

Hidden Price Tags

**An Eastern Orthodox Look at the Dark
Side of Technology and Its Best Use**

Volume 4: Nitty, Gritty Ascesis

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*To Fr. Raphael Armour—
Thank you for welcoming me
into Holy Orthodoxy,
and saying,
“Orthodoxy is slog!”*

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Foreword to the *Hidden Price Tags* series

I gave my heirarch and abbot a copy of *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* for Christmas, and told him, "If I've contributed something to the conversation, it's probably in this book."

This collection is intended to break the contents of that book and a few related works into smaller and more manageable volumes, and give an introduction and discussion questions for individual works.

My life as a whole has been heavy with technology and heavy with theology / patrology, and my distinctive contributions may lie in relation to both. It's very easy to have your life taken over and run by technology; this is about unplugging to an extent, mastering the technologies you use, and using technologies so that they are beneficial instead of draining you. The reality is that without a conscious effort, and perhaps with many kinds of conscious effort, you will be hit by the dark sides of technology.

If this series succeeds, it will be relevant both when it was written, and later on when there are some of the

same kinds of forces at play but the list of technologies that are *au courant* has shifted in significant ways.

I do not wish to continue to update this series to continue to give the impression that it was just written, but there is something timeless even to good books on technology. As regards television, I unhesitatingly draw on Neil Postman's 1985 *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*,¹ Jerry Mander's 1978 *Four Arguments for the **Elimination** of Television*,² and Marie Winn's 1977 *The Plug-in Drug*³ as worth listening to today. None of them anticipate ubiquitous mobile devices, and Jerry Mander is skeptical about whether computers would be of any real use for consumers. I don't mean that Mander was skeptical about whether personal-use computers would be an overall improvement to the picture; I mean that he did not anticipate personally owned computers or computer networks at all, let alone mobile Internet devices. But when you read one of his arguments, the argument of "artificial unusualness,"⁴ under "Argument Four: The Inherent Biases of Television,"⁵ a relatively light edit could give the impression of an incisive analysis of technology—*today*—whose ink is still wet on its pages. *Artificial unusuality was part of television when he wrote it, it is more a part of television now, it is a feature of social media, and it is a core part to how you make technology addictive today.*⁶ It is not just because I have

¹ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness* (London: Methuen, 2007).

² Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial, 2002).

³ Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

⁴ Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 299-322.

⁵ Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 263-346.

⁶ See, for instance, "The Acceleration of Addictiveness," The acceleration of addictiveness, accessed November 18, 2022, <http://www.paulgraham.com/addiction.html>.

heard people say that television is the future of the Internet that I believe these books about technology are relevant. Much may have changed in the intervening 40-50 years since Mander wrote his title, but *the more some things change, the more some things stay the same*. The principles in these precursors to this series are still relevant, and I believe the principles in this collection will likely be at least partially relevant when smartphones and smartwatches are no longer the cutting edge of mainstream consumer use of technology, and, perhaps, there will seem to be something quaint about the concept of watching porn on a flat and external screen.

When I first wrote “ ‘Social Antibodies’ Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy” (in volume 4 of this series)⁷ in 2014, I made multiple attempts at a literature search on Amazon found nothing much on some other queries, and “orthodox technology” turned up, among Orthodox Christian works on technology: my own work and nobody else’s.

At the time of this writing that is no longer true. The first result for that search is no longer one of my own: *Religion, Science, and Technology*.⁸ Jean-Claude Larchet’s *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*⁹ is on Amazon now and eminently worth reading. But my own works represent six of the first page Amazon search results for that query. As I said in “ ‘Social Antibodies’ Needed,” about what I found

⁷ C.J.S. Hayward, *Hidden Price Tags: An Eastern Orthodox Look at the Dark Side of Technology and Its Best Use: Volume 4: Nitty, Gritty, Ascesis*, Spotsylvania: C.J.S. Hayward Publications, 2023.

⁸ Katina Michael, M. G. Michael, and Kallistos, *Religion, Science & Technology: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective ; an Interview with Metropolitan Kallistos Ware* (Wollongong, Australia: University of Wollongong, 2017).

⁹ Jean-Claude Larchet and Archibald Andrew Torrance, *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Publications, The Printshop of St Job of Pochaev, Holy Trinity Monastery, 2019).

when I searched Amazon, “*Um, **thanks**, I think. I guess I’m an expert, or at least a resource, and even if I didn’t want to, I should probably make myself available to Orthodox clergy, with my spiritual father and bishop foremost.*” But for the most part, I am a somewhat obscure local expert if I am in fact a local subject-matter expert.

There may be a number of things I fail to project about the practical realities of the Internet of Bodies but I suspect this book, an attempt at outlining Orthodox asceticism governing technology use, will be somewhere on the scene then. There are some technologies that I have avoided using at all on overpowering negative intuitions, like SecondWife, er, SecondLife, and recommendations may shift from “Use freely,” to “Use carefully,” to “Use very cautiously,” to “Better not to use,” to “Don’t use at all.” We are having more concentrated versions of earlier precursors today, like eighty proof liquor followed age-old wine in ages past. And the case for abstinence may grow increasingly strong as the list of technologies that are *au courant* grows increasingly strong.

So you have in your hands something that may turn out to be significant, possibly moreso than my Amazon reviews may reflect. (After I posted a critique of the “Blessed Seraphim Rose” crowd,¹⁰ admirers were not sated by giving that specific work one star reviews. They also follow through to see that positive Amazon ratings and reviews of any of my works continue to be taken down if they can be dislodged. This may also be part of why my works get one star reviews simply alleging, in two words, “Poorly written.”¹¹)

¹⁰ C.J.S. Hayward, *The Seraphinians: “Blessed Seraphim Rose” and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts* (Wheaton, IL: C.J.S. Hayward Publications, 2012).

¹¹ “Amazon.com: The Luddite’s Guide to Technology: The Past Writes Back to Humane Tech!,” Amazon, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://www.amazon.com/Luddites-Guide-Technology-Writes-Humane/dp/1731439539>.

Reading Marie Winn's *The Plug-in Drug*¹² helped me appreciate why my political science professor at Calvin forcefully told a class, "*Playboy* is more Christian than *Sesame Street*!"¹³ I am writing at a time when technologies are addictive and need to be carefully used if they are used at all, and works like "The Acceleration of Addictiveness" (at <https://paulgraham.com/addiction.html>)¹⁴ suggest that such caution will only be more thoroughly justified as time continues and further modifications of technology unfold before us.

Why Orthodoxy?

One Orthodox community member talked about how he asked people, "I want to understand Orthodoxy. What books should I read?" He got an answer of, "You don't understand Orthodoxy by reading a book. You understand Orthodoxy by attending services." And that is how he answers requests other people make of him for reading recommendations to understand Orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy is an oral culture that uses reading, and monasticism more so. This book is not intended to explain Orthodoxy; you must attend Orthodox services if you want that. But Orthodoxy is how I understand being human and Orthodox theology has "Who are we?" for one of the biggest questions to answer.¹⁵ This big question includes another

¹² Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

¹³ I believe his reason this forceful and possibly exaggerated statement is that *Playboy* is an open and undisguised evil that young people are warned about; *Sesame Street* is a whitewashed tomb full of rotten things which masquerades as a messenger of all things good, wholesome, and educational, and that is a bigger mark of the satanic. ("And no marvel; for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light," 2 Corinthians 11:14, *Classic Orthodox Bible*.)

¹⁴ "The Acceleration of Addictiveness," The acceleration of addictiveness, accessed November 18, 2022, <http://www.paulgraham.com/addiction.html>.

¹⁵ When I was beginning studying theology at Cambridge in 2002, in an

capitally important question: “What is good for us as human beings?” This in turn includes “What use and abstention from technology is good for us as human beings?” That question drives this whole series. I do not write to reason you into being Orthodox, but I would be mistreating you to use anything less than the best resources I know to answer the challenges of technology and using technology without burning yourself.

Electronic technology has perhaps been around for a couple hundred years or less.¹⁶ Our genus *Homo* has been around for millions of years,¹⁷ and our subspecies *Homo sapiens sapiens* has been around for over a hundred thousand years.¹⁸ This means that for well over 99% of the time our human race has been around, electronic technology was simply not part of the picture for anyone. *Maybe the keys to human flourishing and the conditions that the human person are adapted to, are older than electronic technology, and perhaps there are things we need to learn from what was normal human life.*

Let’s go!

early tutorial supervision I was told that the three fundamental questions in theology are “Who is God?”, “Who are we?”, and “How do we relate to God?”

¹⁶ “History of Technology Timeline,” Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed November 18, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/story/history-of-technology-timeline>.

¹⁷ “Homo,” Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, November 7, 2022), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo>.

¹⁸ Glenn Elert, “Age of Homo Sapiens,” Age of Homo Sapiens - The Physics Factbook, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://hypertextbook.com/facts/1997/TroyHolder.shtml>.

Foreword to *Nitty, Gritty Ascesis*

The term “Advent,” as used for the time leading up to Christmas, stems from the same root as “adventure,” but one subdeacon commented that a productive Lent was nothing like what was pushed under the heading of “forty day spiritual adventure” nonsense.

Reaching maturity includes working through things that are not always pleasant, but its fruits are deeper than we often realize. Sometimes we do not even dream of the fruits of proper maturity before we have gained at least some of that maturity.

This collection, perhaps not spectacularly, is meant to dip into the “*Orthodoxy is slog!*” that can necessarily come before *Orthodoxy transforms slog* and the unglamorous labor of “novice’s obediences” in the monastery takes on a character that leads to “Bishops wish they were novices!” (As a Holy Cross Hermitage guestmaster collapsed one of the stories of the heavily recommended *Everyday Saints*.)

You can get better work done if you are willing to put on work gloves.

Note on Footnotes and Claim to Originality

It has been a thing to want originality, and to footnote debts to other authors but otherwise at least implicitly claim, “Except as I explicitly document otherwise, I was born in a house that I built with my own two hands.”

There may be some original content in my writing, even strikingly original and possibly groundbreaking, but the claim I make to originality is nil. I have many debts to many people and more than I can trace (such may be classified as “unintentional plagiarism”), and I do not believe I was born in a house I built with my own two hands. I attempt the renovation and expansion of a mansion whose first roots I cannot trace and which has been touched by many hands before me, and God willing will be touched by many hands after.

When I was an aspiring scholar with an academic library, and I had an essay or assignment, I would do a literature search among the scholarly literature, and document what were often genuine dependencies and my genuine sources. That is not my situation now. *That is not the situation of my readers now.* I made footnotes for the book the first volume in this series was largely drawn from, and what I found was that I was doing five minute Googlepedia hits that may have documented a claim but

generally had nothing to do with where I got my ideas. And today, when in the title of one book I would probably like, we are *Amusing and Informing Ourselves to Death*, people carry cellphones and those who trace a footnote are probably about as capable as I am of a five minute Googlepedia hit.

Additionally, this work as it originally stands has a little more than a thousand pages of various kinds of un-footnoted writing. If we say that comes with an average of three footnotes per page and five minutes per footnote, that comes to over fifteen thousand footnotes, taking more than two hundred and fifty hours, or more than six uninterrupted forty hour workweeks. And I hardly have forty hour workweeks to spare.

Footnoting in this collection is essentially as original, meaning half-fledged Googlepedia hits for the first volume, standard scholarly footnoting in originally academic work, and naming of important sources in the remaining five out of seven volumes.

My apologies for readers who want footnotes; I know it's considered a sign of a serious or formal book, but I would rather make this collection available soon than wait indefinitely for all the half-fledged Googlepedia footnotes to be available.

Introduction

The worst of sins

Victorianism, in caricature and as the term is used today, is seen as a day of excessive prudery that made lust the worst sin around. There is a fraudulent urban legend version of a letter that is, much like “The Good Wife’s Guide,” represents too perfect of a caricature written to be hated. It was allegedly published in 1894 by the Madison Institute, by “Ruth Smythers, beloved wife of The Reverend L.D. Smythers,” and is about how a wife can make sex as miserable and as rare as possible an experience for the husband. It tells the wife, for instance, to nag her husband about XYZ the moment after sex. (I half-wonder, though, if the initials of LDS are part of the joke with an implied innuendo about Mormon sexual practices? And is the “piper” in “time to pay the piper” a double entendre? The alleged author is a Methodist pastor’s wife, part of the denominations that are called “mainline”... er, “oldline”... er, “sideline”... er, “flatline”...) It can easily enough be found in a search on the net; I do not wish to provide details to readers who don’t think they need to trawl through the

whole thing to get the point.

The Victorian age, in caricature, viewed sexual sins as the most serious. I have heard little sympathy for that view among Evangelicals; pride, if anything, has been seen as the worst sin. And this is in continuity with the Philokalia; one author says that various people can help people with various sins, but “only God can help the proud.” Lust and drunkenness are the sins of men; pride is the sin of devils.

Nonetheless, lust, however easily forgiven the first time, represents a serious sin whether or not it is in fact the worst. His Eminence KALLISTOS, in *The Orthodox Church*, without touching on the Protestant cottage industry of reconstructing the early Church, says that Christians now are approaching the status of early Christians as being outside the protection of the law. That has been true when he wrote it and is becoming more true; in Britain and Canada, you can go to jail for reading parts of the Bible. When, before Obergefell, a friend in the U.S. reported on a Canadian pastor saying that homosexual acts are sinful (and that God forgives sins and welcomes sinners) was jailed, his comment was, “It’s coming [in the U.S. as well].” And in fact it is.

The Graeco-Roman world had a degree of pan-eroticism, and “Confucius say secretary not part of furniture until screwed on desk” echoes literal Roman practice where the paterfamilias lay with slaves of both sexes as part of an absolute assertion of ownership rights. At banquets, servant women were expected to lie on guests and be sexually available for intercourse not even private. Though not through antiquarian reconstruction, postmodernism is re-incarnating pan-eroticism, although

there might be said something about that that has been said about paganism. In response to the claim that our society is reverting to virtually classical paganism, the response was, “Would that it were anything so innocent!” The Graeco-Roman world has been clearly stated to be “No sunny Eden of the un-repressed.” The Graeco-Roman world, notwithstanding that it allowed a broader range of targets for lust, had a philosopher answer a question, “How often should I have sex?” with “As often as you want to deplete your energy,” and while women, boys, and slaves were promising targets to pagans, there was not a sense of “Have sex with legitimate targets as often as impulse would have it.” Postmodern pan-eroticism has eclipsed that of antiquity, and while the degree of concern in Victorianism about sexual sin may seem strange against a backdrop of Evangelicalism that attempted sexual purity, the character of pan-eroticism, with hard porn as easy to access as our phones, should give pause to viewing Victorian modesty as a groundless superstition.

The case for pride being the most serious may be stronger; lust and drunkenness are the sins of men while pride and rebellion are the sins of devils, and the Philokalia, against a backdrop of people who took chastity as one of the three cardinal vows of monasticism, views lust as easier to help than pride. But this is not the only sin besides lust to be viewed in such a manner.

In the Middle Ages the great sin to find everywhere was idolatry, and indeed the Ten Commandments open with “I am the Lord your God: you shall have no other gods before me,” meaning “You shall admit no other gods to my presence.” This concern has been ossified and carried on by Protestants, with concern that reverence for our Lord’s

Mother and the saints encroaches on ground that should only be given to God; and this is not the only point of late medieval theology kept alive in Protestantism. Bridal mysticism was very important, and Evangelicals today retain a great concern for one's relationship with Christ.

One of the less obvious choices is what the Orthodox Church calls *akedia*, and when an English rendering is given, is most commonly called "sloth."

I mention the Greek name first, as a symptom of a problem. The concept is not terribly readily accessible; English-speaking Orthodox are ready enough to use the English terms "pride" and "lust" without explanation or even mentioning the classical terms in Greek, much as I have done in this introduction. While the concept of "laziness" exists up to a point, the whole concept of *akedia* is a much larger and much more subtle concept, and it is why I include in this work a first work that is not directly about technology, but about escapism, which fits under the heading of *akedia*. (One aspect and symptom of *akedia* is that a man relates to the divinely given here and now as the sort of thing one would want to escape.) That first work is called, and rightly, "The Hydra,"¹⁹ and it is out of *akedia* in the West that monasticism developed natural philosophy or proto-science, and proto-universities, out of an *akedia* that lost the central points of monasticism. It is quite possible to succumb to *akedia* while becoming very excited about things that do not matter, such as Linux, a sports match, or *Harry Potter* mania.

I might note that I was fully underwhelmed by the

¹⁹ The Hydra was a mythical beast fought by Hercules in Greek mythology. It had nine heads, and if you cut off one, two more heads would sprout in its place.

comment, or lack thereof, in *The Plug-in Drug* about *Harry Potter*. There is a lack of interesting analysis beyond saying that it is wonderful that a series could still beckon kids to read, but not recognizing an exception that proves the rule of the path of least resistance being to be mesmerized, perhaps mixed with boredom, by technology. The spiritual forces that lead to people being sucked into their phones are perfectly capable of allowing a diversion of energy into reading books that provide escape, and an analogy to *The Onion's* article about a strong woman who overcame years of childhood abuse to become a successful porn star. (And yes, that is an insulting analogy; I draw on insulting analogies to crystallize an isomorphism between something I am trying to explain that is less accessible, and something that is already more familiar and exhibits isomorphic traits.)

The effect of *akedia* or sloth is to make one's surroundings, activities, etc. seem unbearable, and the kind of thing one would want to escape. But the "unbearable" does not consist in one's surroundings as it appears; "Hell is a state of mind," as C.S. Lewis said in *The Great Divorce*. And *akedia* is enough to make first world surroundings of luxury unbearably difficult to stay in.

The classic advice given to monks in the desert was to keep on praying until the temptation subsided. Now when I have been in *akedia*, praying felt like positively the last thing I wanted to do. However, when I kept on praying anyway, the difficulty subsided and lasting bliss seemed to always be in its place. It is hard to see, but the entire unbearability does not reside in our surroundings, but in us. The room appears intolerably dark because we have not been able to take off our internal sunglasses.

The solution to all of this consists in taking off the sunglasses.

The poison of escape is found in many forms and is much older than technology. It's included even in one science fiction short story of Socratic dialogue included, with regret for the escape, in this collection. However, the phone's marketing proposition is to offer an escape that does not please for long and is somehow always never enough. This was true of the always-on television in the house, and it is more true of the always-on phone that is always at hand in the pocket.

I said earlier of seeking after honors, "I know the demon personally." I write here about another demon I know personally. One friend who is an editor, and had read some of my fiction, suggested that my brand as a writer might be "non-magical fantasy," and that is because I was fighting one of the symptoms while keeping the problem. Most fantasy portrays magic as something one can engage harmlessly, and I conscientiously tried to avoid that. But I kept the underlying outlook of escape, the same escape out of which I wrote *The Minstrel's Song*.

Part of the cost of *akedia* and escape is that it desensitizes us out of our ability to enjoy what we have. I have written elsewhere that lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe, which first disenchants everything else and then disenchants itself. But the same is true of other spiritual poisons; the best here and now we have feels oppressive to a heart desensitized by *akedia* and we cannot enjoy the simple pleasures in life. Porn only leaves the viewer wanting more porn until the desire is ravaging but porn can only go so far and rape is at hand. Technological escape leave us wanting more technological escape, and our

phones play an important role our desensitization to the beauty of everyday life.

What this work is meant to offer is help disengaging from addictive use of technology, a work that is primarily human and spiritual and only secondarily technological. Technologies are useful for logistics and getting things done, but we need to be in charge.

This is a book about how to take control in our lives and place the human element ahead of technology.

Introduction to “The Hydra”

“The Hydra” is an essay about a vice that is in some ways like the Hydra battled by Hercules in classical Greek myth. The mythological Hydra is a monster with nine heads, and if you cut one off of it, two more sprout in its place.

C.S. Lewis formed this author as an author, but this author finds a core, stinging vice in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and the “Joy” in *Surprised by Joy*. The question here is not an academic question. What it amounts to is whether the sporadic Joy that Lewis gave his life over to searching for is Heavenly or Hellish.

To the avid reader of C.S. Lewis, this offers the possibility to have (as Lewis said) a small man avoiding the error of a great one, and a possibility of a shackle and a chain that Lewis mistook for something truly beneficial.

In this author’s life, there are years in which he has been truly happy and years spent questing for “Joy,” and these two do not really overlap. If “Joy” is a snare, part of happiness follows after letting it go.

The Hydra

A Surprise About “Joy”

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

his nonfiction. And he was, himself, a person who could say the Creed without crossing his fingers, and a good deal more than that. If one is going to look for an able spokesman for any spiritually alive form of 20th century Christianity, C.S. Lewis is at least one of the front runners, and depending on the circles you move in, it might be said that choosing anyone else is a choice that requires justification.

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

C.S. Lewis, in one pivotal passage in his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, wrote:

...The first is itself the memory of a memory. As I stood beside a flowering currant bush on a summer day there suddenly arose in me without warning, and as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; Milton's "enormous bliss" of Eden (giving the full, ancient meaning to "enormous") comes somewhere near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what? not, certainly, for a biscuit tin filled with moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my own past. 'Ιουλιανποθω [Oh, I desire too much]—and before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison.

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

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

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

I knew nothing about Balder; but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described

(except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale, and remote) and then, as in the other examples, found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it.

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

I know that desire. I know it intimately, and it has been called one of the central defining characteristics. And, as is said in *Ostrov*, “I know [the demon] personally.” It is a form of covetousness, one that dwarfs the mere covetousness inspired by car ads, which portray luxury cars as mysterious, sensual, and intimate, and are in their own way “a particular kind of unhappiness or grief”, and which are in their own lesser way “a kind we want.” So far as I know, the Philokalia, which are (more than any other

collection I've read, including the Bible) the science of interior struggle and spiritual warfare) says nothing of this secular enrapturement in its description of human beatitude. It does, perhaps, discuss something like this in the demon of noonday; yesterday and today monks are perennially warned of the passion of escaping the here and now in which God has placed us, and the strict monastic is ordinarily to stay in one's cell and fight the demon of noonday. One classic story tells of a monk who said he defeated the demon of noonday by visiting an elder, and another monk sharply corrected him: far from *defeating* the demon of noonday, his trip was *giving in* to the demon of noonday. This longing, called *Sehnsucht* by the Romantics (and remember that C.S. Lewis's first work after returning to Christianity was *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Defense of Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism*, is eloquently given voice in a work connecting conservative Christianity with Jungian psychology in Brent Curtis's "Less-Wild Lovers: Standing at the Crossroads of Desire," which was published in Mars Hill Review, republished along with *First Things* and other heavyweights in the conservative Christian Leadership University, and been gobbled up by complementarians (I am one) with works such as John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*. But there is an issue, not with complementarianism as such (though complementarians may jump at a literate voice saying something out of [lock]step with feminism), but with what is *not* present in "Less-Wild Lovers." And I would challenge the reader to look at the compelling, *haunting* picture in "Less-Wild Lovers," and ask what is not there for something that complains to be Christian: where, in the entire piece, is the human plight described in terms of the sin and evils condemned by Christian tradition? For the moment let's set aside the question of whether sin is understood, as in *Pilgrim's Progress*, through the paradigm example of a judicial crime, or whether it is understood as in Orthodoxy through the paradigm example of a disease.

John Bunyan and an Orthodox Christian can alike say that judged by the paradigm of the Ten Commandments, we don't stack up, and the Ten Commandments provide a yardstick of something seriously important in human living. Where in the entire article is the yardstick of human failing associated with such things as are in the Ten Commandments? And once a problem is admitted, where does God stand with regard to the center of things? Admittedly one is invited to a larger spiritual world, but when does the advocated "way of the heart" revolve around Christ? Admittedly the differences here between Protestant and Orthodox are significant, but even with these differences where does the thesis that we are marred by sin and saved by Christ ever shape the outlook in the article? "Less-Wild Lovers" compellingly concentrates something that diluted C.S. Lewis's Christianity, something that helps make the *The Chronicles of Narnia* compelling, and a clue to something that is rotten in the state of Denmark. The longing C.S. Lewis appeals to is a form of covetousness, one I am too familiar with, and seriously not-cool.

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

In "A Pet Owner's Rules," I said, God is like a pet owner who only has two rules:

1. *I am your owner.* Receive freely of the food and drink I have given you.

2. Don't drink out of the toilet.

And, I argued, all sin is drinking out of the toilet. For example, getting drunk may feel enticingly nice the first time or two. But being drunk all the time, as any recovering alcoholic will tell you, is suffering you wouldn't want on your worst enemy. And covetousness as a whole is drinking out of the toilet. Pornography, with its lustful shade of covetousness, begins by being very enticing, but lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe: first pornography disenchantments everything that is not porn, and then it progressively disenchantments itself. And it also fits to add that ordinary covetousness is pleasant at first. Watching a really enticing commercial may help you understand the words, "Having is not as pleasing as wanting. It is not logical, but it is often true." But the cost of covetousness is a loss of contentment. One begins by not being satisfied by what one has, and ends by not being satisfied by what one can get. Buying things may get momentary satisfaction, but the ultimate delivery, if you can buy what you covet, is nicer things and with them less contentment than one had before. And in these lines, it matters a great deal whether the intense longing of "Joy" or *Sehnsucht* is in fact covetousness. If it makes the human person settled in happiness, this is news to the Orthodox spiritual person. Everything that is like it is deemed unhelpful in the ascetical literature; avarice is poison, and obeying the demon of noonday is poison. I don't see that my own extensive experience with Joy has made me happy, and even its advocate in Lewis openly says that it can be seen as an intense joy or an intense wounded unhappiness. Admittedly we are to yearn for Christ God, perhaps in a sublimation of the impulse to yearn for created things, and some authors use 'eros' or 'yearning' in relation to God: but neither Lewis nor Curtis finds this desire to be particularly a desire for God. The cost of yearning something that, unlike cars and chewing gum, I cannot have no matter how

much money I have, is like the more vulgar yearning stimulated by commercials. It seems palatial from the inside, like a doorway to a larger space, and it costs me something, namely contentment with what God has given me now. Some times I have recognized that my actions when I have been in the service of such yearning have been toxic. I now remember not a single time in my life when I have been happy that such yearnings have been prominent. If, as Lewis says, these yearnings are such that in their service one would choose them over happiness, perhaps this is not a mark of how wonderfully good they are. Perhaps it is a mark of how *foul* they are.

