

# **Hidden Price Tags**

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

## **Volume 5: Longer Works**

**C.J.S. Hayward**

C.J.S. Hayward Publications

Spotsylvania

© 2010-2023 C.J.S. Hayward  
Licensed CCo (“No rights reserved”).

You are invited to visit the author website at <https://cjshayward.com>, and explore other, related titles on his bookshelf at <https://cjshayward.com/books/>.

*To Fr. Gregory Joyce and all my teachers at the Orthodox  
Pastoral School:*

*Many years and many thanks!*



# Table of Contents

Foreword to the <i>Hidden Price Tags</i> Series .....	7
Foreword to <i>Longer Works</i> .....	13
Note on Footnotes and Claim to Originality.....	14
Introduction .....	17
The Consolation of Theology .....	70
Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article .....	1
True “Woke” Is Repentance .....	145
Conclusion.....	179



## 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*,<sup>1</sup> Jerry Mander's 1978 *Four Arguments for the **Elimination** of Television*,<sup>2</sup> and Marie Winn's 1977 *The Plug-in Drug*<sup>3</sup> 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,"<sup>4</sup> under "Argument Four: The Inherent Biases of Television,"<sup>5</sup> 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.*<sup>6</sup> It is not just because I have

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>6</sup> 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)<sup>7</sup> 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*.<sup>8</sup> Jean-Claude Larchet’s *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*<sup>9</sup> 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

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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).

<sup>9</sup> 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,<sup>10</sup> 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.”<sup>11</sup>)

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

<sup>11</sup> “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*<sup>12</sup> helped me appreciate why my political science professor at Calvin forcefully told a class, "*Playboy* is more Christian than *Sesame Street*!"<sup>13</sup> 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>)<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> This big question includes another

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

<sup>13</sup> 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*.)

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

<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> Our genus *Homo* has been around for millions of years,<sup>17</sup> and our subspecies *Homo sapiens sapiens* has been around for over a hundred thousand years.<sup>18</sup> 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?”

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

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

<sup>18</sup> 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 *Longer Works*

One reader voiced appreciation at my occasionally posting a longer engagement in “The Consolation of Theology.” Longer works may take more work to read, but when they are good, the vistas are higher.

This volume contains three longer works that each in its own way contributes something significant. In the last work, the “something significant” is not really a new idea or insight on my part, but taking my favorite work by St. John Chrysostom, *The Treatise to Prove that No One can Harm the Man who Does not Injure Himself*, and make the wording slightly easier to understand for the reader today, compared to the standard reference translation, which is expressed with Victorian complexity.

Not all the content is politically correct in today’s world, but the least politically correct parts may be where the works are needed most.



## 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

This collection of longer works have in common that they offer a longer, more in-depth analysis than some others. However, these three works are different from each other.

“The Consolation of Theology” is an extended work modeled after Boethius’s *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which was C.S. Lewis’s favorite old book and a favorite across centuries in Europe, too. It is intended to drop another shoe that hadn’t been dropped in over a millennium where people asked why no one dropped the shoe but no one dropped it. One reader commented that my work speaks the languages of theology and technology with equal proficiency, and more than anything else this work is intended to uplift the current reader and open wide the door to joy.

“Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article” was written after a disturbing find: the one result for an academic literature search engine search for “Orthodoxy” and “contraception” and was written with the worst persuasion.

I deliberately included the original article at length, because I thought, “This needs to be saved for posterity!” (And in more ways than one!) As regards the question of why a work on contraception is included in a collection about technology and faith, I assert that contraception is a technology and is written of as such by for instance by C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*. It is not a blazing new technology and none of the mainstream options used to prevent a child from being conceived are at the cutting edge of technology (the one arguable case of a new kind of contraception I am aware of is in COVID vaccines which degrade a woman’s ability to conceive and carry a child), but then the radio Jean-Claude Larchet includes in *The New Media Epidemic* is not a blazing new technology either. Older technologies can have issues, but this work, besides attempting to make sense of an older Orthodox proposition that many people do not find makes sense today, saves for posterity the fetid discovery that is what is behind what I was told was the Orthodox position on contraception, namely that it is permissible if it is done with a spiritual father’s blessing, that abortefascient methods are avoided, and that a couple must not decide, “We never want children.” All three clauses are announced in this article (which confusedly treats the Pill as not being abortefascient), which is greatly at odds with Orthodoxy before. (I half wonder if it was published in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* because the author knew it would not be published in a standard Orthodox journal.) This extended posting was perhaps the one Orthodox posting on my site that went viral with multiple emails in my inbox.

“True ‘Woke’ Is Repentance” includes some material of my own writing, but much of the word count (and in my opinion, much of the merit) comes from a passage intended to take St. John Chrysostom’s masterful “The Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself,” and edit it to make it slightly more accessible to readers today than the Victorian language of

the standard reference translation it is based on in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* collection, Series 1.

Without further ado, here are the works.

## Introduction to “The Consolation of Theology”

My best works are often those in which I was leaning on a classic.

People hear of the Christian Boethius’s *The Consolation of Philosophy* and wonder why he wrote a consolation out of the resources of philosophy rather than theology, and C.S. Lewis makes a distinction between a dissertation offered to the philosophy faculty versus that of divinity. But the work is legitimately Christian, and it was C.S. Lewis’s favorite old book.

I’ve had a C.S. Lewis scholar tell me that I didn’t understand Boethius if I was writing *The Consolation of Theology*, but I believe the remark to be problematic, partly because I *do* regard Boethius’s work as legitimate (and possibly the most charming work of neo-Platonism and possibly philosophy that I have already read), and believe that if it is legitimate for a Christian to write *The Consolation of Philosophy*, it is *a fortiori* legitimate for a Christian to write *The Consolation of Theology*.<sup>19</sup> I invite you to read it!

<sup>19</sup> The other part has to do with “The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab;” the person who made the remark had given his life over to the study of C.S. Lewis, but did not seem happy to have someone

# The Consolation of Theology

## Song I.

### *The Author's Complaint.*

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

considered by some to eclipse C.S. Lewis, walk in his door.

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

## I.

And ere I moped a man appeared, quite short of  
 stature but looking great enough to touch a star. In ancient  
 gold he was clad, yet the golden vestments of a Partiarth  
 were infinitely eclipsed by his Golden Mouth, by a tongue of  
 liquid, living gold. Emblazoned on his bosom were the  
 Greek letters **X**, and **A**. I crossed myself thrice, wary of

devils, and he crossed himself thrice, and he looked at me with eyes aflame and said, ‘Child, hast thou not written, and then outside the bounds of Holy Orthodoxy, a koan?’:

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

The master said, “Inside your heart.”

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

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

‘It is possible at all times and every place to find salvation. Now thou knowest that marriage or monasticism is needful; and out of that knowledge you went out to monasteries, to the grand monastery of Holy Cross Hermitage, to Mount Athos itself, and thou couldst not stay. What of it? Before God thou art *already* a monk. Keep on

seeking monasticism, without end, and whether thou crossst the threshold of death a layman or a monk, if thou hast sought monasticism for the rest of thy days, and seekest such repentance as thou canst, who knows if thou mightest appear a monk in lifelong repentance when thou answerest before the Dread Judgement-Throne of Christ?

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

I stood in silence, all abashed.



## **Song II. His Despondency.**

The Saint spoke thus:

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

**II.**

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

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

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

## **Song III. A Clearer Eye.**

‘We suffer more in imagination than reality,’  
Said Seneca the Younger,  
Quoted in rediscovery of Stoicism,

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

### III.

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

Ere he answered me, 'Whence askest thou the future? It is wondrous. And why speakest thou of thy

fortune? Of a troth, no man hath ever had fortune. It were an impossibility.’

I sat a-right, a-listening.

He continued, ‘Whilst at Fordham, in incompetent medical care, thou wert stressed to the point of nausea, for weeks on end. Thy worry wert not, “Will I be graced by the noble honourific of Doctor?” though that were far too dear to thee, but, “*Will there be a place for me?*” And thus far, this hath been in example “We suffer more in imagination than in reality.” For though what thou fearest hath happened, what be its sting?

