's love" as the healing balm for society's ills are the ones who defend that practice, we have a red flag that may point to another problem: maybe caring might not do what feminists think it does. Maybe it's not enough.

So what would a whole car look like?

I'd like to quote a passage that has one teacher's take on love:

Then a Jewish law scholar stood up to test Jesus, and said "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus answered him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?"

He said to him, "You must love the Lord your God out of your whole heart, with your whole soul, with your whole strength, and with your whole mind, and love your neighbor even as you love yourself."

He said, "That's right; do this and you will live."

But the scholar wanted to be proved righteous before Jesus. He said, "Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus answered and said, "Someone was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and brigands assaulted him, stripping him and leaving him half dead. And by providence a priest was going down that way and saw him and passed by, giving him a wide berth. Likewise, a Levite was travelling the same way, saw him, and gave

him a wide berth. Then a travelling *Samaritan* came across him and was moved with mercy, in the depths of his bowels, and came over, and dressed his wounds with oil and wine, mounted him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and nurtured him. And the next day he gave a good chunk of his wealth to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him, and if he needs anything more, I will repay you when I come back.' Now which one of these three do you suppose showed himself a neighbor to the man who was assaulted by brigands?"

He said, "The one who showed mercy to him."

Jesus said to him, "Go and live that way."

(Luke 10:25-37, my translation) Cloud and Townsend's appropriately titled *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No to Take Control of Your Life* argues that this story is a good illustration of their version of boundaries, and that was when I started listening to some nagging doubts about their theory. They said this was a good example of a measured response: the Samaritan made a moderate and limited response, got the Jew to safety and paid some expenses, and left. Cloud and Townsend ask us to imagine the wounded Jew saying "I need you to stay here," and the moderate Samaritan drawing a their-version-of-appropriate-boundary and saying "I've made a moderate response and need to move on." and saying "No," the way their version of boundaries draws a line and says, "No." And I have not heard a treatment of this story that is further from the truth.

The route from Jerusalem to Jericho was up until the eighteenth century a dangerous place with bandits, and one well-known ruse was to have one bandit lying in the way, apparently grievously wounded, and if someone stopped, the bandits would take advantage of that mercy to assault and rob him. Jesus was saying that the Samaritan stopped in a bad part of Chicago in the middle of the night because a voice in a dark alley said, "Help me." And the Jews and Samaritans hated each other; they didn't have, like today, a setup where people want not to be racist. For that Samaritan to help that Jew was for one gang member to stick his neck out pretty far for a stranger who was from a hostile gang. This is

near the top of stupid things you *absolutely* don't do. Was Jesus exaggerating? He was making a quite ludicrous exaggeration to make the point that your neighbor is every person you meet and every person you do not meet, every person who you like, every person who bothers you, every person who is kind, every enemy and every pest you loathe. Jesus was exaggerating, in fact, to respond to someone who was trying to be too comfortable and make him pointedly uncomfortable. I believe the other person was expecting Jesus to draw a reasonable line of reasonable boundaries to his love, and Jesus was quite blunt about setting an impossible and unreasonable standard.

If we try hard enough, we can shut our eyes and neutralize this story. We can neutralize how uncomfortable it makes us; we can neutralize any way this story might contradict today's psychological dogma of boundaries... and we can neutralize the priceless pearl that this story is meant to help us find. And this story does hold a priceless pearl for us.

The point is not that if someone asks you into a situation that makes you uncomfortable, you must go. I don't really think the point is to set much of *any* kind of literal prescription for how far your love must go. The point is that what is being asked is impossible. Simply impossible, and beyond your power, and beyond my power. It's a command of, "You must be strong enough to lift a mountain." If someone said, "You must be strong enough to lift four hundred pounds off the ground," that would be possible for some people with dedicated training. But the most powerfully built athlete who goes through the most disciplined training cannot lift a medium-sized boulder, let alone a mountain. Jesus isn't saying, "You must be strong enough to lift four hundred pounds," which is something that some of us could achieve through a gargantuan effort. He's saying, "You must be strong enough to lift a mountain," and he's exaggerating, but the whole point is that he's asking something impossible. Only the divine can love that way.

The whole secret hinges on that. The divine became human that the human might become divine. The Creator entered into the creation that the creation might enter into the Creator. Orthodoxy is not a set of rules, however good, to safeguard purely human love. The point of Orthodoxy is to be transformed by the divine love so we can live the life that God lives

and love with the love that God loves. It is to live the life of Heaven, beginning here and now. It is to transfigure every human love so that it becomes divine love. Out of love, God became as we are, that out of love we might become as he is. And what feminism seeks in caring grows to its full stature in Orthodoxy.

There is something fundamental that is missed about Orthodoxy if it is understood as a set of practices organized around love, or a set of ideas in which love is prominent, or a movement which tries to help people be more loving. That has some truth, but the truth is more than that. The human cannot be understood without the divine; to be human is to participate, however imperfectly, in God. Orthodoxy can no longer be understood as a movement or a system of ideas and practices than a campfire can be understood as a collection of sticks. The sticks are not just arranged a certain way in a campfire; they burn, and you cannot understand even the arrangement of the sticks unless you are aware of the fire that is the reason they are arranged. Not only to be Orthodox but to be human is to be made in the image of God, which in Orthodoxy has always meant that we are not separate miniatures of God, but manifestations of his glory. God is not merely a First Cause who started things off; he is the blazing Sun whose light shines on everything that daylight illuminates.

Orthodoxy is the fulfillment of feminism. If feminism is a deep question, Orthodoxy is a deep answer that responds to the depths of motherly love with the limitless depths of divine love. This is not just with love. More spiritual feminists tend to like the idea of synchronicity, the idea that materialist causation isn't the whole picture. Synchronicity is the idea that they're not just isolated domino chains with one domino knocking another domino down; the chains are linked in ways that go beyond dominos bumping into each other. There is a richer picture. And Orthodoxy believes all this and more. Orthodoxy has never been through the Enlightenment, when people tried to argue that scientific knowledge is the only valid kind of knowledge and that the kind of cause-and-effect science studies is not only valid but the only way things come about. People used to believe something richer, and in Orthodoxy we still do: that there can be reasons why things happen; there is an *explanation* for

"*Why?*" and not just a *mechanism* that answers "*How?*" Dominoes do fall, but you will never understand the picture if you only think there are isolated chains of dominoes. All of this is part of the Orthodox understanding of divine providence. Yet providence is deeper than synchronicity. Synchronicity is a jailbreak; providence is a voyage home. Less flatteringly, synchronicity is providence with its head cut off. Synchronicity recognizes interesting designs in the events of our lives. Providence turns from those interesting designs to an interesting designer, and to some Orthodox, the idea of trying to be spiritual by delving into synchronicity and other themes of Jungian psychology is like inviting people over for wine and cheese and serving Velveeta. We have Camembert, we have Brie, we have goat cheese, and when Orthodox see how often "being spiritual" to a feminist means "digging into Jungian psychology," we want to tell you that Velveeta isn't your only choice! Jesus said, "You will know a tree by its fruits:" people's lives can offer a serious red flag about whether you should trust them and trust what they say. Orthodoxy has saints with better lives than a psychiatrist widely known to have slept with his patients in a relationship that was far more problematic than a mere case of raging hormones. Velveeta's the easiest cheese to find at most stores, but it's possible to find better. Orthodoxy deeply engaged the pillars of Jungian psychology far earlier than Jung did, and the reason we reach for something better is that there is something better to reach for.

Feminism senses that there is something wrong with Western culture, and is searching for healing. One of the strange things about Orthodoxy is that you realize you were right all along. Becoming Orthodox has been a confirmation of things I've sensed, and this is not because I was a particular type of Christian or because I am a man, but because I'm human. I believe that becoming Orthodox, to a feminist, will mean much more than an affirmation of what feminism yearns for. But that's not the only strange thing. One Calvin and Hobbes strip shows the two characters walking through a wood. Calvin asks, "Do you believe in evolution? You know, do you believe that humans evolved from monkeys?" Hobbes' answer is simple: "*I can't tell any difference.*" The strip ends with Calvin chasing Hobbes. Orthodoxy might answer the question, "Do you believe evolution is the right answer to the question,

'Why is there life as we know it?'" by saying:

No, evolution is absolutely not the right answer to the question, "Why is there life as we know it?" For that matter, it is not even a wrong answer to the question, "*Why* is there life as we know it?" It is not an answer to any "Why?" question at all. It is an answer to a "*How?*" question, and even if evolution were the whole truth and didn't have any problems answering, "*How* is there life as we know it?" it is a mechanism to tell how things happen and not an explanation of why things happened. To say, "Why is there life as we know it? Because life evolved just like the theory of evolution says," is a bit like saying, "Why is the dining room light on? Because the switch is in the 'on' position, causing electricity to flow so that the light glows brightly." That's how the light is on, but the reason *why* the light is on is that someone decided, "I want light."

The theory of evolution doesn't answer that question. It might answer a different question, but the theory of evolution is not so much false as a distraction, if you are interested in the great and terrible question, "*Why?*" Instead of figuring out whether evolution is the correct mechanism, you might realize that it answers a different question, and start to ask the question, "*Why* is there life as we know it?"

"Why is there life as we know it?" is a meaty question, a you can grow into, and if you grow into it, you can learn about a creation that reflects God's glory. You can learn about layers of symbol, and a physical world that is tied up with the spiritual and manifests its glory. You can learn about many layers of existence, and the body that has humanity as its head. You can learn that the mysteries in a woman's heart resonate with the mysteries of life, and begin to see how a woman in particular is an image of the earth. You can learn about all sorts of spiritual qualities that the theory of evolution will never lead you to ask about. And you might learn that there are other questions, deeper questions to grow into, and start to grow into something even deeper than trying to answer questions.

So no, the theory of evolution is not the right way to answer the

question, "Why is there life as we know it?"

And most of the time it happens without any philosophy or need to wrap your mind around some dense or subtle idea. Part of Orthodoxy is being caught off-guard by God again and again. It's being informed, "I can't tell any difference." It's asking how to pursue a great goal and learning that you shouldn't have been pursuing that goal in the first place. It's trying to find the best way to get all your ducks lined up, and asking the Lord's help, and realizing that the Lord is calling for you to trust him and let him worry about the ducks. *If* he wants to. These are two sides of a paradox, and Orthodoxy presents them both to everyone.

And both are part of coming home.

# **Un-man's Tales:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## The Un-man's own tales

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

actually created her...

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

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

## A strange silence in the criticism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary](#)

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

## Un-man's Tales for Grown-Ups

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

## Conclusion

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

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

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

# "Inclusive" Language and Other Debates

## How I scared off all the other advisors

Before I became Orthodox, I entered a diploma in theology program and wanted to do a thesis on programming-style "design patterns" and recurring patterns in Biblical Egalitarian argument where problems in the arguments, it seemed to me, raised a red flag about the conclusions. I managed to scare off most prospective advisors by the idea of using concepts used in computer science, and almost scared off even the Biblical scholar who handles the computer stuff at a place connected with the university before (somewhat by accident) he looked at the concept I wanted to carry over from computer science and concluded that it wasn't so scary after all, and in fact while he said, "I have never heard of an approach like this before," the concept itself was nowhere so scary to a scholar in theology as the impression I gave by how I introduced my intended thesis. I wrote a thesis under his direction, and at the end of the year, mostly in gesture of thanks, I gave him a classic text in object-oriented programming's "design patterns."