The hydra, or one end of a fallen tree branch

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

I had stepped away from most fantasy with its portrayal of magic; in response to friends who said, “Why can’t we have fantasy with different physical laws?” I said (besides a bit about physics) that they were asking not for fantasy with different *physical* laws, but different *moral* laws, and I asked why they didn’t want fantasy in which other unlawful things besides magic were all kosher. The “different physical laws” seemed to always mean laws that would allow life as we know it (which is astronomically improbable: for physical constants alone, getting things right enough to allow us to live would require precision in

excess of a marksman who could hit a proton from the opposite side of the universe), but in addition allow occult activity without what Christianity has regarded as occult sin. And why, I asked, if one could allow such things under the heading of different physical laws, why not envision universes in which sexual sins were innocent and harmless? And amidst all this, I sought to recreate fantasy, but without magic... which is to say that I sought to excise portrayal of magic from a fabric woven from the same root. I removed the picture but kept the frame on the wall. What fantasy offers is an alternative to the here and now, an alternative that crystallizes in the portrayal of magic. And I had removed magic from fantasy but retained the ambient orientation that powers magical fantasy.

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

Magic as an unnatural vice

My most recent haunting of "Joy" came with a desire for spring greenery and nature, by assumption in a neo-Pagan light. There are a couple of issues here; for one issue, our worship of nature is a worship of an idealized nature that cuts away plants that grow naturally because they are "weeds" (the definition of a "weed" is *a plant I don't want*, and the kinds of plants that intrude on our gardens as weeds tend to be those best suited to the local ecology), and puts plants that are ill-suited to grow in the area, perhaps needing extensive fresh water in an environment where fresh water is scarce. But the other, deeper issue has to be that when we reach for natural religion our eyes search for

neo-paganism, perhaps Druidry. It was always with a faintly guilty conscience that in looking for wallpaper for my computer, I grasped for wallpapers of Stonehenge. Now I do not object to nature wallpaper as such; I have a waterfall wallpaper on my computer now and a clean conscience with it. But the Stonehenge wallpaper has to do with imagining nature in a pagan light. Perhaps this is a pagan light that neo-pagans and Druids would recognize; perhaps they would call it an outsider's conception. But in either case, as with the recent haunting of Joy, my reaching for nature was a grasping that had Romantic, pagan, or occult resonance.

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

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

If there is anything that is natural for us to have, it is the here and now, and the plain sense of the here and now. This "here and now" may be out of doors, or it may be inside a house, or it may in an even more artificial environment like Antarctica or an airplane cockpit. But regardless of which of these possibilities we are actually in, "Your cell will teach you everything you need to know," and

escape from the here and now is unnatural cheating on a test. It's not learning the main lesson brought by the here and now. And if nature is looked to as providing the substance of an escape, then nature is being looked to for something unnatural. Stepping out of a house into something green may momentarily provide escape; but the nature of "out of doors" is no more permanently exotic than "indoors." If the out of doors appears to us to have a shimmer of something magical, a shimmer of exotic escape from the here and now, then we are using nature to dodge the chief lesson that nature is intended to teach us. We are being unnatural in our use of nature herself.

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

Awakening

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

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

And it may turn out in the end that happiness was, like a pair of glasses, on our nose the whole time. If we let go of paganism as a way to connect with nature, we may find that Orthodoxy has held this connection with nature all the time, in details like the flowers adorning icon stands and the saying that if you have two small coins you should use one to buy prosphora and the other to buy flowers for the icons, to the status of the Orthodox Church as the vanguard of the whole visible Creation returning to her Lord, to monastics who cultivate a connection with God and end up having a connection to the natural world as well, to everything discussed in "Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth." It turns out that the idea of paganism and Romanticism as the way to connect with nature was a

decoy, but the good news is that the decoy is not needed. We have better.

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

An ancient hymn says, "Adam, trying to be god, failed to be god; Christ became man, that he might make Adam god." C.S. Lewis well enough said that though the journey to Heaven may cost us our right hand and our right eye, if we persevere through Heaven, we may find that what we have left behind is precisely *nothing*. If we let behind Romanticism and its by-definition-impossible quest for its harmony with nature, and all the occult hydra's heads offering escape from the here and now, we may find that when we have really and truly repented, repentance being the most terrifying moment in Christian experience, once we have opened our hands and let all their necessary-seeming contents fall away as far as God wants, what we have left in our hands is all the good we did not choose, together with all the good we did choose. Letting go of that perennially seductive wish for a moment of deep harmony with nature, deepens our harmony with nature: for indeed,

in terms of true harmony with nature that is continuous with virtue, being at peace with one's surroundings, even in a skyscraper or even a space station, is more than a vacation where one is overwhelmed by hills and trees. And when we have repented of the escape that seems like our only real salvation given our circumstances, we are given real salvation in our circumstances: not wine from an unopened bottle, but appreciated wine from a bottle opened the usual way.

We have nothing to lose but our bondage to sin.

Discussion questions for “The Hydra”

1. Has the Hydra appeared in your life?
2. Has its service left you really and truly happy?
3. What concrete manifestations has the Hydra had in your life?
4. Is Harry Potter mania a route to enjoying the here and now?
5. What could you appreciate more about the here and now?

Introduction to “Technology is Part of Our Poverty”

AT&T ran a series of commercials which are well worth watching, at tinyurl.com/you-will-and-the-company. The asks, “Have you ever filed a book from thousands of miles away? Have you ever crossed the country without stopping for directions? Or sent someone a fax from the beach?... Have you ever paid a toll without slowing down? Bought concert tickets from a cash machine? Or talked to your baby from afar?... Have you ever opened doors with the sound of your voice? Carried your medical history in your wallet? Or attended a meeting in your bare feet? Have you ever watched a movie you wanted to, the minute you wanted to? Learned special things from faraway places? You will, and the company that will bring it to you is AT&T.”

Today we have comparable luxuries to these 1993 commercials, but we do not have a 1990’s standard of living with smartphones tacked on. This is a look at how our gadgets, which may have been science fiction-y thirty years ago, are part of a broader picture where there is poverty.

This article explores how it may be suggested that technology is part of our poverty.

Technology Is Part of Our Poverty

The reason for this work

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

Clearing away one distraction

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

An example of a gap

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I do not contest Jakob Nielsen’s assertion that in the future we will have technology that sounds astounding by today’s standards. That much is indisputable. However, **I strongly dispute the implication that to people living in that reality, it will be a world of wonder, or a world that we could wish were real to us, the way Harry Potter fans wish on some level they could live at Hogwarts.**

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

A meme about a gap: Old Economy Steve

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

Goes to law school.
Pays student loans with first paycheck.

Brought a house in his 20's with a 9 to 5 job that didn't require a bachelor's degree.
"Kids these days have it easy."

"When I was in college my summer job paid the tuition."
Tuition was \$400.

Pays into Social Security.
Receives benefits.

Becomes homeowner at 22.
Tells son's generation it should feel "privileged" because it can afford \$200 smartphones.

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

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

Got my dream job,
By answering a classified ad.

“Why don’t you call and ask if they’re hiring?”
Hasn’t been on a job hunt since 1982.

“I worked all summer to buy a car.”
Corvette!

Grows up in one of the world’s best economies.
Creates the worst global economy the world
has ever seen.

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

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

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

...but the actor in the ad displays an almost sexual thrill at being able to pay a toll while driving at full speed, and whatever the experience is like for us to whom it is an everyday activity, our experience is hardly an orgasm.

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

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

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

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

In one post to a friend, I wrote,

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

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

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

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

YOU WILL

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

Conclusion: My own privilege

Having discussed how we have at least *somewhat* “Harry Potter”-like technologies, but we ain't enjoying Old Economy Steve's “Hasn't applied for a job since Jimmy Carter—’You need to hit the bricks to find work. That's what I did.” living conditions any more, I would like to add an additional note, and tie in something from the beginning of this article, the Privileged girl in Bridge to Terebinthia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I have other privileges besides having taken charge, at least mostly, of my cellphone and internet usage. I'm really book-smart, and I can't simply give that to you,

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

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

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

Epilogue: *Phones can be turned off, folks!*

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

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

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

If I have a legitimate justification to use it, I turn it on for long enough to do whatever I need to do, and then I immediately turn it all the way off. It’s *wonderfully* inconvenient, and it lets me keep my phone with me as much as I want, have it available, but then be in a place in the world that does not have *convenient*, non-stop Internet access. And I can get there without needing to shell out for an expensive plane ticket to some faroff forgotten world, or for that matter shell out any money for anything at all.

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

And while you’re at it, upgrade to a watch that is not a smartwatch, perhaps the watch you had before getting a smartwatch. Mine is a Casio Men’s Pathfinder Casual Watch PRW2500T-7CR Titanium. (Though I felt very small and shamed when I saw a doctor wearing a cheap \$5 digital watch with no special features.)

Discussion questions for “Technology is Part of Our Poverty”

1. What possessions do you now own?
2. Are you in a state of affluence with all the technologies you own?
3. Do you think newer, more science fiction-y gadgets will necessarily make you truly richer?
4. Is our economy the economy of thirty years ago, with our gadgets tacked on?
5. What is the most obnoxious example of a technology you own that is really part of poverty?
6. What could you do to regain some control from that technology?

Introduction to “Branding is the New Root of All Evil”

“The love of money is the root of all evil.” So said St. Paul, at a time when no amount of money could purchase electronic gadgetry.

This article explores a suggestion that branding represents a way to put the love of money on steroids, and get people to impoverish themselves by buying things that not even “natural” love of money and covetousness would by themselves lead people to spend money on.

Branding is the New Root of All Evil

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

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

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

That shut off the *incessant* backseat driving, and it has sometimes taken quite a production to get a boundary to register.

My reason for talking about my parents, though, is not mainly to give a striking memory, but to talk about something I am grateful to them for. From a very young age, my parents tried to free me from advertising's allure and the sacramental shopping of buying into brands. This did not, at least immediately, stop me from telling my parents I needed to have shoes or whatnot for which I had seen a really well-done ad, but it did take root, enough so that I was unpleasantly surprised when reading in a high school science class how in recording duplicable detail for a science experiment, the brand and model of all scientific equipment should be recorded among other details to try to

give a scientific reader the ability to reproduce the experiment.

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

Where did branding come from, anyway?

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

feel the need to make markerboard markers or pads of paper tell their company's brand story.

And what is wrong with branding, anyway?

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

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

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

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

The entire enterprise of marketing and a brand economy tacitly acknowledges that people's natural greed will not stimulate enough purchases to meet the economy's needs. Advertising isn't reining in the horse of love of money and things. *It isn't even laying the reins on the horse's neck.* It's kicking the horse in the side with your spurs as hard as you can kick.

I remember a later conversation where a professor echoed back what he heard me saying, and said, "So you're an anti-capitalist?" and I winced. Usual objections to capitalism are Marxist in character and critique capitalism from the left. There is also a conservative vein of anti-capitalism, the perspective that motivated Dorothy Sayers to write "The Other Six Deadly Sins," in which Sayers

complains, “A man may be greedy and selfish; spiteful, cruel, jealous, and unjust; violent and brutal; grasping, unscrupulous, and a liar; stubborn and arrogant; stupid, morose, and dead to every noble instinct—and still we are ready to say of him that he is not an immoral man.” I quote at length what she wrote in the context of a rationed World War II England, because copies of titles with the essay are rare on Amazon:

Let us seize this breathing space [about gluttony in its crassest form], while we are out of temptation, to look at one very remarkable aspect of the sin of [gluttony]. We have all become aware lately of something very disquieting about what we call our economic system. An odd change has come over us since the arrival of the machine age. Whereas formerly it was considered a virtue to be thrifty and content with one’s lot, it is now considered to be the mark of a progressive nation that it is filled with hustling, go-getting citizens, intent on raising their standard of living. And this is not interpreted to mean merely that a decent sufficiency of food, clothes, and shelter is attainable by all citizens. It means much more and much less than this. It means that every citizen is encouraged to consider more, and more complicated, luxuries necessary to his well-being. The gluttonous consumption of manufactured goods had become, before [World War II], the prime civic virtue. And why? Because machines can produce cheaply only if they produce in vast quantities; because unless the machines can produce cheaply nobody can afford to keep them running; and because, unless they are kept running, millions

of citizens will be thrown out of employment, and the community will starve.

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

If a man invents anything that would give lasting satisfaction, his invention must be bought up by the manufacturer so it may never see the light of day. Nor must the worker be encouraged to take too much interest in the thing he makes; if he did, he might desire to make as well as it can be made, and that would not pay. It is better that he should work in a soulless indifference, even though such

treatment should break his spirit and cause him to hate his work. The difference between the factory hand is that the craftsman lives to do the work he loves; but the factory hand lives by doing the work he despises. We know about all this and must not discuss it now, but I will ask you to remember it.

The point I want to make now is this: that whether or not it is desirable to keep up this fearful whirligig of industrial finance based on gluttonous consumption, it could not be kept up for a single moment without the cooperating gluttony of the consumer. Legislation, the control of wages and profits, the balancing of exports and imports, elaborate schemes for the distribution of surplus commodities, the state ownership of enterprise, complicated systems of social credit, and finally wars and revolutions are all invoked in the hope of breaking down the thing known as the present economic system. Now it may well be that its breakdown would be a terrific disaster and produce a worse chaos than that which went before—we need not argue about it. The point is that, without any legislation whatsoever, the whole system would come crashing down if every consumer were voluntarily to restrict purchases to the things really needed. “The fact is,” said a workingman the other day at a meeting, “that when we fall for these advertisements we’re being had for mugs.” So we are. The sin of gluttony, of greed, of overmuch stuffing ourselves, is the sin that has delivered us into the power of the machine.

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

In the matter of clothing, we are beginning to regain our respect for stuffs that will wear well; we can no longer be led away by the specious argument that it is smarter and more hygienic to wear underlinen and stockings once and then throw them away than to buy things that will serve us for years. We are having to learn, painfully, to save food and material and salvage waste products; and in learning do to these things we have found a curious and

stimulating sense of adventure. For it is the great curse of gluttony that it ends by destroying all sense of the precious, the unique, the irreplaceable.

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

It was left for the present age to endow covetousness with glamor on a big scale and give it a title that it could carry like a flag. It occurred to somebody to call it enterprise. From the moment of that happy inspiration, covetousness has gone forward and never looked back. It has become a swaggering,

swash-buckling, piratical sin, going about with its had cocked over its eye, and pistols tucked into the tops of its jackboots. Its war cries are “Business Efficiency!” “Free Competition!” “Get Our or Get Under!” and “There’s Always Room at the Top! It no longer works and saves; it launches out into new enterprises; it gambles and speculates; it thinks in a big way; it takes risks. It can no longer be troubled to deal in real wealth and so remain attached to work and the soil. It has set money free from all hampering ties; it has interests in every continent; it is impossible to pin it down to any one place or any concrete commodity—it is an adventure, a roving, rollicking free lance. It looks so jolly and jovial and has such a twinkle in its cunning eye that nobody can believe that its heart is as cold and calculating as ever.

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

1. The factories are not first world factories in front of us but third world sweatshops whose workers could only drool over the conditions of first world factories, and:
2. Everything in “The Damned Backswing” is true and we are being stripped of even moderate consumption as the damned backswing plays out past decades’ gluttonous consumption that continues today.
3. So far as I can discern, Sayers does not open or foresee the Pandora’s box of branding.

This is, I would underscore, a *conservative* critique of *capitalism*. It touches on Marxist critique, or Marxism

rather touches on this line of critique, when contrasting the craftsman and the factory hand; but even a stopped clock is right twice a day, including Marxism.

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

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

One lunch with Bruce Winter, the head of Tyndale House, commented on what advertising now sees as a sort of dark age before advertising would essentially get its act together. Before that, an ad advertising (for instance) fur coats, would show a fur coat, maybe with someone in it or maybe not, and the word "SALE" once or maybe repeated several times. (It strikes me as a stroke of brilliant wit that one nearby antiques dealer has, out front, a letter sign with the words "ANTIQUES! ANTIQUES! ANTIQUES!" That kind of nostalgic advertising might work for nothing else, it is perfect for communicating antique goods that in some

cases would fit how some antiques were originally advertised.) Bruce mentioned the older school, and said that it comes from before advertisers understood what motivates people. Now, he commented, car ads sell on the premise that they are “mysterious, sensual, and intimate:” as I would later observe, one glitzy car ad ended with a woman’s low voice saying, “When you turn your car on... *does it return the favor?*” Bruce Winter was, I might underscore, *not* someone who would raise an objection to having something be “mysterious, sensual, and intimate” as such, and he spoke of it with awe. He was merely suggesting that we seek something “mysterious, sensual, and intimate” in the setting where we can enjoy it best.

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

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

Another change in habits has to do with why an appliance repair shop in my hometown closed down, having lost their lease. When an appliance breaks down, most people don’t want a fix that will restore the status quo. Most people prefer to find an occasion to upgrade. For another

example, a senior I know has cookware made in the 1940's or 1950's. His cookware has plenty of use remaining before it will eventually decay. Its expected life, over a half century after when it was first made, is longer than brand new cookware because new cookware is specifically not built to last. Planned obsolescence is another form of life that keeps factory wheels turning. It's not enough to have a darling brand in cars, phones, etc.; people feel an almost entirely unnecessary need to have the latest model.

Sacramental shopping

I have been aware in my own life of a practice that I call "sacramental shopping." Another term is "retail therapy," and perhaps today the lexicon includes "Amazon therapy." It is *shopping that functions as an ersatz sacrament*, and it may be the chief sacrament in the ersatz religion of brand economy.

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

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

When I was getting ready to study theology, in 2002 I purchased a computer that would see me through my studies up through 2007. It was an IBM ThinkPad, a brand and line that were respected and for good reason, and I purchased a computer with ample screen real estate, a 1GHz processor that was probably overkill for my needs, and maxed-out 1G RAM. And after I did my research and

set my heart on a particular purchase, and my conscience held me back. I ran from my conscience and then faced up to it, a conscience saying, “No.” And I let go of buying it altogether, and as soon as that my conscience gave me an instantaneous green light.

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

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

Nonetheless, I believe that moment was permitted me so I could acquire the computer without it being an act of sacramental shopping, which is something quite significant. It has been my experience that when my conscience says, “Let it go, all the way,” sometimes I am freed from XYZ forever, and sometimes the instant I fully let go is the instant I get an unexpected green light. After years of struggle about posting from my story at Fordham, at all, ever, I let go... and my conscience gave me a

surprisingly sudden green light, the only condition being that I not name individual figures. So I posted “Orthodox at Fordham” at <https://cjsheyward.com/orthodox-fordham/>.

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

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

Do I have a personal brand? Should I?

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

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

I do not speak highly of personal branding, but I would like first to field an objection that may occur to some of my readers: do I, great critic of brands as I am, am unusually gifted, an Orthodox author who writes in the fashion of some of the great English-language apologists, see things from a different angle, and so on; and, also, I have a distinctive look to my favorites among the books I

have written. It would make sense to say, “If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, isn’t it a personal brand?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, out of all this there have been few things intended to address concerns of branding. My website has a distinctive and beautiful appearance and background image; and that visual identity flows onto book covers. And in a case of “Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you,” from (appropriately enough) that Sermon, I have been told that my work is largely known and often endorsed among conservative converts to Orthodoxy, and I’ve even been told that my name has trilettered on Facebook to CSH (meaning C.S. Hayward) which caught me off guard. And I would briefly like to address one question some people have: why am I happy to have fame among conservative converts to Orthodoxy? Why not write for all Orthodox? My answer, I

believe, lies in communication style. *Any Orthodox Christian, along with other interested parties, are welcome to read my writing.* However, the way I write is shaped by English language apologists, as is probably a shared experience with many more converts than people who grew up in the Church, and writing style may be a barrier. There have been some times I have tried to write with a more patristic style, such as “The Arena,” “Apprentice gods,” and “Technonomicon,” but it is a liability and a limitation to my stature as an Orthodox writer that people raised in the Orthodox Church might not as easily connect with my writing.

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

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

Vincent J. Miller, in *Consuming Religion* (a Marxist text which I checked out because I confused it with Tom Beaudouin, *Consuming Faith*, which I read at Fordham), writes in his introduction, in reference to voluntary simplicity:

[Marketers] want to know where the nerves are so they can position their products to hit them. A stroll through the supermarket illustrates this marketing strategy. Foodstuffs and

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

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

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

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

An inflection point towards the *real* answer

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

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

God is Love (1 John 4:8). And the first gift of Love was life. The meaning, the content of life was communion. To be alive man was to eat

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

But in sin man lost this eucharistic life. He lost it because he ceased to see the world as a means of Communion with God and his life as eucharist, as adoration and thanksgiving. . . He loves himself and the world for their own sake; he made himself the content and the end of his life. He thought that his hunger and thirst, i.e. his dependence of his life on the world—can be satisfied by the world as such, by food as such. But world and food, once they are deprived of their initial sacramental meaning—as means of communion with God, once they are not received for God’s sake and filled with hunger and thirst for God, once, in other words, God is no longer their real “content,” can give no life, satisfy no hunger, for they have no life in themselves... And thus by putting his love in

them, man deviated his love from the only object of all love, of all hunger, of all desires. And he died. For death is the inescapable “decomposition” of life cut from its only source and content. Man thought to find life in the world and in food, but he found death. His life became communion with death, for instead of transforming the world by faith, love, and adoration into communion with God, he submitted himself entirely to the world, he ceased to be its priest and became its slave. And by his sin the whole world was made a cemetery, where people condemned to death partook of death and “sat in the region and shadow of death” (Matt. 4:16).

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

Divine and immortal, He gave to all those who would believe in Him, i.e. find in Him the meaning and the content of their lives. Such is the wonderful meaning of the Last Supper. He offered Himself as the true food of man, because the Life revealed in Him is the true Life. And thus the movement of Divine Love which began in paradise with a Divine “take, eat. ..” (for eating is life for man) comes now “unto the end” with the Divine “take, eat, this is My Body...” (for God is life of man). The Last Supper is the restoration of the paradise of bliss, of life as Eucharist and Communion.

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

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

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

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

A conclusion

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

Discussion questions for “Branding is the New Root of All Evil”

1. Does the love of money make real happiness?
2. If you live in a first world standard of income, has that made you happy?
3. How does branding contribute to the sale of things that people don't need?
4. What brands would you like to associate with?
5. Have the brands you have already associated with made you truly happy?
6. What is one area where you could produce less waste?

Introduction to “Changing Orthodoxy”

People who are disloyal to Orthodoxy may want to change it, but there is a kind of change from within that can be and perhaps must be sought by people who are loyal to Orthodoxy.

The principle of *oikonomia* is that one’s priest or spiritual father has a power to bind and loose in one’s case, striking a balance between *akgravia*, the striving for strict excellence, with *oikonomia*, the principle of lenient love, to grow in their own condition.

This applies at multiple scales, and now that phones have gone worldwide and are common in the poorest continent, Africa, a change in Orthodoxy might be called for.

Changing Orthodoxy

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

A: *CHANGE?!?*

C.S. Lewis, in *The Abolition of Man*, makes a distinction between “change from within” and “change from without.” The difference, in his choice of illustration is the difference between saying, “You like your vegetables moderately fresh; why not grow your own and have them perfectly fresh?” and “Throw away that loaf and try eating bricks and centipedes instead.” Lewis compares it additionally to someone who regards his language as having no authority over him, and a poet who loves his language from within, for whom “The same language that suffers the changes is the language that inspired those changes.” That is a difference “as different as the works of Shakespeare are from Basic English.”

He goes on to say “Those who understand the spirit of the *Tao* [basic moral principles known across many cultures] and who have been led by it in directions which that spirit itself demands.... From within the *Tao* itself comes the only authority to modify the *Tao*.” Those who change the *Tao* from within may attempt changes as drastic

as those who change it from without, but there is a world of difference between the two.

One of the conservatives included in my undergraduate political science class—I do not know whether a religious conservative or some other stripe of conservative—said, “To conserve is to change.” Or as an Athonite elder said when I was on pilgrimage, “You don’t receive what the last generation passed on unchanged and pass it on to the next generation unchanged. You take what the previous generation worked on, work on it, and pass it on for the next generation to work on.” Perhaps in something of the same vein stands the famous saying, “Being Orthodox has never been a matter of mindless parrot-like repetition of the past, but always a matter of creative fidelity,” a statement that worries me for how many identical parrot-like repetitions I have heard of it and no development from it.

But I would like to suggest that, of my own work, some of my work is not intended to change. *Doxology* contains nothing new so far as I know. Anything of merit in it has probably been advanced further by some canonized saint, and further its demerits likely contain nothing new. The justification for reading it is not “publish or perish;” the justification for reading it is an articulation of timeless truths for today. However, a major streak of some other of my works is *precisely to change Orthodoxy*.

The majority of books on my bookshelf are intended to address how we might best use, moderate, or abstain from the use of technologies not available for 99% of human history and 99.9999% of human pre-history. I do not revise what the Three Hierarchy of St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, and St. Gregory the Theologian have to say about moderating our use of smartphones for the simple reason that phones were not available for them to offer direct guidance. Indirect guidance exists aplenty. The situation, in C.S. Lewis’s

terms, is one of modifying the *Tao* to successfully (or perhaps unsuccessfully) apply its spirit in further extension. I claim precursors, both in theology such as Tito Colliander's *The Way of the Ascetics*, and secular precursors treating dysfunctional technology use such as Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the **Elimination** of Television*. To some extent I attempt to answer the question of, "What would figures like St. John Chrysostom have to say if people were getting sucked into cellphones in his day?" His remarks about a theatre that insults the shared nature of women obviously translate to internet porn, but beyond that a technology that naturally lends itself to checking a cellphone a hundred times a day might be reined in or prohibited. In one sense it is a questionable enterprise to ask what a particular person would have said to a question or a concept that was simply not available in his world, but in the broader sense, however silly it might be to try to demarcate the differences the Three Heirarchs would have if phones were around in their day, it is not silly to try to change the faith's capital to express its spirit in relation to a situation not directly at the points that capital's authors shone the brightest.