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

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

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

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

to save other souls.

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

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

‘And again:

He who wants to be an imitator of Christ, so that he too may be called a son of God, born of the Spirit, must above all bear courageously and patiently the afflictions he encounters, whether these be bodily illnesses, slander and vilification from men, or attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls to be tested by various afflictions of this kind, so that it may be revealed which of them truly loves Him. All the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs from the beginning of time traversed none other than this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by doing this that they fulfilled God’s will. ‘My son,’ says Scripture, ‘if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently endure’ (Ecclus. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: ‘Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.’ Thus the soul that wishes to do God’s will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us

listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to utter confusion. As St Paul writes: 'God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a way out, so that we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

Hemp, unless it is well beaten, cannot be worked into fine yarn, whilst the more it is beaten and carded the finer and more serviceable it becomes. And a freshly moulded pot that has not been fired is of no use to man. And a child not yet proficient in worldly skills cannot build, plant, sow seed or perform any other worldly task. In a similar manner it often happens through the Lord's goodness that souls, on account of their childlike innocence, participate in divine grace and are filled with the sweetness and repose of the Spirit; but because they have not yet been tested, and have not been tried by the various

afflictions of the evil spirits, they are still immature and not yet fit for the kingdom of heaven. As the apostle says: 'If you have not been disciplined you are bastards and not sons' (Heb. 12 : 8). Thus trials and afflictions are laid upon a man in the way that is best for him, so as to make his soul stronger and more mature; and if the soul endures them to the end with hope in the Lord it cannot fail to attain the promised reward of the Spirit and deliverance from the evil passions.

'Thou hast earned scores in math contests, yea ranked in scores of math contests, ranking 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition. Now thou hast suffered various things and hast not the limelight which thou hadst, or believeth thou hadst, which be much the same thing. Again, what of it? God hath provided for thee, and if thou hast been fruitless in a secular arena, thou seekest virtue, and hast borne some fruit. Moreover thou graspest, in part, virtue that thou knewest not to seek when thou barest the ascesis of a mathematician or a member of the Ultranet. Thou seekest without end that thou mayest become humble, and knowest not that to earnestly seek humility is nobler than being the chiefest among mathematicians in history?

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

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

I want you to know that your weakness has need of My strength, and your safety lies in



allowing Me to protect you. I want you to know that when you are in difficult conditions, among people who do not understand you, and cast you away, This was from Me.

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

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

I allowed this frustration to touch you so that you would learn that your best friend is the Lord. I want you to bring everything to Me and tell Me everything. Did someone slander you? Leave it to Me; be attached to Me so that you can hide from the “contradiction of the

nations.” I will make your righteousness shine like light and your life like midday noon. Your plans were destroyed? Your soul yielded and you are exhausted? This was from Me.

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

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

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

Because then you were sunk in your own works and plans and I wouldn’t have been able to draw your thoughts to Me. But I want

to teach you the most deep thoughts and My lessons, so that you may serve Me. I want to teach you that you are nothing without Me. Some of my best children are those who, cut off from an active life, learn to use the weapon of ceaseless prayer. You were called unexpectedly to undertake a difficult and responsible position, supported by Me. I have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

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

All these things were from Me.

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

“What of it? Thy purity of conscience is in no manner contingent on what others decide in their dealings with thee. It may be that the change in thy medicaments be less dangerous than it beseemeth thee. It may be unlawful to the

utmost degree for thou to seek thine own demise: yet it is full lawful, and possible, for our God and the Author and Finisher of our faith to give thee a life complete and full even if it were cut short to the morrow.

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

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

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

## **Song IV.**

### ***Virtue Unconquerable.***

I know that my Redeemer liveth,  
 And with my eyes yet shall I see God,  
 But what a painful road it has been,  
 What a gesture of friendship has met a knife in my back.  
 Is there grandeur in me for my fortitude?

I only think so in moments of pride,  
With my grandeur only in repentance.  
And the circumstances around me,  
When I work, have met with a knife in the back.

#### IV.

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

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

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

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

‘But, and this says much of today and its berzerkly grown science, in which the crowning jewel of superstring theory hath abdicated from science’s bedrock of experiment, happiness is such a thing as one would naturally approach through psychology, because psychology

is, to people of a certain bent, the only conceivable tool to best study to understand men.

‘One can always critique some detail, such as the import of what psychology calls “flow” as optimal experience. The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, outlined three versions of the good life: the *Pleasant Life*, which is the life of pleasure and the shallowest of the three; the *Engaged Life*, or the life of flow, called optimal experience, and the *Meaningful Life*, meaning in some wise the life of virtue.

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

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

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

‘*Flow*, as it occurs, is something exotic and obscure. It has been studied in virtuosos who are expert performers in many different domains. Once someone of surpassing talent has something like a decade of performance, it is

possible when a man of this superb talent and training is so engrossed in a performance of whatever domain, that sits pretty much at the highest level of performance where essentially the virtuoso's entire attention is absorbed in the performance, and time flies because no attention is left to observe the passage of time or almost any other thing of which most of us are aware when we are awake.

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

'And there is a similitude between the ancient monastic obedience that was *par excellence* the bread and butter of monastic manual labour, and the modern obedience. For in ancient times monks wove baskets to earn their keep, and in modern times monks craft incense. And

do not say that the modern obedience is nobler, for if anything you sense a temptation, and a humbler obedience is perhaps to be preferred.

‘But in basket making or incense making alike, there is a repetitive manual labour. There are, of course, any number of other manual obediences in a monastery today. However, when monasticism has leeway, its choice seems to be in favour of a repetitive manual labour that gives the hands a regular cycle of motion whilst the heart is left free for the Jesus Prayer, and the mind in the heart practices a monk’s *watchfulness* or *nipsis*, an observer role that traineth thee to notice and put out temptations when they are a barely noticeable spark, rather than heedlessly letting the first temptation grow towards acts of sin and waiting until thy room be afire before fightest thou the blaze. This watchfulness is the best optimal experience the Orthodox Church gives us in which to abide, and ‘tis no accident that the full and unabridged title of the Philokalia is The Philokalia of the *Niptic* Fathers. If either of these simple manual endeavours is unfamiliar or makes the performer back up in thought, this is a growing pain, not the intended long-term effect. And what is proposed is proposed to everybody in monasticism and really God-honoured marriage too, in force now that the Philokalia hath come in full blossom among Orthodox in the world, that optimum experience is for everyone, including sinners seeking the haven of monasticism, and not something exotic for very few.

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



a computer programmer at the time, wert unfortunate because thy work demanded thy full mental attention.

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

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

Then he paused, and ere a moment resumed explaining. ‘If I may pull a rare note from the wreckage postmodern, there is the concept of a semiotic frame, perhaps a myth, that determines a society’s *possibles et pensables*, that which is understood to be possible in a society, and that which is found to even be thinkable. The knife cuts well against some radicals. And people are in blinders about activism and psychology.

‘Think of thy feminist theology professor, who said both right and full that she believed in Tradition, and in the same breath placed Arius, the father of heretics, alongside St. Athanasius as equally full representatives of that Tradition. When in your theological anthropology class she picked two texts for disability, the obvious agenda, the one

and only thing to do for autism (as her agenda fell) was to engage some activist political advocacy for to make conditions in some wise more favourable for that particular victim class. No expression of love was possible save additional political activism. And I would say, and thou wouldst say, that she were too political in her response, and not nearly political enough. (For when all is civil warfare carried on by other means, real concern for the life of the polis but starves.)

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

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

‘And in like wise to how thy professor automatically jumped to political activism as how one might exhibit right care for the severely autistic and other disabled, in this day and age the go-to discipline for understanding humans is psychology, and a psychology fashioning itself after hard science, introducing itself by what might be called *the*

*physics envy declaration*: psychologists-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics.