The scholar is a major scholar in Biblical Egalitarian circles, as in a plenary speaker at CBE conferences. He gave me kind and appropriate direction in a thesis that critique common styles of argument associated with convictions that are important to him, and we've remained in contact every now and then. There may be important distinctions within Biblical Egalitarians, but when he directed me he was working to help me produce a good thesis and did so without trying to lead me to his position, and I do not know what exact *stripe* of Biblical Egalitarian he is.

## Defining terms

I use the terms *Biblical Egalitarian* and *complementarian* heavily here. The two terms represent the liberal and conservative camps on issues of men, women, and gender. The flagship organization for Biblical Egalitarians (or, more simply, egalitarians) is [Christians for Biblical Equality](#); the flagship organization for complementarians is [The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#).

**Biblical Egalitarians** try to combine Christianity with feminist concerns of various stripes. For one example, they adamantly believe the Bible's "In Christ there is no... male nor female" and, more specifically, consistently try to neutralize "Wives, submit to your husbands as if to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave his life for her..." to make room for "no male nor female". To the Egalitarian, if you *really* believe "In Christ there is no male nor female", you believe it on terms informed by feminism. In my experience Biblical Egalitarianism is always argued with sophistry; what got me off sitting on the fence was a forceful presentation of Biblical Egalitarianism clothed in rhetoric that profoundly disturbed me. There is more to Biblical egalitarianism than inclusive language advocacy, but one part of their concern is that using "man" or "brother" when your intent is generic is perpetuating an injustice towards women. Overall there are several feminist-influenced concerns in Biblical egalitarianism; inclusive language is one of them. The basic goal of Bible scholarship pursued by Biblical Egalitarians is to arrive at an understanding of key passages that is more informed by feminist concerns.

**Complementarians**, in a name as carefully chosen as "egalitarians", argue that we are missing something until we understand men and women as *complementary*. They tend to believe that "In Christ there is no... male nor female" and "Wives, submit to your husbands as if to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave his life for her..." both belong to the same whole and in fact seem to both be cut from the same cloth. *Complementarians* are people who say, "No, that's not good," in response to feminism trying to uproot elements

of traditional society. However, groups like the [Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#) are making a proactive effort to take a positive position. They are not simply making a negative reaction to change; they are trying to offer a carefully considered positive position about why specific changes are not good and what a real, serious alternative to those changes would be. The basic goal of Bible scholarship pursued by complementarians is to arrive at an understanding that is more Biblical—not for us to adjust the *Bible*, but for the Bible to adjust *us*.

"Inclusive" language is not the only issue for either, but it is not a trivial issue, and I focus on it here. I would briefly suggest that what is at issue is not whether women are included, but the *terms* of inclusion: belabored "inclusive" language pushes to a Biblical egalitarian version of inclusion, while traditional language includes women on more complementarian terms.

## Where I stand

Where do I stand? "It's complicated" may be the best short answer, but that's misleading. First of all, though I am closer to complementarianism than egalitarianism, it does not mean "I'm a complementarian but I'd rather not say so plainly," and second of all, it does not mean, "I'm trying to forge my own new path between the two extremes." Then what on earth *does* it mean? Um, it's complicated.

The Catholic Church teaches that Catholics and Orthodox believe the same things, and ultimately the only barrier to reunification is that the Orthodox fail to lovingly recognize that we should restore full communion. I responded to that in [An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism](#). Some Orthodox have found it a bit forceful, but more have found it astute in its observations. But Catholics have only given one response: "**FOUL!** There's no way you can understand us if you are saying what you are saying about Thomas Aquinas and such." And as Orthodox, I find the question "Are you a complementarian or egalitarian?" something like "Are you Catholic or Protestant?" as a false dilemma.

Before becoming Orthodox, I wrote [an essay called "Knights and Ladies" that tried to pin down as qualities manhood and womanhood, and suggested a made-up term "qualitarian" as an alternative to "complementarian."](#) It's a piece that I consulted several men and women in writing, that complementarians seem to like and egalitarians seem to critique, but I now regard it as flawed. It's not exactly that I want to mix in more egalitarianism, but the basic project I took on was a thick description of qualities as a line of response, and a thick description of qualities is part of postmodern Zeitgeist and *not* a real part of Orthodox theology, and as such it is (arguably) a fairly successful attempt to bark up the wrong tree in offering a rebuttal.

There is a forum where I posted certain arguments and received counter-arguments from Orthodox scholars that were subtly reminiscent of the kinds of arguments I had studied in Biblical Egalitarian texts in that thesis. For one example, I made an argument from experience and

that thesis. For one example, I made an argument from experience and basic observations about society, and it was dismissed by an Orthodox scholar who had just published a paper with his own thesis. The stated ground? I wasn't arguing from the Fathers. I'd almost like to say that I let that dismissal slide; a close reading of Church Fathers is not what powers the Church Fathers, but writing of spiritual realities out of experience. But I dropped that line of argument, and in response to his dismissal of both my argument and other attempts to define the qualities of male and female, I pulled from the beloved theologian St. Maximus Confessor and said that, like the Cappadocians and some other figures, St. Maximus Confessor did very much root for transcending the differences between male and female, but this was in connection with a theology that sought to transcend the differences between the spiritual and the material, paradise and the inhabited world, Heaven and earth, and ultimately the uncreated and the created. In every one of the other four cases, the desire to transcend a difference assumes there's a difference in place to begin with. When I gave this answer to a request to argue from the Church Fathers, he dismissed St. Maximus on this point altogether, saying that his widely loved theology was just flawed.

This example may invite a gentle response of, "Your interlocutor was a scholar who had just published a paper that you were hacking away at; it would be naive to expect him to welcome your argument." And perhaps it would be, but this is an example of a common thread; though Orthodox heirarchs have not necessarily treated feminism as something to put their foot down on, and there are Biblical Egalitarians and feminists in the Orthodox Church, every single argument I've seen from an Orthodox trying to help me be more open and receptive to those perspectives has arguments that smell really funny—a strong whiff of eau de red flag.

I haven't spent too much more time revising my beliefs after becoming Orthodox, not really because I think I've arrived at the full truth, but because as people grow in Orthodoxy, sooner or later they figure out that there is more important work than straightening out their worldviews, and they let go of reasoning about truth because they are working to drink Truth Himself. Nonetheless, I wanted to give this email conversation between him and myself, and pay attention to how appropriate or inappropriate the rhetoric is in particular.

## Should we really be that concerned about rhetoric?

I pay very close attention to rhetoric, rhetorical examples, and argument in these pages. There is a reason why which arises from my experience.

In the [Sermon on the Mount](#), Christ calls for a very close care to the fruits people bear:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

The most obvious "fruits" might be how people are treated, especially the less powerful, sexual behavior, and so on, but as time has passed rhetoric has time and again been faithful to its tree: commendable positions are advanced with commendable rhetoric and false positions are advanced with slippery rhetoric. It is a rare case, rare indeed, where truths we would best heed are heralded by rhetorical treachery.

I do not fault the *presence* of rhetoric; an observer would say that my writing is just as rhetorical, and just as much contains some kinds of argument and not others, as any piece whose rhetoric and argument I treat as cause for concern. But certain kinds of rhetoric aren't just a rotten wrapping paper around healthgiving fruit. They betray that much more is tainted in the offering than merely a slight logical fallacy here, a misleading example there.

I would not limit the "fruit" in the [Sermon on the Mount](#) to be rhetoric alone; I don't really believe it is one of the main fruits Christ intended to evoke, compared to how one treats the poor (for instance).

But it is an important fruit in *one* respect: it is available to us as long as we have the message.

In this day of the Internet, false prophets may rarely meet us face to face and we may have little clue of a teacher's sexual fidelity, or lack thereof, or whether the person arguing with us feels entitled to socially acceptable theft, whether to take office supplies or to listen to music without paying the artist or those who worked to make the music available. It might take a Big Brother to tell us whether an activist bears good or bad fruit there. But there is one way we can attend to the prophets' fruits without Big Brother invasions of privacy: true and false prophet alike offer us their rhetoric, and it is well worth attending to this one fruit that is impossible to hide.

## Rhetoric that keeps on recurring—giving an answer when it appears in email

Let us turn to the conversation, which began after I put up a search engine and sent him a link; he followed a link and read, on my site, [The Commentary](#), and then [Inclusive Language Greek Manuscript Discovered](#). He responded to both:

### **My advisor wrote:**

BTW I read your "Commentary" piece a couple of times. I wasn't sure what you were getting at. At first glance it looked like you are rejecting all interpretations which take cultural context into account. At second reading it looks like you may merely be warning readers that humanity itself hasn't changed, so we shouldn't re-interpret the Bible as if people weren't so clever then. But I wasn't sure.

But it left me wondering:

\* Are you saying we shouldn't make allowance for greater ignorance in the past?

We are no more intelligent now, but we do have better understanding about medicine, geology, astronomy etc. This affects the way we interpret things like "the moon turned to blood" - which we would now regard as an atmospheric phenomenon and nothing to do with the nature of the moon.

\* Are you saying we shouldn't make allowance for cultural situations in the past?

God expects the same morality from humans at all times, but don't the rules change in order to result in the same principles? I'm thinking of things like slavery, which in the OT was restricted to certain permitted types (6-yr voluntary slavery, and minimum rights for lifelong slaves from warfare), and was tolerated in the NT "for the sake of the Gospel", and was increasingly opposed by the church (albeit very gradually) with as much speed as society permitted.

as much speed as society permitted.

Perhaps I didn't read it carefully enough.

Then I went on to read your piece on the gender-neutral MS. Do you really think that there are people who want to accurately reflect the gender of everything in the Bible? The NLT and others have followed the TNIV lead, and even the ESV has a policy of translating anthropos as 'people' or something similarly neutral. I don't know ANY version which uses the pronoun "it" for the Holy Spirit when the Greek does - eg in Jn.14:17. How would you decide when to follow the Greek and when to follow English convention?

I guess that your aim for these pieces of writing is to provoke the reader to think about the issues, rather than give an answer. You have certainly succeeded in my case!

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### **My advisor wrote:**

\* Are you saying we shouldn't make allowance for cultural situations in the past?  
God expects the same morality from humans at all times, but don't the rules change in order to result in the same principles? I'm thinking of things like slavery, which in the OT was restricted to certain permitted types (6-yr voluntary slavery, and minimum rights for lifelong slaves from warfare), and was tolerated in the NT "for the sake of the Gospel", and was increasingly opposed by the church (albeit very gradually) with as much speed as society permitted.

Perhaps I didn't read it carefully enough.

### **I wrote:**

Perhaps one way we should put it is that we should attend to the beam in our own eye.

Then I went on to read your piece on the gender-neutral MS. Do you really think that there are people who want to accurately reflect the gender of everything in the Bible? The NLT and others

reflect the gender of everything in the Bible? The NLT and others have followed the TNIV lead, and even the ESV has a policy of translating anthropos as 'people' or something similarly neutral. I don't know ANY version which uses the pronoun "it" for the Holy Spirit when the Greek does - eg in Jn.14:17. How would you decide when to follow the Greek and when to follow English convention?

The point is not exactly that the English grammar of translations should follow Greek grammar as regards grammatical gender, but that what is going on in inclusive language isn't going on in the Bible.

This response is brief and enigmatic: not the most helpful. But in the following emails I address the concerns and touch on the same things from different angles.

Despite the communication weaknesses in my writing, I thought some of the points were worth sharing.