The changes I suggest may be ultimately as far-reaching as those sought in woke culture; but the difference is the difference between suggesting growing your own vegetables to have them perfectly fresh, and suggesting eating bricks and centipedes. Again to refer to Lewis, there is arguable debate from within the *Tao* whether the advance of moving from the Silver Rule of Confucius, "Do not treat others in a way that you would not like them to treat you," to the Golden Rule of Christ, "Treat others the way you'd like them to treat you." There may be room within the *Tao* to discuss whether this advance is truly helpful or whether the extension is superfluous. Even then, though, the two sides of this hypothetical advice both recognize the Golden Rule as further application of the spirit of the Silver Rule. People who treat gold as a more

valuable precious metal than silver can only meaningfully do so on the assumptions that at least some metals are precious metals and that silver is one such precious metal.

Why should I be listened to? Ideally because of continuity with traditional Orthodoxy, and faithfulness even in seeking change. When I searched Amazon in a literature search some years ago, I tried several queries and got unrelated results until I search for “Orthodox technology” and found myself and no one else on the whole of Amazon. Ancient Faith has, as I understand, accepted my request to share my “Social Antibodies” Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy, not directly for publication, but as a question that might be posed to its authors. I haven’t heard back, though. The manager at my monastery’s bookstore seemed to think that Jean-Claude Larchet (author of what I consider a top-notch *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*) and I represent the only serious Orthodox presence for this question. I believe I could be a pioneer, and the question is less a question about whether my work is groundbreaking than if it is groundbreaking in a way that is truthful and helpful, or earns me new status as a groundbreaking arch-heretic.

(The last point is one I take very seriously; founders of heresies are usually very intelligent men who believe the authorities above them are in error. Arius arguably was attempting a change from within Tradition, and it is not clear to me that I would get the doctrine of the Trinity right working just from the Bible. I wrote “Dissent: Lessons from Being an Orthodox Student at a Catholic University,” and arguably went into error because I acted too much to try to avoid formal dissent when I believed my bishop had done something wrong that put people disagreeing with him on very shaky ground. I might have held to what my current bishop believes more successfully if I were less wary of dissenting from my previous bishop.)

That point aside, I wish to state that I am attempting

to change Orthodoxy's day-to-day life, that I believe that to conserve is to change, and that my attempt represents an effort to change from within as Lewis used the term. I believe that success or failure will not arise so much from whether I was really *trying* to change Orthodoxy from within, but will be a verdict of history of whether I *succeeded* in that the change I am trying to live was right given that it is an attempt to change from within.

I'd like to wind down with one story I heard this past Sunday, challenging an Enlightenment model that says we have to be continuously progressing. Someone mentioned an alcoholic who died as an "alcoholic who still suffers" in the language of Alcoholics Anonymous, and people were surprised when an authority said he went to Heaven. When they asked why, the answer was, "His mother was an alcoholic and there was alcohol in her milk. There was never a time when he was not an alcoholic. But he struggled for sobriety to the end of his days, and for that effort, he was saved."

Many people have heard this next story, but it bears repeating. In the deserts of Egypt, in ancient times, Abba Iscariot was asked, "What do we do?" He answered, "The half of what our fathers did." He was asked another question: "What will those after us do?" He answered, "The half of what we do." The Abba was then asked one final question: "What will people in the last times do?" He said, "They will not be able to do much of any ascetical exploit, but those that keep the faith will be honored above our fathers who raised the dead."

It is my hope that, in this world with ever more addictive technologies pushed at a younger and younger age, my work will help support people in keeping the faith until the end of their days.

Discussion Questions for “Changing Orthodoxy”

1. How can Orthodoxy be kept up in continuity with the past?
2. Do you agree with the words “To conserve is to change?” Why or why not?
3. Do we have new technologies where ethics needs to catch up?
4. What kinds of change would best conserve Orthodox capital in our brave new world?
5. Where could you voluntarily rein in your use of technologies and not wait for people in charge to make edicts?

Introduction to “Escape”

Escapism is a clear and present danger.

People today have escape at much easier reach than many people in the past did.

It is still spiritual poison.

This is an essay about the spiritual poison, with at least hints with enjoyment of the real here and now that is mightily difficult to imagine when one is being assailed by escape.

Escape

I want to write today something to do with happiness, something that is interwoven with my whole life story.

“You are too old, children,” said Aslan, “and you must begin to come close to your own world now.”

“It isn’t Narnia, you know,” added Lucy. “It’s you. We shan’t meet you there. And how can we live, never meeting you?”

“Are—are you there too, Sir?” said Edmund.

“I am,” said Aslan. “But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.”

These words, from the end of a book by C.S. Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia* were for me a big spiritual turnoff

for as long as I can remember. (They went over my head when my father read *The Chronicles of Narnia* to my brother and me as little boys.)

When I read those words, they could not but grate because I wanted to continue to live vicariously in Narnia, not our world which seemed so drab and dull, and I was more interested in Aslan than a real Christ. And here I wish to touch on something.

The term “occult” has a few senses and meanings; it can mean supernatural power not given by God; or it can mean something that may or may not be supernatural but is very obscure and known to few. One classic study of occult memory techniques in Renaissance times is occult in both senses. By contrast, a familiarity with the story of the twelve paladins as heroic literature may or may not be occult in its supernatural dimension but is occult in the sense of being obscure. Today, Harry Potter and the X-Men may glorify an imaginary occult world but they are not occult in the sense of being obscure by the standards of pop culture: both of them are backed by tremendous marketing muscle to be a global financial powerhouse, and one need not try to delve into obscure matters to start becoming interested in either.

At that point I remember being puzzled by a counselor showing something almost like a patriotism towards one of the colleges in Harry Potter; in one sense it may seem harmless enough but I would expect a psychologist to know enough about happiness not to build a proper patriotism for something not literally available. I remember in reading “How to Be a Hacker” that talked about “hackers” (software experts who are usually not focused on breaking computer security) as being “neophiles”, meaning people who, like the “Athenians and strangers” of the Bible in Acts 17:21, “...spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.” And though technologies change and develop and there is little end to which changes of some sort are available, one

of the big things I read on reading propaganda for HTML5 is that the axe ground against its predecessor XHTML spoke of an appetite for change in excess of the admittedly significant technical changes HTML5 heralded. The amount of bad smell attributed to XHTML was reminiscent of New Age people grinding an axe against Newton, or perhaps today Einstein, as a primary authority figure. My involvement in physics, for instance, never really turned up figures grinding an axe against past paradigms by physicists. Newtonian physics may be considered to have been surpassed, but I was taught Newtonian physics before relativity, and engineers (and for that matter some physicists) routinely stick with Newtonian physics in a large number of cases where the discrepancy between Newtonian and relativistic physics (or quantum mechanics, or superstring theory) is dwarfed by much larger imprecision in other matters. And being a neophile is a downwind attribute of finding that things one already has are just *boring* and really not being happy with life as it is. I would expect a psychologist to know, not so much that enough involvement in literal occult activities is a recipe to lose your mind, but that placing what is rightly called patriotism in a mere fantasy setting is a recipe to find what one can literally *have*, to be quite dull in comparison. Perhaps a degree of curiosity towards new things is helpful in rapidly changing times, but boredom with tried and true technology is not an attribute of happiness, and patriotism for Hogwarts represents a problem in the first world that is not, as the idiom goes, a “first world problem.” A true first world problem is something minor that is blown out of proportion. A spiritual condition that can let you be in circumstances coveted worldwide and not appreciate it is a matter of grave concern. In a world where many are hungry, many lack clothing or shelter, where many lack a safe place to stay, many people wish for a lot that comes easily in the USA, and is taken for granted when one pines for Harry Potter and Hogwarts. A true “first world

problem” is something like having a cracked phone screen or having to use cheaper and rougher toilet paper, for the lack of graver and more pressing concerns. Being an American white middle class professional is something that is coveted around the world. (Being an American white middle class professional who thinks her lot is dull, and pines for a bit of spice in patriotism for Hogwarts, is a significant missed spiritual opportunity.)

I harp on escapism because even though I have resisted some of its manifestations, it is something I know well, and it is not innocent or harmless. I imitated the staring in one place that opened a portal to a magical world in *The Last of the Really Great Whang-Doodles*; in a French language novel by a friend, there was no question about whether escape was to be found, only of how it might be ferreted out. There is also in fiction the possibility of intense concentration or some other intense psychological state breaking through; though it is not exactly a delivery of *escape* by which the curse is broken at the end of *Ella Enchanted*, the ace card that trumps magic nothing else could ever break illustrates another portal by which escape is provided in literature. In my own experience, reading or dipping into games can be a way to imbibe tainted spiritual realities as well.

My own attempted interest in Arthurian legends (in *The Sign of the Grail*), I omitted entirely one part of the rhythm of Arthurians where two knights hacked each other to death’s door and were both well a few weeks later (contrast history where a sword duel was usually eventually fatal to *both* duelists), is relatively unique in that I don’t see the fountainhead as being Sir Thomas Mallory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*, but studied the medieval flourishing that escaped Celtic folklore into mainstream European popularity in the 12th century “Brut”, and was finally transformed into a 1000 page synopsis by Mallory as the end of a flourish. (And I tried hard to convince myself that reading an arbitrarily long sample of Arthurian legend is fascinating.

Most of the time I was fighting uphill to convince myself that what I was reading was interesting, when I knew it was deadaly dull.)

These Arthurian legends, told and retold and formed and reformed from about the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, concern a time frame of allegedly the sixth century. The times in which the stories were told were separated from the time they occurred in by about as many centuries as the reteller's timeframe is distant to us historically, before history and period awareness were really discovered in Western culture.

For just a slice of what changed between the sixth century and the centuries of these retellings, such things as *knights* who fought on horseback and *jousts* simply were not available in sixth century England. Historically knights were mounted shock troops who fought from on horseback, and that depends on the *stirrup*, a technology not available in sixth century England. Without stirrups, horses can be useful but they can only take you to a battle scene faster where you can fight on foot. A knight riding on horseback in a battle, or in a joust, simply was not available in the sixth century any more in the sixth century any more than people in the twelfth through fifteenth centuries would have been able to coordinate their combat by using modern radios, walkie-talkies, and cellphones in a world where news really couldn't travel faster than people.

They are the medieval equivalent of our fantasy TV shows having Robin Hood's merry band go through a haunted house, and have Maid Marian confronted with a magical apparition the other side of a mirror and saying, "I am having... a *biochemical... reaction!*" or otherwise show scriptwriters who know how fantasy storytelling works today, but do not share Lewis's and Tolkien's writing of medieval fantasy out of a profound knowledge of medieval literature and history. And in the days when these Arthurian legends were rampant, it really is not academic peskiness to suggest that chivalry was the real religion of

the nobles, or to observe that Western Europeans traveling to the Byzantine empire participated in the dangerous sport of jousting that was practiced one place and the other sometime around the thirteenth century. “People now don’t really love,” to quote a repeated didactic comment about courtly love by a troubadour, are the kind of signal that tells the historian that the milieu of medieval mania for Arthurian legend embodies courtly love as never before.

(And something of the same sensitivity gives me hope when Orthodox say that too little of the greatness of ancient monasticism is alive now, because it may signal a flourishing quite independent of our needing to re-create the conditions of the Egyptian deserts met by the followers of St. Anthony the Great. The *Philokalia* is very widely read among the faithful today, and that in and of itself is exciting.)

My mother showed consternation in relating a report that children surveyed would “rather be rich and unhappy than be poor and happy,” but the consternation played out in circumstances in my life. Many people today would rather be escapist and ungrateful and unhappy with the here and now than be happy and grateful with the here and now.

I had the privilege of studying at the University of Cambridge in England, and in a very real sense that was an escape into a golden other world for me. A real Narnia to me, if you will. And it did not make me happy; I very much preferred being in Europe when the opportunity was open even if I was unhappy there. It was not until after I had returned to the U.S. that I learned how to be happy in the here and now. Years after that I traveled to Mount Athos, and I was expecting to feel better, but I was just happy, if the word “*just*” is appropriately used in such a case. The voyage was one of tremendous blessing to me, but I did not

feel better for a transition to the Holy Mountain's medieval settings.

When I was at Cambridge I was received into the Orthodox Church, and I bristled when I read Vladyka KALLISTOS's comment in *The Orthodox Church* that Orthodoxy "is not something Oriental or exotic," because that is precisely what I wanted Orthodoxy to be for me. I also bristled when the priest who received me said, "Orthodoxy is slog!" Now, years and a decade later, I find that Orthodoxy *transforms* slog.

My "escape from escape" essentially unfolded as follows. When I had been leaning enough on, for instance, subtle mind tricks, one priest commented to me that monks in the desert were perennially warned about escape, with pastoral advice of praying through the temptation until it was gone. And I finally came to a point where I bleakly let go of escape, when all of my desire on one level was to escape the bleak here and now, and in an instant my eyes were opened and I no longer found the here and now to be bleak. Nowadays, the temptation comes back from time to time and I need to keep on intensely praying through the temptation the Fathers called "the demon of noonday," but even if the activity of prayer is initially bleaker, I know where victory comes from. When I pray through the temptation, sooner or later it leaves, and I find that the here and now bears some of the marks of Paradise.

"The road less traveled" is today the embrace of the here and now instead of trying to find happiness via escapism, and leaving the broad highway of escapism for the narrow and straight road less traveled, by all means, makes all the difference.

Discussion questions for “Escape”

1. Where has escape appeared in your life?
2. Where has escape and escapism seemed seductively attractive?
3. When you have given in and pursued escape, has it produced lasting happiness?
4. Does the here and now seem to be dreary to you?
5. Have you gone places and brought things to provide an escape from the here and now?
6. Has the new normal taken care of the problem?
7. What could you do to appreciate the here and now and be grateful for it?

Introduction to “What to Own for Happiness” (and what not)

Hankering after something cool is no way to escape a miserable here and now.

However, there is some tiny sliver of things available that could be used in ways that would make you happier.

For instance, simply owning a good pair of walking shoes (even better if they are zero drop shoes) will provide only a fleeting happiness no matter how cool they look.

However, a steady exercise habit using said shoes can help you enjoy life more. Shoes alone will not create a healthy exercise habit, but with good guidance that in Orthodox form says “Start small and escalate slowly but steadily,” investing in a good pair of exercise-appropriate shoes can help reach that goal.

(It has been said that if the health benefits of exercise could be put into a pill, that pill would be the #1 miracle drug of all time.)

What to Own for Happiness (and what not)

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

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

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

But there is a caveat. A good pair of walking or running shoes, or better barefoot shoes, may not buy especially more comfort for your feet, but it can make more attainable the goal of walking or running and the health benefits that that brings. And really, as the video I quote below says, if the health benefits of exercise could be put into a pill, that would be the most important wonder drug in history. Shoes will not make you happy if you just buy them and don't exercise, but they can put regular exercise

in better reach, and a solid exercise regimen can make you happier.

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

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

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

A rugged outdoors computer

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

If you spend a fair amount of time on a laptop or desktop computer, it is a great advantage to have a computer with a sunlight-readable display. Macs usually have a brighter display than normal PC's, but rugged PC's are brighter than either. Rugged laptops are available on Amazon, and they can be built to last as a longer-term investment.

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

A stand desk, if you work from a desk

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

Lambs EMF protective clothing

We are surrounded by much higher doses of ambient wifi, radio, 3G, 4G, and 5G electromagnetic fields (EMF),

and this can be a drain on your mood where you don't even recognize what is happening.

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

There are many cheaper options on Amazon, not to mention more options. If you explore Amazon, just scroll on past things like a lead apron for dental X-rays to see the real options for protecting your head and torso.

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

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

One possible caveat: Throwing protective clothing through the wringer by putting it through the regular wash can slowly degrade its protective value. I don't wash protective clothes if I can't smell anything in the armpits, and when I do wash it, I rinse it with cold water, dry what I can with a towel, and hang it to air dry.

Infowars supplements

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

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

At least one sun lamp

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

A light alarm

When I am woken up by the sound of a regular alarm clock, I don't feel very awake. There is something to be said for getting enough sleep, but I have found that I feel significantly more awake when I am woken by a simulated sunrise than just sound.

Amber goggles (or red goggles, for a stronger effect)

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

A red flashlight for nighttime trips to the bathroom

If you need to get up in the night to use the bathroom, it's a lot easier to get to sleep if you go only by the light of a red flashlight and do not turn on overhead lights. Red and amber goggles still let in much too much stimulating light, and can make it harder, and take longer, to fall asleep. Using a red flashlight and no overhead lights is a good way to be avoid being woken up so much it's hard to fall asleep.

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

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

One friend explained to me that Cheerio's, which are sold under claims like "I'm eating Cheerios to be alive longer for my loved ones," are harvested by poisoning the

plants with herbicides so it will be easier to get the oats off. Quaker Oats are also really bad news.

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

Orthodox fasting is done in agreement with your priest or spiritual father, but I might point out that fasting does not automatically mean grains and pasta; it is possible to keep a strict fast by eating Paleo vegetables.

A weighted blanket

Having a little weight resting on you promotes good sleep. I personally find a ten pound blanket better than others calculated for my weight; the general rule of thumb in choosing a weighted blanket is to pick a blanket about a tenth of your weight, and possibly throw in an extra pound or two. (This guideline is used for children as well as adults.)

Barefoot shoes (some good brands include Vivo Barefoot, FeelGrounds, Wildling, and Ashina Shoes)

Shoes with a raised heel are to some extent working with the body and train runners and walkers to lead with a heel strike that isn't how our feet are designed to work. Barefoot shoes work with the body rather than against it, and over time they wear increasingly well.

PEMF (Pulsed Electro-Magnetic Field) generators

This is a big-ticket item and it's worth it, if it is a live option for you. Space programs realized how vital the pulsed energy of the earth's electromagnetic field is; miss it for one day and you will have no immune system ever after. Some people began to wonder, if an artificial PEMF

generator is vital in space, whether such a thing might be helpful on earth.

And it is helpful. It is powerfully anti-inflammatory (diseases of civilization are powered by inflammation), and can be very regenerative. Check out the PEMF Supply homepage for more info.

Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy by David Burns (CD)

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

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

My own titles Happiness in an Age of Crisis, maybe The Luddite's Guide to Technology, and possibly The Good Parts if you're hungry for more

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

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

Orthodox classics

The Bible (I recommend the Orthodox Study Bible, perhaps paired with the Classic Orthodox Bible which

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

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

The things you give away

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

The answer came, “Some of them.”

“Which ones?”

“The ones you gave away.”

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

One priest commented that he had never seen a trailer attached to a hearse; the footwear I wear will be of no further use to me when I die, even if I am buried with footwear on, but the boots sent to Ukraine will be helpful. And this isn't just a point about the next life; it is a point about this life, too, and we profit more when we are generous: it is more blessed to give than to receive. Generosity is a characteristic of a happy and joyful spirit; it is an abundance to be had even if one possesses little; it is a cause and effect of good spiritual health. And what we can buy that will make ourselves happier is dwarfed by what we can buy that will make others happier.

Things not to own

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

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

Phones can be useful, but they open a door to some things that are really not savory—and I do not just mean porn. There are many G-rated uses for a phone that are a distraction and orient us away from joy. My own recommendations for cellphone use are to use it in a way that is purely instrumental; the only game I play is chess, which I want to learn how to properly play. There is also something to be said for not owning the newest and hottest doodad. I have an iPhone 8 which I purchased, used, and which I have taken steps to protect for the longer term (i.e. a screen cover and a shock-absorbing case), and which I would not trade for an iPhone 13 Pro Max (or whatever is the hottest new doodad when you are reading this). I believe my phone supplies enough EMF radiation; I do not hold it to my head much, and I do not really want to hold a 5G EMF radiation source to my head at all. (Older phones are already plenty radioactive enough to cause brain cancer in kids who always have a phone at their ear—and always on the same side they held the phone to.)

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

General Omar Bradley, upon seeing atomic weapons, said, "We have grasped the mystery of the atom and we have rejected the Sermon on the Mount." Now we have grasped the mystery of a worldwide communication

network that sports 5G radiation and continues to grow, and still rejected the Sermon on the Mount.

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

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

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

Discussion questions for “What to Own for Happiness (and what not)”

1. What have you accumulated that you could de-accumulate?
2. What purchases might be genuinely useful?
3. What can you do to own what is genuinely useful and let go of what is just clutter?
4. What item on the list would you most like to purchase now?
5. Can you make a list of de-accumulations and strategic purchases that would help you better enjoy life?

Introduction to “ ‘Social Antibodies’ Needed: A Request to Orthodox Clergy”

This piece is not my oldest, but in it I did multiple literature searches on Amazon to find treatments of Orthodoxy and technology, and found... my own work and nothing else.

This is presented, and intended, as a request for guidance from Orthodox clergy, but it represents an inflection point for what I have to offer to readers.

“Social Antibodies” Needed: A Request to Orthodox Clergy

Some time ago, a pastor contacted me and asked permission to quote one of my poems. We’ve been in contact at least occasionally, and he sent me an email newsletter that left me asking him for permission to quote.

Let me cite the article in full (©2014 Pastor Vince Homan, used by very gracious permission):

When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is wise. Proverbs 10:19

I recently violated a longstanding position I have held; to avoid all further interaction with social media, particularly Facebook. It wasn’t necessarily because of any moral high ground; it was more because I had already mastered e-mail and was satisfied with my online

accomplishments. In addition, I didn't have any additional time or interest to keep up with pithy little sayings, videos, cartoons, social life, or even cute kiddie pictures. But now I am happily in the fold of Facebook users (particularly if there is a picture of one of my grandbabies on it). In addition, it has allowed me to discover that there are literally dozens of people who are just waiting to be my friends. However, the real reason I'm on Facebook is work related. Thanks to the good work done by a few of our church members; both of our churches have excellent Facebook pages. In order to access those pages, I needed an account, so—here I am. And though all seems well with the world of Facebook, I am discovering that it is not always the case. For all the “warm fuzzies,” and catching up with friends and family it offers ... there is also a dark side.

At a recent continuing education event I attended, the speaker presented some dire consequences to uninhibited use of social media. He reported that social media had replaced money as the number one contributor to marriage problems. He said it wasn't so much affairs that online relationships led to; rather it was the persistent flirting that broke down barriers and hedges, which once protected the marriage. Such interaction often led to a downward spiral, corrupting and compromising the marriage vow. One in five divorces involves the social networking site Facebook, according to a new survey by the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. A staggering 80% of divorce lawyers have also

reported a spike in the number of cases that use social media for evidence of cheating, with Facebook by far the biggest offender. Flirty messages and photographs found on Facebook are increasingly being cited as proof of unreasonable behavior or irreconcilable differences. Many cases revolve around social media users who get back in touch with old flames they hadn't heard from in many years.

PBS recently hosted a webinar, *This Emotional Life*, about the internet's impact on relationship and marriage.[i] One of the panelists, Theresa Bochard, explored the issue a bit farther in an article originally published on PsychCentral.com. She said that after reading hundreds of comments and emails from people who have been involved in online relationships or emotional affairs as well as the responses on several discussion boards, she concluded that while the internet and social media *can* foster intimacy in a marriage, it seems to do more harm than good. She reported that an astounding 90% of opposite-sex online relationships were damaging to the marriage. Facebook affairs are threatening healthy couples too.

"I have suggested to myself to write a thank you note to the inventors of Facebook and Myspace because they have been responsible for a significant percentage of my income," says marriage counselor Dr. Dennis Boike. He's not kidding. "I'm having people say I never would have expected me to do this. It's in the privacy of my computer. I'm not going out anywhere, I'm not dressing for it, I'm not

smelling of another's perfume. There are no tell-tale signs except my computer record." But a new study suggests Facebook can also help disconnect you from your better half. The site, which boasts more than 350 million active users, is mentioned in over 20% of divorce petitions, according to Divorce-Online.

Prominent Houston divorce attorney Bucky Allshouse can understand why. "It's really kind of shocking what people put on Facebook," says Allshouse. Perhaps it's not so shocking that the social networking site can essentially pour kerosene on "old flames." Most online relationships start out benign: an email from a person you knew in college, friending an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend on Facebook (as suggested by Facebook: "people you might know"), getting to know a co-worker or acquaintance better online. But the relationship can take a dangerous turn very quickly if you're not careful and even more easily if you are doing most of the talking behind a computer.

We have no non-verbals with which to interpret people's conversation when we communicate online. What we say can be misinterpreted and come off in a way we don't intend. Or worse, we purposely allow our conversation to drift into an unhealthy area, where we put out "feelers" to see if the person we are communicating with will do the same. We will text things to people that would make us blush if we said them in person. All too often the end result is flirting, compromising our values, and allowing the secrecy of social

media to sweep us off our feet and into a quagmire of social dysfunction. This is not a victimless choice. Many times, inappropriate conversations through social media lead to great pain with children, spouses, parents, and friends.

One such instance occurred when Jonathan found Sharon on Facebook, 20 years after he dumped her one week after their high school prom. She had never married, while he had and was also the father of two teenagers. During months of emailing and texting, Sharon proved a sympathetic listener to his sense of isolation and loneliness within his own marriage. He found they could talk easily, picking up with the friendship they had had years before. They shared feelings they had never shared with others. After a few months, they decided to cross a few states and meet half way. Then, they talked of marriage. Shortly after, Jonathan went through with his divorce and months later he and Sharon married. Not surprisingly, and after only four months, they divorced. What happened? Fantasy was hit hard by reality. They went into a marriage without really spending time to know each other as they are today. Their romance was fueled by their history (as 18-year-olds) not their adult present. The romantic idea of reconnecting with an old lover, at a time Jonathan was unhappy in his marriage, was a recipe for danger.