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Psychology, whilst being secular, in its completion offers ersatz religion that, though meant to be value-free, provides a secular mystical theology. That this secular religion, fit for all religions and patients, uses guided imagery allegedly from some generic copy-paste of Chinese medicine, Tibetan Buddhism, Native American traditions, and goeth back to Graeco-Roman times; mindfulness from

Buddhism's Eightfold Noble Path; and yoga from Hinduism is but an illustration of G.K. Chesterton's observation: *the man who does not believe in God does not believe in nothing; he believes anything*. But put this aside and take psychology's claim of secularity at face value. The Philokalia is scarcely but a library of collected works about how to rightly live the inner life. It is not in the main concerned with pleasure or joy: but it has an infinite amount to say about repenting from sins that bear Hell each and every one. Psychology does not trade in temptation, sin, or passion: but it too offers a rudder for one's inner life, and if it teacheth not the extirpation of things that sully the soul's purity, it has infinite reach in a battleplan to not be conquered by negative emotion.

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

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

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

His All Holiness answered me and said, 'All world religions have grandeur, and for an analysis secular all

world religions represent a way that a society can live together and persevere. Hinduism is not the sort of thing one *uses up*, whether across years, lifetimes, or centuries even; its spiritual paths are millennia old, and to destroy it would likely take nuclear war or an apocalyptic event. By contrast, remember thou how thou hast said, “No form of feminism that has yet emerged is stable:” easily enough one finds the living force of body image feminism today, whilst it would scarce be live in the academy in fifty years. Thy friend answered thy remark of something called “Christian feminism,” which articulates how traditional Christianity cares for, and seeks, the good of women: for an example, it takes politically incorrect words about husbands and wives and offers the breathtaking change of addressing women as moral agents, and never telling husbands to keep wives in line. That is if anything the exception that proves the rule: for it may bear the external label of “feminism,” but its core be much slower to decay than any feminism at all, for it is *not* feminism at all. In thy feminist theology class one author said that in feminist theology, “all the central terms are up for grabs.” Meanwhilst, remember thy superior when thou wert an assistant at a bookstore. He hath told thee that books of liberal theology have a shelf life; after five years, perhaps, they are hard to sell. Meanwhilst, his shop published and sold Puritan sermons three centuries old. Thou mayest have a care that they are heterodox: but do not have a care that they will go out of fashion, or if they do go out of fashion, it will not be because the sermons lost their appeal to future Protestants seeking Biblical faith, but something else hath changed features of Protestantism that have survived since the Reformation.

“Thou needest not refute TED talks; a few years and a given talk will likely be out of fashion. There is something in the structure of TED that is liberal, even if many talks say nothing overtly political: forasmuch, there is more to say than that they are self-contained, controlled, plastic things, where world religions are something organic that may or

may not have a central prophet, but never have a central planner. TED is a sort of evolving, synthetic religion, and it cannot fill true spiritual hunger.

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

‘In a forum discussion thou readst, a conversation crystallised on care for diabetes, and cardinally important advice not to seek a book-smart nurse, but a diabetic nurse. For it is the case with empirical science that it entirely lacketh in empirical character. In psychology, as oft in other disciplines, a sufficiently skilled practitioner can pick up a book about part of the subject he does not yet understand, and understand well enough what there is to understand. Understanding were never nursed on the practice of direct experience, and understanding here is malnourished.

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

## **Song V.**

### ***O Holy Mother!***

O Holy Mother! Art Thou the Myst'ry?  
Art Thou the Myst'ry untold?  
For I have written much,  
And spent much care,  
In The Luddite's Guide to Technology,  
And looked all the whilst,  
Down the wrong end,  
Of the best telescope far and away that I could find.  
I have written of man and creation defiled,  
Yet for all my concerns,  
Of so-called 'space-conquering technologies,'  
Which it beseemeth me 'body-conquering technologies,'  
Sidestepping the God-given and holy bounds,  
Of our embodied state,  
Where better to seek healing,  
For an occult-free simulation,  
Of the unnatural vice of magick arts,  
Than in the perfect creaturely response,  
'Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.  
Be it unto me according to thy word.'  
Then, the gates, nay, the foundations,  
The foundations of Hell began a-crumbling,  
The New Eve, the Heavenly Mother,  
Whom Christ told the Disciple,  
'Behold thy Mother!'  
In Her is the microcosm of Creation aright,  
And She is the Friend and Comfort,  
Of the outcast, and the poor:  
My money, my property, I stand to lose:  
But no man can take from me,  
A Treasure vaster than the Heavens;  
Perhaps I would do well,  
To say little else of technologies progressively degrading  
humanity,  
And pray an Akathist to the Theotokos,  
And put a trust in Her that is proto-Antiochian,  
Rather than proto-Alexandrian,



And give Her a trust in the great Story,  
Diminished not one whit,  
If She happeneth not to be a teacher,  
Offering such ideas as philosophers like:  
Her place in the Great Story is far greater than that:  
And such it is also,  
With illumined teachers,  
Who offer worship to God as their teaching,  
And are in travail,  
Until Christ be formed in their disciples.

## V.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Second of all, as mentioned by an undergraduate psychologist, it gives people joy to give real pleasure to another person, and the case of children is special. She did not comment or offer comparison between knowing thou hast given pleasure to any age in childhood and knowing thou hast given pleasure to an adult, but she did comment, and her comment were this: the boy were guileless: too young to just be polite, too young for convincing guile, perhaps too young for any guile worthy of the name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that his ongoing and delighted laughter were only, and could only be, from unvarnished candour. Wherewith thou hadst no question of “Does he enjoy what I am doing with him, or is he just being polite?” Just being polite were off the table.

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

what a cat desireth and conveyeth if it purreth and perchance licketh thine hand.

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

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

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

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

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

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

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

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

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

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in

heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets  
which were before you.

“The word translated, “blessed,” *makarios*, hath what we would count as at least two meanings in English: “blessed,” and “happy.” Among English Bible translations there are some, but a few, translations which render the word as “happy,” including Young’s Literal Translation:

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

Happy the mourning — because they shall be  
comforted.

Happy the meek — because they shall inherit  
the land.

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

Happy the kind — because they shall find  
kindness.

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

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

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

Happy are ye whenever they may reproach  
you, and may persecute, and may say any evil  
thing against you falsely for my sake — Rejoice  
ye

and be glad, because your reward [is] great in the heavens, for thus did they persecute the prophets who were before you.

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

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

‘Thou rememberest thy surprise, when reading thine undergraduate psychology text, when thou readedst what wert said of the pleasure principle. For the pleasure principle art an artifact of bad philosophy, which noting perchance that most of our actions bring some pleasure or pleasing result, assumes and defines that every action anyone ever takes is that which is calculated to bring thee the most pleasure. In settings less far back, thou hast

listened to people saying that the only motivation anyone takes for any action is that it is calculated to bring them the greatest economic profit, and thou hast borrowed an answer, to say that several people have essayed to convince thee of this as truth, and so far as thou knewest, not one of them stood to gain financial profit from convincing thyself of this purported truth.

“Thy textbook, like those who try to convince with a charming smile where a reasoned argument is ordinarily polite to offer, said that it were more a virtue than a vice to show kindnesses to others because one enjoyed the feelings it gave, and thou hadst two answers in thy heart: first of all, past the sugar-coating of “more a virtue than a vice” lies an assertion that virtue is impossible in principle, and secondly, that the only theoretical possibility thou couldst care for the poor in order to help thy fellow men is if one received absolutely no pleasure or consolation in any stripe or dimension to care for the poor out of a genuine motive of benefitting others and not whatever probable pleasures their generosity and service might come back their way. That appalling price tag reaches beyond exorbitant. And thou desirest to speak of a “masochism principle” or “pain principle” whereby all decisions and all actions at all times by all men are whatever is calculated to bring them the greatest sufferings, alike useless to assert for any philosopher worthy of the name. It is hardly to be denied that most decisions bring some pain or have some downside on the part of the persons who make them, so a pain principle mirroring a pleasure principle is alike unprovable, and alike unfalsifiable, an untestable guess that hath not any place in science and scarcely more any place in disciplines seeking to be established as science. It was not until later that thou readst a competent philosopher who said that the existence of pleasure and a reward does not in and of itself make any action which brings pleasure to be motivated solely as a means to obtain pleasure. The thought-experiment were posed, that a man who gives to

the poor and enjoys doing so were offered a pill which would give him the full pleasure and benefits of his generosity, but do nothing at all for the practical needs of the poor, would be in but rare cases utterly spurned as a right empty and worthless counterfeit.