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### **My advisor wrote:**

\* Are you saying we shouldn't make allowance for cultural situations in the past?  
God expects the same morality from humans at all times, but don't the rules change in order to result in the same principles? I'm thinking of things like slavery, which in the OT was restricted to certain permitted types (6-yr voluntary slavery, and minimum rights for lifelong slaves from warfare), and was tolerated in the NT "for the sake of the Gospel", and was increasingly opposed by the church (albeit very gradually) with as much speed as society permitted.

### **I wrote:**

I wanted to comment on this point more specifically.

To an American, references to slavery first evoke field-slaves in our country. The movie *Malcolm X* has Malcolm on a TV show debate opposite a black opponent who was very educated, culturally almost white, and played to what a white audience then would like to hear for

their comfort. The host asked Malcolm what he called his opponent, and he shouted a racial slur and then distinguished between house- and field-slaves: the field-slave's lot was extremely rough; the house slave was much less difficult and could verge on effectively being a well and politely-treated servant. Compared to the field slave who faced rough realities, the house slave almost represented a leisure class and the house-slave's outlook and experience were white.

In the U.S., we no longer have people clothed in a few garments, meant to last, with cotton garments woven from the work of field slaves. We have instead many garments meant to wear out, and the culture of a fashion industry that socially enforces purchases above replacement of low-quality garments, made in sweatshops which wear people out faster than U.S. field slavery wore people out. And there are other areas where we are pushing forward not only on abortion, but on scientific use of human embryos meant to be destroyed. And I do not exclude the U.K. from this critique.

I would really not consider a picture to be complete that includes the abolition of slavery and remains, unlike St. John Chrysostom on slavery, silent on other areas where we do worse.

My initial response to his mention of slavery mentioned "a beam in our eye"; this was intended to specify one such beam that makes me skeptical of celebrations of how much we have progressed as a society.

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### **My advisor wrote:**

Could I press you a little more on what you mean by inclusive language? How would you translate the following:

Blessed is the man who ... ([Ps.1](#))  
If a brother sins against you... ([Lk.17.3](#))  
God made man in his own image, ... male and female he made them  
([Gen.1.27](#))

If we had read these in a modern English book, we'd assume the author was implying that

author was implying that

- \* women can't be blessed,
- \* sisters don't sin against you
- \* women aren't made in the image of God.

Some Bibles are translated to help people understand what the words were in the Greek and Hebrew, while others are translated to help people understand what God's message is, in their own language. It is fairly easy to translate those verses literally, but how would you translate them into modern English so that a reader wouldn't get the wrong impression about what the message is?

I'm trying to gauge opinions on this from a wide range of people, and I'd be interested in your response.  
But don't feel pressured into answering - I won't think badly of you if you don't have time to answer.

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### **My advisor wrote:**

Could I press you a little more on what you mean by inclusive language?  
How would you translate the following:

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If we had read these in a modern English book, we'd assume the author was implying that

- \* women can't be blessed,
- \* sisters don't sin against you
- \* women aren't made in the image of God.

### **I wrote:**

Your last paragraph almost begs the question; it's reminiscent of saying "humankind" even though never, outside of the shadow of inclusive language efforts, has "mankind" been understood to encompass

inclusive language efforts, has mankind been understood to encompass anything less than all of us.

"Exclusive" language is what "inclusive" language wants standard English to be. Inclusive language efforts, and specifically the efforts to recast the alternative as exclusive, redefining "man", "brother" (and even "mankind") to be male only, are not a more inclusive alternative to an unchanged option. They are an effort to replace a naturally inclusive language with a more belabored language, and redefine away the inclusive character of what is being attacked.

My point here is that "exclusive language" and "inclusive language" are no mere neutral and descriptive terms: they are loaded language that misrepresent what change is actually being advanced. An alternative, if pointed, terminology for "exclusive" language and "inclusive" language might be **naturally inclusive language** and **belabored inclusive language**.

"Exclusive" language is arguably *not* what inclusive language advocates say it is, language that includes women where the alternative is exclusive to them, except where inclusive language advocates have succeeded in redefining *naturally inclusive language* as exclusive language.

Furthermore, there are several things to untangle, and I give more than one answer to the question about how I would translate "If a brother..." and other passages because there is more than one thing to say. I write quite a few emails because there's really quite a lot tangled up in the remarks I am responding to.

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I wanted to add a couple of notes from a class that dealt in hardcore feminist theology. I am noting this specifically as something that I would not directly lump Biblical Egalitarians in with unless Biblical Egalitarians ask to be lumped in with them.

The first point was that several of them dealt with the question of an inclusive term for one person of unspecified gender, and in general did not opt to use "they" for one person. Several alternatives were tried,

including "s/he" (pronounced "she"), and one author tried hard to make the point that "she" and "her" could be entirely appropriate as a rightly inclusive term for males as well as females.

The second point is that so far as I remember, none of the feminist authors were of limited concern for adult women only; some might speak at one point and refer only to adults (in reference to aging, for instance), but all of the authors were concerned for girls, and from whenever life began in their eyes, a girl was a full-fledged member of the class of women to be cared for...

...but none of them raised concerns of "inclusive language" that "woman" is a term only referring to adults, and so is wrongly applied to a 14 year old or a 14 month old.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but it seems when feminists want to use language that will include all females, their term of choice works like the "exclusive" language of "man", "mankind", and such. The list of people who choose the language style of *naturally inclusive language*, when they want to include all members of a group, includes feminists who never flinch at using "women" when they mean to include all females—girls *every bit as much as* adult women.

And returning to the topic of my advisor and his Biblical Egalitarianism, while he clearly uses and advocates **gender**-inclusive language, he never once uses what might be called **age**-inclusive language. He may ask if a rendering of "Blessed is the man..." demands "Women can't be blessed", but he seems entirely unconcerned to clarify whether minors can be blessed. He never uses words like "child", "boy", "girl", "infant", etc: he applies sophistry to ask us to make it clear that *women* can be blessed, but the same effort is not made for children, even if they are girls!

It would appear that at least as far as age is concerned, my advisor assumes that what is called "exclusive language" in gender is not exclusive at all, but ***naturally inclusive***.

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### **My advisor wrote:**

Could I press you a little more on what you mean by inclusive language?

How would you translate the following:

Blessed is the man who ... (Ps.1)

If a brother sins against you... (Lk.17.3)

God made man in his own image, ... male and female he made them (Gen.1.27)

### **I wrote:**

I might also comment, before giving a brief interlude that the first example on Orthodox rather than Protestant kinds of exegesis refers to Christ primarily and us derivatively, which is an aside to the context as it has been:

The last example differs from the first two examples, where conservative and liberal readings of the underlying text alike take terms as generic.

In terms of Orthodox Church Fathers who can attract feminists, the Cappadocians are one group of usual suspects; St. Ephrem, who had women as well as men chanting liturgical teaching in liturgy, is another, and Kathleen McVey's *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* shows some of those concerns. At one point, "Branch" is the metaphorical name applied to the Cross and then Christ, and the translator explains that the term 'branch' is grammatically feminine and, at that point, renders repeated pronoun references to the Branch, which refer to Christ with varying ambiguity, as "She".

The footnote I take as an example of the French proverb "*Qui s'excuse, s'accuse*" (in politically correct English: "To excuse yourself is [by that very fact] to accuse yourself") and it is the same light that I read the NRSV's excusing and accusing themselves for their translation for what you left out in the ellipsis, rendering "them" for "him" in "in the image of God he created him"; I've read the whole NRSV and that

footnote is the most convoluted footnote justifying a translation that the NRSV offers; the NRSV does not usually *s'excuse/s'accuse* concerning its renderings.

Now that is over the ellipsis. As regards referring to God as "him", we have left the question of horizontal inclusive language where a grammatically male reference to a person of unspecified sex in the original text is argued to require explicitly gender-neutral language in English today. Or to put it differently, the original text worked more like the English now called "exclusive language", but its spirit today is best reflected by the "inclusive language" that is used in redefining the alternative as "exclusive language". But this question is not the issue in calling God "him"; at most it is a gateway drug.

The first two comments are simply about passages where all sensible scholarship agrees that "man", "brother", etc. as they appear in the original text are intended to include women. The last example is one where there is real controversy over whether the text should be rendered to be more politically correct. I was trying to say, "Look, I see two problems—cans of worms—in translating the last text that aren't in the first two."

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### **My advisor wrote:**

\* Are you saying we shouldn't make allowance for cultural situations in the past?

God expects the same morality from humans at all times, but don't the rules change in order to result in the same principles? I'm thinking of things like slavery, which in the OT was restricted to certain permitted types (6-yr voluntary slavery, and minimum rights for lifelong slaves from warfare), and was tolerated in the NT "for the sake of the Gospel", and was increasingly opposed by the church (albeit very gradually) with as much speed as society permitted.

### **I wrote:**

There's something I might like to comment.

There are some points where any number of examples might be chosen. In the Bible, [Sodom is an emblem of sin](#) and is used to say that a particular community's sins are grievous, but the list of sins connected to Sodom is rather open-ended: without going with queer scholarship and saying that the sin had nothing to do with "sodomy", there is room to say that the men of Sodom showing vile and obscene inhospitality to angelic visitors was the anvil that broke the camel's back; part of the build-up is a dialogue in which Abraham tries to negotiate with a God who cannot find ten righteous in the city. The city is an image of vice later in the Bible, but the sins that are compared to Sodom are open-ended: they include hollow religious observances while preying on one's neighbor and the poor ([opening of Isaiah](#)), adultery and defiled living ([Jeremiah 23:14](#)), pride and excessive eating without care for the poor ([Ezekiel 16](#)), not receiving Christ's apostles appropriately ([Matthew 10](#)), general ungodliness ([II Peter 2:6](#)), and unnatural lust ([Jude 7](#), perhaps the biggest fly in the ointment to queer exegetes who assert that Sodom's story is no more about homosexual relations as such than the story in [Judges 19](#) is about heterosexual relations as such). But the list is open-ended and I have not included connections of pagan nations; my main point is that the list of sins is open-ended; prophets name Sodom in connection to the sins they indict. And other things are open-ended in church and in scholarship...

But it really strikes me how much this one simple example of slavery and the Bible comes up in certain contexts. When I read queer scholarship arguing that the story of Sodom can be read without the hypothesis that homosexual relationships are condemned as such, *a discussion of slavery in the Bible paves the way*. When Craig Keener argues in the example of bad scholarship I chose for my thesis that we can do better than the Ephesians haustafel, *a discussion of slavery in the Bible paves the way*. When I discussed this regularity with one teacher, and asked "If it is necessary that we will get our bearings somewhere about what orients our understanding of Scripture, why this specific paradigm example?" It would seem that when people want to enhance what the Bible has, or draw out what it intends more clearly, or improve on it as demoted (*if in fact I name more than one intent*), the paradigm example that should orient our view of Scripture invariably finds itself in a Bible that did not offer our progressive abolitionism.

(I might comment in reference to my earlier example, though, of clothing and sweatshops: Before the abolition of slavery, Northern as well as Southern U.S. citizens who wore cotton were clothed at the expense of preventable human misery from field-slavery. And today, black and white Americans alike are clothed at the expense of preventable human misery from sweatshops. But there is a difference of scale. Americans own, use, and replace quite a few more garments, and if one may speak of a "carbon footprint", one may perhaps also speak of a "footprint in preventable human misery", and say that U.S. field slavery was an abomination, but the "footprint in preventable human misery" of an American today in clothing is not comparable to the footprint of an American before the civil war; it is comparable to the footprint of a small city. And as long as we have excess of clothing and other unneeded luxuries at the expense of preventable human misery, we should perhaps moderate our celebration of ourselves for having progressed beyond such evils as slavery.)