In talking about it later, Jonathan realized he had not intended to start up a romance; he hadn't intended to leave his marriage in the

first place. As he and Sharon shared feelings, he felt more cared for by her than by his wife. When asked who raised the issue of marriage, he wasn't sure. "Perhaps she pushed it, but I may have been just been musing something like, 'Wouldn't it have been great if we got married,' and that led her to talk about marriage. I wonder if I led her on. Did I promise more than I had realized and then feel in love with my own fantasy?"[ii]

When we cross barriers that were intended to keep us safely within the parameters of our marriage vows, we start in internal conflict—one that attacks our emotional and mental center. Conversations with people of the opposite sex can lead to flirtations. Flirtations can lead to imaginations which lead to fixations ... and there is a fine line between fixation and passion. Promiscuity is rarely a random act. It is pre-meditated. Something triggers our thoughts. And that something *can* be social media.

Christians must be wary of intimate conversations with people of the opposite sex; it is a trap that too many good people have been caught in. Paul wrote: "We are casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). It is good advice; cast down imaginations ... take every thought captive, because it is often out of our imaginations and thoughts that bad choices are born. Jesus said something similar. Speaking to the disciples he warned, "But the

things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander” (Matthew 15:18-19). The battleground is not the computer or cell phone; it is the heart and the mind. But secretive messaging avenues like social media offers can help plant the seed for a battle that good people lose every day.

Dr. Karen Gail Lewis, a marriage and family therapist of 39 years and author of numerous relationship books, offers these social networking guidelines for married couples.

1. **Be clear about your agenda in contacting the other person.**
2. **Limit the frequency of your time online.** This sets a good boundary around the social networking contact.
3. **Don't talk intimately.** By not sharing intimacies with your correspondence, you reduce the chance of sending a message that you want a more intimate relationship.
4. **Let your spouse know with whom you are contacting.** This openness makes it clear you have nothing to hide. (I would add, especially so if you are contacting a person of the opposite sex).[iii].

5. **Share your outgoing and received emails/texts with your spouse.**

Sharing communications removes any chance for jealousy or misunderstandings (I would add, share passwords with your spouse; give them full access to your social media sites).[iv].

6. **Do not meet in person unless your spouse is with you.**

Meeting up with old friends with your spouse by your side is a reminder that you two are a team and removes sending mixed messages to your former lover. This also reinforces the importance of fixing your marriage before playing with the flames of old flames.[v].

Jesus taught us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16). Social media is a place that Scripture applies. I believe in the sanctity of marriage. I believe a person places their personal integrity and honor on the line in the marriage vow more than anything else in their life. And I believe marriage is under attack from multiple directions. I have officiated at many young couples weddings. I spend time with each one, warning them of the potential pitfalls and dangers; encouraging them to make their marriage a priority each day. Because I know the reality; many of the ones I marry won't make it. It's not because they are bad people or people of no character; but they get *caught* in a trap, and they can't seem to find a way out. And I also know most of them deeply regret

their decisions after the fallout of their choices turn to consequences.

Social media can be a wonderful thing. I love keeping in touch with family and looking at pictures of the grandbabies. Now our churches are using social media to share the gospel. But Christians should be wary of the potential dangers. We must keep up our barriers at all times. James warned, “Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. So don’t be misled, my dear brothers and sisters” (James 1:14-16). Indeed, we must not be misled, rather be guided by the protective barriers God has placed around us; especially so if we are married. We must watch our words carefully and keep our thoughts captive. The sanctity of our marriage vow demands it.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Vince

[i]
<http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/blogs/does-internet-promote-or-damage-marriage>

[ii]
<http://www.hitchedmag.com/article.php?id=903>

[iii] Parenthetical mine

[iv] Parenthetical mine

[v]

<http://www.hitchedmag.com/article.php?id=903>

This article left me *reeling*.

In part, I wondered if my collection in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* as it then existed was simply wrong. Or if someone might rightly say to me, "What you give in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* is helpful up to a point, at least for someone with a similar background to yours. However, regular people need much more concrete guidance." What struck me very concretely about Pastor Vince's article is that it gave very practical advice on how married people can appropriately handle Facebook.

The article reminded me of remarks I'd seen by people interested in making computers that people can actually use that the Apple Macintosh was the first computer worth criticizing. Perhaps some detail of the guidance in the article above *could* be criticized: perhaps much of it *should* be criticized: but it may be the first article I've seen on the topic that was *worth* criticizing.

The concept of "social antibodies": it's not just Facebook

Paul Graham's "The Acceleration of Addictiveness" (<https://paulgraham.com/addiction.html>) is worth reading in full. (It's also worth *quoting* in full, but he's asked nicely that people link to it instead of reposting, which is a fair request. So I am linking to it even though I'd prefer to reproduce the whole article.)

"The Acceleration of Addictiveness" talks about a little bit bigger picture about things that are addictive. Though he mentions Facebook as something that's even more addictive than television, he's clear that the big picture is more than addictive little Facebook. Graham talks

about a concept of “social antibodies” which I think is incredibly useful.

Decades ago, smoking cut through the US like a hot knife through butter. But, while smoking is still dangerous and there still continue to be new smokers, we no longer have glamour shots of celebrities holding cigarettes in some flashy, sophisticated, classy pose. Smoking is no longer “sexy;” over the past 20 years it has been seen as seedy, and “smoker” is not exactly the kindest thing to call someone. (I remember one friend commenting that he could think of a number of terms more polite than “smoker,” none of which were appropriate to the present company.) *As a society, the US has developed social antibodies to smoking now.* There are many things that we need “social antibodies” for, and we keep developing new technologies, Facebook included, that need social antibodies. The six prescriptions in the quoted articles are essentially social antibodies for how to use Facebook without jeopardizing your marriage. They may seem harsh and excessively cautious, but I submit that they are easier to go through than divorce. *Much easier. A piece of cake!* And I quote Pastor Vince’s article because it’s something we need more of.

A helpful parallel to technology: Wine as an example

Simply not drinking alcoholic beverages is an option that I respect more as I think about it, but for the sake of this discussion, I will leave it on the side. I am interested in helpful parallels for “social antibodies” in moderation and restraint in using technology, and as much as I may respect people who do not drink, that option is not as interesting for my investigation. This is especially true because people living in my society assume that you are *not* abstaining from every technology that can cause trouble. So with a respectful note about not drinking alcohol at all, I want to

look at social antibodies for moderate, temperate, and appropriate use of wine.

Wine and liquor slowly increased in strength in Western Europe, slowly enough that societies had at least the *chance* to build social antibodies. This makes for a marked contrast to escape through hard liquor among Native Americans, where hard liquor blew through decimated nations and peoples like escape through today's street drugs would have blown through a Europe already coping with the combined effects of the bubonic plague and of barbarian invasions. Perhaps there are genetic differences affecting Native Americans and alcohol. A Native American friend told me that Native American blood can't really cope with sugar, essentially unknown in Native American lands apart from some real exceptions like maple syrup. And lots of alcohol is worse than lots of sugar, even if some of us wince at the level of sugar and/or corn syrup in the main US industrial diet. (Even those of us not of Native American blood would do well to restrict our consumption of artificially concocted sugars.) But aside from the genetic question, introducing 80 proof whiskey to societies that did not know how to cope with beer would have been rough enough even if there were no genetic questions and no major external stresses on the societies. If there was something of a stereotype about Native Americans and whiskey, maybe part of that is because hard liquor that had been developed over centuries in the West appeared instantaneously, under singularly unfortunate conditions, in societies that had not even the social antibodies to cope with even the weaker of beers.

I cite St. Cyril of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, Book Two, Chapter II: On Drinking as a model for approaching alcohol (and, by extension, a serious reference point in understanding moderate use of technology), with some reservations. The translation I link to is obscure and archaic, and if you can get past that, the individual prescriptions are the sort that would only be all kept (or, for

that matter, mostly kept) by the sort of people who are filled with pride that they observe ancient canons more strictly than any canonical bishop. In other words, *don't* try these directions at home unless you know you are in agreement with your priest or spiritual father. But the chapter of *The Instructor* on wine offers a **priceless** glimpse into real, live social antibodies on how to navigate dangerous waters. This is a live example of the sort of things we need. The book as a whole covers several topics, including clothing and boundaries between men and women, and they could serve as a model for pastoral literature to address the challenges offered to spiritual life today. Not specifically that *online* interactions between men and women **introduce** an element of danger. That element of danger has always been there, and always will be there. But online interactions frame things a little differently. This means that people with social antibodies that would show appropriate caution face-to-face might not recognize that you have to compensate when dealing with the opposite sex online, or might not intuit exactly *how* you have to compensate when dealing with the opposite sex online.

I would like to close this section with a word about wine and why I drink it. The politically incorrect way of putting this point is to say that wine is something which literally and figuratively is not part of Islam. Islam works out, in stark relief, what it means to subtract the Incarnation from Christian faith. It means that not only has the Son of God not become incarnate in Christ, but all the more does God become incarnate in his children. It means that Holy Communion is just a symbol, and wine could absolutely, absolutely *never* become the blood of God. Water is necessary and wine is not, as St. Clement tells us, but the Orthodox Church that regards Islam as a Christian heresy used fermented wine exclusively in the Eucharist, and condemned heretics' use of pure water for the same purpose. And my reason for drinking a little wine is that

wine has an elasticity that bears the meaning of Jesus's first miracle, turning water into even more wine when wine ran out at a wedding where the guests were already pretty drunk, and it bears the meaning of the Holy Mysteries: few if any material substances are as pregnant with spiritual depth as wine. Ecclesiastes is perhaps the most dismal book in the entire Bible, and "Go, eat thy bread with mirth, and drink thy wine with a joyful heart" is close to being the only invitation to joy in the book. I do not say that this is a reason why people who have decided not to drink should change their mind. However, the theological motive to drink in Christianity comes from a higher plane than the admittedly very real reasons to be careful with alcohol, or else abstain. It's deeper.

Is the iPhone really that cool?

One news story reported that police officers had started using drug dealers' confiscated iPhones, and realized they were incredibly useful. And I wouldn't dispute that at all.

I would say that having an iPhone is a little, but not quite, like being able to call 911, which is the most important number for you to be able to call. Over 99% of the time it is inappropriate and perhaps illegal to call 911, but the (less than) 1% of the time you *should* be calling 911, it can save your life. Literally. And I use my iPhone over 1% of the time; besides built-in phone, email, notes, and looking things up on the web, and including my personal logistical dashboard, and apps like GPS, my iPhone makes me more productive, and unsexy nuts and bolts usage has been very useful.

So I wouldn't agree with Come With Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated my iPhone that the iPhone is simply "Terrible For Productivity." It certainly *can* be, and unrestrained use *will be*. And for that matter I've seen a lot of exquisitely produced apps in the App Store, and though

I've written one iPhone app, I've found precious few apps that look genuinely useful to my purposes. But I am glad I have my iPhone, am not struggling to rein in inappropriately heavy use, and I believe it makes me more productive.

The LinkedIn article “Come With Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated My iPhone” talked about how one family decided to get rid of their iPhones. The author talked about how the iPhone had taken over their lives. They suggested that trying to use their habit to use the iPhone in moderation was a nonstarter, however enticing it may look. And, on a sobering note, they had earlier tried to avoid using smartphones, even for work. And I am convinced they made the right choice: not having any smartphone use is better than addictive smartphone use, hands down. And while I am cautious about advertising responsible smartphone use to people who can't live without their iPhone—the analogy drawn in the LinkedIn article was, “In hindsight, it's like an alcoholic saying ‘I thought I could have it in the house and not drink it.’” But I have iPhone use which is defensible, at least in my opinion; I have drawn a boundary that is partly tacit and partly explicit, and while it can be criticized, it is a non-addictive use of the iPhone. I average less than one text a day; I do not compulsively check *anything* that's out there. A few of the guidelines I found are,

1. **Limit the time you spend using your smartphone.** The general Orthodox advice is to cut back a little at once so you never experience absolute shock, but you are always stretched a little bit outside your comfort zone. That may be a way to work down cell phone use, or it may not. If you compulsively reach for your smartphone, you might leave it in one room that you're not always in. Put a boundary between yourself and the smartphone.

2. **Limit how often you check your cell phone *unprovoked*.** When I'm not at work, I try to limit checking email to once per day. Limit yourself to maybe once per day, maybe more, maybe less, to the extent that your job genuinely allows, and restrain yourself.
3. **When you're going to bed for the day, you're done using your smartphone for the day.** I am not strict in this; I will answer a call, but checking my iPhone, unprovoked, after my evening prayers or my bedtime is a no-no.
4. ***Don't use the iPhone as a drone that you need to have always going on. This includes music, texting, games, and apps, including Vince's hero, Facebook.*** Perhaps the single biggest way that this violates Apple's marketing proposition with the iPhone is that the iPhone is designed and marketed to be a drone that is always with us, a bit of ambient noise, delivering precisely what the Orthodox spiritual tradition, with works like *The Ladder*, tell us is something we don't need.
5. **The iPhone's marketing proposition is to deliver an intravenous drip of noise.** The Orthodox Church's Tradition tells us to wean ourself from noise.
6. **iPhones have "Do Not Disturb" mode. Use it.** And be willing to make having "Do Not Disturb" as your default way of using the phone, and turn it off when you want "*Please Interrupt Me*" mode explicitly.
7. **Don't multitask if you can at all avoid it.** I remember reading one theology text which claimed

as a lesson from computer science, because people can switch between several applications rapidly, that we should take this “lesson” to life and switch between several activities rapidly. And in a business world where multitasking has been considered an essential task, people are finding that multitasking is fool’s gold, an ineffective way of working that introduces a significant productivity tax where people could be doing much better. Smartphones make it trivially easy to multiask. *Don’t*, unless a situation calls for it.

I note with some concern that the most I’ve been shocked at someone using an iPhone was when 12 and under kids were manipulating the iPhone, not to get something to done, but to activate the iPhone’s smooth animations. Looking over their shoulders in shock has felt like I was eavesdropping on a (non-chemical) *acid trip*. Children’s use of iPhones driven by slick animated transitions between applications are even more unhelpful than what the business world means by multitasking. (This feature of kids’ use of iPhones has made me kind of wish iPhones were not used by people under 18.)

Now I should post this with a clarification that this is, so to speak, pastoral advice to *myself*. I’ve found the basic approach helpful, and priests and spiritual fathers may draw on it if they choose in their best judgment to take something from it, but I have not been ordained or tonsured, and I would fall back on the maxim, “As always, ask your priest.” My reason to post them is to provide another reference point beyond those given to “social antibodies” in dealing with technology. With these antibodies, I hold the reins, or at least I hold the reins a little better than if I didn’t have these antibodies. But I am aware of something vampiric, something that sucks out energy and life, in even my more moderate use of some technologies, and I am a little wary of comparing my use of

technology to moderate and sober use of alcohol. Appropriate use of alcohol can be good, and apart from the risk of drinking getting out of control, it is an overall positive. I'm leery of claiming the same for my use of technology, even if I've tried hard to hold the reins and even if I may do better than average. There is something that has been drained from me; there is something that has been sucked out of me. Maybe I am less harmed than others: but my use of technology has harmed me. I am wary of saying now, "I've found the solution."

In dealing with another passion besides sexual sin, namely anger, people have started to develop "social antibodies:" as mentioned briefly by Vince Homan, we don't have the important channels of people's nonverbal communication, which flattens out half the picture. And when we are angry, we can flame people in emails where there is no human face staring back to us, only letters on the screen that seem *so* right—or perhaps not nearly *right* enough!—and write hurtful flames unlike anything we would dare to say in person, even to someone who hurt us deeply. And on that score, people seem to me to have developed social antibodies; I've been in lots of flamewars and given and received many unholy words, but I don't remember doing that recently, or seeing flames wage out of control on many mailing lists, even if admittedly I don't spend much time on mailing lists. But sexual dangers are not the only dangers online, and for online flaming, most of the people I deal with do not flame people like I did when I was first involved in online community. I've acquired some "social antibodies," as have others I meet online. *Some* social antibodies have already developed, and the case is not desperate for us as a Church learning how to handle technology in the service of holy living instead of simply being a danger.

Pastoral guidance and literature needed

I visited Amazon to try to get a gauge on how much Orthodox pastoral resources about appropriate use of computers, mobile, internet, and technology were out there, a sort of The Instructor for technology today, and my search for orthodox internet found 109 resources from Christianity, Judaism, and the occult, none of which seemed to be about “How does an Orthodox Christian negotiate the social issues surrounding computers, smartphones, tablets, the Internet, apps, and technology?” Some other searches, such as orthodox pastoral internet, orthodox pastoral smartphone, and orthodox pastoral technology turned up nothing whatsoever. A search for “**orthodox technology**“ turned up one page of search results with... *several connected works of my own*. Um, *thanks*, I think. I guess I’m an expert, or at least a resource, and even if I didn’t want to, I should probably make myself available to Orthodox clergy, with my spiritual father and bishop foremost. But this compliment to me, if it is such (maybe it means I’m off the rails) caught me quite off-guard; I was expecting to see at least *some* publications from people with pastoral authority and experience. But seeing as I’m the local expert, or at least a first author for this particular topic, I’ll briefly state my credentials. I have been an Orthodox Christian for a decade, so no longer a recent convert, have works on social dimensions of technology dating back as far as 1994, have two years of postgraduate theology under slightly silly conditions at Cambridge, and two more years under very silly conditions at a sort of “Monty Python teaches theology” PhD program (one Orthodox priest consoled me, “All of us went through that”), but did not complete the program. I grew up with computers back when my home computer access meant going to an orange and black terminal and dialing up a Dec

MicroVAX on a 2400 (or less) baud modem, was on basically non-web social networks years before it became a buzzword, have worked with the web since before it went mainstream, much of it professionally. I've been bitten by some of the traps people are fighting with now. And I'm also kind of bright. So I guess I am, by default, a local expert, although I really think a responsible treatment of the issues raised here would see serious involvement from someone with pastoral qualifications and experience. I haven't been tonsured, at least not yet, and perhaps not ever.

But I would ask priests reading this piece to consider a work on a sort of technological appendix to *The Rudder*, or maybe I shouldn't say that because I have only barely sampled the ancient canons. But I would like to see ideally two pastoral works parallel to *The Instructor*, Book II: one for pastoral clergy use, and one for "the rest of us faithful." When I was a lay parish representative at a diocesan conference, there was talk about appropriate use of the internet; Vladyka PETER read something that talked about the many legitimate benefits we have received from using computers, but talked about porn on the internet, which is a sewer I haven't mentioned; he said that young people are spending hours per day looking at porn, and it's more addictive than some street drugs, and he commented how porn has always been available, but you used to have to put on a disguise and a trenchcoat, and go leave your car in front of a store with the windows covered up, where now, it finds you and it comes free with a basic utility in the privacy of your home. And the biggest thing I can say about freedom from porn comes from the entry for porn in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*:

There is a story about a philosopher who was standing in a river when someone came to him. The philosopher asked the visitor, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!"

Then the philosopher held the visitor under the water for a little while, and asked him the second time, “What do you want?” The visitor answered, “Truth!” Then the philosopher held the visitor under water for what seemed an interminable time, and let him up and asked, “What do you want?” The visitor gasped and said, “Air!” The philosopher said, “When you want Truth the way you want air, you will find it.”

The same thing goes for freedom from the ever-darker chain called pornography, along with masturbation and the use of “ED” drugs to heighten thrills (which can cause nasty street drug-like effects [and a doomed search for the ultimate sexual thrill that decimates sexual satisfaction] even in marriage).

And I would like to suggest some guidelines for fighting Internet porn, quite possibly the most commonly confessed sin among young men today. Sexual sins are among the most easily forgiven: but they are a deep pit. So, in the interest of providing a “dartboard” draft that’s put out for people to shoot at. I am intentionally saying more rather than less because it’s easier for a pastoral conversation to select from a set of options than furnish arbitrarily more additional options. Here are several things I’d consider, both sacred and secular:

I have heard of some helpful things being said in response to confession of sexual sin, such as, “St. Basil said that a man in lust is like a dog licking a saw; the salt it likes tasting is the taste of its own woundedness,” and so there is a vicious cycle.

However, I have not heard of a list anywhere near this complete being given when a man confesses a very common (now) sin. Maybe parts of it could be incorporated into advice given at confession.

If your right eye offends you, tear it out and throw it away from you: for it is better for you that one part of your body should die than that your whole body should be thrown into Hell.

These words are *not* to be taken literally; if you tore out your right eye you would still be sinning with your left eye, and the Church considers that it was one of Origen's errors to castrate himself. But this is a forceful way of stating a profound truth. There is an incredible freedom that comes, a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light, when you want purity the way you want "*Air!*", and you apply a tourniquet as high up as you need to to experience freedom.

Give your only computer power cable to a friend, for a time, because you can't have that temptation in the house? That is really *much* better than the alternative. Have the local teenager turn off display of images in Chrome's settings? That is really *much* better than the alternative. Webpages may look suddenly ugly, but not nearly as ugly as bondage to porn. Only check email at the library? That is really *much* better than the alternative. These tourniquets may be revised in pastoral conversation, but tearing out your right eye is much more free and much less painful than forever wanting to be free from addiction to porn, but also secretly hoping to give in to the present temptation; as the Blessed Augustine prayed, "Lord, give me chastity, but not yet." There is a great deal of power in wanting purity **now**, and once you go slash-and-burn, the power is amazing.

Install content-control software, such as Norton Family / Norton Family Premier, and have things set up so that only the woman of the house knows the password to make exceptions. There are legitimate needs for exceptions, and I remember being annoyed when I went to customize Ubuntu Christian Edition and finding that a site with all sorts of software to

customize the appearance of Ubuntu was blocked, apparently because of a small sliver of soft porn in the wallpaper section of a truly massive site. There will be *legitimate* exceptions, but it cuts through a *lot* of self-deception if you get the exception by asking your wife.

Don't bother trying to find out how to disable porn mode "Incognito Mode" on your browser; set up a router to log who visits what websites. However much browser makers may tout themselves as being all for empowerment and freedom, they have refused to honor the many requests of men who want freedom from porn and parents who care for their children in many, many voices asking for a way to shut off porn mode.

There is an antique browser hidden in `/usr/bin/firefox` on my Aqua-themed virtual machine, but even with that after a fair amount of digging, I don't see any real live option to browse for instance Gmail normally with a browser that doesn't offer porn mode. But there is something else you should know.

Routers exist that can log who visits what when, and if you know someone who is good with computers (or you can use paid technical support like the Geek Squad), have a router set up to provide a log of what computers visited what URLs so that the wife or parents know who is visiting what. *The presence of a browser's porn mode suddenly matters a lot less when a router records your browsing history **whether or not** the browser is in porn mode.*

Rein in your stomach. Eat less food. Fast. It is a classic observation in the Orthodox spiritual tradition that the appetites are tied: gluttony is a sort of "*gateway drug*" to sexual sin, and if you cut away at a full stomach, you necessarily undermine sexual sin and have an easier contest if you are not dealing with sexual temptation on top of a full stomach.

And it has been my own experience that if I keep busy working, besides any issues about “Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop,” the temptation to amuse and entertain myself with food is less. So that cuts off the temptation further upstream.

If you eat only to nourish the body, it helps. Even if nourishing food tastes good, cutting out junk like corn-syrup-loaded soft drinks, or anything sold like potato chips in a bag instead of a meal, and moderating consumption of alcohol (none before going to bed; it doesn’t help), will help.

When you are tempted, ask the prayers of St. John the Much-Suffering of the Kiev Near Caves, perhaps by crossing yourself and saying, “St. John the Much-Suffering, pray to God for me.” In the Orthodox Church you may ask the prayers of any saint for any need, but St. John is a powerful intercessor against lust. That is part of why I asked Orthodox Byzantine Icons to hand-paint an icon of St. John for me: a little so I would have the benefit of the icon myself, and the real reason because I wanted Orthodox Byzantine Icons’s catalogue to make available the treasure of icons of St. John the Much-Suffering to the world, which they would.

As I write, the icon is in the process of production, and I hope that it will be available within a couple of weeks.

Other saints to ask for prayer include St. Mary of Egypt, St. Moses the Hungarian, St. Photina, St. Thais of Egypt, St. Pelagia the Former Courtesan, St. Zlata the New Martyr, St. Boniface, St. Aglaida, St. Eudocia, St. Thomais, St. Pelagia, St. Marcella, St. Basil of Mangazea, St. Niphon, and St. Joseph the Patriarch. (Taken from **Prayers for Purity**.)

Buy and pray with a copy of Prayers for Purity when you are tempted, and when you have fallen. It

is an excellent collection and helps when you know you should be praying but words are not coming to mind.

If you have been wounded, bring your wound to confession the next weekend. (And try to have a rule of going to church each week.)

It can be powerful, when you are facing a temptation, not to want to confess the same sin again in a couple of days.

But in parallel with this remember when a visitor asked a saintly monk what they did at the monastery, and the saintly monk answered, “We fall and get up, fall and get up, fall and get up.” Fall down seven times and rise up eight: fall down seventy-seven times and rise up seventy-eight: keep on repenting for as long as you need to to achieve some freedom, and know that some saints before you have risen after falling very many times.

Buy a prayer rope, and use it. When you are tempted, keep repeating a prayer for one prayer rope, and then another, and another, if you need it. Pray “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,” or to St. John the Much-Suffering, “Holy Father John, pray to God for me,” or to St. Mary of Egypt, “Holy Mother Mary, pray to God for me.”

Use the computer only when you have a specific purpose in mind, and not just to browse. Idle hands are the Devil’s workshop; For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind.; Do not look around in the streets of a city, or wander about in its deserted sections. Turn away your eyes from a shapely woman, and do not gaze at beauty belonging to another; many have been seduced by a woman’s beauty, and by it passion is kindled like a fire. *Men’s roving sexual curiosity* will find the worst-leading link on a page, and then another, and then another. Drop using roving curiosity when you are at a computer

altogether; if you need to deal with boredom, ask your priest or spiritual father for guidance on how to fight the passion of boredom. But *don't* use the Internet as a solution for boredom; that's *asking* for trouble.