## **Song VI.**

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

The tale were told,  
 Of a child starkly scant of mind,  
 Who received a glittering package, a gift,  
 And kept the glittering package,  
 Indeed taking it with him well nigh everywhere,  
 And after long time,  
 When the disposable wrapping paper,  
 Were well battered and now dingy,  
 An adult asked,  
 ‘Aren’t you going to open the package?’  
 The child exclaimed with joy,  
 Once the toy emerged from the tatters,  
 And squealed with joy, saying,  
 “Oh, there’s *another* present!”  
 My Lord and my God!  
 Perhaps I will never open,  
 The Sermon on the Mount.

## **VI.**

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

like the obscene and *thundering* announcement: “I lost 235 pounds in one weekend!”

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

## **Song VII.**

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

Betimes my salad days were right begun,  
 I programmed an Apple ][,  
 In gradeschool adventure games and a 4D maze,  
 Simple arithmetic- and trigonometric-powered animations.  
 My father a computer scientist,  
 Who shared with me his joy,  
 And in high school a Unix system administrator became.  
 My family got, and still hath the carcass,  
 Of one original ‘fat Mac’,  
 So named because it had an available maximum 512k of  
 RAM.  
 My calculator in high school,  
 On which I programmed computer-generated art,  
 And a simple video game, had as much.  
 Ere my salad days were dwindled,  
 I remained a Unix programmer,  
 And judged Mac OSX my preferred flavor of Unix.  
 Later I had iPhones,  
 And for the first time in my life,

Owned a computer where I lacked root privilege.  
Along the way I got an Apple Watch,  
My desire increased as I read about it,  
And vanished when I learned it were,  
Bereft of such things as even a web browser.  
I gave it to my brother,  
Who later gave it back before it broke.  
I sing a song to my Apple,  
A peerless 17" MacBook Pro,  
Which through minor design flaw,  
Burned through video cards oft enough,  
And when the Apple Store stopped receiving those cards,  
So with it went any hope of keeping my Mac without  
frequent \$500 repairs.  
And along the way,  
With the sweetness of a Linux virtual machine,  
Realized that OSX had grown monstrous as a version of  
Unix.  
When I asked about one cardinally important open source  
project,  
I were told that Apple had removed parts of the operating  
system,  
That the project needed to run,  
But information technology work in my Linux virtual  
machine,  
Was the command line equivalent of point and click.  
It were a discovery as if I had returned to Paradise.  
I sing a song to Apple's technical support,  
For when I asked a question,  
About command-line-driven Apache configuration,  
It took escalations up to level 3 technical support,  
Before a Genius knew that Macs *have* a command line.  
I purchased a computer meant to last many years.  
I sing a song to my late iPhone,  
Bewailed by men who made the Mac great,  
Which slipped a pocket near a food bank,  
Booted my laptop into Windows and found,

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

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

But we may not yet be in the clear.  
 And if the U.S. has been called “One nation under  
 surveillance,”  
 Where No Such Agency has received every email,  
 It is now clear and open knowledge,  
 To those that will reflect,  
 That among most most Americans,  
 ‘Every breath and step Americans take,’  
 Is monitored by Big Brother,  
 But perhaps it is not just human agencies,  
 That reap the information collected.

++ungood

(Did anyone besides my most reverend Archbishop mention  
 that it used to be that you had to seek out pornography, and  
 leave your car in front of a store with papered-over  
 windows, and wear your trenchcoat disguise for the  
 mission, whereas now *pornography* seeks *you*?  
 It is something like a water cooler that hath three faucets,  
 Serving cold water, hot water, and antifreeze,  
 And the handles perplexing in their similitude.)

## VII.

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

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

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.
2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must.
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by discipline.
4. Say the Lord’s Prayer several times each day.

5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.
15. Read the scriptures regularly.
16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.
18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.

26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.
28. Face reality.
29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
32. Never bring attention to yourself.
33. Listen when people talk to you.
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.
45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.



47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty.
48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves.
49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
50. Be merciful with yourself and others.
51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.
53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.
54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over.
55. Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

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

I answered, 'Of a troth.'

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

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

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

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

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

I said, ‘Nay.’

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

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

## **Song VIII.**

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

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,  
 ‘There be no war in Heaven,  
 Not now, at very least,  
 And not ere were created,  
 The royal race of mankind.  
 Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,  
 And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.  
 There were war in Heaven but ever brief,  
 The Archangel Saint Michael,  
 Commander of the bodiless hosts,  
 Said but his name, “Michael,”  
 Which is, being interpreted,  
 “Who is like God?”  
 With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,

Sore losers one and all.  
They remain to sharpen the faithful,  
God useth them to train and make strength.  
Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?  
Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?  
As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up,  
Or as if the staff should lift up itself,  
As if it were no wood.  
Therefore be not dismayed,  
If one book of Holy Scripture state,  
That the Devil incited King David to a census,  
And another sayeth that God did so,  
For God permitted it to happen by the Devil,  
As he that heweth lifteth an axe,  
And God gave to David a second opportunity,  
In the holy words of Joab.  
Think thou not that God and the Devil are equal,  
Learnest thou enough of doctrine,  
To know that God is greater than can be thought,  
And hath neither equal nor opposite,  
The Devil is if anything the opposite,  
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,  
Though truth be told,  
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,  
The Devil fared him not well.  
The dragon wert as a little boy,  
Standing outside an Emperor's palace,  
Shooting spitwads with a peashooter,  
Because that wert the greatest harm,  
That he saweth how to do.  
The Orthodox Church knoweth well enough,  
'The feeble audacity of the demons.'  
Read thou well how the Devil crowned St. Job,  
The Devil and the devils aren't much,  
Without the divine permission,  
And truth be told,  
Ain't much with it either:

God alloweth temptations to strengthen;  
 St. Job the Much-Suffering emerged in triumph.  
 A novice told of an odd clatter in a courtyard,  
 Asked the Abbot what he should do:  
 "It is just the demons.  
 Pay it no mind," came the answer.  
 Every devil is on a leash,  
 And the devout are immune to magic.  
 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder:  
 The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under  
 feet.  
 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.  
 Wherefore be thou not arrogant towards men,  
 But be ever more arrogant towards devils and the Devil  
 himself:  
 "Blow, and spit on him." '

## VIII.

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

He said, 'Doth that surprise thee?'

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

He said, 'How readest thou that parable?'

I said, 'In this life, some live in riches, and some in poverty, but all alike leave this life carrying only their deeds with them. The last English homily I heard, the priest quoted someone who said, "I have never seen a trailer attached to a hearse." Which were, "You can't take it with you," save that terrifying tale of a monk who died with over a hundred gold pieces. ('Twas said he was not avaricious,

but merely stingy.) When he died, the community discussed what to do with his nigh incalculable sum of wealth: some suggested a building or other capital project, others some kindness to the poor. And when all was discussed, *they buried all the gold with him*, a costly, potent reminder to monastics that they should not want to be buried with even one gold piece. But the monk could not take the gold with him ere it were buried with him.'

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

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

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

He said, 'Speak on.'

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

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

I said, 'Yes.'

He said, 'What thou sayest resoundeth not as boasting in my ears, but many people have wished for the

remembrance of death and not reached it, no, not in monasticism even.'

I asked, 'Will I reach monasticism?'

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

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

'With death cometh a realization of, "I shall not pass this wise again."