When I made the comment about this one example that keeps paving the way to orient us, the professor made a comment about canons within a canon, and I would like to comment on the concept and then her specific comment. The idea of a canon within a canon is not a particularly Orthodox one, and I'm not sure I've ever read an Orthodox theologian speak in such terms. The first time the concept was explained to me was something like this: "All great and even minor theologians draw disproportionately from some areas of the Bible more than others, and they do not all do so in exactly the same way. We call the areas of focus 'the canon within the canon.'" And in that sense, I'm not sure there's Orthodox room to object, even if there may be more important things to say. But what I would say is that while that is one way of understanding the canon, it is profoundly misleading to suggest that this is the only basic meaning current in academia. On those terms, which I'm not sure I'd particularly object to, "the canon within the canon" for a particular theologian is a simplification, a generalization, and the kind of thing you observe after the fact. One may claim to identify a particular theologian's "canon within the canon" in something of the same spirit where C.S. Lewis spoke of defining periods in history: he didn't see how you could do serious history without them, but they are a map that does necessary violence to its terrain, and unnecessary violence if it is imposed as an absolute

abstract.

In my time at another school, I heard the phrase "canon within the canon" consistently. One example was when people were setting out to engage in a particular theology, and identified as the very first task to identify the canon within the canon. Taken in context, this was clarified to mean not "What few areas of the Bible will we give special focus?" but "What few areas of the Bible will we not truncate away?" Not all examples were the same as this, but I do not remember a usage of "the canon within the canon" that retained the boundaries and modesty of the definition I first met. And, returning to when I raised a question in a paper about getting our bearings from the passages of the Bible that treat slavery prescriptively and do not directly abolish it, my professor responded that there needed to be some canon within the canon. And that response surprised me. I have seen the example of slavery repeatedly, but apart from that one remark I have never heard it called "the canon within the canon." But it does in a certain way make sense.

**If you are going to orient and situate people so they will naturally seek to appreciate the Bible's strengths while gently working to refine its weaknesses, then there is no "canon within the canon" in the Bible that can properly compete with prescriptive moral teaching in the Bible that sets bounds for slavery but fails to command its abolition.**

The best nutshell summary I've heard of Polanyi's theory of personal and tacit knowledge is, "Behaviorists do not teach, 'There is no soul,' but rather induct students into investigation in such a way that the possibility of a soul is never even considered." And there is something telling along these lines in the slavery example that keeps being chosen when the audience is drawn to work and refine the Bible's weaknesses.

I find the example significant.

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On another note, I realized I had misread your intent because of where I cut a quotation. Let me quote the part that I muffed, and then respond to that.

God made man in his own image, ... male and female he made them (Gen.1.27)

If we had read these in a modern English book, we'd assume the author was implying that

...

\* women aren't made in the image of God.

On that point may I comment about Mary the Mother and Birth-giver of our God?

There are some pretty medieval Catholic things that the Reformers kept even as they rebelled against Rome, and I'm not referring in this case to assuming that doctrines like the Trinity and the Incarnation should remain after reform.

There is precedent as old as Origen, and as Orthodox as a number of canonized saints, for having as one layer of piety an identification of the believer as the Lord's bride. In Orthodoxy this is not as focal as the image of the Church as the bride of Christ, and in piety it is not nearly as important as the Biblical image of sons of God (I am intentionally using the masculine here; the Bible includes "children of God" but never "daughters of God"). But was really on steroids in the medieval Catholic West and the bedrock of sanctification through the metaphor of bridal mysticism remains the bedrock of sanctification in Evangelicalism today, and is part of a rather asinine question I asked in moving towards Orthodoxy: *Is the reason so many Evangelical men are converting to Orthodoxy that Orthodoxy understands sanctification as deification and Evangelicalism understands sanctification as a close personal relationship with another man?*

Another example has to do with what The Sin is, the one sin we ought most to look out for. In the pop caricature of Victorianism, The Sin was lust. Among many Evangelicals today, there is a wariness much like what made a Catholic Dorothy Sayers write, "The Other Six Deadly Sins", and The Sin is pride. In late medieval Catholicism, The Sin was idolatry, and people were looking for it everywhere. If the Reformers found that the adoration of the saints to be idolatry, they were developing a medieval

Catholic perspective.

Whether medieval Catholic and contemporary Orthodox veneration of Mary the Mother of God should be seen as the same or different is something I am not interested in exploring here, but the following element of Orthodox piety I am sure would have been classified as idolatry by the Reformers:

It is very proper and right to call thee blessed,  
Who didst bring forth God,  
Ever blessed and most pure,  
And the Mother of our God.  
More honorable than the cherubim,  
And more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim,  
Who without spot bearest God the Word,  
True Mother of God, we magnify thee.

I would like to make a point, and it is not exactly about agreeing to disagree. A basic Reformation outlook or worldview had no place to classify this other than as worship. First of all, it addresses Mary in the second person. In the culture of at least of Evangelicalism as I know it, in a secular context you address other people in the second person, but in a church context you address God alone in the second person. Second, it extols her above the highest ranks of angels and really gives her a place that the Reformers did not see as a place to be given rightly to a created and sinful human. And third, it calls her Mother of God, which would at least give the impression of placing her above God. The Christological controversy that led Nestorius's attempt at a reasonable way to please everybody with "Christotokos" is known, at least on the books, but that "Mother of God" is both confessional Christology and not intended to place Mary as supra-divine (Orthodox liturgy refers to Joachim and Anna as "ancestors of God" and icons call James "the brother of God"), and a relational statement: "Mother of God" is not confused with being above God any more than the readings of "sons of God" in the Bible mean that we are taken to be fully divine by nature in the same sense as Christ.

My point in these clarifications is not exactly to say that the Reformation view is wrong; my point is to say that what is going on in these words is something that the Reformation universe has no place for

those words is something that the Reformation universe has no place for, except in the category of worship that should be given to God alone.

And my reason for bringing this up is not to say "Because we praise Mary as the Mother of God, we don't view women as inferior." It is to say that, to paraphrase what I'm responding to, "Gen 1:27 says, '...in his image he created him, male and female he made them.' Does this mean that women aren't made in the image of God?"

There's a fairly clear statement on that point in the Bible, in one of the passages that your camp sees as (residual?) misogyny in Paul and something that we need to progress beyond, because that's the only place for it, much as an early Reformer could only see the liturgical quote above as idolatry, of rendering to a creature what is only proper to give to the Creator:

For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.

I will leave it mostly as an exercise to the reader what I believe of this text; what I will say is that I will understand if your conceptual framework has no place for statements like this except as one of the areas of the Bible that is not so much a strength to appreciate as something to gently refine.

The two points buried under all these words are first, that bringing up slavery as the place to get our bearings in understanding the Bible is highly significant, and second, that there's something going on in the text that egalitarianism has no place for and is apt to misfile because it has no place to receive it.

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### **My advisor wrote:**

But it left me wondering:

\* Are you saying we shouldn't make allowance for greater ignorance in the past? We are no more intelligent now, but we do have better understanding about medicine, geology, astronomy etc.

This affects the way we interpret things like "the moon turned to blood" - which we would now regard as an atmospheric phenomenon and nothing to do with the nature of the moon.

**I wrote:**

The assumptions that frame this question are part of what I was trying to answer in ["Religion and Science" Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution](#). That treats the religion-science question at interesting and arguably provocative length; beyond the link, I'd like to respond briefly.

I don't make allowances for greater ignorance in the past. Allowances for different ignorance in the past are more negotiable. And I would quote General Omar Bradley: "We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the [Sermon on the Mount](#)."

To put things differently, my advisor could be paraphrased, "Look, we've progressed! We have a more scientific understanding of some things!"

My response rejects the modern doctrine of progress: I don't believe we've progressed, and in particular the fact that we are more scientific is not the same as moral progress. In fact, the case may be that when we have moved to a more scientific outlook it has led us to lose sight of things that are foundational to Christian faith: ["Religion and Science" Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution](#) explains how exactly being more scientific may not be good for theology.

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**I wrote:**

There was one other point I would like to venture, in terms of how things fit together:

Jerry Root wrote a monograph from his dissertation, [C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil](#), arguing that C.S. Lewis made an objectivist critique of subjectivism and that this is a major thread through multiple works across decades and arguably could be called the common theme. All of Lewis's fiction, or at least the samples quoted from before he was a

Christian ("Dymer") onwards, have villains who are ascribed subjectivist rhetoric.

Root is himself an egalitarian, which I need to say in fairness, although his egalitarian argument smells faintly subjectivistic, along with a silence that speaks rather loudly: he never intimates that the message of the Unman in Perelandra might in fact be almost unadulterated subjectivism and a gospel of feminism and that these are arguably not two separate things, at least in the narrative.

I have a friend who is a silver-haired, balding counselor, and tried really hard to help me prepare for my Ph.D. program (which blew up anyway, but I can't fault his help or any defect in his help). He spoke appreciatively of his training in gay theology (he is a conservative Orthodox and was not trying to convert me to queer agendas), and the biggest single point he tried to make, as something I would have trouble understanding, was subjectivism in relation to feminism.

One of the things he told me that I wouldn't understand was the kind of thing that was illustrated in this: there is a hardcore academic feminist camp that insists that all male celibacy is a tool of patriarchal oppression, and there is a hardcore academic feminist camp that insists that all heterosexual intercourse is rape, and these camps coexist without particular conflict. The objectivist says, "Wait a minute, unless at least one of these is at least partly wrong, or there is an imperative for all men to be homosexually active (or doing something more creative), there is no course open that would let a male live without being a sex offender," is in a very real sense intruding with something foreign onto the scene: objectivism that says there is a reality we should seek to conform to, however imperfectly we may do so.

Biblical egalitarianism is often not so pronounced; I doubt many, or even any, of the egalitarians at Wheaton College make any claim of comparable feminist extremity. But the subjectivism is there, and my thesis could be described as an analysis of how subjectivists argue when straight argument won't get them where they want to go—and every single treatment of the passage from a Biblical Egalitarian/feminist that we looked at for a comparison study had the same shady argument; I

have yet to see a Biblical Egalitarianism treatment of the passage on husbands and wives in [Ephesians 5](#) that argues in objectivist fashion; every one of the dozens of cases I've seen argues with sophistry out of a subjectivism that is unwilling to conform to the reality studied.

I wrote about the connection more explicitly in [point 24 of From Russia, with Love](#); that explains concretely and more descriptively what it would mean for feminism and egalitarianism to be intertwined with subjectivism.

I know Jerry Root and probably should have called him Jerry instead of Root the second time. I sat in on one of his classes once, to observe before teaching (he is considered a legendary professor in the community), and as a C.S. Lewis scholar quoted Lewis as he said, "Satan is without doubt nothing else than a hammer in the hand of a benevolent and severe God. For all, either willingly or unwilly, do the will of God: Judas and Satan as tools or instruments, John and Peter as sons." He then said, communicating with great warmth, "and I would add, 'or daughters'" and said that women were included in the great company of those who do God's will as children of God and not as mere tools.