Use a support group, if one is available in your area. If I were looking for a support group now, I would call Christian counseling centers in the area if available. Talking with other people who share the same struggle can help.

Use XXXchurch.com, or at least explore their website. Their entire purpose is buying you your freedom from lust.

Yearn for purity.

In the homily “A Pet Owner’s Rules,” I wrote:

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

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

...

Lust is also drinking out of the toilet. Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe. It is a magic spell where suddenly nothing else is interesting, and after lust destroys the ability to enjoy anything else, lust destroys the ability to enjoy even lust. Proverbs says, “The adulterous woman”—today one might add, “and internet porn” to that—“in the beginning is as sweet as honey and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword.” Now this is talking about a lot more than

pleasure, but it is talking about pleasure. Lust, a sin of pleasure, ends by destroying pleasure. It takes chastity to enjoy even lust.

When we are in lust, *God does not seem real to us*. Rejecting lust allows us to start being re-sensitized to the beauty of God's creation, to spiritual sweetness, to the lightness of Heavenly light. Lust may feel like you're losing nothing but gaining everything, but try to be mindful of what you lose in lust.

And that's my best stab at making a "dartboard," meant so people will shoot at it and make something better, and more complete and less one-sided in navigating the pitfalls of technology. This isn't the only trap out there—but it may be one of the worst.

I would suggest that we need a comprehensive—or at least *somewhat* comprehensive—set of guidelines for Orthodox use of technology. Such a work might not become dated as quickly as you may think; as I write in the resources section below, I unhesitatingly cite a 1974 title as seriously relevant knowing full well that it makes no reference to individually owned computers or mobile devices: it's a case of "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Or, perhaps, *two* works: one for clergy with pastoral responsibilities, and one for those of us laity seeking our own guidance and salvation. I believe that today, we who have forms of property and wealth undreamed of when Christ gave one of the sternest Luddite warnings ever, **Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth**, can very easily use things that do not lead to spiritual health: sometimes like how Facebook can erode marriages that are well defended as regards old-school challenges.

The best I know, secondhand perhaps, is that today's Church Fathers, on Mount Athos perhaps, are simply saying, "Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!" What they want instead sounds like a liberal political-social experiment, where

people who have grown up in an urban setting and know only how to navigate life there, will move en masse and form some sort of Amish-like rural communities. Or perhaps something else is envisioned: mass migration to monasteries? Given all that monasticism offers, it seems sad to me to receive the angelic image, of all reasons, only because that's the only remaining option where you can live a sufficiently Luddite life. I have heard of spiritual giants who incomparably excel me saying that we should stop using recent technology at all. I have yet to hear of spiritual giants who incomparably excel me, *and who live in places where technology is socially mandated*, advise us to unplug completely. For that matter, I have yet to hear of *any* Orthodox clergy *who live in places in the world where technology is socially mandated* say, only and purely, "Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!"

The Orthodox Church, or rather the Orthodox-Catholic Church, is really and truly Catholic, *Catholic* ultimately coming from the Greek *kata*, "with", and *holos*, "whole", meaning "with the whole", meaning that the entirety of the Orthodox Church belongs to every Orthodox-Catholic Christian: the saints alike living and dead, the ranks of priesthood and the faithful, and marriage and monasticism in entirety belong to every Orthodox Christian, every Orthodox-Catholic Christian: and giving the advice "Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!" as the limits of where the Orthodox-Catholic Church's God and salvation can reach, is very disappointing. It's comparable to saying that only monastics can be saved.

Total avoidance of all electronic technology is guidance, but not appropriate guidance, and we need advice, somewhat like the advice that began on how to use Facebook, to what I wrote about iPhones or internet porn. A successful dartboard makes it easier to say "What you said about _____ was wrong because _____ and instead we should say _____ because _____." And I am trying

to raise a question. I am trying to raise the question of how Orthodox may optimally use technology in furtherance of living the divine life.

Is astronomy about telescopes? No!

I would close with a quote about technology—or is it? Computer science giant Edgser Dijkstra said,

Computer science is no more about computers than astronomy is about telescopes.

And how much more must Orthodox discussion of how to use technology ascetically be no more *about* technology than astronomy is *about* telescopes? The question is a question about spiritual discipline, of how the timeless and universal wisdom of the Bible, the Philokalia, and the canons of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

Resources for further study

All the Orthodox classics, from the Bible on down. The task at hand is not to replace the Philokalia, but to *faithfully* adapt the Philokalia (and/or the Seven Ecumenical Councils to a new medium, as it were. The principles of the Bible, the Philokalia, and the Seven Ecumenical Councils are simply *not* dated and simply *do not* need to be improved. However, their application, I believe, needs to be *extended*. We need ancient canons and immemorial custom that has the weight of canon law: however ancient canons express a good deal more about face-to-face boundaries between men and women than boundaries in Facebook and on smartphones. We need guidance for *all* of these.

St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*. I reference Book II and its chapter on wine as paradigms we might look too.

Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*. Mander is a former advertising executive who came to believe things about television, with implications for computers and smartphones, For instance, he argues that sitting for hours seeing mainly the light of red, green, and blue fluorescent pixels is actually awfully creepy. Mander has no pretensions of being an Orthodox Christian, or an Orthodox Jew for that matter, sounded an alarm in his apostasy from advertising that is worth at least hearing out. (Related titles, good or bad, include *The Plug-in Drug* and *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.)

Discussion questions for “ ‘Social Antibodies’ Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy”

1. What areas in your life with technology would you most say, “We need some rules?”
2. What is the biggest problem that this dartboard refers to?
3. What adaptations of this article would be most helpful to you?
4. What can you bring from this article to discuss with your priest or spiritual father for best lessons for your life?

How rightly or wrongly has this first dartboard framed its question?

Introduction to “A Heart-to-Heart about Technology, COVID, and Big Brother”

Technology, COVID, and Big Brother are part of the nexus we live and could be compared with the N.I.C.E. in C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*. It is an open secret of sorts that COVID vaccines confer no permanent immunity; it is almost an open secret that hospitals are killing patients for the purpose of making \$100k per death attributed to COVID.

Here is a heart-to-heart about the whole nexus.

A Heart to Heart About Technology, COVID, and Big Brother

Let there be light!

I think I would like to depart from an initial discussion of lighting, on which point I would quote *Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary*:

Environmentalist, *n.* One devoted to a particular political agenda, regardless of its impact on the environment.

A recent project at Argonne National Laboratory was working on a new generation of nuclear reactor which would be in many ways a dream come true. Its design would be such that meltdown would be physically impossible. It could run on nuclear waste from other plants, not only generating power but reducing them to material which would become harmless

in a matter of roughly a century, rather than millions of years. It could run on nuclear warheads, thus not only providing a safe and permanent manner to dispose of some of the most appalling and destructive devices ever created, but so doing in a manner which would provide useful energy to hospitals and families; a beautiful picture of what it means to beat swords into ploughshares.

However, it is still nuclear, and, in the eyes of environmentalism, all nuclear power is evil and must be stopped at any cost. This project was, most definitely, stopped at any cost. It was terminated at great monetary cost; it was nearing completion, and, now that it was ready to be tested on different materials, those materials must be disposed of, at a cost of ninety-four million dollars more than it would have cost to complete. It was terminated at great environmental cost; those materials are dangerous nuclear wastes, and, though they were going to be made harmless, they must now be disposed of in established manners; that is to say, function as the nuclear waste that environmentalists so adamantly oppose. However, they stopped something bearing the dirty 'n' word, so environmentalists are now happy.

It is at least fortunate that environmentalists do not yet have the means to extinguish the sun.

Historically, there have been many transitions of technology. Before he came along, people were happy with the solutions they had for indoor lighting, and those solutions exist: when I grew up we had an oil lantern and various candles, which were trotted out for power outages and candlelight dinners, and I use candles in my prayers today. However, you could brightly illuminate indoor spaces with Edison's light bulbs, and precious few people reach for candles and lanterns when they want illumination. The Amish might, for all I know, because of carefully thought out convictions. However, when the question of illuminating a building or a room comes up, people naturally reach for electric lighting, just like horses exist (and I would love to have a horse), but when the question comes of getting from one point to another, they reach for an automobile of some description, whether gas, hybrid, or electric. I'd personally love to have both a horse and a recumbent trike, and there are bicycle-friendly cities where people have made another carefully-thought-out decision, but for practical purposes I may have a say in which *type* of car I drive; I don't have a say in which of these are live options for my living situation. The invisible hand of the free market has removed candles oil-burning lighting and horse riding from mainstream use.

Having Big Brother legislate a technology transition from incandescent bulbs to good LED lighting would have been bizarre enough, but the move that was actually made, at first, was at any cost to the health of the environment. I have gently twisted a CFL to unscrew it and broken it; my understanding is that there are technical implications which make it not a live option to make a durable plastic shell for the mercury payload, but people can and do mass produce thin tempered glass sheets that will substantially

protect cell phones from some pretty impressive blows. Making CFL's that require more than being treated as if they are made of glass (something adults have learned in dealing with incandescent bulbs) is asking for environmental degradation that dwarfs the higher power consumption of an incandescent heat bulb.

Now the first white LED's I know of were what is called "lunar white", which looked white but (speaking as someone who used a lunar white LED flashlight to pick out clothes from a close closet) everything was a shade of grey and it was a wild guess whether a shirt and a pair of pants had matching color. Something of this has been explicitly acknowledged in LED lighting advertising that they show colors truly, and the problem has been overcome. And it is part of the normal flow for people to note that good LED bulbs don't need to be treated like they are made of glass (or at least I have never broken one), cost pennies on the dollar for your electric bill, apparently last for ages (or at least I've never replaced an LED that died), don't make a well-lit summer room even hotter, can be truthfully advertised as much more attractive for environmental concerns, and so on and so forth, and the forces of the free market would make incandescent heat bulbs go the way of the oil lantern and the horse without the faintest government intervention.

But what is odd, and really historically out of place, was that Big Brother decided he needed to power the change. It would have been a strange thing for the dead hand of government intervention to specify a move from incandescent bulbs to mature LED technology, but the exact inept move enforced was from incandescent bulbs, which contain no toxins to speak of, to a mercury delivery system that seems not to be intended for members of the general public to be able to handle without breakage. And again, I've broken a CFL by a gentle if firm twist that would have been entirely appropriate for a made-of-glass incandescent bulb.

What's true for the goose is true for the gander

We have not directly have laws in force that require us to use any technology, and people off the grid are welcome to stay off the grid. However, the quarantine has created social conditions so that now some technologies are socially mandated. No one is holding a gun to our heads and demanding we use Zoom—but the government is holding a gun to our heads and forbidding us most normal social interactions.

What can we do?

There are several things to do, and I would point out the top 10:

1. **Read *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* and apply it liberally.**

Please note that I am not jockeying for book sales, and if you don't want to buy a copy on Amazon, **email me and I will send you a free copy.** Most of it was worked out before the present cyberquarantine, but the issues have long roots, and a book on how to be responsible with beer and wine has everything to do if water and juice are restricted but 151 proof rum is now placed before us and available for free.

2. **Watch *Depression is a Disease of Civilization*, and implement what you can.**
(tinyurl.com/depression-is-a)

There are different helpful materials; the full bang

for your buck as far as diet is concerned is available if you change your diet to Paleo. If like me you live somewhere winter days are short, compensate for the lack of sun. I use one of many entry level sun lamps during the day (I can see it but not visualize it.)

3. Do what you can within the rules to live as human.

It has been said in reference to fair trade that international laws are not biased against poor countries, but for the rich. Fair trade serves as a witness that it is possible to support dignified and human life if a conscious effort to that is done.

The rules are not specifically prohibitions on all human contact; they just load the dice so a Toastmasters Zoom meeting is much more in reach than a face-to-face meeting, and it must be admitted that doing some things virtually has its convenience. However, it is still possible to have human meetings. It is still possible, if socially awkward, to have a conversation with a friend across six feet's distance. It is possible to eat at picnic tables six feet apart. Things like this are not *impossible*; they just take an extra bit of reaching when virtual interaction is in much easier reach.

4. Limit your use of counterfeit social interactions, or at least try to consume them in balance.

I have written in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* about the goal of a tofu virtual chicken in every pot. I mentioned research that cultures that have absorbed tofu use and are not harmed by it consume only

fermented soy, in limited quantities, and never as a replacement for meat.

Social media (meaning *anti-social media*) are fake tofu. FecesBook keeps you plugged in and glued on, but it causes depression. The people who enjoy it most dip in and out quickly; prolonged use is asking for real depression.

If you are feeling lonely, seek out a face-to-face conversation with a friend. Maybe a conversation at six feet distance while wearing a mask, but don't just reach for FecesBook when you feel lonely and want to feel better.

5. Make counter-cultural technology decisions.

I agreed with Jean-Claude Larchet's *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul* before I read it, but reading Larchet raised the bar higher. I didn't watch TV or movies if there was a polite way to avoid it, and I still don't. What's different is that instead of checking my email every hour (and watching my clock), I now check my email once in the morning and other times as needed on a case-by-case basis. I also don't compulsively check my phone. My life is only the richer for this, and I have unplugged a drain on the human soul.

6. If you can get away with it, wear a gaiter mask.

I put on a gaiter mask just around my neck in the morning, pull it up to cover my mouth and nose when a mask is called for, and can breathe without feeling hot. It's a bit of a mask lite, but all the orthochristian.com articles about COVID being a big

deal were by older men. I entertain some skepticism for a situation where e.g. a motorcycle fatality is classified as a COVID death because doctors know what side their bread is buttered on.

A gaiter mask removes a strong disincentive to social interactions of the normal face-to-face type.

7. Consider getting a pet.

Some people are not animal people, and I am not personally in a position to responsibly own a pet. However, a friendly, good-natured cat or dog makes wonderful companionship without a quarantine, and possibly makes essential companionship with a quarantine. And if you like animals but can't own one now, do spend some time with the pets of any friend you visit.

8. Vote your conscience—and your fears

A First Things feature sometime back said:

We vote our fears. And a very good thing that we do, according to the formidable Dennis Prager. In his newsletter, he lists the major interest groups of the two major parties and then suggests that we ask ourselves: “If all the listed Republican groups had their way, what would happen to America? If all the listed Democratic groups had their way, what would happen to America?” Mr. Prager asked himself and concluded that, while he supports almost none of the organizations on the Republican list, he

fears them less than the groups on the Democratic list, and so he “nearly always” votes Republican. Here are his lists. Republican: National Rifle Association, Christian Coalition and Religious Right, Big Business, Black Conservatives (e.g., Clarence Thomas), Pro-Life Organizations, Conservative Justices, Tobacco Companies. Democrats: American Civil Liberties Union, Hollywood, Teachers’ Unions, Black Leaders (e.g., Jesse Jackson), Feminist Organizations, Liberal Justices, Trial Lawyers, Alcohol Companies.

The comment is dated by more than twenty years; the lack of mention of the gender rainbow alone says that the ink is far from being wet. But I would mention something to those who *do* vote your fears:

The quarantine will be bad under Trump and worse under Biden. That it will go badly under Trump hardly needs saying, but under Biden we are talking drones to enforce the wearing of masks, and who knows what else after federal drones have their “killer app” role of enforcing mask use. *Please, have the courage to vote your fears.*

9. Live The Sermon on the Mount and Thomas Hopko’s 55 Maxims.

In Robert Heinlein’s sex-crazed, anti-Christian *Stranger in a Strange Land*, the grandfather-figure asks the heroine if she knows the Bible, and when she says “not much,” he says, “It merits study, it provides helpful advice for most emergencies.” And

really, it does. “Do not worry about tomorrow; each day has enough trouble of its own” is very, very practical advice. If you haven’t availed yourself of this kind of resource, visit an Orthodox Church that is open (some are). If you have, dig deeper.

And in any case, give thanks in any and every circumstance, and be mindful of what you have to be grateful for.

10. Share this with others!

I think this post is worth sharing. *If you like it, please share it with others!*

And that’s all.
All the Best,
C.J.S. Hayward

Discussion questions for “A Heart-to-Heart about Technology, COVID, and Big Brother”

1. What do you think of living, in the title of an article, “One Nation Under Surveillance?”
2. What in this article surprised you?
3. How have others been irrational about COVID?
4. How have you been irrational about COVID?
5. Do you wish to graduate from more Big Brother-watched technology to less technological living such as our societies had before COVID?
6. What do you make of the words, “It will be easier to get people out of the cyber-quarantine than to get the cyber-quarantine out of the people?”

Introduction to “The Anti-Game: Better than Materialist Magic”

C.S. Lewis, in an introduction to *The Screwtape Letters*, says that devils want us to be magicians or materialists: it does not matter to them very much which one as long as we embrace one of these two fatal errors.

He comments about an Unholy Grail sought by devils in the figure of the materialist magician, something not to be found anywhere but which devils would very, very much want to see.

It is my thesis in this article that gaming offers a way that one can put one foot in materialism and the other foot in lust for magic, and become just that materialist magician.

The Anti-Game: Better than Materialist Magic

I grew up on technologies but became more and more suspicious of inattentive use of technologies as marketed to us. Enough so that my reaction to having my cell phone disappear was almost, “I have a GPS. Beyond that, I might be experiencing an early start on one of the privileges of monasticism already,” a reaction that would not surprise a reader of *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology*.

I am also a former gamer, and I have long wanted to put down on paper why one might unplug from games as I have unplugged from TV as far as I reasonably can. “Everything is permitted, but not everything is beneficial,” and this applies to games and iPhones apps alike.

Let me start by looking at the archtypal Game.

The Game

In the movie *The Game*, there is a game which the player is dumped into that has a profound element of transcendence. Nothing that is portrayed as happening is presented as intrinsically supernatural; the creators, so far as I know, are materialists, and so far as I can recall the audience is never taxed with a request for even a willing *suspension* of disbelief: the viewer is in the movie and in

the end never asked to entertain that there could have been even one faintest magical blessing from the tiniest fairy. Nonetheless, there is something that is transcendent in the movie, and though Hollywood normally capitalizes movie titles, capitalization convention is not the real reason I believe that this is not a movie about a “game,” with a lowercase G, but the Game, with a very *uppercase* G. Some very bizarre things happen at the beginning of *The Game* that are ordinarily what Christians would associate with the bizarre operations of demons, and there is a long plot with questions about what is real and shifting sands until everything is unveiled at the end as impressive, but believable on terms of materialism. On the recommendation of my brother I also watched *The Spanish Prisoner* and *The Usual Suspects*, but I was disappointed in because they did not drop you into an obvious maze of a *Game* specifically. In retrospect, I was disappointed after my brother recommended to me some astonishingly similar movies to one which with I was enthralled. Nonetheless the other movies’ essentially isomorphic plots unfold with much shifting sand and bewilderment about what is real, until in the last minute everything is clear and the stage magician explains, on materialist terms, how all the big illusions were pulled off.

My sister-in-law’s mother, an independent bookstore employee, has talked about how people have a right to know what they’re getting in a book, and (without divulging explicit details for the rest of us to struggle to un-see mental images) talks about speaking with patrons about *The Hunger Games* to let them know that they contain XYZ. However, everything I’ve known about the books is that they are books dealing with an epic Game, capital G: again, shifting sand, a hidden rules game, and the question of whether the strangeness of the details are literally supernatural really seems to matter less than one might think at first. Apparently another capital ‘G’ Game.

If I may pick a title that has not to my knowledge been Hollywoodified, the milder *An Invitation to the Game* has characters trapped in an unfortunate ersatz leisure class in a ruined world; someone gives children golden tickets to go to play a game, and they get temporarily knocked out of the game when they make a mistake that would kill them; and when they say in the game, “I wish So-and-So were here,” and the other person, who had been much better off, suddenly gets kicked down into the leisure class. Eventually, the game becomes real, and a pod of eight kids are sent among others to begin a new life on a beautiful new world such as they had virtually visited in the Game. Now in this instance the roller coaster activity is rated PG instead of being rated R, but we are still talking about something transcendent: the Game, with a capital G please.

Switching our attention from the Game to (g)ames

The English language, and some religious communities, have a distinction between God, with a capital G, and ‘gods’, with a lowercase G. The pagan gods of the Israelites’ neighboring nations, or the Greeks, have been described as little more than humans with super powers and endless life, and sometimes much less. The Christian God is something different, enough so that it represents confusion to place another god alongside him or speak of another God, and Orthodox Christianity goes through this looking-glass to say that its children are made gods, because the Deity has a Oneness so thorough that to let humans share in the divine Life and become themselves gods cannot threaten the One God, but fulfill his oneness. And at this point I would like to comment that games, with a lowercase ‘g’, are in the shadow of the Game that appears in literature, and in a dilute and less sharpened peak offer a

participation of the characteristic of the transcendent Game.

Materialist Magic

One point is that whether or not the entire tale of the Game is told as involving a single physically occult feature, the Game is occult. It has the same heart as magic. For a fantasy version, *The Labyrinth* that enthralled me very much asks for major willing suspensions of disbelief, but as a hidden rules game, the shifting sand and the question of what is really going on has the same heart as The Game in any materialist implementation. The heart of the Game has an occult resonance such as I dissected in *AI as an Arena for Magical Thinking Among Skeptics*, and this is not irrelevant to the heart of games, in which something is overlaid atop real life.

C.S. Lewis, in and outside discussion for *The Screwtape Letters*, says that demons have two lies to offer us: that they do not exist, or that they are all-powerful. He says that which one you believe matters less than one might think: they are both devastating, and he asks the reader to avoid *both* errors if we are to have spiritual health. He also, and more pointedly, posits that demons might have a holy grail (he does not use such language) in the “Materialist Magician,” given that demons are equally satisfied to make of us a Materialist or a Magician, but it is not at all clear how one would go about making both of the same man. I would pose that *The Game*, *The Spanish Prisoner* and *The Usual Suspects* offer a maelstrom of magic, unveiled to run materialistically at the very ending. The Game, whether or not it is available to us in real life, is the locus of Materialist Magic. The ordinary (g)ames we can buy, download, or create, and become absorbed in, are never as impressive as the Game, but they participate in its Materialist Magic. The mechanism appears materialist; the resonance is in a real sense occult.

A journey of repentance

The usual reasons Protestants leave role playing game is that one is in one's heart, pretending to do magic or do other things. The issue of violence may be treated less forcefully, but I remember in college when one friend was trying to recruit me back to Dungeons & Dragons, and he made the point that Dungeons & Dragons wasn't just battle. He talked about how in a recent campaign, in actions that the players imagined, his character had used magic and charmed a jeweler, and conned him into giving him jewels, and he didn't say much more than "bad example" so that his picture of Dungeons & Dragons being more edifying was saying that his character:

1. Used magic,
2. Lied, and
3. Stole bigtime.

My conscience boiled down to the question, essentially, of "Would you be right to do with your hands what you are doing vicariously in your heart by saying that your character does XYZ?" And I left Dungeons & Dragons with concerns of imagining one's viceroys to be using magic and violence well beyond the bounds of any version of "just war" theory I've heard Christians assert. People training with firearms can be told, "The *second last* thing you want to do is pull that trigger." Trying to "stop" real, live opponents with a real, live gun is one notch away from being the last resort. By contrast, Dungeons & Dragons makes getting into at least some fights to be desirable, a form of entertainment, and a way for characters to gain experience to advance in the game. The combat rules are very different from traditional duels in the West, where

there was a protocol to try to avoid duels, but usually there was not so much a winner or a loser as:

1. One disputant who died one to two weeks later as a direct result of injuries sustained in the duel, and:
2. One disputant who died six to eight weeks later as a results of indirect infections stemming from injuries sustained during the duel.

I've never heard of a game in Dungeons & Dragons where there was a significant chance of dying due to infection from a wound from an enemy's dirty blade. I've heard of pacifist characters every once in a blue moon, or players refusing to use violence, but I've never heard of gashes and wounds that modern medicine could heal ending up getting infected and a character dying from sepsis.

But the real, central reason Dungeons & Dragons and kin have been called demon games is vicarious magic use, and I believe that the temptation and what Orthodox would call the passion are the same thing. Some time after leaving Dungeons & Dragons, I decided that imaginary play as such was not wrong, and pioneered and playtested *The Minstrel's Song*, set in an unfallen world. And possibly it could be played in weaning someone from harder-core activity, and I missed the second point argued in "Escaping Reality: The Danger of Role Playing": that role playing games, including *The Minstrel's Song*, deliver an escape from reality.

And this brings me to various points that are often not given any connection with gaming. It is a spiritual problem that is like stepping on a water balloon: a problem which I called, for lack of any other name that was better, The Hydra. Though I do not mention it in the article, I think of a very unpopular website I made in the early days of the web, called "The Revenge of the Hydra." (If you

visited, nine popup windows appeared, and if you closed one of them down, two more appeared.)

What I say in “The Hydra,” in which I criticize C.S. Lewis, is something I bundled up with in my recent title “*St. Clive: An Eastern Orthodox Author Looks Back at C.S. Lewis* and in this volume, is:

“You are too old, children,” said Aslan, “and you must begin to come close to your own world now.”

“It isn’t Narnia, you know,” added Lucy. “It’s you. We shan’t meet you there. And how can we live, never meeting you?”

“Are—are you there too, Sir?” said Edmund.

“I am,” said Aslan. “But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.”

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

On the point of escapism, I would briefly comment that monks, in the ancient world, were perennially warned about the perils of escape, which when they were tempted, were advised to pray through the temptation until they were through it. And without further ado, I quote below a

work that already expresses my concern about escape and Narnia...

Some of the heads of the Hydra sound related to gaming; some sound unrelated. For instance, I long had a futile desire for something from another world, and my heart ached when I read a story about a saint being given a ring that had miraculous powers: which I coveted, not for the miracle, but for a ring that (it seemed) did not have its origin from earth.

I've heard of an alcoholic who had a rum problem, and gave up rum altogether and tried whiskey, until he found he had a whiskey problem and foreswore whiskey in favor of vodka. In my case it was more a matter of developing a Moonlight Sonata problem, and then avoiding Beethoven and finding I had a problem with swimming, and dried up inside and out and then found myself repeatedly tripping over my shoelaces. The number of substances an alcoholic might get in trouble with can all be identified as including something you can get from a liquor store; the The Hydra neither begins or ends with (g)ames, though its trunk is hinted at in the (G)ame.