'Such death as we have giveth life a significance eternal in its import. For thou knowest that all ye in the Church Militant stand as it were in an arena before God and His Christ, before all the saints and angels and even devils, as God's champions summoned to vindicate God as St. Job the Much-Suffering and others vindicate God. And whereinever thou triumphest, Christ triumpheth in thee.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# **Discussion questions for “The Consolation of Theology”**

1. What most struck you about this work?
2. When in your own life have you met good surprises?
3. Can theology indeed console in dire times?
4. What is one way you could be less tied to technology?
5. What is one way you could take consolation from such theology?



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

I have written a number of works and got coverage for some IT offerings. The one work of theology that went viral is this one.

I am not entirely clear about why, but I suspect that part of it is that it unearthed “buried treasure,” as the term is used, that was astonishingly bad and needed to be “dug up and removed.”

I might briefly state that contraception is a (set of) technologies, that it is significant in why many races are not procreating at replacement levels, and that it is not an accident that C.S. Lewis called it on the carpet in *Mere Christianity*.

This is one of few works that includes a section on how to use the document. It includes a shortened form of an academic paper (and by the way, I heartily encourage John Noonan’s *Contraception* as a Roman academic study), and then a commentary with the full text of an astonishingly bad

piece of “buried treasure” that should be saved for  
posterity...

...in more ways than one!

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

## The reason for writing: “Buried treasure?”

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

A surprising piece of code found in some program. While usually not wrong, it tends to vary from *crafty* to *bletcherous*, and has lain undiscovered only because it was functionally correct, however horrible it is. Used sarcastically, because what is found is anything *\*but\** treasure. Buried treasure almost always needs to be dug up and removed. ‘I just found that the scheduler sorts

its queue using [the *mind-bogglingly* slow]  
*bubble sort!* Buried treasure!

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

## How to use this document

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

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

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

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

## Why the fuss?

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

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

Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward -  
CJSHayward@pobox.com - CJSHayward.com

---

## Patristic and Current Orthodoxy: on Contraception

### Introduction

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

Much of what I attempt below looks at what is unquestionable today and asks, “How else could it be?” After two sections comparing the Patristic and modern circumstances, one will be able to appreciate that one would need to cross several lines to want contraception in Patristic

Christianity while today some find it hard to understand why the Orthodox Church is being so picky about contraception, I look at how these considerations may influence positions regarding contraception.

## How are the Fathers valuable to us?

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

Understanding Church Fathers on contraception can provide a moment of, “That’s funny...”

## The Patristic era

My aim in this section is not so much to suggest what views should be held, than help the reader see how certain things do not follow from other things self-evidently. I

would point out that in the Patristic world, not only were there condemnations of contraception as such, but more deeply, I would suggest that there was a mindset where the idea of freeing the goodness of sexual pleasure from any onerous fecundity would seem to represent a fundamental confusion of ideas.

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

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

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

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

This specific document mentions a few quotations from saints. More, and good, quotations are also available in the excellent article at "Sacred Seed, Sacred Chamber."



*Is it not you who used to counsel us to observe as much as possible the time when a woman, after her purification, is most likely to conceive, and to abstain from cohabitation at that time, lest the soul should be entangled in flesh?* This proves that you approve of having a wife, not for the procreation of children, but for the gratification of passion. In marriage, as the marriage law declares, the man and woman come together for the procreation of children. Therefore whoever makes the procreation of children a greater sin than copulation, forbids marriage, and makes the woman not a wife, but a mistress, who for some gifts presented to her is joined to the man to gratify his passion. Where there is a wife there must be marriage. But there is no marriage where motherhood is not in view; therefore neither is there a wife. In this way you forbid marriage. Nor can you defend yourselves successfully from this charge, long ago brought against you prophetically by the Holy Spirit (source; the Blessed Augustine is referring to I Tim 4:1-3).

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

Note:

There is some irony in calling “Natural’ Family Planning” making a set of mathematical calculations and

deliberately avoiding intercourse at the times when a woman is naturally endowed with the greatest capacity for desire, pleasure, and response.

Besides the immediate irony of Augustine criticizing the *form* of contraception to be heralded as “*Natural* Family Planning,” (remember that “natural” family planning is a calculated abstinence when a wife is capable, naturally, of the greatest desire, pleasure, and response), Augustine’s words are particularly significant because the method of contraception being discussed raised no question of contraception through recourse to the occult (“medicine man” *pharmakeia* potions) even in the Patristic world. There are various issues surrounding contraception: in the Patristic world, contraceptive and abortifascient potions were difficult to distinguish and were made by *pharmakoi* in whom magic and drugs were not sharply distinguished (Noonan 1986, 25.). But it would be an irresponsible reading to conclude from this that Patristic condemnations of contraceptive potions were only condemning them for magic, for much the same reason as it would be irresponsible to conclude that recent papal documents condemning the contraceptive mindset are only condemning selfishness and not making any statement about contraception as such. Patristic condemnations of contraception could be quite forceful (Noonan 1986, 91.), although what I want to explore is not so much the condemnations as the environment which partly gave rise to them:

[L]et us sketch a marriage in every way most happy; illustrious birth, competent means, suitable ages, the very flower of the prime of life, deep affection, the very best that each can think of the other, that sweet rivalry of each wishing to surpass the other in loving; in addition, popularity, power, wide reputation, and everything else But observe that even

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

Let no one think however that herein we depreciate marriage as an institution. We are

well aware that it is not a stranger to God's blessing. But since the common instincts of mankind can plead sufficiently on its behalf, instincts which prompt by a spontaneous bias to take the high road of marriage for the procreation of children, whereas Virginity in a way thwarts this natural impulse, it is a superfluous task to compose formally an Exhortation to marriage. We put forward the pleasure of it instead, as a most doughty champion on its behalf... But our view of marriage is this; that, while the pursuit of heavenly things should be a man's first care, yet if he can use the advantages of marriage with sobriety and moderation, he need not despise this way of serving the state. An example might be found in the patriarch Isaac. He married Rebecca when he was past the flower of his age and his prime was well-nigh spent, so that his marriage was not the deed of passion, but because of God's blessing that should be upon his seed. He cohabited with her till the birth of her only children, and then, closing the channels of the senses, lived wholly for the Unseen...

This picture of a "moderate" view of marriage that does not "depreciate marriage as an institution" comes from St. Gregory of Nyssa's treatise *On Virginity*, and allowances must be made for the fact that St. Gregory of Nyssa is contrasting virginity, not with an easy opposite today, namely promiscuity or lust, but marriage, which he bitterly attacks in the context of this passage. The piece is not an attractive one today. However, that does not mean that what he says is not part of the picture. This bitter attack is part of a picture in which contraception could look very different from today, but that way of looking at

contraception is not purely the cause of a rhetoric attacking marriage to praise virginity. I present this not to analyze St. Gregory's exact view on marriage, but to give a taste of an answer to "How else could it be?" in comparison to what is unquestionable today.

Some attitudes today (arguably the basic assumption that motivates offense at the idea that one is condemning the goodness of the created order in treating sex as rightly ordered towards procreation) could be paraphrased, "We affirm the body as good, and we affirm sex in all its goodness. It is a source of pleasure; it is a way to bond; it is powerful as few other things are. But it has a downside, and that is a certain biological survival: unless countermeasures are taken, along with its good features unwanted pregnancy can come. And properly affirming the goodness of sex means freeing it from the biological holdover that gives the good of sexual pleasure the side effect of potentially resulting in pregnancy even if it is pursued for another reason." To the Patristic Christian, this may well come across as saying something like, "Major surgery can be a wonderful thing. It is occasion for the skillful art of doctors, in many instances it is surrounded by an outflow of love by the patient's community, and the difficulties associated with the process can build a thicker spine and provide a powerful process of spiritual discipline. But it would be really nice if we could undergo surgery without attendant risks of unwanted improvements to our health."