In my role as a visitor, as a fly on the wall, I held my tongue on saying, "You're not adding to the text, you're taking away from it." By saying that he was adding that the text could apply to women, he was **retroactively** redefining the text, when no sane reader, even a sane reader who prefers to use explicitly gender-neutral terms when the intent does not include specifying gender, would read Lewis's text as saying that males like Peter and John could do God's will the good way but *by definition* Mary the Mother of God and Mary Magdalene the Apostle to the Apostles could not.

Do I *really* believe Jerry believed that, or intended that in anyone he addressed?

*The rhetoric is too subjectivist for that.*

---

**My advisor wrote:**

Your emails are interesting though, as you say, they have gone down paths which you were particularly interested in.

The main question I had was:

Blessed is the man who ... (Ps.1)  
If a brother sins against you... (Lk.17.3)  
God made man in his own image, ... male and female he made them  
(Gen.1.27)

How would you translate them into modern English so that a reader wouldn't get the wrong impression about what the message is?

My guess, from what you've said, is that you don't think English has changed, and you don't think that anyone would get the wrong message except hard-line feminists who would intentionally misread the text.

On Ps.1 you point out the Christological interpretation, which I recognise, though I wouldn't say it is the primary meaning of the text. One of the wonderful things about Jesus was that he DID associate with sinners, though without becoming one of them.

I fear that English has changed, whether we like it or not, and modern readers need some help, or else they will think the Bible is exclusivist.

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**I wrote:**

I believe English has changed, but you assert forcefully that when the text says "man" it cannot refer to women, fullstop, in the modern reader's mind. I would take that as a rhetorical overstatement, but even if it is a rhetorical overstatement, it suggests that you have been getting your bearings from egalitarians for whom "inclusive" language is an active priority, whether this is a conscious or unconscious effort. Compared to other Christians, especially outside academic circles, I would expect you have a disproportionately high number of friends and contacts who are members of CBE or share significant sympathies.

(You can fairly say that at least in academic circles I have a disproportionately low number of such friends, and a disproportionately higher number of friends who would critique CBE, and I would say I am not middle of the road for the friends I know.)

English, especially among the learned, has changed, and "man" is less likely to be read as simply referring to people in general. But it is a strong position to say that "if a brother sins against you", in a passage whose plain sense gives "brother" a much more expansive sense than the biological, will be read only as referring to males. And strictly speaking, at least two of your points contain the same logical fallacy as saying that "All taxicabs are vehicles" demands, if taken literally, that "Because a truck is not a taxicab it cannot be a vehicle". "If a brother sins against you" if taken to exclude women cannot logically imply "sisters can't sin." "In the image of God he created him" if taken not to refer to Eve cannot logically imply "Women are not created in the image of God." You take an extreme interpretation and position, perhaps partly to rhetorically underscore a point, but with what I think are appropriate allowances for rhetorical overstatement, I believe you take a change that has occurred partially to be full and absolute.

The story of the *TNIV* does not commend the reading that the change is simply bringing the language of the translation in sync with the language on the street. The argument that this needs to be further imported to Bible translations has something of a whiff of the offensive, "The bureaucracy is expanding... to meet the needs of an expanding bureaucracy!"

N.B. The reference to the *TNIV* (Today's New International Version) is essentially as follows: The *NIV* (New International Version), like many other translations, has been updated and revised over time. The people in charge of the *NIV*, as one update, were going to change to inclusive language. There was an enormous outcry that ended in the people in charge of the *NIV* signing an agreement not to convert the *NIV* to use inclusive language. And after making that commitment in writing, they still left the *NIV* available but made an inclusive language version of the *NIV* and renamed it "***Today's*** New International Version."

For the claim, "English has changed", the argument is that perhaps in the past readers may have read "man" and "brother" as fully inclusive of women, but we need to use (belabored) inclusive language now because things have changed.

The position taken is that we need to move from the older style of naturally inclusive language, to explicit (and belabored) inclusive language, to adjust to the fact that we are in the process of moving from naturally inclusive language to a belabored inclusive language. We should stop using "man" in an inclusive sense because we are stopping using "man" in an inclusive sense. The bureaucracy is expanding... to meet the needs of an expanding bureaucracy! We must work harder at political correctness to meet the needs of an expanding political correctness.

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**My advisor wrote:**

It sounds like I have trodden on your toes - I'm very sorry.

In the English of most newspapers and blogs, a "man" is male, a "woman" is female and a "person" can be either.

In my original question, I recognised the value of literal translations for those who know the Bible well. But I was wondering how you would translate such example passages for friends who aren't Christian, or for people who pick up a Bible in their hotel room - ie those who haven't ever heard of CBE or other such groups, and who don't know that "man" can mean both male and female in the Bible.

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**I wrote:**

Well, that depends somewhat on audience. If I am aiming for the chattering classes as my audience, I would probably follow the rule, "Unless it is your specific intent to exclude half of humanity from any possible consideration, use strictly and explicitly gender-neutral language."

But when I step outside the bubble of those classes, and overhear working-class people talking, "If you see someone, tell them..." melts away and leaves "If you see someone, tell him..." The experience of "he" and "him" as essentially "exclusive" language is common with the bubble we live in but far from absolute, and that matter far from common, in this U.S., where I believe your concerns have made more headway than in the U.K. If we are talking "people who pick up a Bible in their hotel room", we have left the realm of educated people who read the Bible as literature, and we are talking truckers and the unwashed masses--you know, the kind of people who furnished some of the twelve disciples. And there the answer is simple: say "he" when your intent is generic; saying "they" for one person sounds weird and part of a foreign world intruding on normal English.

And this may be drifting slightly, but if the question is, "How do we render 'If a brother sins against you' so that the full sense of the Church as a family and rebukes within that community comes across," I don't know, and I am wary of the question and approach. Certainly part of it may be more explicit in rendering "If a brother or a sister sins against you"--or, if you don't mind making things even harder for truckers opening a Bible in a hotel room, "If a sibling sins against you"--but more broadly the choice of 'brother' in Greek bears a wealth of layers that are hard to translate so that all of them are apparent on first blush in English, a game which is very hard to win.

This is meant more as a confession of stupidity on my part than a boast, but at one point I tried to make my own Bible translation, called the Uncensored Bible, and aiming for clarity. There were a few highlights to it, and it rendered the Song of Songs clearly, or was intended to, like the original NIV before the higher-ups vetoed translating the Song of Songs the same way they translated other books. And, though this is not intended as an inclusive language issue, the wordplay in Matthew 6:27 was rendered neither "Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" nor "Which of you by worrying can add a single cubit to his height?" but "Do you think you can add a single hour to your life by worrying? You might as well try to worry yourself into being a foot taller!"

But the work as a whole has pearls amidst sand, and it taught me

chiefly that translating the Bible is a lot harder than I had given credit for, even knowing several languages and having done translation before. And while I partly succeeded, part of what I learned through that failure was that my idea of "Just make what is in the verse plainly simple" is a lot harder, and part of my naivete in the project was in trying to do that. Certainly it's possible to be a little clearer where major translations deliberately obscure things from the unwashed masses, but the biggest thing I got out of it was recognizing I was doing something dumb, and coming to respect what the major translations accomplish a whole lot more.

But if that is the goal, "If a brother sins against you" is much harder to get across than changing "If a brother" to "If a brother or sister", "If a sister or brother", "If a sibling", etc. because "brother" speaks of the Church as a family and frames the situation not as discussing appropriate rebuke of someone who you are not particularly connected to, but appropriate rebuke within one tightly connected fatherhood or family. And the expansiveness of "brother" is perhaps 10% clarified, and 90% not clarified, by including the word "sister" or going for the gelding option of "sibling".

So I would partly say, "I don't know", and you can call it a dodge if you want, but if your goal is to make what is going on in the text clear to most readers, especially outside academia and the chattering classes, you might or might not get 10% of the way there by explicitly making language more gender-inclusive, but if you do so, don't say, "Mission accomplished," because the large part of making "If a brother sins against you" accessible in translation is not accomplished once the translation is clear in applying both to men and women.

The rhetorical posture is taken, "The person I'm really concerned about is the person on the street, the average blue-collar Joe or Jane. What about ordinary people who don't have all this academic knowledge?"

I answer quite simply, "Don't worry; that large demographic is probably the one least affected by political correctness and least likely to hear 'Women are excluded' if they read a Bible that says 'man' or

'brother'."

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**My advisor wrote:**

It looks like we both want to educate people to understand the Bible and then translate it literally, because it is so hard to translate it to be understood without that education.

Your decision to use the second person instead of third person is often done in gender-neutral translations, and it works sometimes (such as the example you gave), but not always. I wish we had a neutral pronoun.

Ah well, we have to live with imperfection.

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**My advisor wrote:**

It looks like we both want to educate people to understand the Bible and then translate it literally, because it is so hard to translate it to be understood without that education.

**I wrote:**

Something like that; it is a difficult matter.

Your decision to use the second person instead of third person is often done in gender-neutral translations, and it works sometimes (such as the example you gave), but not always. I wish we had a neutral pronoun.

Ah well, we have to live with imperfection.

In many ways. My attempt at translation taught me that even more than it taught me I was dumber than I thought.

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## Of vinyl records, black and white photography, and using *naturally* inclusive language

Belabored "inclusive" language is here to stay, the rhetoric for it is here to stay, and English usage has changed. I can hardly contest any of these claims, but I would make a point.

When I was a child, it appeared that black and white film had been permanently superseded by color film for all mainstream personal use, and I watched vinyl records be superseded by CD's, pure and simple. Black and white photography outside of Official Art Photography by Real Fine Art Photographers was obsolete now that we had advanced to color film, and a big record player was a waste of space.

But something funny has happened since then—the "improvements" are not so final as one might think. It is not just Official Art Photographers who make those obsolete monochrome photographs; there is an increasing appreciation for black and white photography, to the point that *color* digital cameras take pictures and extra work is done to make monochrome photographs, either black and white or sepia. And while digital audio isn't going away anytime soon, the more an audiophile really, really cares about music and really, really cares about the sound that is rendered, the more likely he is to explicitly prefer the live sound from good vinyl records and a good record player with a good needle to the tinny and more mediocre sound of even the best digital audio.

I said above, partly to avoid pressing a point, "educated people who read the Bible as literature," giving the impression that the Bible as literature crowd will obviously use inclusive language translations. But there's something really funny going on here. Educated liberals who read the Bible as literature normally use inclusive language. Educated liberals who read the Bible as literature normally believe in inclusive language. And, in my contacts, educated liberals who read the Bible as literature pass over every inclusive language Bible translation for the majesty of the King James Version. With its *naturally* inclusive language.

"Men" has taken something of the tint of a comic image, and hearing

man has taken something of the tint of a sepia image, and hearing language like "humankind" sounds like the tinny mediocrity of a CD to an audiophile who prefers vinyl: the point gets across, but not the way vinyl allows.

Inclusive language efforts have given the traditional language of "man", "brother", and "mankind" a share of the beauty and poetic force of sepia and vinyl.

## What's *wrong* with the emails above

I've written these emails with a growing sense that there is something wrong with them: a sense that there was something inescapably misleading even when the observations were accurate. After a while I put a finger on what bothered me. These observations may be accurate observations of truths (or maybe just politically incorrect). But they are not a drinking of Truth. They fall short of the [Sermon on the Mount](#):

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Do you think that by worrying you can add a single hour to your span of life? You might as well try to worry you way into being a foot taller? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?