What we don't see when we look into The Hydra: The Silhouette and the Full-Color Portrait

G.K. Chesterton, writing on an immediate topic of madness (and not games in particular):

Nevertheless he is wrong. But if we attempt to trace his error in exact terms, we shall not find it quite so easy as we had supposed. Perhaps the nearest we can get to expressing it is to say this: that his mind moves in a perfect but narrow circle. A small circle is quite as infinite as a large circle; but, though it is quite as infinite, it is not so large. In the same way the insane explanation is quite as complete as the sane one, but it is not so large. A bullet is quite as round as the world, but it is not the world. There is such a thing as a narrow universality; there is such a thing as a small and cramped eternity; you may see it in many modern religions. Now, speaking quite externally and empirically, we may say that the strongest and most unmistakable mark of madness is this combination between a logical completeness and a spiritual contraction. The lunatic's theory explains a large number of things, but it does not explain them in a large way. I mean that if you or I were dealing with a mind that was growing morbid, we should be chiefly concerned not so much to give it arguments as to give it air, to convince it that there was something cleaner and cooler outside the suffocation of a single argument. Suppose, for instance, it were the first case that I took as typical; suppose it were the case of a man who accused everybody of conspiring against him. If we could express our deepest feelings of protest and appeal against this obsession, I suppose we should say something like this: "Oh, I admit that you have your case and have

it by heart, and that many things do fit into other things as you say. I admit that your explanation explains a great deal; but what a great deal it leaves out! Are there no other stories in the world except yours; and are all men busy with your business? Suppose we grant the details; perhaps when the man in the street did not seem to see you it was only his cunning; perhaps when the policeman asked you your name it was only because he knew it already. But how much happier you would be if you only knew that these people cared nothing about you! How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it; if you could really look at other men with common curiosity and pleasure; if you could see them walking as they are in their sunny selfishness and their virile indifference! You would begin to be interested in them, because they were not interested in you. You would break out of this tiny and tawdry theatre in which your own little plot is always being played, and you would find yourself under a freer sky, in a street full of splendid strangers.” Or suppose it were the second case of madness, that of a man who claims the crown, your impulse would be to answer, “All right! Perhaps you know that you are the King of England; but why do you care? Make one magnificent effort and you will be a human being and look down on all the kings of the earth.” Or it might be the third case, of the madman who called himself Christ. If we said what we felt, we should say, “So you are the Creator and Redeemer of the world: but what a small world it must be! What a little heaven you must inhabit, with angels no bigger than butterflies! How sad it must be to be God;

and an inadequate God! Is there really no life fuller and no love more marvellous than yours; and is it really in your small and painful pity that all flesh must put its faith? How much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be, if the hammer of a higher God could smash your small cosmos, scattering the stars like spangles, and leave you in the open, free like other men to look up as well as down!”

Today Chesterton’s use of the term “infinite” is opaque; a high school student studying classic geometry will be told of finite line segments and infinite lines, but the term “infinite circle” does not arise. However, there is a sort of logic that connects with where the term “infinite” comes from. It means, “without end.” On a geometric line segment, you can go a certain distance in either direction and have to stop cold, while on an infinite and proper line, you can go as far as you want in each direction and never meet an end. The same thing can be said of a circle that modern mathematicians would call “finite;” you can travel along the curve of the circle as far as you want in either direction and never have to stop before the circle runs out of curve and you’ve reached the end of the circle. In that sense Chesterton is saying something mathematically as well as literature-wise coherent when he talks about a circle that is infinite as any other, but cramped. And though Chesterton does not speak of it, there is something relevant in the Circle whose Center is everywhere and whose perimeter is nowhere.

I said that Chesterton is talking about madness and not games, but I caught myself crossing my fingers... but may have found a way to say it without crossing my fingers. Here’s what I think I can say: I see no evidence that Chesterton was thinking about games in any sense, and I do not recall reading him condemn games when he mentions them elsewhere, much less make the claim that I make

here. None the less, a game is a way to step into another, smaller circle. It is the Materialist Magician's way. In addition there is a scale of hard- to soft-core games, and I remember when I was trying to push the envelope on gaming, from tabletop role playing into a (re)invention of real life role playing, to make it harder core, that an occultist who respected me more than I think was due gently said that this is how magic works, and it's real enough when you get a call at 3:00 AM to take down a Brujah (a type of vampire in the "World of Darkness" role playing game *Vampire, the Masquerade*), it feels about as real as you can get.

It is known even among secular behavioral health professionals that involvement in the occult can make you lose your mind and end up detached from the real world; as another head of the Hydra, the nexus of games, gaming and gamers seems too close a relative to this to dismiss the danger. The figure of the role player who has fallen off the deep end is known to role players as much as anyone else, and I can't help but sense an implied need to establish that role playing is OK even among geeks, as stated in Lifestacker's "The Surprising Benefits of Role Playing Games" and "How to Get Started." Games in general are attractive enough, at least to some, that one might be surprised that they would need defending, as it is a pariah Protestant thing to warn about the evils of role playing game. The "Surprising Benefits" mentioned in the title evoke a French proverb, "*Qui s'excuse, s'accuse*," literally "He who excuses himself (by that very fact) accuses himself:" or more loosely, "You only rationalize when you know you're wrong." Lifestacker mentions that role playing is a way to get instant friends. The same is true among bikers; come alone on a motorcycle to a group of bikers and you have instant friends. But there is something unsavory to both alike.



What does a gamer have if gaming is taken away? It's not about changing which part of a silhouette you are in, but seeing a portrait in full color.

Watching a DVD of *The Game* is a whole lot more attractive of a proposition than turning around your chair and facing the wall while other people are at least *watching* the DVD; and if your pleasure and sense of well-being is drawn from the Game, only the Chesterton quote really hints at what could possibly be better if you think losing your participation in the Game and games is simply turning around and staring at a wall.

But in fact it is not a matter of being more constricted. G.K. Chesterton, if applied to gaming, does not stop at giving arguments or critiques. He wants to give the gamer *air*. He wants the small circles to be abandoned, not to be even more constricted, but to enter that Circle whose Center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere. He wants gamers to let go of their Game Master's plans to be swept into the galaxies by the Lord of the Dance. A famed Far Side cartoon says "In the days before television" and showed a family huddled around the blank spot in a living room where there was nothing instead of there being a television.

Some humor provokes laughter by pointing out what is clearly and painfully true. But this point, and even its truth, is accented by saying something ludicrous. The days before television, in the West, were not characterized by people vegging out in front of a blank wall. People often

spent time in what geeks call “The Big Room,” namely outside. Children read, threw paper airplanes, built things, spent time playing with pets, built model airplanes, danced, manipulated physical toys such as jacks, played hide and seek, and for that matter played some make-believe games that bore a living and healthier organic link to today’s grown-up role-playing games. And what I believe is offered to gamers is not to turn a chair around and stare at the wall; it is to turn your chair a bit, get up, and go to the Big Room and get some fresh air. And start, just start, to see the Divine Face in full, living color that is not even hinted at in even a remote white part of a silhouette.

The Apocalyptic Anti-Game

There have been several earlier works which I tried to write, but the time was not ripe, or at least I had not grown enough to write them. I tried and failed to write an article called “The Luddite’s Guide to Technology” but now consider *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology* to be one of my best books, even if it was years before a similar voice was heard in *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*. At much less of an interval, I tried and failed to write an article on “St. Clive” before writing “*St. Clive: An Eastern Orthodox Author Looks Back at C.S. Lewis* (the Kindle edition was for several days the #1 topselling new title in “Christian Literature and Arts.”) This work, incidentally, began life as an attempt to write a dialogue called “Medieval Anti-Game”, in which the Middle Ages are not the medieval theming of classic role play, but the historical root that has now developed into what has now been called “Western cultural singularity;” we live in the logic of the medieval West played out; and the Middle Ages were thought of as a bridge that can go both ways and that we can follow the medieval bridge the other way into a greater sanity: the Middle Ages offer a kind Anti-Game, rightly understood. It

is increasingly difficult to fail to see that we live in one spectacular unfolding singularity. **We seem to be in the kinds of circumstances where saints are made.** It is not in easy times that the arm of the Lord bares its power.

I had earlier hoped to wind this down with the classic monastic advice given when one is tempted to escape: “Persevere in alternating prayer and work, and one can eventually emerge a victor,” and with an anecdote that one of the times I repented of another layer of this vice I desired, instead of God putting me somewhere else as I sought escape, that a loving God had put me in quite an awesome place without escape, and that in the here and now where God has placed me I am in a very real sense in communion with the stars in the sky and the salt in the sea. And that is where the lesson ended when I began working on this article... but there is more.

In a discussion where conservatives said that liberals were well enough able to have one point on which they were conservative, one friend described a liberal launching off about how bad the possibility is that we might be ruled by one world government. My friend mentioned commenting, “I suppose this would be a bad time to mention the Book of Revelation,” and watching the color drain from the other person’s face. Gamers who have played Call of C’Thulu, in which a sleeping Old One is coming to life and wants to destroy the world, might let go of the game only to come to terms with the possibility that we might be in something very much like the Call of C’Thulu, in which an Old One that has been trying to come to this world may in fact show up. Such is called the Antichrist, whether he will openly appear in two years or two millenia.

Another friend (from what source I do not know and do not know whether I should trust), claimed that there was a prophecy that the present Pope would be the last real Pope and after him would only be anti-Popes. I do not know if that is true, but I am not terribly impressed with Poop Francis. He says deliberately ambiguous things that

can be interpreted in an (o)rthodox way by Roman standards, but can be read in very different ways and sound pretty much like something a leftist journalist would want once his words pass through the alimentary canal of mainstream journalism.

It is increasingly known on the left and the right what Amazon represents, not only in closing regular bookstores but even in teaching bookworms to own fewer and fewer physical books, and rent rather than own Kindle books. I remember years back reading Richard John Neuhaus sounding the alarm that all of the major components of National Socialism were being redeemed in academic circles. I also remember my grammar professor at the Sorbonne saying how he would never forgive a former French president for earning political advantage by splitting the right into the right and the far-right: in hard economic times, giving all kinds of at least apparently preferential treatment to immigrants, and then insisting that the far-right Le Pen be given ample coverage and time to speak (*“Les votes pour Le Pen sont a cent pourcent les trous de balle!”*—“One hundred percent of the votes for Le Pen are bullet holes!”). Now we have a new white nationalism emerging after racism being un-respectable in most conservative circles for a while, and (I haven’t paid attention to what is this year’s installment) the taking down of Confederate flags and statues of Confederates is a masterful way to get white nationalism alive and kicking (I once wrote an Onion-style article about how frustrated filmmakers in our day erected another statue of a smiling Martin Luther King because they couldn’t figure out how to deal in film with their hero’s difficulties keeping something in his pants). But the problem extends beyond white nationalism. And it’s worse.

National Socialism in very large measure motivated by eugenics, one pillar of which was to hope that certain races be eliminated. Google, which no longer goes by the motto “Don’t be evil” of its former days, is open and direct

in supporting the successor to eugenics: transhumanism, Eugenics 2.0, a transhumanism which I discuss in part of my thesis. A eugenic hope was that the only people left in the world would be people who were sufficiently white and acted sufficiently white. Transhumanism goes further, no longer satisfied to phase specific human races out, but instead hoping in its ideal that the human race itself be phased out in a posthuman science fiction eschaton. And what eugenics was to Nazi Germany, transhumanism is to Google. It's just in an incubation stage.

Other things are playing out in the small. An increasing number of young people in the U.S. aren't interested in driving; they are also not interested in earning their own income. One deacon I know said, "Conversation is like texting for adults," and the concern is raised that youth are learning social skills that are anemic at best. Some people have said that Romans 1 might as well have been written about people today... and furthermore that reading Romans 1 aloud might be legally classified as hate speech in a political climate increasingly resonant with Terreurs past and present. Meanwhile smartphones are no longer any kind of rich kid's syndrome; 85% of African homes have a television and many families incur debt for multiple mobile devices.

We've had several shellshocks now: Islam is finding its kairos or decisive moment, the U.S. Constitution is used to defend gay rights over and against the free and proper exercise of religion, and it's been something like two decades since I heard journalists giving attention to our society's increasing use of porn. I don't think we've seen the end.

But there is more than this. When we have let go of the last dear shred of games and gaming, what we may need to face is that we are in fact in a real Game, that we are in a real game more spectacular than the most brilliant of created games, with the best possible Game Master of all. And there is one more thing to say: as an undead pirate in

Pirates of the Caribbean tells an unbelieving woman, “You best start believing ghost stories, Miss Turner... *You’re in one.*”

Read e.g. *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*. We may be the last to remember the medieval institution of face-to-face universities; perhaps as discussed in *The Dying of the Light* Christian colleges and universities may have disengaged from the Christian faith but they have kept as strongly as Anselm of Canterbury a face-to-face conversation for centuries; and companies and even unions may act unlike the practices of a medieval guild, but until recently work was part and parcel where you went and not only what you did. There is an unbroken stream of saints shining in Heaven, and they still beckon us to join their august College. And though we may only go into outdoor parks for picnics as a special occasion, comparable to medieval “Maying,” we do much more than the dungeoneer in classic *Dungeons & Dragons*: we are summoned to a company in age-long war against an ancient red dragon with seven heads and ten horns. We may be in a unique place to live cyberpunk; in a spiritual sense many of us are there already. And lastly, we may be in something more “Call of C”Thulu” than “Call of C”Thulu” itself, where an Old One has long been knocking on our door, and the door may be open soon. It may be that everything that is compelling in role play is in the real world setting offered to us today, where all games come together and, having long repented from the foolishness of infantile games, we find before us an embossed card saying, “An invitation to The Game”, and if we look at it closely, it is covered with etched letters saying, “**Love, God.**”

Discussion Questions for “The Anti-Game: Better than Materialist Magic”

1. How does our society use games, movies, TV shows, etc.?
2. How do you use games and similar methods of escape?
3. Is there a reason why Orthodox accounts of child saints say that they abstain from children’s games?
4. To what extent have you been the Materialist Magician?
5. What do you make of the suggestion that once we have let go of the desire to play games, we are ready to reach the vantage point of seeing that we live in the greatest game of all?

Introduction to “Mindfulness and Manners”

We are seeking mindfulness from the East because we have rejected it in the West.

The traditional Western place for mindfulness has been as a department of manners and not a very prominent one when everybody is addicted to a phone. My own suggestion that Right Mindfulness is a cardinal virtue in the East under Buddhism and a feature of older manners in the West is less intended to convince the reader of one or the other being the real place of mindfulness, than to help the reader understand how it may be found in both places, and both places represent what is at its core the same thing.

Mindfulness and Manners

“Mr. Jenkins One looked at his watch.”

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

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

“55 New Maxims for the Cyber-Quarantine“

Declaring war on the pencil

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

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

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

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

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

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

The difference is illuminating.

Face-threatening behavior and basically rude behavior

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

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

On another level, I remember a post-graduation visit to a well-liked professor who, as we were talking, glanced at his clock and then apologized, saying that he looked at the clock because he was surprised it was dark so soon. This was a graceful recovery from a minor social blunder: needlessly looking at his clock, which is an example of basically rude behavior. When Madeleine l'Engle briefly states that Mr. Jenkins One "looked at his watch," this is a

social shorthand to say that Mr. Jenkins One was tired with the present social situation, was wishing it would be over and he could be doing *something* else, perhaps *anything else*, and that he wondered how long it would continue to drag on and on. And the professor I was visiting, who has a profound ability to enjoy and be present to practically *anyone*, made a social recovery after a behavior that carries a message of “I wish this conversation were over.”

Mindfulness and manners

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

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

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

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

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

However, I will remark, as curiously interesting, that while I've seen attention to mindfulness blanketing the air and I have been invited to share in mindfulness exercises, **not one of the mindfulness practices I have seen**

talks about old-fashioned manners to pay attention to others and the situation. Mindfulness is discussed as a Far Eastern virtue or discipline. I have never heard it connected to old-fashioned Western manners.

Fr. Tom Hopko's famous (to Orthodox) 55 Maxims include:

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

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

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

results for “fr tom hopko 55 maxims” attest that he has written something simple that people can connect to. Manners are much more important, and much more than arcana about which is the salad fork. “The fork goes to the left, and the knife guards the spoon,” is a particular alphabet and language in which manners are translated. It is at the exterior of manners that, under some circumstances, you could be given a bowl of water to rinse your fingers in before eating. A much deeper glimpse into manners is afforded in that a distinguished visitor to a Queen picked up his finger bowl and then drunk it, then Her Majesty picked up her finger bowl and then drunk it, and then every person seated around the table picked up their finger bowls and drunk them.

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

In Madeleine l’Engle’s day, needless attention to a watch or clock was the go-to device to avoid practicing mindfulness for a time. It changed and told you where you are. This pint of beer that Boomers tried not to drink too many of has been replaced by a pint of rum in the

smartphone, and a pint of weed in the smartwatch and its successors. Mr. Jenkins One looked at his plain old pre-digital watch, probably one without a second hand, while kids now enjoy (or are bored with) a virtual acid trip quickly surfing from one smartphone app to another.

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

My own rather counter-cultural technology choices

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

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

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

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

But a funny thing happened along the way.

I've almost exclusively used the solar watch face because, while it may be beautiful, it is less distracting than the face of my industrial strength Pathfinder watch, which changes every second and shows patterns in the numbers (to a mathematician, 11:23:58 looks familiar). I have it set to a smaller analog clock face display within the solar face because from childhood I've found analog clocks harder to read than digital. (If analog clocks were easier for me, I would have the digital display, and if I had the option to turn off the inset clock besides the outer solar display, I would turn it off.)

Taking a cue from Humane Tech, I have dug around in "Accessibility" settings and set the watch face to grayscale. It's beautiful, and the analog clock face's second hand, brown on blue when seen in color, blends in remarkably well. I have to strain to see it the one time I genuinely want to watch a second hand's sweep. I also found, under "Display and Brightness," how to turn off one of the key reasons I purchased an Apple Watch 5: its "Always on" display. It now takes just a little more work to check my watch, supplemented by wearing an oversized fleece whose sleeves tend to cover my watch face. I've also turned on the hourly chime, also an accessibility feature. This reminds me to check the clock once an hour, and relieves me of having to constantly check. If I need to check email once an hour (my preference is to check it once a day), I don't need to check either my watch or my email compulsively; my watch will remind me on the hour. Furthermore, I set alarms for when I need to do something. Besides appointments and things like taking medication, I have followed a practice recommended by sleep advocates and set an alarm for when I should go to bed and not when I should get up.

I would briefly pause and acknowledge one objection to the technique above, which is that doing things according to a preset timer and quite possibly stopping when you have momentum going is not as good as working on tasks for as long as they naturally take. For those no ancient or modern watch is needed. However, while I believe working on something for however long it takes to unfold naturally is often better than working for a fixed length of time set without knowledge of how things will unfold, I believe that use of intelligently set alarms is better than clock-watching. (One further aspect of intelligent use of alarms is to have two alarms for something: one five or ten minutes before, meaning when you look at your watch because of the “early warning” alarm, it’s time to start wrapping up; and one at the exact time, meaning it’s time to stop.)

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

The Apple Watch is designed and marketed as the next level of integrating digital and everyday life, and in my opinion that is not a wise thing to be wishing for at all. However, it is also powerful enough that judicious choices mean it can be tamed into unobtrusiveness further than any previous watch I’ve owned.

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

A few closing words

I would recall a few words from “Seeing Through Native Eyes.” The main speaker recounted a visit to Kalihari bushmen, who retain hunter-gatherer life unhindered today, and an elder asked him in reference to a device, “Is that a timepiece?”

He said, “Yes.”

The elder said, “Then I don’t like it.”

He said, “Why not?”

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

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

Discussion questions for “Mindfulness and Manners”

1. Are manners obsolete, or just neglected?
2. What humble ways can you be more mindful of the present?
3. Can you make attentiveness to the present to be a bigger part of your manners?
4. Does mindfulness require a surprising supply of “mindfulness exercises?”
5. Are there other virtues besides mindfulness?
6. What virtues would you most like to have?
7. What degree of attention to others would you most like to have in your manners?

Introduction to “Ignorance”

Some forms of ignorance just stem from not having met the truth.

This is a look at a studied and deliberate ignorance. C.S. Lewis said in *The Chronicles of Narnia* that the problem with trying to make yourself more stupid than you actually are is that you will quite often succeed.

It is the suggestion in this piece that large parts of our political landscape represent a deliberate and studied ignorance.

Ignorance

I've been thinking after reading a tweet that quoted a French educational minister who had announced that French schoolchildren would be taught Latin and Greek starting in 5th and 6th grade. He was asked whether students would also be taught "PHP, JavaScript, Python." He was rather confused by the question, and the interlocutor asked, "Will they be taught to code?" and he answered, "No, they will not be taught to code."

The tweet treated the French leader as so obviously out of touch with reality that further comment was not even offered. But I'd like to talk a bit about my own education to say why there was a problem, not with the French leader, *but the twit*.

I have had about as much education in mathematics and STEM as there is to be had, though I did not end up with a PhD, and about as much education in academic theology as there is to be had, though I did not end up with a PhD there either, and read Latin and Greek at a significant level, and for that matter spent a semester at the Sorbonne (I am the local francophone at my monastery). And I believe studying Latin and Greek is relevant, or at least reading classics in translation (I have read little beyond the Bible in Latin or Greek). And I believe a

knowledge of the world's classics, such as one can find in the *Norton Anthology of World Literature* (beginnings to 1650, 1650 to present).

My six best works, or at least those that have most met with profound reader approval, are those in *C.J.S. Hayward in Under 99 Pages*:

- An inversion of C.S. Lewis's most famous work in "The Angelic Letters."
- A paradoxically meditative poem in "A Canticle to Holy, Blessed Solipsism."
- A very light adaptation of Plato's most famous allegory in "Plato: The Allegory of the... *Flickering Screen?*"
- A hymn of glory in "Doxology."
- The book people ask why Boethius did not write: *The Consolation of Theology*. (St. Boethius instead wrote *The Consolation of Philosophy*, neo-Platonism's finest little gem.)

And just for the record, I have not read Plato in Greek nor St. Boethius in Latin, and I am on the whole not a literary Weird Al Yankovic; it's just that my best works seem to go further when I am leaning on a past giant. Also, for what it's worth, I have worked in PHP, JavaScript, and Python, the last of which is my favorite (computer) language.

My first and less serious objection to the perspective in the tweet has to do with how I talked my way out of candidacy for a dream job. My interviewer said I would have my complete choice of languages and platform, and the core of the job and its description was to program a payment gateway that would take about a million people's

membership fees. I tried, unsuccessfully, to explain one Information Technology manager's published opinion that ten years prior, IT work was "*build, build, build*", but then, even then, it was "*Partner before buy; buy before build.*" And it wouldn't just be faster and cheaper to zero in on a good, vetted, mature open source project that could handle the collection of annual membership fees; it would have been hands down more secure. For me to give my interviewer what he thought he wanted would have been to put both of us in a situation where a routine programming error could jeopardize a million people's finances, and I would have had no other programmer in the organization to ask to review my code. A business analyst would not have boiled down "*collect membership fees*" to "*write a program from scratch to collect membership fees;*" a more obvious interpretation of the situation would have been to "*identify and acquire a secure software solution appropriate to collecting membership fees.*" By that time, the wheel had already been reinvented many different ways, and so had the internal combustion engine. And I do not say that Python etc. skills are irrelevant; when I had trouble with WordPress I circumvented the issue by implementing a simple content management system in Python, and that has generated a site that I'm building. But the number of people who really need to know these languages is small and shrinking. I think Python is a particularly good choice for people interested in recreational and hobbyist programming, but I do not think it is beneficial across the board to expand primary education to cover the five R's of Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic, and Ruby on Rails. But here is my more serious concern. My prior spiritual director, before this monastery, looked at what I talked about and had written and said that my primary contribution seemed to be talking about Orthodoxy and technology. And that is work where a deep and sensitive understanding of METS issues is essential, but the heavy lifting is all done on humanities's power. And in terms of

the liberal arts ideal, and educating an informed public, Latin and Greek in middle school makes sense. It sounds like an informed opinion, and not only makes classics more available to the general public, but provide an environment where French intellectual giants will grow up with the languages of most of the heavy lifting in humanities in the history of Western culture. Proficiencies in classical languages will also age and mature well compared to computer languages in particular. Someone who learned to read classics in Latin and Greek twenty years ago will have much profitable reading available today; but someone who had learned C, C++ and Java ten years ago, and has not kept up with the risings and fallings of programming languages, will be considered a dinosaur today. Classics age better than fashion.

“Conversation is like texting for adults”

There is a sort of chauvinism I have encountered, not least in my advisor saying, “Do you make allowances for greater ignorance in the past?” to which I coolly answered, “I do not make allowances for greater ignorance in the past. Allowances for different ignorance in the past are more negotiable.” I refrained from saying that I make allowances for greater ignorance in the *present*. But I get ahead of myself.

Today’s youth are not even learning face-to-face social skills, and still we have a chauvinism that we assume the competencies of our predecessors without needing to acquire these competencies as our predecessors have. Thomas Kuhn’s post-truth account of science, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, says that after a heavily political revolution has occurred, history is rewritten so as to provide an additive picture where the history of related developments adds increases of knowledge when the

change is *not additive, but ecological*. I have studied, though I find it very hard to put into words, what was lost in the founding of Western science. (The best indication I can easily give is to look at what C.S. Lewis says about science/magic in the final third of *The Abolition of Man*, and dig deeper in Mary Midgley's *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning*, and perhaps my "Physics", which may or may not help.) But there is some real merit in what a friend wrote:

Learning with your whole body

I'm assuming that most of you have been to college. Even if you haven't, you've been learning for 12 years in an institution that has taught you that learning is done with the brain, that it comes from words written on screens or paper, and that the way you show what you've learned is to write intelligent words on screens or paper.