It seems so natural today to affirm the goodness of the body or sex, and see as the only possible translation of that affirmation "the goodness of the pleasure in sexual experience," that different views are not even thinkable; I would like to mention briefly some other answers to the question, "How else could it be?" The ancient world, in many places, looked beyond the few minutes of treasure and found the basis for the maxim, "*Post coitum omne animal triste*" (after sex, every animal [including humans] is sad), and feared that sex could, among other things,

fundamentally deplete virile energy (Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, New York: Random House 1985, 137): its goodness might be seen as a costly goodness involving the whole person, rather than simply being the goodness of “one more pleasure, only a very intense one, that is especially good because it is especially intense” or self-evidently being at the core of even a good marriage (Noonan 1986, 47-8).

This is not to suggest that Christians merely copied the surrounding views. Contraception, abortion, and infanticide were quite prevalent in the Roman world (Noonan 1986, 10-29). Whatever else Patristic Christianity can be criticized for in its strong stance on contraception, abortion, and infanticide, it is not an uncritical acceptance of whatever their neighbors would happen to be doing. And if St. Gregory of Nyssa holds up an example which he alleges is procreation that minimizes pleasure, it might be better not to simply say that neo-Platonism tainted many of the Fathers with a dualistic view in which the body was evil, or some other form of, “His environment made him do it.”

## **Modernity and “natural” family planning**

In the discussion which follows, I will use the term “contraceptive timing” in lieu of the somewhat euphemistic “natural family planning” or “the rhythm method.” In my own experience, I have noticed Catholics consistently needing to explain why “natural family planning” is an opposite to contraception; invariably newcomers have difficulties seeing why decreasing the odds of conception through mathematical timing is a fundamentally different matter from decreasing the odds of conception through biological and chemical expedients. I would draw an analogy to firing a rifle down a rifle range, or walking down a rifle range to retrieve a target: either action, appropriately

timed, is licit; changing the timing of an otherwise licit action by firing a rifle while others are retrieving their targets and walk in front of that gun is a use of timing that greatly affects the moral significance of an otherwise licit act. I will hereafter use the phrase “contraceptive timing.”

## Orthodox implications

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

The one article I found on the topic was “lobbyist” scholarship that seemed to *avoid* giving a fuller picture (Zaphiris 1974.). This one article I found in the ATLA religion database matching the keywords “Orthodox” and “contraception” was an article that took a “new consensus” view and, most immediately, did not provide what I was hoping a “new consensus” article would provide: an explanation that can say, “We understand that the Fathers had grave reservations about contraception, but here is why it can be permissible.” The article in fact made no reference to relevant information that can (at least today) be easily obtained from conservative Catholic analyses. There was no discussion of relevant but ambiguous matter such as Onan’s sin (Noonan 1986, 34-6.) and New Testament condemnations of “medicine man” *pharmakeia* which would have included some contraception (Noonan 1986, 44-5.). There was not even the faintest passing mention of

forceful denunciations of contraception by both Greek and Latin Fathers. John Chrysostom was mentioned, but only as support for distinguishing the good of sex from procreation: “The moral theologian *par excellence* of the Fathers, St. John Chrysostom, also does not stress the procreation of children as the goal of marriage.” (Zaphiris 1974, 680) Possibly, as for that matter it is possible to argue that Zaphiris does not see openness to children as something to shut off, and wrench that fact out of context to say that Zaphiris opposed contraception. St. John Chrysostom may not have written anything like the incendiary material from St. Gregory above. But “the moral theologian *par excellence* of the Fathers” *did* write:

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

[St. John Chrysostom:] *Why do you sow [your seed—CJSH] where the field is eager to destroy the fruit [the child—CJSH]? Where are the medicines of sterility? Where is there murder before birth? You do not even let a harlot remain only a harlot, but you make her a murderess as well. Do you see that from drunkenness comes fornication, from fornication adultery, from adultery murder? Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its*



*formation. What then? Do you condemn the gift of God, and fight with his laws? What is a curse, do you seek as though it were a blessing?... Do you teach the woman who is given to you for the procreation of offspring to perpetrate killing?... In this indifference of the married men there is greater evil filth; for then poisons are prepared, not against the womb of a prostitute, but against your injured wife. (Homilies on Romans XXIV, Rom 13:14, as translated in Noonan 1986, 98.)*

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

Let me give an analogy to explain why. People consume both food and drink, by eating and drinking. But it is somewhat strange to point out that a person has never drunk a roast beef sandwich, particularly in an attempt to lead a third party to believe, incorrectly, that a person has never consumed that food item. The Church has “defined” statements relating to Trinitarian and Christological, and other doctrines, and formulated morally significant canon law. But she has never “defined” a statement in morals; that would be like drinking a roast beef sandwich. And so for Zaphiris to point out that the Orthodox Church has never “defined” a statement about contraception—a point that would be obvious to someone knowing what sorts of things the Church does not “define;” “defining” a position against murder would, for some definitions of “define,” be like drinking a sandwich—and lead the reader to believe that the Church has never issued a highly authoritative statement about contraception. The Orthodox Church has issued such statements more than once.

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

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

There have been times before where the Orthodox Church has accepted something alien and come to purify herself in succeeding centuries. In that sense there would be a precedent for a change that would be later undone, and that provides one ready Orthodox classification. The Orthodox Wiki provides no history of the change in Orthodoxy, and a formal statement by the Orthodox Church in America, without specifically *praising* any form of contraception, attests to the newer position and allows some use of reproductive technologies, but does not explain the change. I would be interested in seeing why the Orthodox Church in particular has brought itself into

sudden agreement with cultural forces beyond what the Catholic Church has.

The Orthodox Church both affirms that Christ taught marriage to be indissoluble—excluding both divorce and remarriage after divorce—and allows by way of *oikonomia* (a concession or leniency in observing a rule) a second and third remarriage after divorce, not counting marriages before full reception into the Orthodox Church. However, there is a difference between observing a rule with *oikonomia* and saying that the rule does not apply. If a rule is observed with *oikonomia*, the rule is recognized even as it is not followed literally, much like choosing “the next best thing to being there,” in lieu of personal presence, when one is invited to an occasion but cannot easily attend. By contrast, saying that the rule does not apply is a deeper rejection, like refusing a friend’s invitation in a way that denies any duty or moral claim for that friend. There is a fundamental difference between sending a gift to a friend’s wedding with regrets that one cannot attend, and treating the invitation itself with contempt. The rites for a second and third marriage are genuine observations of the fact that one is observing a rule with leniency: the rite for a second marriage is penitential, the rite for a third marriage even more so, and a firm line is drawn that rules out a fourth marriage: *oikonomia* has limits. If a second and third marriage is allowed, the concession recognizes the rule and, one might argue, the reality the rule recognizes. If one looks at jokes as an anthropologist would, as revealing profound assumptions about a culture, snipes about “A wife is only temporary; an ex-wife is forever” and “When two divorced people sleep together, four people are in the bed” are often told by people who would scoff at the idea of marriage as a sacred, permanent union... but the jokes themselves testify that there is something about a marriage that divorce cannot simply erase: a spouse can become an ex-spouse, but the marriage is too permanent to simply be dropped as something revocable that has no intrinsically permanent

effects. And in that sense, an ex-spouse is closer to a spouse than to a friend that has never had romance. Which is to say that marriage bears witness both to an absolute and oikonomia in how that absolute is observed.

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

## Conclusion

I am left with a puzzle: why is it that Orthodox have adopted the current "new consensus"? My guess is that Zaphiris's quite provocative article was taken as simply giving a straight account of Orthodoxy and Patristic teaching as it relates to contraception. The OCA document more or less applies both his analysis and prescriptions.

But, while I hesitate to say that no one could explain both why the Fathers would regard contraception as abhorrent and we should permit it in some cases, I will say that I have not yet encountered such an explanation. And I would present, if not anything like a last word, at least important information which should probably be considered in judging the rule and what is appropriate *oikonomia*. If Orthodoxy regards Patristic culture and philosophy as how Christ has become incarnate in the Orthodox Church, then neither condemnations of contraception, nor the reasons why those condemnations would be made in the first place, concern only antiquarians.