The observations above are the equivalent of careful, meticulous observations about how to run after food and clothing when there is a Kingdom of God to seek after. Food and clothing have their place, and the observations I made could have a place in the ascetical life, but they are not what there is to seek first, and true Biblical manhood and womanhood come not from trying to be complementarian but from seeking wholeheartedly for the Kingdom of God and his perfect righteousness, and letting all else fall into its place.

Let us seek the greater good.

# Veni, Vidi, Vomi: A Look at "Do You Want to Date my Avatar?"

*Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.*

*I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.*

**[The Song of Songs](#), 4:16-5:1, [King James Version](#)**

## A Socratic dialogue triggered by [The Labyrinth](#)

Trimmed slightly, but "minimally processed" from an email conversation following [The Labyrinth](#):

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

**Visitor:** Oh gosh, that's just layers and layers of sad. It's all about the experience, but the message is kept just this side of tolerable ("nerds are the new sexy" - the reversal of a supposed stigmatization) so it can function as an excuse for the experience. At least that's my analysis.

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

...and added a tooltip of, "Veni, vidi, vomii".

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

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

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

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

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

Veni, vidi, vomii: I came, I saw, I puked.

**Visitor:** Yep... the basic masculine sense of humor, cloaked in Latin. I'm ever so honored you let me in on this. If the world were

completely fair, someone would be there right now to punch your shoulder for me... this is my favorite form of discipline for my brother in law when he gets out of line.

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

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

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

OK, I find that funny - and appropriate.

**Author:** Which do you think works better (i.e. [The Labyrinth](#) with or without images):

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

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

**Visitor:** Welcome.

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

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

**Visitor:** I like that.

**Author:** Thank you.

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

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

The true raison d'Ãatre was known to desert monks,

Ancient and today,  
And by these fathers is called,  
Temptation, passion, demon,  
Of **escaping the world.**

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

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

In [That Hideous Strength](#), towards the end, Lewis writes:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Author:** P.S. My brother who introduced it to me, as something cool, explained to me that this is part of the main performer's effort to work her way into mainstream television. She demonstrates, in terms of a prospect for work in television, that she can look beautiful, act, sing, dance, and be enticing while in a video that is demure in its surface effect as far as music videos go. (And she has carefully chosen a viral video to prove herself as talent.)

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

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

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

**Author:** As far as "technology rainbow":

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

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

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

where heterosexuality is only one option.

*Neither member of this conversation had anything more to say.*



were conquering in India, many Hindu women committed suicide because they knew "Muslim men would rape them in front of their husbands' eyes, kill their husbands, and [forcibly] take them for wives." Not, perhaps, that Islam has a monopoly on soldiers raping: in World War II, after D-Day, U.S. military courts hanged dozens of soldiers for rape, and some of both the court members and the soldiers tried had to be Christian. Rape in war happens, is recognized to happen, and in better moments is treated as a clear atrocity. But, unless you are very anti-Christian, a Christian who rapes under *any* circumstance is acting in an un-Christian way. At least in the Indian women's perspective that was articulated, it may not be acting in a clearly un-Muslim way to rape an Indian woman in front of her husband's eyes, murder her husband, and forcibly marry her.

## **Western stupidity about Christian fundamentalists as nut jobs and Muslims as much more attractive?**

One roommate I had talked about hearing something that scared him silly, about the younger George Bush. He didn't present this as 100% certain, but he claimed that George Bush, in a meeting with several Muslims, had shown the staggering insensitivity to Islam of saying that God had told him to do X. Apparently only one of the Muslim leaders remembered this striking claim, and that one leader didn't understand what was such a big deal, but then-President Bush had shown a most appalling insensitivity to Islam and Muslims that scared him silly.

I pointed out to him, or tried to, that on his account:

- President Bush had done something in the presence of several influential Muslims that was patently offensive to Muslims,
- Only one such Muslim remembered it and didn't see what the big deal was.

And these two do not match.

Really, whatever other things Islam may be accused of, we cannot accuse them of going off in a corner, quietly sulking, and leaving the rest of us to play impenetrable guessing games about why they're upset and what they want us to do to make amends. But I tried quite in vain to point this out.

Whether in fact George Bush ever told Muslims that God told him something I do not know. But there is a bit of illogic going on. It may scare an academic liberal silly for someone in power to believe there is a God who makes such claims on us. But *it is not offensive to Muslims to believe there may be a God and this God could make such claims on us*; the basic implication need offend Muslims scarcely more than it need offend scientists to say that it is helpful to test our theories by

experiment, or that it need offend coaches to say that athletes should train before they go to competitions.

There is a sense among the people I have known that "Bible-believing Christians" are really not enlightened, and are really nut jobs, but with due charity we should pay Muslims the common courtesy of recognizing that they are basically enlightened and *not* like Christian fundamentalist nut jobs, and that unlike stupid and dangerous types like John McCain and Sarah Palin, Muslims want to ☺☻☼☽☾☿ and unlike those weird Christian fundamentalists, they will ☺☻☼☽☾☿ quite nicely. Maybe this is changing; [South Park can obscenely mock every religious founder but one, as far as Comedy Central allows after Muslim response](#), and people in the West are starting to act like saying something vile about Mohammed will get a bit different of a response from those nut job Christians (you know, those dunces who just don't get that we should ☺☻☼☽☾☿). But the way it has changed in the West may not be for the best.

If you find something objectionable about conservative Christianity, fine, but understand that Islam is further, not nearer, to your outlook than such Christianity. It is a capital mistake to worry about some kinds of Christians in power and assume that Muslims, unlike Christians, will be well-behaved and enlightened people we need to understand, and if we only approach them the right way, they will ☺☻☼☽☾☿ with us flawlessly. If you find such Christians extreme, be ready to experience Islam in power as going out of the frying pan, into the fire... or rather, into the thermite.



# What Makes Me Uneasy About Fr. Seraphim (Rose) and His Followers

## Uncomfortable and uneasy—the root cause?

***Two out of many quotes from a discussion where I got jackhammered for questioning whether Fr. Seraphim is a full-fledged saint:***

"Quite contrary, the only people who oppose [Fr. Seraphim's] teachings, are those who oppose some or all of the universal teachings of the Church, held by Saints throughout the ages. Whether a modern theologian with a 'PhD,' a 'scholar', a schismatic clergymen, a deceived layperson, or Ecumenist or rationalist - these are the only types of people you will find having a problem with Blessed Seraphim and his teachings."

"If he's not a saint, who is?"

There are things that make me uneasy about many of Fr. Seraphim (Rose)'s followers. I say *many* and not *all* because I have friends, and know a lovely parish, that is Orthodox today through Fr. Seraphim. One friend, who was going through seminary, talked about how annoyed he was, and appropriately enough, that Fr. Seraphim was always referred to as "that guy who taught the tollhouses." (*Tollhouses* are the subject of a

controversial teaching about demonic gateways one must pass to enter Heaven.) Some have suggested that he may not become a canonized saint because of his teachings there, but that is not the end of the world and apparently tollhouses were a fairly common feature of nineteenth century Russian piety. I personally do not believe in tollhouses, although it would not surprise me that much if I die and find myself suddenly and clearly convinced of their existence: I am mentioning my beliefs, as a member of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, and it is not my point to convince others that they must not believe in tollhouses.

It is with sympathy that I remember my friend talk about how his fellow seminarians took a jackhammer to him for his admiration of "that guy who taught the tollhouses." He has a good heart. Furthermore, his parish, which came into Holy Orthodoxy because of Fr. Seraphim, is much more than alive. When I visited there, God visited me more powerfully than any parish I have only visited, and I would be delighted to see their leadership any time. Practically nothing in that parish's indebtedness to Fr. Seraphim bothers me. Nor would I raise objections to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia's newsletter affectionately calling Fr. Seraphim "our editor." Nor am I bothered that a title of his has been floating around the nave at my present parish.

But with all that said, there is something that disturbs me about most devotees of Fr. Seraphim, or at very least most of his vocal devotees. The best way I can put it has to do with *subjectivism*, which says in essence, "I will accept what I will accept, and I will reject what I will reject, and I will project what I will project." There is something that demands that Fr. Seraphim be canonized as a saint regardless of whether he really should be, almost like "My country, right or wrong!" This isn't the only thing that smells disturbing, but it is one. And these followers who insist that Fr. Seraphim be canonized as a saint seem to quickly gloss over how he broke away from canonical status in the Orthodox Church to dodge Church discipline. Now I do not wish to exceed my authority and speak *ex cathedra* to decisively say which sins should be a bar from sainthood; it is God's job to make saints out of sinners, and any sin that Fr. Seraphim has committed, there are canonized saints who did something ten times worse. However, this is an example of something

that needs to be brought to light if we are to know if Fr. Seraphim should be considered a saint, and in every conversation I've seen, the (vocal) devotees of Fr. Seraphim push to sweep such things under the rug and get on with his canonization.

To pull something from putting subjectivism in a word: "I will accept what I will accept, and I will reject what I will reject, and I will project what I will project" usurps what God, O ΩN, supremely declares: "**I AM WHO I AM.**" Subjectivism overreaches and falls short in the same gesture; if you grasp it by the heart, it is the passion of pride, but if you grasp it by the head, it is called subjectivism, but either way it has the same stench. And it concerns me gravely that whenever I meet these other kinds of followers, Fr. Seraphim's most vocal advocates, it smells the same, and it ain't no rose.

## Protestant Fundamentalist Orthodoxy

A second concern is that, in many of Fr. Seraphim's followers, there is something Protestant to be found in the Church. Two concerns to be mentioned are "Creation Science"-style creationism, and the fundamentally Western project of worldview construction.

On the issue of "Creation Science"-style creationism, I would like to make a couple of comments. First, the Fathers usually believed that the days in Genesis 1 were literal days and not something more elastic. I believe I've read at least one exception, but St. Basil, for instance, insists both that one day was one day, and that we should believe that matter is composed of earth, air, fire, water, and ether. The choice of a young earth and not any other point of the Fathers is not the fruit of the Fathers at all; it is something Protestant brought into the Orthodox Church, and at every point I've seen it, Orthodox who defend a young earth also use Protestant Creation Science, which is entirely without precedent in the Fathers. One priest said, "It was easier to get the children of Israel out of Egypt than it is to get Egypt out of the children of Israel." There have been many Orthodox who believe entirely legitimately in a young earth, but every single time I have met young earth arguments from a follower of Fr. Seraphim, they have drawn on recycled Protestant arguments and fundamentalist Protestant Creation Science. And they have left me wishing that now that God has taken them out of Egypt they would let God take Protestant Egypt out of them.

I observed something quite similar to this in a discussion where I asked a partisan of Fr. Seraphim for an example of his good teaching. The answer I was given was a call for Orthodox to work on constructing a worldview, and this was presented to me as the work of a saint at the height of his powers. But there's a problem.

The project of worldview construction, and making standalone adjustments to the ideas in one's worldview, is of Western origin. There is no precedent for it in the Fathers, nor in medieval Western scholastic theologians like Thomas Aquinas, nor for that matter in the Reformers.

The widespread idea that Christians should "think worldviewishly", and widespread understanding of Christianity as a worldview, is of more recent vintage than the Roman proclamations about the Immaculate Conception and the Infallibility of the Pope, and the Protestant cottage industry of worldview construction is less Orthodox than creating a systematic theology. *If* there is an Orthodox worldview, it does not come from tinkering with ideas in your head to construct a worldview; it arises from walking the Orthodox Way for a lifetime. Protestants who come into Orthodoxy initially want to learn a lot, but after time spend less time with books because Orthodoxy has taken deeper root in their hearts and reading about the truth begins to give way to living it out. Devotional reading might never stop being a spiritual discipline, but it is no longer placed in the driver's seat, nor should it be.