Here is the first thing I need you to understand: out here in the garden, you do not learn with your brain. You learn with your hands and with your eyes and with your whole body. Your brain is involved, sure. But don't let it take over. Don't separate "learning" and "working." Every moment you're in this teaching garden, and even a lot of the time you're working in other parts of the farm, if you pay attention you can be learning constantly.

School teaches us to think of learning as information. It's such a mistake! Yes, there is information that will help you learn to garden, and I'll teach you some of it—but if you don't

learn it with your body, it won't be much use to you.

You're going to need educated eyes—you're going to need the ability to look at a plant and know if it's thriving, to look at a little seedling and be able to see in your mind how big it'll be so you can give it enough space, to look at a patch of weeds and have a sense of how much bigger it'll be next week if you don't kill it now. (The most advanced skill, which I'm still learning, is looking at a row of green beans and estimating—from how thick the blossoms & small beans on it are—how much it's going to produce over the next couple weeks.) You need educated hands—you need to be able to feel, when you're swinging a hoe, whether you're really biting into the roots of the weeds, and you need hands that know how to weed fast and effectively, and how to use a pitchfork, etc, etc. And you need instincts, too—when you've just transplanted a plant, you need to have the instinct to check on it till it's established, same as people have the instinct to check on a baby.

And you learn all that by experience. Writing it down won't help. Doing it while being aware of it is what helps. Be in the moment, don't be thinking of something else while you work. (Well, maybe when you're weeding strawberries!) Get your hands in the dirt and feel it, compare it with how it felt last week, watch and observe the plants as they grow—and watch the weeds as they die! Watch how much quicker they die on a sunny or a windy day, watch how they re-root themselves even from a lying-down position if it's too wet. At some point it all comes together and you start to develop a sort of instinctive

understanding of the garden as a natural system. I've been doing this for five years now—I knew next to nothing about gardening before that—and I have a sense now of how all the pieces work together, not in theory but what's happening in real time in my own garden, and it's such a pleasure. It has been such a pleasure to go from someone who learned things only with her brain, to someone with hands and eyes that understand my garden.

I know some of what I'm saying you may already know, but I still think it's worth saying at the start here. I've just seen so often how hard it is to get rid of the idea that reality is in our heads or on paper and start focusing on the reality that's under our feet—to stop going on what you think is supposed to happen instead of looking at what really happens. I know it took me a lot longer than it should have. I still remember my breakthrough moment. I was using the push-cultivator—which I'll teach you how to use—and it was a new tool for us at that point so I didn't know its capabilities. The thing is that when the weeds get to a certain height, the push-cultivator doesn't kill them anymore—you have to use a hoe. But I would push the cultivator on down the row and it would kill a few weeds and knock down the rest and cover them with dirt so the row looked clean, and I never noticed that their roots were still in the soil, and in my head I would make a little check mark—well that row's done. The next week, we'd be looking through the garden to see what needed doing, and there would be a bunch of weeds in that row again, and I'd go, "Wow! They came

back fast!” and cultivate again. I still remember the day the little lightbulb came on in my head and I realized I’d never killed those weeds at all. I felt so dumb. That was the day I learned to look at what I was doing. Not just at what I thought I was doing.

And that’s a lot of what is involved in learning a skill—not just knowing “how” but involving your hands and eyes and brain all together in the process, so that you can feel how the motion is working and you can see whether it’s working—and you remember to double-check the next day whether it worked!

Okay, I have one more story. This one taught me so much. We had a temporary volunteer in the garden for three days. He was this guy who, if you told him how to do something, would look annoyed as if you were patronizing him or something. Because, you know, everybody knows how to hoe, right? Well, I got embarrassed by him being offended and figured he was right, maybe it was rude to try and tell someone how to do such simple stuff. I was a beginner too, at the time. Erin told us to hoe a certain section, and we did it. And we did it backwards. We started at the back of the section and walked backwards to the front as we hoed, so that all the plants we hoed up ended up in a pile in the next bit we had to hoe, covering the weeds there. The result was that at the end of our work all you could see was a pile of dead plants, so it looked great, it looked done. And the next day when those dead plants had dried up and withered away, what you could see was a section that looked like someone had hit it a few times here and there with a hoe—at least half of the weeds

were still alive and kicking. The next day Erin took me aside and showed me how to hoe for real: you move forward, and you hoe up every inch of the soil, whether you see a plant there or not. And I've never felt embarrassed to teach anyone to hoe since then. It's a skill.

It's a huge mistake to think of any part of farming as unskilled labor. A skilled worker can weed about five times as fast as a beginner—if not more. Farming is skilled, complicated, grounded work that involves your hands and your eyes and your brain and your whole body—and at some point you may find it starts to involve your heart. You're learning something this year that you can be proud of. (Heather Munn)

In other conversation, she said that people seem to assume that low-prestige work doesn't require skill. And this is, if you will, one case of our chauvinism in assuming we have the knowledge of prior ages without any attempt to learn it, because we're making progress or whatever. Before zeroing in on one case study, let me underscore one quote by General Omar Bradley that I will also quote below:

“We have too many men of science; too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount.

“Man is stumbling blindly through a spiritual darkness while toying with the precarious secrets of life and death. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.”

A Deliberate and Studied Ignorance

I would like to quote *Knights and Ladies, Women and Men*:

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.” And if two of them are wrong in the same way, that might be significant.

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 her off her 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*. Seeing as how rooting out from the desire for fairy tales from little girls and little kids in general, 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 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 about Sarah Smith as discussed below, “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 Un-man'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 Un-man'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 Un-man'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 Un-man's Tales.

What is this mysterious slippage?

One of the two men who shut me down completely when I compared *Dealing with Dragons* with Un-man's tales, told me when I spoke with him a reason why my comparison was out of bounds: it provoked "a strong emotional reaction" to compare the book the group had chosen to Un-man's tales, and so I was making a

problematic comparison. With his efforts to waft away and disable my reaction, I zeroed back in on the center: first, that the *style* of telling the tales was exactly the same between the Un-man and Patricia Wrede, and second, the *content* of the tales was exactly the same. But let me take a step further back.

That man was my best friend, and there was one time where he went away for a weekend and had a conversation with me the like of which I have not seen before or since. He gave extremely forceful and heavily loaded language indicating that “there is no... male nor female” mean as much as possible (*he did not honestly admit that included was that “no male nor female” mean as much as possible what a feminist would want it to mean*), and the question remains of what to do with passages that “**appear** to say” (*always, and with another friend who found her way into the gender rainbow, heavy verbal stress on “appear” for any inconvenient passage*) something contrary, and tried to neutralize the claim that the husband is the head of his wife by saying that in Greek the term “head” need not mean “boss” but can also mean “source,” as in that “the head of a stream is where the stream came from (*he never explained why the assertion that “head” means “source” diminished the authority of a husband*).

I took a bit before responding, “**That’s loaded language!**,” followed by suggesting that he might repeat what he said with the language loaded in the opposite direction.

That conversation, with a man whose character was gentleness, honesty, and truth, left me mystified: why is it that feminism is always advanced by slimy language? This might be a worst example in my life (*at least apart from the text I analyzed in my diploma thesis, Craig Keener’s Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Woman’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul*), but it is far from an only example in my life, and since I started paying attention to the matter I

have never noticed an attempt to advance feminism that was not slippery in rhetoric. The jarring blow helped me move from sitting on the fence between egalitarianism and complementarianism (*and not considering the question important*), to the belief that feminism is bankrupt enough that it cannot convincingly be advanced through clean methods of persuasion. My question was initially one of rhetoric alone, but my concern grew to encompass a movement that needs to use such language to recruit, and needed to use such language when feminism was widely held to be the moral high ground over complementarianism, and there was an incredible hegemony to the belief that if you want to advance the good of woman, you do so by promoting feminism. This was years and almost decades before I would quip, “He for She. Because feminism knows it is sinking.”

My advisor on that dissertation, incidentally, has been a plenary speaker at a Christians for Biblical Equality (“*well, I suppose one in three is not bad*”) conference. And he did not hinder me from a conservative thesis; Cambridge professors do not normally take out their differences on students. But he did try to recruit me. One example was, “And what about Biblical Egalitarians, who believe ‘In Christ, there is no male nor female’?”

I responded by dismantling the missile: I first commented that in English language idiom, talking about the group who does such-and-such idiomatically means that the unshared, distinguishing feature of that group is such-and-such, and his assertion communicates that feminists and Biblical Egalitarians believe that “In Christ, there is no male nor female” and their opponents do not, where one conservative response might be, “The same God inspired passages feminists like and passages they don’t like, and if your interpretation needs to neutralize one to make room for the other, your interpretation is broken.” I do not ever recall a conservative rejection or attack on “In Christ there is no male nor female,” because

complementarians also believe, really and truly, that “In Christ there is no male nor female” is as much part of divine revelation as passages feminists attack.

Then I drew attention to a hidden payload: “In Christ there is no male nor female” was assumed to mean as much as possible what a feminist would want it to mean, an identical legal franchise extended to both male and female. If it is hard to see anything else, I would add a passing reference to St. Maximus the Confessor, who said that in hesychasm monks know what temptation is coming by what image they see: if a man’s face who had wronged us appeared in imagination, there was a temptation to anger coming, and if a woman’s face appeared, a temptation to lust was coming, and in Christ there is no male nor female, meaning neither anger nor lust. Now I don’t believe this is a complete interpretation; if it is truth, it has the truth of a layer, and there are other things on other levels that “In Christ there is no male nor female” should mean. But I reference St. Maximus the Confessor to give an example of what besides a feminist goal of equal legal-style franchise “In Christ there is no male nor female” could mean.

And this happened easily a couple of dozen times: he asked, regarding inclusive language in translation, if I thought Greek or English language conventions should be followed in Bible translations, and I said, “You’re begging the question!” because he used “English language conventions” to automatically mean belabored inclusive language instead of naturally inclusive language, when the very point under consideration was whether a New Testament written in naturally inclusive language should be most faithfully translated by exchanging the naturally inclusive Greek for belabored inclusive English. At some point, after a great deal of this, he got discouraged and tried to recruit me less often.

I would suggest that feminism represents a deliberate and chosen ignorance that needs to reach out and dupe others. The verse in Genesis that declares the

image of God also says what may more picturesquely be stated as, “Prong and tunnel He created them.” And feminism is devoted to annihilating what in society that works out, just as its rhetoric is post-truth, the rhetoric of the assassin’s guide to making foul rhetoric.

The most politically incorrect passage in Scripture: Romans 1

For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and venerated and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

Some people have said this reads as a description of today, and I used to agree with that.* I quote the passage because it is explicitly an assessment of a deliberate and chosen ignorance.

* What's the asterisk for? Simply put, we've managed to go farther. What used to be called LBG has now become "the alphabet people," because they keep adding letters in a brainstorm of sexualities (or numbers, as in 2-S). (As a techie, I think /L.* / is appropriate for LGBTQ+, and which people are actively working on expanding to LGBTQP+.)

Furthermore, there was a moralist injunction regarding SecondLife, saying, “Fornicate using your OWN genitals!” The technological nexus we live in has had a breach with natural living. Our ancestors devised one kind of artificial environment to be in, namely indoors most of the time, and we’ve taken artificiality to a next level unimaginable in St. Paul’s day. Committing sexual vice in person, which is all the Apostle imagined, suggests face-to-face social skills. “Chang[ing] the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things,” has been superceded for changing the glory of God for monsters that don’t exist except as created by man: Pokemon is “in” as I write. Pokemon trainers do things St. Paul never imagined. Again, let me quote General Omar Bradley about **one single dimension** of our chosen ignorance, and that before technology that must be taken for granted today:

We have too many men of science; too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount.

Man is stumbling blindly through a spiritual darkness while toying with the precarious secrets of life and death. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.

You can read my work *Origins Questions* if you like. I have raised concerns loud and long about *The Seraphinians* who have imported Protestant beliefs and practice into Orthodoxy by their young earth “Creation ‘Science’“. But there are serious humanist objections to the

theory of evolution as well, and I have written about the theory of evolution from a humanist's eye.

Much as C.S. Lewis points out in *The Abolition of Man* that the popular impression that magic was the old medieval thing and science was the new thing that swept it away, when in fact there was very little magic in the Middle Ages and science was born around the high noon of magic, Darwinism arose in the same nexus as eugenics and respectable racism which treated it as a problem to show human compassion to other races. Though I don't think this is what St. Paul had in mind, we have traded in human life in the image of God to human life in the image of mere animals, and lost a sense of special obligation to other people. Some people admit of finally getting that the Creation account in Genesis 1 means that all of us are family, a very different picture from the idea that the races can and should be in ruthless and violent competition. Darwin and Galton were cousins, and the former created a theory of evolution very different from what scientists call "evolution" today, while Galton used his concept of IQ to push eugenics.

The ignorance we have today is a hydra. We have phones to turn our brains into tapioca, and in the case of The Damned Backswing, we are using Zoom to connect to people all over the world, people which we could only once in a blue moon meet with face to face. In recent history, Google scanned books and made them available, and has now confiscated access to priceless classics. Today Zoom makes things easy in terms of connecting with others, but that can be whisked away too. And at some point we will stop meeting our neighbors face-to-face, even worse than the present conditions that have led a religious leader to tell America "You can put a man on the moon but you do not meet your neighbors face-to-face." And the time will come when people stop meeting together.

Then the end will come.

Discussion questions for “Ignorance”

1. What is a deliberate and studied ignorance?
2. Do you see how feminism might be an embrace of such an ignorance?
3. Is there anything of concern in feminists using slimy rhetoric?
4. Are the Un-man’s tales a catechism in ignorance?
5. Feminism has, without conflicts that I am aware of, people who assert that all heterosexual intercourse is rape, and people who assert that male celibacy is a tool of patriarchal oppression. What might this reveal about the nature of deliberate ignorance?

Introduction to “Ask for the Ancient Ways”

An obscure Bible verse advises the reader to “Ask for the ancient ways.” This is immediately an advisor to return to forgotten morals.

In this piece the direction is tweaked to advise the reader, in a day where mere gloom is considered brightness, to do some non-cyber-quarantine things that have some continuity with what has been the human baseline since ages before civilization. The emphasis between the two may be different, but the new version of going to a restaurant with friends via GPS is intended to accent a dimension of the older version.

Ask for the Ancient Ways

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

and if they were all playing video games, they were still playing them face-to-face, friends like in time immemorial.

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

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

surprisingly more convenient not to drive (another technology) and meet people face-to-face.

For what it's worth...

Discussion questions for “Ask for the Ancient Ways”

1. What is one thing you haven't done as much during the cyber-quarantine?
2. What would be a good opportunity to connect with a friend again?
3. How can you enjoy the natural world?
4. What ancient ways can you return to in the sense mentioned in this article?
5. What ancient ways can you return to in the Biblical sense?
6. What goals can you set for yourself in both?

Introduction to “Why I’m Glad I’m Living Here, Now, at This Place, at This Time, in This World”

We are led to experience the here and now as something miserable, something to escape.

I share that temptation and sometimes that sin, but the here and now where we have been placed in is part of the Lord’s ineffable mercy to us.

What we need to do is not to abandon the here and now, but abandon our escape.

This is an article grateful to God for an opportunity for placing me in a time and place which may be the setup for an epic life in eternity when I finish this mortal race.

Why I'm Glad I'm Living Here, Now, at This Place, at This Time, in This World

First Things, in a column by Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, muses,

The clock is ticking, and many in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee are counting the days, the hours, and even the minutes before Archbishop Rembert Weakland has to submit his resignation at twelve noon on his seventy-fifth birthday. I am told that the champagne bottles will be popped at 12:01 p.m. upon receiving the fax from Rome that the resignation is accepted. **Truth to tell, I've always had something of a soft spot for the Archbishop. He's liberally daffy but more amusingly candid than most of that persuasion. Of course he has a very high opinion of himself, but he's never tried to hide it. I particularly liked his public statement that he would have**

made a great Bishop of Salzburg in the time of Mozart but ended up as Bishop of Milwaukee in the time of rock and roll. There's something perversely refreshing about a bishop who doesn't mind saying that he's too good for the people he's called to serve.

If I had been meant to live in Salzburg at Mozart's time, God would have done that. If I had been meant to live in the Middle Ages, in the desire that underpinned my second novel, God would have done that. And if I if I had been made to live in the age of many Church Fathers, God would have done that too. As it is, God's providence has placed me here and now... and God may make of me a Church Father anyway, without a time machine. To nostalgic Romans, it may be a sadness that the door to the Middle Ages is closed, but to Orthodox living at the corner of east and now, the door to being patristic remains ever open, and I may die (or be subtilized by the returning Christ) a Church Father anyway. As things are, God has given me a whole lot of being in the right place in the right time, and put me in the days of... *C.J.S. Hayward!* I got onto the web by accident (or rather by providence that I did not see as significant) and I have multiple major websites and a big bookshelf on Amazon.

As I write, incidentally, the majority of U.S. flags I've seen are black and white with a strip of color, the old "Don't tread on me" rattlesnake flag is seen not infrequently, and when I popped in to LinkedIn turned up a friend reflecting on a news item that grandmas are buying shotguns. I did not expect that, but I am not in the least surprised. And one other thing: I can't meaningfully prep apart from measures I have taken that have been unfruitful. I am on maintenance medications, and if I stop taking them, I'll die within days. And as I write I seem to have COVID.

And in all this, I am *grateful*. St. John Chrysostom's final words were, "Glory be to God for all things!" and I echo them. I have food, shelter, clothing, medicine, and really quite a lot of things that I do not need and I am not entitled to. I only need to be faithful today with what I have today. God will bring tomorrow, and not knowing what tomorrow may bring is much less important if you know Who will bring tomorrow.

And my death is, basically, non-negotiable. God, in his great mercy, does not let us know ahead of time when we die, because we would put off repentance and be incorrigible sinners in the hour of death. A few saints know ahead when they will die. They are so secure spiritually that they will not be less faithful for knowing. For the rest of us, it is mercy that we do not know. I could, possibly, die within days. I could for that matter die sooner: when I got my first COVID injection, a blood clot formed in my leg and dislodged to make trouble in my lungs, and the doctor said I was lucky I got to the hospital when I did, because it could have killed me. I think COVID injections are the greatest breakthrough in human health since DDT, but I digress. I could die an old man, like my grandfather who lived to be 95. I could live to see the returning Christ. And which of these, or other possibilities, hold, is not my concern. Each day has enough trouble of its own—and I have found solving a life's problems on a day's resources to be an entirely preventable ticket to despair.

Some people think that this life is only a preparatory life and is therefore unimportant. St. Nikolai, in *Prayers by the Lake*, talked (I forget exactly where) about how birth and death are only an inch apart, and the ticker tape goes on forever.

This makes what we choose in this life incredibly important. We can only "save for retirement" between birth and death. We can only repent between birth and death. After death, improving the lot we have eternally chosen in this life will be impossible. I wish to live in repentance for

the rest of my life, but I have not gotten to monasticism yet, but if death cuts short my attempts, that matters less than you might think. God treats an active intent as if the person had done what is intended; I do not see I can rightly stop seeking monastic repentance, but if I am faithful and fail, I am in the same position as martyrs said to be “baptized in their own blood” because they were martyred before they could even reach *baptism*.

And, to borrow from a childhood favorite, *A Wind in the Door* (my esteem is much less for it now), the heroine “felt as though fingers were gentle fingers pushing her down,” I sought to stay when I visited Mount Athos and was told that the conditions for being made a saint are in America, and implicitly reminded that monastic “white martyrdom” is an artificial surrogate to the “red martyrdom” of the Church in a hostile world.

I would like to quote a unicorn in C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, though I’m not sure it applies to our world:

He said that the Sons and Daughters of Adam and Eve were brought out of their own strange world only at times Narnia was upset, but she mustn’t think that things were always like that. In between their visits there were hundreds and thousands of years when peaceful king followed peaceful king till you could hardly remember their names or count their numbers, and there was really hardly anything to put in the History Books.

As to the question of why God did not create Narnia and bring me to it, I reply that every excellence is incomparably excelled in what “eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor any heart imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” I can’t get to a real Narnia, but I’m trying to get to a real “better than Narnia,” a “better than

Narnia that begins on earth, as I discuss in A Pilgrimage from Narnia:

A Pilgrimage from Narnia

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

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

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

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner,
Silence without, building silence within:
The prayer of the mind in the heart,
Prayer without mind's images and eye before
holy icons,

A simple Way, a life's work of simplicity,
Further up and further in!

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

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

We are summoned to war against dragons,
Sins, passions, demons:
Unseen warfare beyond that of fantasy:

For the combat of knights and armor is but a shadow:
 Even this world is a shadow,
 Compared to the eternal spoils of the victor in warfare unseen,
 Compared to the eternal spoils of the man whose heart is purified,
 Compared to the eternal spoils of the one who rejects activism:
 Fighting real dragons in right order,
 Slaying the dragons in his own heart,
 And not chasing (real or imagined) snakelets in the world around:
 Starting to remove the log from his own eye,
 And not starting by removing the speck from his brother's eye:
 Further up and further in!

Spake a man who suffered sorely:
 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time,
 Are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us, and:
 Know ye not that we shall judge angels?
 For the way of humility and tribulation we are beckoned to walk,
 Is the path of greatest glory.
 We do not live in the best of all possible worlds,
 But we have the best of all possible Gods,
 And live in a world ruled by the him,
 And the most painful of his commands,
 Are the very means to greatest glory,
 Exercise to the utmost is a preparation,
 To strengthen us for an Olympic gold medal,
 An instant of earthly apprenticeship,
 To a life of Heaven that already begins on earth:

He saved others, himself he cannot save,
Remains no longer a taunt filled with
blasphemy:
But a *definition* of the Kingdom of God,
Turned to gold,
And God sees his sons as more precious than
gold:
Beauty is forged in the eye of the Beholder:
Further up and further in!

When I became a man, I put away childish
things:
Married or monastic, I must grow out of self-
serving life:
For if I have self-serving life in me,
What room is there for the divine life?
If I hold straw with a death grip,
How will God give me living gold?
Further up and further in!

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

And for our world, I would quote C.S. Lewis in
saying that “humanity has always been on a precipice.”
Such study as I have had of Byzantine history leads me not
to wonder that Constantinople fell, but that over a
millennium after Constantine, after many times the Empire
should have resolved, it took modern *cannons* to break
through Constantinople’s walls and subdue the great city.

“Humanity has always been on a precipice”—and it seems to be increasingly more of a precipice.

It is believed by some Orthodox that Hinduism has room for the demonic and OrthoChristian.com describes Orthodox mission in India as “Perpetual Embers,” but do not speak ill to a Hindu of Krishna and the milk-maids. However, it is not provocative to call Kali demonic: a goddess of death who wears a necklace of skulls and bestows madness as her special blessing. Or at least I don’t see why it need offend a Hindu.

I have what I would call an “unintended kept loan” in that I was loaned a copy of the *Bhagavad-Gita* (“Song of God”) by an Indian woman, and then lost all contact and don’t see how to return it. Nor was the loan small; the *Bhagavad-Gita* was accompanied by commentary, as is Hindu tradition to unpack their greatest classic, in a beautiful two-volume boxed set. And the front matter talked about our being in the “Kali-yuga,” or age of Kali. I don’t know or understand what exactly a Hindu would mean by the Kali-yuga, but I can take a guess. And I have had some contact with the movement called “Traditionalists,” which find certain underlying themes in many world religions that are threatened in the modern way of life and are sympathetic to Hindus who would see a Kali-yuga:

There is a singularity which has developed over past centuries, was present in decisive breaks made in the scientific revolution that paved the way to hard science as we know it, and has been unfolding and accelerating, and now crassly has vomited TV’s and cellphones on Africa, the poorest continent. One obvious question is, “Do you mean the Book of Revelation?” and my answer is an emphatic “Yes... *and No...*” There are certain things which I believe we have been told will pass as Revelation is fulfilled. These include great tribulation, the coming of the Antichrist, and the return of Christ in glory to judge the living and the dead, and the glorious resurrection. But trying to pin down

Biblical prophecy down in detail is essentially an attempt to get a crystal clear view into deep waters that are impregnably and unfathomably murky. Don't, at least not before the prophecies have been fulfilled.

However, while I have extreme suspicion for detailed point-for-point pinpointing the events in Revelation, I think it is a much more possible and profitable measure to study the singularity we are in as a singularity, a point I explore with some video in "Revelation and Our Singularity," in this volume.

A student of World War II may be able to pinpoint a lynchpin in German manufacturing. There was a single point of failure in a ball bearing factory. If that factory had been taken out, it would all but destroyed Nazi Germany's capability to produce cars, trucks, tanks, and airplanes. Or in other words, it would have crushed their balls. Now let me ask: where is the linchpin in our technological society? *Trick question!* There are so many that no one knows how many there are. One of the most Luddite statements I've read is from a computer programmer: "If builders built buildings the way computer programmers write programs, the first woodpecker that came along would destroy civilization."

At Honey Rock, there was a delightful place called "the Web" that used World War II cargo netting to make a great amusement for kids. It, after several decades, fell beyond safe use, and the camp's people tried hard to find replacements. There were none to be found, came the conclusion from their research. Furthermore, it is now a respectable number of decades since technological museum curators have computer media that they believe to likely be intact but which they have no idea how to interpret. Cryptanalysis can break all sorts of very well-engineered codes. However, storage media produced with neither the desire nor attempt towards secrecy cannot straightforwardly read media that was intended to be straightforward to read.

To put things in miniature, like almost any at least half-serious website I have switched from sending unencrypted HTTP to confidential HTTPS. This was a right decision, I believe. However, to do that I need to get a stream of certificates, and if someone by any means shut down my ability to obtain certificates, my website would practically be dead in the water. Search engines would now be linking to security error pages; even bookmarks wouldn't work. I might be able to get the word out that my website was served via HTTP, if I wasn't blocked from social media by that time, but my use of the recommended practice of serving webpages confidentially via HTTPS introduces one more single point of failure. (That's why I'm revamping and roughly doubling my "Complete Works" collections in paperback. Amazon believes it has a total right to delete anything from a Kindle any time.) We are going from fragile to more and more and more fragile, to an effect like that in "The Damned Backswing."