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

## **“Morality of Contraception: An Orthodox Opinion:” A commentary**

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

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

#### Footnote from Zaphiris's text

Chrysostom Zaphiris (Orthodox) is a graduate of the Patriarchal Theological School of Halki, Turkey, and holds a doctorate with highest honors from the University of Strasbourg, where he studied with the Roman Catholic faculty. His 1970 thesis dealt with the "Text of the Gospel according to St. Matthew in Accordance with the Citations in Clement of Alexandria compared with Citations in the Greek Fathers and Theologians of the Second to Fifth Centuries." Dr. Zaphiris taught canon law and New Testament courses at Holy Cross School of Theology (at Hellenic College), Brookline, MA, 1970-72. From 1972 to 1974, he was Vice Rector at the Ecumenical Institute for Advanced Studies, Tantur, Jerusalem.

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

THE MORALITY OF CONTRACEPTION: AN  
EASTERN ORTHODOX OPINION\*

by

CHRYSOSTOM ZAPHIRIS

PRECIS

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

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

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

contraception allowing for contraception under certain circumstances.

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

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

## I. INTRODUCTION.

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

I don't know an exact rule for "what must be considered for the Orthodox tradition," but besides of Biblical witness, the Patriarch of New Rome and one of three "hierarchy and ecumenical teachers" of the Orthodox



Church, St. John Chrysostom, homilectically treating something as an abomination and calling it “worse than murder” would tend to be something I would include under “aspects which must be considered according to the Orthodox tradition.”

One reaction which I would like to address in many readers, even though it is not properly commentary is, “Contraception is comparable to *homicide*? It’s called “worse than *murder*”? Is this translated correctly? Is this gross exaggeration? Is it cultural weirdness, or some odd influence of Platonic thought that the Church has recovered from? Why on earth would anybody say that?” This is a natural reaction, partly because the Fathers are articulating a position that is inconceivable today. So the temptation is to assume that this has some cause, perhaps historical, despite moral claims that cannot be taken seriously today.

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

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

The answer to that question depends on what qualifies as “destroying a painting.” If one disrupts the artist who is thinking about painting a painting, or scatters the paints and half-painted canvas, then in neither case has one destroyed a finished painting. You cannot point to a completed painting that was there before the interruption began, and say, “See? That is the painting that was destroyed.” *However*, someone who is not being legalistic has good reason to pause before saying “This simply does not qualify as destroying a painting” A *completed* painting

was not destroyed, but the process of artistic creation that produces a completed painting was destroyed. And in that sense, someone who interrupted Van Gogh and stopped him from painting “Starry Night” is doing the same sort of thing as someone today who would burn up the completed painting. The two acts are cut from the same cloth.

Now my intent is not to provide a precise and detailed allegory about what detail of the creation process represents conception, birth, etc. That is not the intent of the general illustration. My point is that talk about “destroying paintings” need not be construed only as destroying a completed painting in its final form. There is also the possibility of destroying a painting in the sense of willfully disrupting the process of an artist in the process of making a painting. And, perhaps, there is room for St. John Chrysostom’s horrified, “*Indeed, it is something worse than murder and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation.*” Now is this rhetorical exaggeration? Quite possibly; Noonan studies various penitentials, all from before the Great Schism, and although there is not always a penance assigned for contraception by potion, two assign a lighter penance than for homicide, one assigns the same penance, and one actually assigns a penance of four years for homicide and *seven* for contraception. Contraception could bear a heavier penance than murder.

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

exact calculus to measure the relative gravity of the sins. The point is that they are all connected in patristic writing.

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

## II. THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE.

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

The claim in the last sentence is true; more has been argued from St. John Chrysostom. But Orthodoxy does view celibacy and marriage as more compatible than some assume today. At least by the letter of the law, Orthodox are expected to be continent on fasting days and on days where the Eucharist is received, meaning a minimum of almost half days of the year, including one period approaching two months. I don't know what degree of *oikonomia* is common

in pastoral application, but an Orthodox might want to drop another shoe besides saying “both Scripture and the Fathers consistently counsel the faithful to live in such a way that sexuality can be expressed in marriage.”

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

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

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

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

Does “physical help” simply boil down to the C-word, as Zaphiris seems to mean? Are there no other possibilities? And why is “physical help” just something a wife gives a husband and not something a husband gives a wife? The euphemism sounds like the wife should be kind enough to join a pity party: “*It causes him so much pleasure, and it*

*causes me so little pain.*” I would like to propose a much more excellent alternative: **making love.**

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

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

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

In the case of St. Paul, it is a question of sexual relations of continence within marriage or of marriage as opposed to virginity, but never exactly the question of procreation in any of these cases. Paul considers marriage and virginity as charisms within the life of the Church. He exhorts believers to the practice of

virginity if they have this charism; if not, he encourages them to marry. This raises a subsequent question: “Does St. Paul encourage marriage first of all to promote the procreation of children or rather make up for human weakness which is experienced in sexual passion?” While I acknowledge that procreation of children is one of the reasons for marriage which Christian theology has consistently taught, it has never been the *only* reason for Christian marriage.

If we follow St. Paul closely, it is apparent that he encourages a man to marry, not simply to procreate children, but for other reasons, the most prominent of which 679 would be to avoid fornication (cf. I Cor. 7:2). It is because human persons have the right

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

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

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

development, and there are attempts to use the concept differently from the secular West.

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

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

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

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

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

In saying this, St. Paul is obviously not opposed to procreation as the end of marriage. The bearing of children was naturally expected to result from the practice of sexual intercourse within marriage as he counseled it. Abstinence from regular sexual intercourse was encouraged only to deepen the life of prayer for a given period of time. This limiting of abstinence to a specific period of time shows well Paul’s sensitivity to the demands of



human sexual passions and his elasticity of judgment in giving moral counsel. Thus, from the exegesis of Genesis of St. Paul, the whole contemporary question of the explicit connection between sexual intercourse within marriage and the procreation of children was simply not raised in the same form in which it is today.

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

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

There is one story where contraception is mentioned in the Bible, and it is one of few where Onan joins the company of Uzzah, Ananias, Sapphira, Herod (the one in Acts), and perhaps others in being the only people named in the Bible as being struck dead by God for their sins. This is not an august company. Certainly Onan’s story is not the story of a couple saying, “Let’s just focus on the children we have,” but a story *that* forceful in condemning Onan’s sin, *whatever* the sin properly consisted in, has *prima facie* good claim to be included a Biblical text that factors into a

Biblical view of contraception. The story is relevant, even if it is ambiguous for the concerns of this question.

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

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

Zaphiris’s footnote:

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

Turning from the writings of Paul to those of the Greek Fathers, we will see that there is a continuity of Orthodox tradition in this understanding of the purpose of marriage. First, let us consider the statement of Clement of Alexandria who raises this problem as a theologian and as a pastor of the faithful. When he comments on I Cor. 7:2, he uses

neither the allegorical nor the spiritual method of exegesis, but rather the literal interpretation of this Pauline text. Through this methodology, Clement, in spite of his usual idealism, recommends marriage over fornication and counsels sexual intercourse within marriage over the possibility of serving the temptor through fornication.[1]

Zaphiris's footnote

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

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

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

respecting those who are unable to chasten their appetites.”

Zaphiris’s footnote

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

Methodius applies similar logic to the possibility of the second marriage, in that he permits the second marriage, not specifically for the procreation of children, but “on account of the strength of animal passion, he [Paul] allows one who is in such condition may, ‘by permission’ contract a second marriage; not as though he expressed the opinion that a second marriage was in itself good, but judging it better than burning . . .” According to Methodius, the apostle speaks here, first saying that he wished all were healthy and continent, as he also was, but afterwards allowing a second marriage to those who are burdened with the weaknesses of the passions, goaded on by the uncontrolled desires of the organs of generations for promiscuous intercourse, considering such a second marriage far preferable to burning and indecency.[3]

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

The moral theologian *par excellence* of the Fathers, St. John Chrysostom, also does not stress the procreation of children as the goal of marriage. On the contrary, he adheres to the Pauline texts and to the apologists for

virginity and concludes that marriage does not have any other goal than that of hindering fornication.