## **This tree: What to make of its fruit?**

This is strong language, but in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), Christ says:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

Not every one who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers."

Fr. Seraphim has borne fruit in his lifetime and after his death. In his lifetime, there was the one fruit I mentioned, a close tie to someone who broke communion with the Orthodox Church shortly after his death. After his death, he has brought Protestants into the Orthodox Church. But in the living form of his disciples, those who have been taken out of Egypt seem not to have Egypt taken out of them; they have asked me to pay homage to Protestant calves they've brought with them.

Let me try to both introduce something new, and tie threads together here. Subjectivism can at its heart be described as breaking communion with reality. This is like breaking communion with the Orthodox Church, but in a way it is more deeply warped. It is breaking communion not only with God, but with the very cars, rocks and trees. I know this passion and it is the passion that has let me live in first world luxury and wish I lived in a castle. It tries to escape the gift God has given. And that passion in another form can say, "If God offers me Heaven, and Heaven requires me to open up and stop grasping Fr. Seraphim right or

wrong, I will escape to a Hell that makes no such demand for me to open up to God or His reality." And it is a red flag of this passion that breaks communion with reality, that the people most devoted to Fr. Seraphim hold on to pieces of fundamentalism with a tightly closed fist. And these Protestant insistences are a red flag, like a plume of smoke: if one sees a plume of smoke coming from a house, a neighbor's uncomfortable concern is not that a plume of smoke is intolerable, but that where there's smoke, there's fire and something destructive may be going on in that house. And when I see subjectivism sweep things under the rug to insist on Fr. Seraphim's canonization, and fail to open a fist closed on Protestant approaches to Holy Orthodoxy, I am concerned not only that Fr. Seraphim's colleague may have broken communion with the Orthodox Church to avoid Church discipline, but that Fr. Seraphim's devotees keep on breaking communion with reality when there is no question of discipline. The plume of smoke is not intolerable in itself, but it may betray fire.

I may be making myself unpopular here, but I'm bothered by Fr. Seraphim's fruit. I know that there have been debates down the centuries between pious followers of different saints—but I have never seen this kind of phenomenon with another well-known figure in today's Orthodoxy.

So far as I have tasted it, Fr. Seraphim's fruit tastes bad.

# Oops... Could the Western Rite Please Try Again?

Fr. Cherubim has left a considerable wake; the tip of the iceberg is in his contribution to a wave of committed Evangelicals deciding that being Orthodox is an indispensable aid to pursuing their cottage industry of reconstructing the ancient Church. The sycophant excitedly commented, "Yes; there was an article on this phenomenon in *The Onion Dome*. It was a bit like that article in *The Onion*, um, what was it... there was a woman, a strong woman, who overcame years of childhood abuse to become a successful porn star..."

[Followers of Fr. Cherubim \(Thorn\) Demand His Immediate Canonization and Full Recognition as Equal to the Hierophants](#)

## The Western Rite: "Chaotic Neutral" Orthodoxy

Since my involvement with Dungeons & Dragons, I wrote a Christian role playing game, [The Minstrel's Song](#), before writing [Exotic Golden Ages and Harmony with Nature: Anatomy of a Passion](#) and moving away from role playing games.

When I played *Dungeons & Dragons* in high school , one of the cardinal rules surrounded alignments: "Lawful Good", "Neutral Good", "Chaotic Good", "Lawful Neutral", "True Neutral", "Chaotic Neutral", "Lawful Evil", "Neutral Evil", and "Chaotic Evil". Each of these alignments was quite different from each other, but there was a common undergirding: no matter what alignment you play, you pick a course of action and you stick with it. You may be a hero or a villain; you may believe in organized cooperation or the power of the individual, but whatever your choice may be, you are shirking due diligence as a role playing gamer unless you pick a course of action and stick with it.

Except for one exception. "Chaotic Neutral" isn't exactly a matter of picking a course of action and sticking it with it. "Chaotic Neutral" role play can be described as "You can do anything you want, as long as you don't do it twice," and it is the closest alignment to acting like a hero one day and a villain the next. It has a bad reputation among gamers, perhaps because it disproportionately draws gamers who want to dodge proper handling of one cardinal aspect of game play, and quite possibly may dodge due diligence in other areas as well. And the Western Rite seems in large measure to be the "Chaotic Neutral" of Orthodoxy.

## **Q: Why do some Protestants keep trying to reconstruct the ancient Church?**

### **A: The "Great Apostasy"**

If you are trying to understand Protestant Christianity, one of the key features you should understand is the "Great Apostasy", even if the term is unfamiliar to many Protestants today. Today the Internet is in working order, and regardless of what may happen in the future, it would be a strange thing to seek out venture capitalists now to help fund the great endeavor of reconstructing the Internet. It doesn't make sense to "reconstruct the Internet" unless the Internet is dead, which it isn't. And it also doesn't make sense to try to "reconstruct the authentic ancient Church" unless the ancient Church died and left no surviving continuation into our day.

The Reformers asserted that there were serious problems in the Catholic Church they knew, and on that score many loyal Romans agreed with them. (For that matter, there are problems in Orthodoxy today—*real* problems.) What the Reformers asserted was something stronger: some time between the days of the Apostles and their days, the genuine Church had vanished altogether, on some accounts very soon after the Apostles passed away, and this belief impelled them to a great project of scholarly research and antiquarian reconstruction to reconstruct the (genuine) ancient Church. And so we have the Evangelical cottage industry of trying to reconstruct the ancient Church, which only makes sense if the Church had vanished and, in Orthodox terms, there was no living Tradition whose milk we should turn to nurse from. It is not an accident that the Reformers abandoned Church vestments in favor of scholar's robes; understanding the Bible was no longer through reading the words of holy saints, but through secular antiquarian research. (This attitude still holds in the secular discipline of Bible scholarship today.)

**Q: And why does the Western Rite keep trying to reconstruct Western Orthodoxy?**

**A: Their own version of the "Great Apostasy."**

The Western Rite's project does make some sense here: the Western Church did in fact go through a Great Apostasy, and while I have never heard someone from the Western Rite find a Great Apostasy and say that the Orthodox Church has died out in Antiochian, Greek, Russian, Serbian, Georgian, etc. living Tradition, none the less it is not a provocative thing to say that the West was once canonically Orthodox and has ceased to be that.

But in my conversations with Western Orthodox and what I have read, *the plumbline of Orthodoxy is always a Protestant-style reconstruction of Western Orthodoxy from the time the West was Orthodox*. Hence one asserts, for instance, that the vestments used follow the pattern of the time when East and West wore the same liturgical vestments, before the East changed. And this is not an isolated example; things keep coming up where the offered reason for a decision is that this is closest to what historical lessons tell us things were like in the ancient Church. It is a Protestant tune that is foreign to non-Western Rite Orthodox, and it keeps coming up.

## Converts from the same tradition

The Western Rite discussion I have seen on Facebook often has an edge of British nationalism. There were "historical" articles posted, and I remember some surprise at someone asserting King Arthur as literal, historical fact. I've (as a historian type) read quite a lot of scholarly commentary on King Arthur, as well as thousands of pages of medieval Arthurian legends, and though there is some evidence that there might have been a warrior named Arthur, [the basic idea of King Arthur comes from a pseudo-historical work, the Brut, which was great reading and captivated European readers, but is not a work of history in any way, shape, or form.](#) (I don't remember reference to King Oswald, a saint and martyr which English kings associated with until slightly after William the Bastard's invasion in 1066.)

One thing that concerns me is that Western Rite Orthodox are by and large not former Roman Catholics, but former Anglicans: one who understood Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism would be much more wary of former Anglicans practicing the Western Rite than former Romans. But let us waive that aside.

One point of spiritual danger for converts to the Orthodox Church is to overly associate with other converts from the same place, an arrangement that seems to invite subtle regressions to how the former confession places things. I have heard friends commenting how an Orthodox group of former Catholics was getting a bit unhealthy, and I have seen it in a mailing list of former Evangelicals. The Western Rite is largely a group of former Anglicans, and subtle (and maybe not-so-subtle) bits and pieces of Anglicanism seem to keep cropping up.

The Western Rite was unknown until St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco started to create it on his own authority; it is not a continuous, living tradition preserving Orthodoxy, and here nature abhors a vacuum. Converts practicing Western Orthodoxy, not in a position to nurse from the bosom of a living rite of Eastern Orthodoxy, willingly or unwillingly regress to the milk of [an Anglicanism whose Archbishop of Canterbury is](#)

[a Druid](#). (Some have said that the Anglican way is not *via media* as proclaimed, but "cut, copy, and paste." But let us leave that aside.)

## **Must I adopt a foreign culture?**

Christ did not invent baptism, nor did John the Baptist. Baptism was practiced in Judaism for the reception of non-Jewish pagans into Judaism: it was bringing in someone who was unambiguously portrayed as an outsider. What Christ did that was distinctive was to say that baptism is for everyone, Jew as much as Greek pagan. *We all start outside.*

The introduction to Bishop NIKOLAI's [Prayers by the Lake](#) speaks of "the Christ-fighting Slavic soul": Russians and Serbs need to swim upstream. And I remember a discussion with one Serb on Facebook who was a devout Orthodox and corrected my assumption that he had grown up in Orthodoxy: he grew up an atheist and learned that the giants of Serbian history were all Orthodox, and then discovered something much bigger than nationalism when he discovered Holy Orthodoxy.

One of the differences between Catholicism and Orthodoxy is that in Catholicism, philosophy and culture can be swapped in and out; Thomism is a usual standby but Patriarch JOHN PAUL was a phenomenologist. In Orthodoxy, however, philosophy and culture are not something you change like a garment, and the Orthodox Church in its way keeps alive philosophies and cultures long after the West apostasized. Today's Western culture boasts a millenium of apostasy and is scarcely closer to tenth century England than it is to present-day India. If you're going to aim for what Western culture was when it was still Orthodox, you have at least as far to go as if you join an Orthodox Church and start to absorb its culture along the way.

And not to put too fine a point on it, but former Catholics and Protestants can only enter the Church as reconciled heretics; we may wish it were some other way, but former Anglicans (among others) are reconciled heretics who particularly need to submit to the Church as one shaped outside of her ways.

## Is there any alternative?

Let's leave aside generalities for just one moment and talk in the specific. My priest is a protopresbyter or archpriest within ROCOR, and a former Anglican deacon. He is glad that he was not immediately ordained when he entered the Orthodox Church, but spent some time as a layman growing Orthodox roots. And not to put too fine a point on it, but I have *never* heard him argue, in Western Rite style, "This book says that this is how something was done in the ancient Church, so we should implement a program of change to restore this part of ancient Christianity."

Not that he has any particular desire to throw out the old; he's rather conservative. But one particular decision he has made is interesting. As well as being a priest he is a physician, a doctor who treats patients at the extremes of pain and suffering, and he has brought together an icon shrine devoted to one of the "holy unmercenary physicians", saints who healed without charge. And he has placed, very near together, an icon of the ancient Roman St. Panteleimon next to a hand-painted icon of the twentieth century Blessed St. Luke. Another icon shows all of the holy unmercenarys across all the centuries, and as it so happens, the specific saint the corner is named after is St. Panteleimon. From the same fount as this icon corner comes a priest who will accept wisdom from a saint of any century, and again, I have never heard him argue, "This is what my book research says about how things were way back several centuries ago, or nineteenth century Russia or whatever, so we should change what we are doing to reconstruct the past."