In a homily a few weeks back, my priest said,

Let us go to the Egyptian desert, and overhear a conversation taking place between a group of monks led by Abba Iscariot. This took place in the third century and the conversation went like this.

Abba Iscariot was asked, "What have we done in our life?"

The Abba replied, "We have done half of what our fathers did."

When asked, "What will the ones who come after us do?"

The Abba replied, "They are doing the half of what we are doing now."

And to the question, “What will the Christians of the last days do?”

He replied, “They will not be able to do any spiritual exploits, but those who keep the faith, they will be glorified more than our fathers who raised the dead.”

We live in an **exciting** time.

My spiritual director said, “We think we are not on Plan A any more, not on Plan B, not on Plan C, and so on down the alphabet, *but God is always on Plan A.* If you wonder how that could possibly be, I invite you to read “God the Spiritual Father,” the next and last work in this series.

Discussion questions for “Why I’m Glad I’m Living Here, Now, at This Place, at This Time, in This World”

1. What is one thing you have to be thankful for?
2. What are ten things you have to be thankful for?
3. How you be more cognizant of living this life as the birth and death that are an inch apart on a ticker tape that goes on forever?
4. What can you do differently in light of this perspective?
5. What can you do to make this day count?
6. What can you do to be thankful and pray through moments where you are spiritually stuck?

Introduction to “God the Spiritual Father”

This article looks more explicitly at the Fatherhood of God in light of a comparison upwards from an Orthodox monastic spiritual father.

The service of a spiritual father is to try to arrange everything for the benefit of the disciple. This does not necessarily mean that everything is pleasant, but the difficult parts of a spiritual father’s service, like the easier ones, are part of doing everything for the benefit of the person receiving spiritual direction.

This aspect of Providence is explored as a fitting note to end this volume.

God the Spiritual Father

“I believe in one God, the Father, Almighty...”

The Nicene Creed

All of us do the will of God. The question is not whether we do God’s will or not, but whether we do God’s will as *instruments*, as Satan and Judas did, or as *sons*, as Peter and John did. In the end Satan may be nothing more than a hammer in the hand of God.

C.S. Lewis, paraphrased

“The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.”

Proverbs

“My precious, precious child, I love you and will never leave you. When you see one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.”

Footprints, paraphrased

“Look to every situation as if you were going to bargain at the market, always looking to make a spiritual profit.”

The Philokalia, paraphrased

For it was fitting that God, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make Christ the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Hebrews

There are a lot of concerns on people’s minds. For those of us in the U.S., we’ve been facing an economic disaster. Is “the decade from Hell” over and done? Or has the economic depression just begun? Has the *real* nightmare just *begun*? People have faced unemployment, and some are worried about hyper-inflation. And the big question on almost everyone’s mind is, “Can I survive this? And if so, how?” And these quotes have something to say to the billion dollar question on almost everyone’s mind.

Let’s turn the clock back a bit, to 1755. There was a catastrophic earthquake in Lisbonne in Portugal, and its untold misery shook people’s faith in the goodness of the world we live in. In the questioning that came afterwards, Voltaire wrote *Candide* in which the rather ludicrous teacher Pangloss is always explaining that we live in “the best of all possible worlds:” no matter what misfortune or disaster befell them, the unshakable Pangloss would always find a way to explain that we still lived in the best of all possible worlds. And Voltaire’s point is to rip that preposterous idea apart, giving a dose of reality and showing what the misery in Lisbonne made painfully clear: we do *not* live in the best of all possible worlds. Far from it. But there is another shoe to drop.

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

Once we have truly grasped that God the Spiritual Father is the best of all possible Gods, it becomes a mistake to focus on how, in fact, we simply do not live in the best of all possible worlds. Perhaps we all need to repent and recognize that we ourselves are far from being the best of all possible *people*. But we need to raise our eyes higher: raise our eyes and see that our lives and our world are under the love of the best of all possible Gods: God the Spiritual Father.

The Orthodox Church has understood this since ancient times. Let's read some longer quotes:

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

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.
- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.

- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgment and establish virtue.
- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
- Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
- Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
- Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire virtue.
- Weakness and ignorance, so that, turning one's back on worldly things, one may be under obedience in stillness and humility.
- Unsought loss of goods and possessions, so that one may deliberately seek to be saved and may even be helped when incapable of shedding all one's possessions or even of giving alms.
- Ease and prosperity, so that one may voluntarily struggle and suffer to attain the virtues and thus become dispassionate and fit

to save other souls.

- Trials and hardship, so that those who cannot eradicate their own will may be saved in spite of themselves, and those capable of joyful endurance may attain perfection.

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

The Philokalia

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, while 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.

The Philokalia

All These Things Were From Me

(The new St. Seraphim, of Viritsa was born in 1866. He married and had three children. In 1920, at the age of 54, he and his wife quietly separated and each entered monastic life. Eventually he became the spiritual father of the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra in St. Petersburg, where, as a clairvoyant staretz, he also confessed thousands of laity. He said, "I am the storage room where people's afflictions gather." In imitation of his patron saint, he prayed for a thousand nights on a rock before an icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov. He reposed in the Lord in 1949 and the Church of Russia glorified him in August of 2000.) The following is (slightly abridged) from a letter sent by St. Seraphim to a spiritual child of his, a hierarch who was at that time in a Soviet prison. It is in the form of consolation given by God to a troubled man's soul.

St. Seraphim of Viritsa

Have you ever thought that everything that concerns you, concerns Me, also? You are

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Me and, instead of doing it, you fell into a bed of pain. This was from Me.

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

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

All these things were from Me.

St. Seraphim of Viritsa

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry,

“Abba! Father!” it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he

also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans

We may be entering an economic depression. We live in hard times, and things may get much harder. It is becoming more and more clear that this is no mere recession: it looks more and more like a depression. We see people asking, "Where is God when it hurts?" And there is something important about the answer to "Where is God

when it hurts?": something very important, something profoundly important.

I believe in one God, the *Spiritual* Father Almighty.

I'm not sure how to explain this without saying something about Orthodox monasticism, but the Orthodox concept of a *spiritual father* is of someone one owes obedience in everything, and who normally assigns some things that are very difficult to do, unpleasant, and painful. And this seems a strange thing to be getting into. But there is method to what may seem mad: we do not reach our greatest good, we do not flourish, we do not reach our highest heights, if we are the spiritual equivalent of spoiled children. And the entire point of this duty of obedience is to arrange things for the good of the person who obeys in this situation. *The entire point of obedience in what the spiritual father arranges is for the spiritual father as a spiritual physician to give health and freedom through the disciple's obedience.*

In that sense, only monks and nuns are expected to have spiritual fathers to shape them. The rest of us have God as our Spiritual Father, and we can kick against the goads, but God the Spiritual Father is at work in every person we meet. *God the Spiritual Father is God the Great Physician, working everything for our health and freedom if we will cooperate.* People and situations he sends us may be part of his will for us as instruments, or they may be part of his will for us as sons of God, but God's will unfolds in each person who acts in our lives: kind people and cruel, having excess and having lack, getting our way and having our will cut short as a spiritual father does to form a monk under his care, becomes part of the work of God the Spiritual Father. Even economic nightmares become part of "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."

When God gives us our true good, *nothing* can take it away.

What exactly is our true good unfolds in the saints' lives, which are well worth reading: many of them lived in great hardship. Some were martyred; the beloved St. Nectarios lost his job repeatedly for reasons that were not just unfortunate, but completely and absolutely unfair. God was still at work in his life, and he is now crowned as a saint in Heaven. God allowed things to happen, terrible things to happen, but not one of them took him away from God giving him everything he needed and ultimately working in him the glory of one of the greatest saints in recent times.

The Sermon on the Mount says some harsh words about how we use money, but these words set the stage for a profound treasure that we can still have, even in an economic depression:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, [*or, today, where economic havoc can ruin our financial planning*] but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal [*or, today, where your treasures cannot be taken away even by a complete economic meltdown*].

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also...

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money.

Therefore I tell you, do not 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? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? 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?

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

For the godless seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have its own worries. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The life of St. Philaret the Merciful speaks volumes:

Righteous Philaret the Merciful, son of George and Anna, was raised in piety and the fear of God. He lived during the eighth century in the village of Amneia in the Paphlagonian district of Asia Minor. His wife, Theoseba, was from a

rich and illustrious family, and they had three children: a son John, and daughters Hypatia and Evanthia.

Philaret was a rich and illustrious dignitary, but he did not hoard his wealth. Knowing that many people suffered from poverty, he remembered the words of the Savior about the dread Last Judgment and about “these least ones” (Mt. 25:40); the Apostle Paul’s reminder that we will take nothing with us from this world (1 Tim 6:7); and the assertion of King David that the righteous would not be forsaken (Ps 36/37:25). Philaret, whose name means “lover of virtue,” was famed for his love for the poor.

One day Ishmaelites [Arabs] attacked Paphlagonia, devastating the land and plundering the estate of Philaret. There remained only two oxen, a donkey, a cow with her calf, some beehives, and the house. But he also shared them with the poor. His wife reproached him for being heartless and unconcerned for his own family. Mildly, yet firmly he endured the reproaches of his wife and the jeers of his children. “I have hidden away riches and treasure,” he told his family, “so much that it would be enough for you to feed and clothe yourselves, even if you lived a hundred years without working.”

The saint’s gifts always brought good to the recipient. Whoever received anything from him found that the gift would multiply, and that person would become rich. Knowing this, a certain man came to St Philaret asking for a

calf so that he could start a herd. The cow missed its calf and began to bellow. Theoseba said to her husband, "You have no pity on us, you merciless man, but don't you feel sorry for the cow? You have separated her from her calf." The saint praised his wife, and agreed that it was not right to separate the cow and the calf. Therefore, he called the poor man to whom he had given the calf and told him to take the cow as well.

That year there was a famine, so St Philaret took the donkey and went to borrow six bushels of wheat from a friend of his. When he returned home, a poor man asked him for a little wheat, so he told his wife to give the man a bushel. Theoseba said, "First you must give a bushel to each of us in the family, then you can give away the rest as you choose." Philaretos then gave the man two bushels of wheat. Theoseba said sarcastically, "Give him half the load so you can share it." The saint measured out a third bushel and gave it to the man. Then Theoseba said, "Why don't you give him the bag, too, so he can carry it?" He gave him the bag. The exasperated wife said, "Just to spite me, why not give him all the wheat." St Philaret did so.

Now the man was unable to lift the six bushels of wheat, so Theoseba told her husband to give him the donkey so he could carry the wheat home. Blessing his wife, Philaret gave the donkey to the man, who went home rejoicing. Theoseba and the children wept because they were hungry.

The Lord rewarded Philaret for his generosity: when the last measure of wheat was given away, a old friend sent him forty bushels. Theoseba kept most of the wheat for herself and the children, and the saint gave away his share to the poor and had nothing left. When his wife and children were eating, he would go to them and they gave him some food. Theoseba grumbled saying, “How long are you going to keep that treasure of yours hidden? Take it out so we can buy food with it.”

During this time the Byzantine empress Irene (797-802) was seeking a bride for her son, the future emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos (780-797). Therefore, emissaries were sent throughout all the Empire to find a suitable girl, and the envoys came to Amneia.

When Philaret and Theoseba learned that these most illustrious guests were to visit their house, Philaret was very happy, but Theoseba was sad, for they did not have enough food. But Philaret told his wife to light the fire and to decorate their home. Their neighbors, knowing that imperial envoys were expected, brought everything required for a rich feast.

The envoys were impressed by the saint’s daughters and granddaughters. Seeing their beauty, their deportment, their clothing, and their admirable qualities, the envoys agreed that Philaret’s granddaughter, Maria was exactly what they were looking for. This Maria exceeded all her rivals in quality and modesty and indeed became Constantine’s wife, and the emperor rewarded Philaret.

Thus fame and riches returned to Philaret. But just as before, this holy lover of the poor generously distributed alms and provided a feast for the poor. He and his family served them at the meal. Everyone was astonished at his humility and said: "This is a man of God, a true disciple of Christ."

He ordered a servant to take three bags and fill one with gold, one with silver, and one with copper coins. When a beggar approached, Philaret ordered his servant to bring forth one of the bags, whichever God's providence would ordain. Then he would reach into the bag and give to each person, as much as God willed.

St Philaret refused to wear fine clothes, nor would he accept any imperial rank. He said it was enough for him to be called the grandfather of the Empress. The saint reached ninety years of age and knew his end was approaching. He went to the Rodolpheia ("The Judgment") monastery in Constantinople. He gave some gold to the Abbess and asked her to allow him to be buried there, saying that he would depart this life in ten days.

He returned home and became ill. On the tenth day he summoned his family, he exhorted them to imitate his love for the poor if they desired salvation. Then he fell asleep in the Lord. He died in the year 792 and was buried in the Rodolpheia Judgment monastery in Constantinople.

The appearance of a miracle after his death confirmed the sainthood of Righteous Philaret.

As they bore the body of the saint to the cemetery, a certain man, possessed by the devil, followed the funeral procession and tried to overturn the coffin. When they reached the grave, the devil threw the man down on the ground and went out of him. Many other miracles and healings also took place at the grave of the saint.

After the death of the righteous Philaret, his wife Theoseba worked at restoring monasteries and churches devastated during a barbarian invasion.

This merciful saint trusted God the Spiritual Father. He cashed in on the promise, “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his perfect righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you as well.”

In terms of how to survive an economic depression, the right question to ask is *not*, “Do I have enough treasures stored up on earth?” but “Do I have enough treasures in Heaven?” And the merciful St. Philaret lived a life out of abundant treasure in Heaven.

The biggest thing we need right now is to know the point of life, which is to live the life of Heaven, not starting at death, but starting here on earth. C.S. Lewis lectured to students on the eve of World War II when it looked like Western civilization was on the verge of permanent collapse. I won't try to repeat what he said beyond “Life has never been normal” and add that God's providence is for difficult circumstances every bit as much as when life seems normal. God's providence is how we can survive an economic depression. The Sermon on the Mount is no mere wish list only for when life that is perfect; it is meant for God's work with us even in circumstances we would not choose, *especially* in circumstances we would not choose, and speaks of the love of God the Spiritual Father who can

and will work with us in an economic depression, if we will let him, and work with us no less than when life is easy.

(Some have said not only that God provides in rough times as well as easy times, but that God's providence is in fact clearer in rough times, such as an economic depression, than when things go our way and we can forget that we need a bit of help from above.)

God the Spiritual Father wants to use everything for our good. Everything he allows, everything in our lives, is either a blessing or a temptation that has been allowed for our strengthening. His purpose even in allowing rough things to happen is to help us grow up spiritually, and to make us Heavenly. The Great Divorce imagines a busload of people come from Hell to visit Heaven, and what happens is something much like what happens in our lives: they are offered Heaven and they do not realize Heaven is better than the seeds Hell that they keep clinging to because they are afraid to let go. Heaven and Hell are both real, but God does not send people to Hell. C.S. Lewis quotes someone saying that there are two kinds of people in this world: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "*Thy* will be done," respecting their choice to choose Hell after Heaven has been freely offered to them. The gates of Hell are bolted and barred from the inside. Hellfire is nothing other than the Light of Heaven as experienced by those who reject the only possibility for living joy there is. And neither the reality of Heaven nor the state of mind we call Hell begins after death; their seeds grow on us in this training ground we call life. We can become saints, heavenly people like St. Philaret, or we can care only about ourselves and our own survival. God the Spiritual Father wants to shape us to be part of the beauty of Heaven, and everything he sends us is intended for that purpose. But in freedom he will let us veto his blessings and choose to be in Hell.

Heaven is generous, and that generosity was something Heavenly that shone during the Great

Depression. People who had very little shared. They shared money or food, if they had any. (And even if you have no money to share, you can share time; if you do not have a job, you can still volunteer.) St. Philaret shared because he knew something: “Knowing that many people suffered from poverty, he remembered the words of the Savior about the dread Last Judgment and about ‘these least ones’ (Mt. 25:40)...” In this part of the saint’s life, the reference is to some of the most chilling words following The Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?”

And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”

Then he will say to those at his left hand,
“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal
fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I
was hungry and you gave me no food, I was
thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a
stranger and you did not welcome me, naked
and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison
and you did not visit me.” Then they also will
answer, “Lord, when did we see thee hungry or
thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in
prison, and did not minister to thee?”

Then he will answer them, “Truly, I say to you,
as you did it not to one of the least of these, you
did it not to me.”

And they will go away into eternal punishment,
but the righteous into eternal life.

St. Philaret the Merciful will be greeted before
Christ’s awesome judgment seat and hear, “Inherit the
kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the
world, for I came to you and asked for a little wheat, and
you gave me all six bushels you had, and your only donkey
with them.” God did provide, but the reward is not just that
a friend gave him forty bushels of wheat. The ultimate
reward is that Christ regards how St. Philaret treated other
people as how he treated Christ himself, and because St.
Philaret was merciful, there is a reward for him in Heaven,
a reward so great that next to it, the forty bushels of wheat
from his friend utterly pale in comparison.

Remember this next time you see a beggar. If you
can’t give a quarter, at least see if there is a kind word or a
prayer you can give. This has everything to do with how to
survive an economic depression.

We are at a time with terrible prospects for earthly
comfort, but take heart. Let me again quote Lewis: “Heaven

cannot give earthly comfort, and earth cannot give earthly comfort either. In the end, Heavenly comfort is the only comfort to be had. To quote from my own "Silence: Organic Food for the Soul:"

Do you worry? Is it terribly hard
to get all your ducks in a row,
to get yourself to a secure place
where you have prepared for what might
happen?
Or does it look like you might lose your job,
if you still have one?
The Sermon on the Mount
urges people to pray,
"Give us this day our daily bread,"
in an economy
when unlike many homeless in the U.S. today,
it was not obvious to many
where they would get their next meal.
And yet it was this Sermon on the Mount
that tells us our Heavenly Father will provide
for us,
and tells us not to worry:
what we miss
if we find this a bit puzzling,
we who may have bank accounts, insurance,
investments
even if they are jeopardized right now,
is that we are like a child with some clay,
trying to satisfy ourselves by making a clay
horse,
with clay that never cooperates, never looks
right,
and obsessed with clay that is never good
enough,
we ignore and maybe fear
the finger tapping us on our shoulder

until with great trepidation we turn,
 and listen to the voice say,
 “Stop trying so hard. Let it go,”
 and follow our father
 as he gives us a warhorse.

This life is an apprenticeship, and even now, when we may be in situations we do not like, God is asking us to be apprentices, learning to be knights riding the warhorse he gives us *even in the situations we might not like*. The life of Heaven begins on earth, *even in an economic depression*.

However much power world leaders may have, God the Spiritual Father is sovereign, and their summits pale in comparison for the work God the Spiritual Father is working even now.

Why do the nations conspire,
 and the peoples plot in vain?
 The kings of the earth set themselves,
 and the rulers take counsel together,
 against the LORD and his Christ, saying,
 “Let us rip apart their religious restrictions,
 and throw off their shackles.”
 He who sits in the heavens laughs;
 the LORD has them in derision.

Psalms

For the conqueror says: “By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I have removed the boundaries of peoples, and have plundered their treasures; like a bull I have brought down those who sat on thrones. My hand has found like a nest the wealth of the peoples; and as men gather eggs that have been forsaken so I

have gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing, or opened the mouth, or chirped.”

Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood!

Isaiah

World leaders may work his will as instruments or as sons, but they will always work his will. This is true in an economic depression as much as any other time. God the Spiritual Father rules the world as sovereign on a deeper level than we can imagine, and he works good out of everything to those who love him and are called according to his purpose to make them sons of God.

Some people really hope that if the right government programs are in place, we can get back on track to a better life. But even if governments have their place, “Put not your trust in princes,” or rather, “Do not put your trust in governments,” is not obsolete. Far from it: government initiatives cannot make everything better, even in the long haul, even with lots of time, sacrifices, and resources. But having given that bad news, I have good news too. Even if government initiatives fail to do what we want them to, we have God the Spiritual Father trying to give us the greatest good, and the time he offers us his will does not start sometime in the future: it is for *here*, and it is for **now**. He works his will alike through instruments like Satan and Judas, and sons like Peter and John, but in either case he works his will now, not sometime in the future when some human effort starts achieving results. Again, “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.” “The king’s heart

is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.”

God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man that man might become god and the sons of God.

St. Maximus Confessor

There was one time when two theology professors were talking when the weather was very rough. One of them said, “This is the day that the Lord has made,” and the other said, “Well, he’s done better!” And the joke may be funny, but sun and rain, heat and cold, are all given by God. We miss something if we only think God is working with us if it is warm and sunny, if we find ourselves in a violent storm and assume God must have abandoned us, if it seems that God can’t or won’t help us because the weather is so bad.

And we are missing something if we look at the news and the world around us, and want to say, “This is the day that the Lord has made... he’s done better!”

If we are in an economic depression, say, “This is the day that the Lord has made.” You’re missing something if you need to add, “Well, he’s done better!”

A friend quoted to me when I was in a rough spot,

“Life’s Tapestry”

Behind those golden clouds up there
the Great One sews a priceless embroidery
and since down below we walk
we see, my child, the reverse view.

And consequently it is natural for the mind to see
mistakes

there where one must give thanks and glorify.

Wait as a Christian for that day to come
where your soul a-wing will rip through the air
and you shall see the embroidery of God
from the good side

and then... everything will seem to you to be a
system and order.

And it is true. It is not just, as some have said, that *God's address is at the end of your rope*. That is where you meet God best. It may be easier, not harder, to find God and his providential care in an economic depression. God is working a plan of eternal glory. Westminster opens with the great question, "What is the chief end of man?" and answers, "To glorify God and enjoy him forever." But there is a deeper answer. *The chief end of man is to become Christ*. The chief end of man is to become by grace what Christ is by nature. God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man that man and the sons of man might become gods and the sons of God. The Son of God became a man that men might become the sons of God. The divine became human that the human might become divine. This saying has rumbled down through the ages: not only the entire point of being human, but the entire point of each and every circumstance God the Spiritual Father allows to come to us, as a blessing or as a temptation allowed for our strengthening, as God's will working through instruments or sons, is to make us share in Christ's divinity, and the saints' lives show few saints who met this purpose when everything went their way, and a great many where God worked in them precisely in rough and painful circumstances. If we watch the news and say, "This is the day the Lord has made. Well, he's done better," try to open your eyes to the possibility that "Well, he's done better" is what people want to say when, in the words of C.S. Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, "*Aslan is on the move.*"

Christ's Incarnation is humble. It began humbly, in the scandalous pregnancy of an unwed teen mother, and it unfolds humbly in our lives. Its humble unfolding in our lives comes perhaps best when we have rough times and rough lives, in circumstances we would not choose, in an economic depression above all. You do not understand Christ's Incarnation unless you understand that it is an Incarnation in humility, humble times, and humble conditions. You do not understand Christ's humble

Incarnation until you understand that it did not stop when the Mother of God's scandalous pregnancy began: Christ's humble Incarnation unfolds and unfurls in the Church, in the Saints, and Christ wishes to be Incarnate in every one of us. Christ wishes to be Incarnate in all of us, not in the circumstances we would choose for ourselves, but in the circumstances we are in, when God the Spiritual Father works everything to good for his sons.

Take heart if this sounds hard, like a tall order to live up to. It is hard for me too. It is hard, very hard, or at least it is for me. But it is worth trying to live up to. Even if we do not always succeed.

God became man that man might become God. In whatever circumstances God gives us to train us, as God the Spiritual Father, let us grow as sons of God.

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

Discussion questions for “God the Spiritual Father”

1. How has God provided for you in the past?
2. Have there been times in the past that seemed hopeless but that God came through?
3. What do you have to be grateful?
4. Are you able to see how years back you wanted very badly something that would not have been good for you?
5. Are you able to recognize that now you would not benefit from things you want very badly?
6. Can you accept God the Spiritual Father caring for you today and caring for you for eternity if you will let him?

Conclusion

Let me run a few calculations.

Humans of some sort have been around for a few million years.

Writing exists in the wake of civilization and the agricultural revolution, which is really less than ten thousand years old.

This means that writing has been around for significantly less than 1% of the time humans have been around.

The digital and electronic technologies of *The New Media Epidemic* as Jean-Claude Larchet titles his book, opening with commercial radio, which has been confined to the past century.

This means that our world of technologies has existed less than 1% of the time civilization has been around, and less than .0001% of the time humans of any sort have been around.

It is difficult to convey how exceptional this is. Up until about two centuries ago, meaning the overwhelming majority of history which is itself tiny next to our overwhelming majority of prehistory, people have lived,

among other things, in close contact with nature and under narratives that have been severely disrupted today. Our living conditions are familiar to us, or perhaps we are accustomed to a steady future shock, but it is hard to say how different it is from normal life as the overwhelming majority of people have lived it.

There are multiple letters in the opening of the book of Revelation that might be applied today. Pergamos is warned that it has some that hold to the teachings of Nicolaitanes; today there might be a warning about the gender rainbow. Nonetheless, I would look at the one letter that does not convey a rebuke:

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of Life.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

I would return to the Abba quoted in “Revelation and Our Singularity:” about people who live in the last days: “They will not be able to do much of any exploits, but for those who keep the faith, they will be honored above our fathers who raised the dead.”

It is not necessary to be a great saint.

It is not necessary to be a saint.

In these difficult times, merely keeping the faith bears a great crown.

It took me some time to accept my priest’s words that we live in an exciting time. I had not, at the time, recognized that God’s Providence includes what time he has placed us in the entire past, present, and future of the

human race. If God had meant for me to be in nineteenth century Russia, he would have put me there. If he had meant me to live in the medieval West or the patristic East, he would have put me there. It is his Providence that I lived where I am now and have the story that I have, and the same is true for you.

Let's enjoy where we are.