Looking at all the reconstruction of Western Orthodoxy that looms so large in the Western Rite, and seeing *such an incredibly Anglican demeanor among Anglican converts who do not seem to really see themselves as reconciled heretics, wild olive branches grafted onto the Vine*, leads me to want to say, "**Oops... Could the Western Rite please try again?**"

# The Consolation of Theology

## Song I.

### The Author's Complaint.

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

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

## I.

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

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

The master said, ‘Inside your heart.’

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

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

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

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

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

I stood in silence, all abashed.

**Song II.**

## **His Despondency.**

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

## II.

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

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

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

## Song III.

### A Clearer Eye.

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

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

### III.

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

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

I sat a-right, a-listening.

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

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

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

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

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

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

virtue.

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

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

'And again:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

All these things were from Me.

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

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

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

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

## Gods.

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

## **Song IV.**

### **Virtue Unconquerable.**

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

## IV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Song V.**

### **O Holy Mother!**

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

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

## V.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

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

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

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

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

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

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

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

Happy the mourning — because they shall be comforted.

Happy the meek — because they shall inherit the land.

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

Happy the kind — because they shall find kindness.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Song VI.**

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

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

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

## VI.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Song VII.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

But we may not yet be in the clear.

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

Where No Such Agency has received every email,

It is now clear and open knowledge,

To those that will reflect,

That among most most Americans,

'Every breath and step Americans take,'

Is monitored by Big Brother,

But perhaps it is not just human agencies,

That reap the information collected.

++ungood

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

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

Serving cold water, hot water, and antifreeze,

And the handles perplexing in their similitude.)

## VII.

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

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

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

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

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

I answered, 'Of a troth.'

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

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

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

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

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

I said, 'Nay.'

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

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

## **Song VIII.**

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

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

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

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

## VIII.

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

He said, ‘Doth that surprise thee?’

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

He said, ‘How readest thou that parable?’

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

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

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

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

He said, ‘Speak on.’

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

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

I said, ‘Yes.’

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

I asked, ‘Will I reach monasticism?’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Fr. Cherubim (Jones) Anathematized by the Canonical Autonomous True Orthodox Synod in Dissent, of the Dregs of the Dregs of Rubbish Outside of Rubbish Bins (RORB)

*[Editor's note: Our first reporter, assigned to investigate directly with the Canonical Autonomous True Orthodox Synod in Dissent, of the Dregs of the Dregs of Rubbish Outside of Rubbish Bins, ran away screaming. A more seasoned reporter was able to locate a Church scholar with a strong heresiological and religious studies background, who was willing to speak on the record; the official was available for comment but has requested conditions of total anonymity.]*

**Reporter:** So how do I get to the bottom of all this? What on earth is "the Article by which the Orthodox Church stands or falls?"

**Scholar:** Fr. Cherubim, like many after him and even those who anathematized him, retained significant Protestant attributes long after being received into the Orthodox Church. The concept of an Article by which the Church stands or falls stems

from the Reformation, when Martin Luther rightly or wrongly pressed the entirety of theology as it was then known into a very small nutshell and cut off things that wouldn't go in. He had a famed three Sola's: "*Sola gratia. Sola fide. Sola Scriptura*," that we are saved only by divine grace, saved only through faith, and accept Scripture alone as authoritative. The "Article by which the Church stands or falls" is that we are saved only by grace. It was, to Luther, the only doctrine that *mattered*: if you know whether the Church believes in salvation by grace alone, that is really the only question worth asking.

In Fr. Cherubim, called "*Dead Cherubim Jones*" by those who anathematized him, there are large bits of intact Protestantism that have survived and gotten a brushstroke or two of Orthodox dÃ©cor. With or without anyone anathematizing anyone, the zealots, written CATOSDDDRORB, owe Fr. Cherubim a tremendous debt. There is no longer an Article by which the Church stands or falls, but now an Article by which the *Orthodox* Church stands or falls. Where the former was concerned with momentous questions of *grace and salvation*, this is concerned by *how many miles across the universe* is.

Reporter: *Dead Cherubim Jones*?!? How many mileâ€™whaaa? Is there an indictment of ecumenism in all this?

Scholar: Hmm, yes, those types will give you quite an earful about ecumenism, but there is genuinely more going on. Let me take on a couple of housekeeping details before addressing the meat of the matter.

First, CATOSDDDRORB correctly notes that when people spoke of "Blessed Cherubim Jones," they were making a twisted use of language. For many, many centuries, someone recently deceased in the Lord is referred to as, "Of blessed memory." When Fr. Cherubim's posthumous work came out, he is quite straightforwardly called "of blessed memory," just like many people are referred to as being "of blessed memory" in the years

following their demise.

It is an available alternative, and you find this in figures as ancient as St. Irenaeos, that instead of saying, "So-and-so of blessed memory," things are packed in a bit to refer to that person of "blessed So-and-so." So shortly after the death of an Alexander Schmemmann or Vladimir Lossky, one can be entirely right to refer to "blessed Alexander Schmemmann" or "blessed Vladimir Lossky," and this is not just for famous people. A recently reposed member of your parish may just as rightly be called "blessed So-and-so," and other things as well.

Fr. Cherubim's camp abused this custom to effectively give Fr. Cherubim a seemingly official honorific that sounds like a type of saint. The term sounded more and more official as "blessed" was hardened into a never-dropped "Blessed," and since this did not satisfy, "Blessed" became "Bl."

Then when Fr. Cherubim had the temerity to challenge Protestant assumptions in posthumous unearthed texts, the "Canonical True Autonomous Orthodox Synod in Dissent, of the Dregs of the Dregs of Rubbish Outside of Rubbish Bins" split off from another jurisdiction whose name I don't remember, and as their first act, anathemized Fr. Cherubim. Their second act was to collectively realized that "Bl." really only meant "dead," and that it would be calling a spade to refer to their former pioneer as "*Dead* Cherubim Jones." With emphasis on "Dead."

**Reporter:** Wow. You're bending my brain.

**Scholar:** There's more; if you need to, take a walk or sit outside for a few minutes. I'll be here.

**Reporter:** Ok; thanks. Is there more?

**Scholar:** Ok. Have you heard Alan Perlis's quote, "The best book on programming is [Alice in Wonderland](#), but that's just because it's the best book on anything for the layman?"

**Reporter:** Now I have.

**Scholar:** Precise measurement as we know it didn't exist. We have a platinum one meter bar under lock and key; we have measuring implements made to the most minute precision we can. Whereas, in the ancient world, under conditions of poverty that you can hardly imagine, having all kinds of measuring tools would be costly on tight purses. So, among other units of measure, they used parts of their own bodies for measurement. If a man straightens out his forearm, the distance from the outside of the elbow to the tip of the finger would be one cubit: a solution that was *free, sensible, and practical*. It, by the way, remains a brilliant idea today: circumstance permitting, if you want to measure a distance of a certain general neighborhood, if you don't have a measuring implement handy, you can measure it in cubits, multiply it by some other tool and divide by the length of your body's cubit. Voilà : approximate measurement in a pinch when you don't have any artificial measuring-tool.

This may not be a direct observation of the Bible, but literature in the medieval West had creatures who at times appeared to be the size of insects and at others reached adult human stature, and there was a remarkable lack of interest in nailing down an exact size for such wondrous being. The astute viewer may watch some cartoons that take radical changes in size to be perfectly unremarkable, and entirely natural.

Now there are certain translation issues between the Hebrew and the Greek for the Old Testament, possibly stemming from relations between the arm and the leg. The "hand", in modern Greek, interestingly extends to the elbow, and "daktulos" without further clarification can apply to either fingers and toes. Scientifically speaking, an arm and a leg are the same basic kind of thing; their proportions are different and their uses are different but they are each one of our four limbs.

And what gets really interesting is when you take Protestant fundamentalist efforts to determine the size of the

Universe from the Bible.

**Reporter:** What's that?

**Scholar:** According to the Hebrew and the Greek Old Testaments, the CATOSDDDRORB devotees yield a size of 4000 miles for the Hebrew, and 7500 for the Greek, and they decided to do things the Orthodox way and settle with the universe conclusively being 7500 miles in size.

**Reporter:** Um, uh, ok... does that do any real *harm*?

**Scholar:** Maybe, but that's not really the point. The CATOSDDDRORB eagerness to straighten out scientists' "backwards understanding of science" has irritated a number of members of the academy.

**Reporter:** That's not too bad.

**Scholar:** There's worse.

**Reporter:** Present CATOSDDDRORB members were scandalized when some further manuscripts were put to publication.

First, Fr. Cherubim said everything we said above and more. He said that a "foot" may be a unit of measure, maybe, but a foot of what? Of an insect? A dinosaur? Ezekiel seems to specify an explicitly human cubit. The Old Testament in either Hebrew or Greek seems to trade in "feet" (I will not comment on some ambiguities), but not "foot of man" as such.

Second, this draws on mathematical subtlety, but a distance on earth, straightened out as much as a sphere permits, corresponds to a certain angle of an arc. Distances between places can be a linear measure of how much surface is crossed, or (if they are straight) they can be an angle.

What this means is that distances, if we are dealing cosmologically, are cosmological distances. There are the

difference represented by an angle between two rays from the earth's center. In normal science, scientists are quick to use so-called "scientific notation" where the total size of the universe is a mouthful of 500,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 miles wide but you write it as  $5.0e+23$ .

But here's the interesting thing. *Fr. Cherubim was not dogmatic, or at least not dogmatic about the size of the universe.*

**Reporter:** Huh?

**Scholar:** Of course he was dogmatic about some things; he is dogmatic that this universe in entirety belongs to God, and scarcely less adamant that God could have created the universe at any size he wanted. However, his scholarship on the universe's size never really nails down dogmatically that the universe is either 4000 or 7500 miles wide, or a number with lots of zeroes. If you are at all careful, you will recognize that he mentions something more devastating to CATOSDDDRORB: the size of the universe does not seem to be a particularly live question, or one that attracted particularly much debate. The Fathers didn't really make a fuss about it. But he also fails to vindicate the standard model. Not only does he not make known use of scientific notation, but he does not seem to name the numbers that motivated people to create scientific notation in the first place, or for that matter numbers at all. One gets the impression that he envisioned a "middle-sized" universe, incredibly large to the CATOSDDDRORB crowd, ludicrously small to standard science. The gist of his writing is not to help people get the right numeric calculation. It is, here, to draw to people's attention to how much they don't know, and gently draw their attention to greater things.

**Reporter:** What was the reaction to that?

**Scholar:** In a heartbeat, "Blessed Cherubim Jones" became "**Dead** Cherubim Jones," and the new Canonical Autonomous True

Orthodox Synod in Dissent, of the Dregs of the Dregs of Rubbish Outside of Rubbish Bins anathematized him. The chief complaint was that he failed to buttress their efforts to take a beloved Protestant ambiance in Biblical exegesis, substitute the Greek for Hebrew Old Testament, and make their calculation of a 7500 mile wide Universe into the Article by which the Church stands or falls.

**Reporter:** This has been very interesting. Do you have any further reading to recommend?

**Scholar:** Sure! Here's my spare copy of [Alice in Wonderland!](#)