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

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

There is arguably a degree of ambiguity in the Church Fathers. However, the ambiguity is of a far lesser degree. The Fathers argued most vehemently against opponents who believed the procreation of *any* children was morally wrong; contraception was seen as a duty in all intercourse, and not a personal choice for one’s convenience. See Augustine as cited on page 6 above. Acknowledging that the Fathers addressed a different situation, this does not mean that, since the Fathers did not

address the situation of a couple not wishing to be burdened by more children for now, the patristic arguments are inapplicable. An injunction against suicide may say something about self-mutilation even if, in the initial discussion, there was no question of mutilations that were nonlethal in character.

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

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

Christian theologian before 1500 explicitly upholding the lawfulness of intercourse in pregnancy” (Noonan 1986, 78.). Properly taken in context, this would support a much stronger position than I have argued, and one less attractive today.

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

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

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

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

This is one of several passages that raises questions of slippery rhetoric, perhaps of sophistry. Assuming that the above understanding of “defined” applies (a question which I am unsure of even if it seems that an affirmative answer would be consistent with the rest of the document), his

claim is technically true. But it is presented so as to be interpreted as stating that the Orthodox Church has no real position on the matter, unlike other moral questions where the Orthodox Church would presumably have defined a position. This understandable inference is false. The Patristic witness, and arguably the Biblical witness, in fact do treat contraception as suspicious at best. If so, this is a case of Zaphiris saying something technically true in order to create an impression that is the opposite of the truth. That is very well-done sophistry.

Zaphiris continues with a small, but telling, remark:

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

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

First, the Church vigorously denounces any obvious case of pure egotism as the motivating force in Christian sexuality within marriage. Any married couple within the Orthodox Church who want absolutely no children sins grievously against both the Christian dispensation and against the primordial purpose of human life which includes the procreation or, as the Greek Fathers prefer, the “immortality” of the human 680 species.

It seems that Zaphiris may be, for reasons of rhetoric and persuasion, providing a limit to how much he claims, so as to be more readily accepted. Zaphiris provides no footnotes or reference to sources more specific than the “Greek Fathers” to buttress this claim, and does not provide an explanation for certain questions. One such question is why, if marriage is not morally required and celibates are



*never* obligated to provide that specific support for the “immortality” of the human species, such obligation is binding on *all* married couples. Are all celibates exempt from “the primordial purpose of human life,” and if so, why is it permissible to fail to meet such a foundational purpose of human life? I do not see why Zaphiris’s logic justifies his making the more palatable claim that some openness towards children is mandatory.

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

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

Zaphiris’s footnotes:

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

6. In this regard, we should stress the fact that the Greek Fathers forbid every induced abortion of a human fetus because abortion involves tampering with a human soul. In fact, the soul is not the product of the sexual act of the parents, but is rather the manifestation of the love of God or the result of a special direct

or indirect action of God (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VI. 135, *et Eclogae prophetae*, 50, 1-3). A study of the means of the transmission of the soul is beyond the scope of the present paper so that we do not try to explain it here. What is important is to emphasize that the parents cannot destroy any human life—even embryonic—because the embryo carries the soul which is transmitted by God.

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

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

Secondly, the Orthodox Church, following the teachings of the Fathers,[5] is totally opposed to any form of the abortion of unborn children. Human life belongs exclusively to God and neither the mother nor the father of the fetus has the right to destroy that life.[6] When the Fathers of the Church debated against the non-Christian philosophers[7] of the first centuries, they considered abortion as murder because the life of the fetus is animate being.[8]

(Note, for the closing claim, that the reason Zaphiris provides is articulated in a fashion which does not apply to

contraception, at least not directly: destroying a painting is wrong precisely because an existing and completed painting is a work of art. What the rhetoric says, avoids saying, and leaves the reader to infer, seems to be exquisitely crafted sophistry.)

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

Zaphiris's footnote:

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

Fourthly, it is important to stress that the Orthodox Church has not promulgated any solemn statements through its highest synods on the whole contemporary question of contraception. In general, I think it is accurate to say that, as long as a married couple is living in fidelity to one another and not

allowing an immoral egotism to dominate their sexual relations, the particularities of their sexual life are left to the freedom of the spouses to decide.

Finally, it is important to note that the Orthodox Church looks to the medical profession itself to come to some unanimity in its biological research on the effects of contraception for human health. At the moment, the world of science does not furnish the world of theology such a unanimous body of opinion as would allow the Church prudently to formulate unchangeable moral teaching on this point. 682

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

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

Unknown woman: “Would I!”

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

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

Winston Churchill: “We’ve already established that. We’re just negotiating over the price.”

This claim is not a claim that the theological status of contraception is to be determined by the medical profession. The paragraph quoted above means that the

theological status of contraception has already been established, with the “price” left to the medical profession to work out.

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

Zaphiris’s footnote:

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

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

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

Zaphiris’s footnote:

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

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

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

I might comment that it is almost invariably first-world people enjoying a first-world income who find that they cannot afford any more children. Are they really that much less able than people in the third-world to feed children, or is it simply that they cannot afford more children *and* keep up their present standard of living? If

this choice is interpreted to mean that more children are out of the question, then what that means is, with apologies to St. John Chrysostom, a decision that luxuries and inherited wealth make a better legacy for one's children than brothers and sisters.

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

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

To limit as far as possible the moral, religious, social, economic, cultural, and psychological problems which arise with the arrival of an unwanted child—both for the parents and for the larger community—I believe that the use of contraceptives would be, if not the best solution, at least the only solution we have at our disposal today. I cannot distinguish between natural and artificial means because the morality of both is the same. If someone

uses either a natural or an artificial means of birth control, the intention is the same, i.e., to prevent an unwanted pregnancy. The use of contraceptives can facilitate a sexual life which enjoys a minimum of anxiety.

With these reflections on the current situation of family life and based on the above understanding of St. Paul and the Fathers, I ask myself what is better: to practice abstinence from the act of sexual intercourse, an act made holy by the blessing of God, or to practice a controlled sexual life within marriage and avoid the temptation of Satan? As we know, sexual intimacy within marriage is a very important <sup>683</sup> aspect of the relationship between husband and wife. With the use of contraceptives this sexual intimacy can be practiced without fear of unwanted pregnancy or without the danger of adultery which may result from the practice of abstinence.

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

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

At that evening, over beer and (for the others) cigars I asked about the idea that I had been mulling over. The insight is that concepts ideas and positions having practical conclusions that may not be stated in any form. I asked Fr.



Neuhaus for his response to the suggestion that the practice of ordaining women is a fundamental step that may ripple out and have other consequences. I said, “It would be an interesting matter to make a chart, for mainline Protestant denominations, of the date they accepted the ordination of women and the date when they accepted same-sex unions. My suspicion is that it would not be too many years.”

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

Fr. Neuhaus’s response raises an interesting question for this discussion. There might be greater value than Zaphiris provides in answering the question, “What are the practical effects, both positive and negative, for sexual intimacy that happen when a couple uses contraception?” There is room to argue that intimacy premised on shutting down that aspect of sharing may have some rather unpleasant effects surfacing in odd places. Fr. Neuhaus seemed to think before suggesting a connection between contraception and divorce. But this is *not* the question Zaphiris is answering; the question he seems to be answering is, “How can we present contraception as potentially a savior to some couples’ marital intimacy?” This is fundamentally the wrong question to ask.

Zaphiris’s foonote:

12. This spiritual union and the physical union are not opposed to one another, but are complementary. As an Orthodox theologian, I cannot treat physical union and spiritual union as dialectically opposed realities, which would result from an opposition between matter and spirit. Rather than getting trapped in this typically Western problem, I follow the

theological stress of Orthodoxy; this opposition between matter and spirit is resolved through the Logis, and matter and spirit are affirmed to be in extraordinary accord and synergy.

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

There was one webpage I saw long ago, comparing the 1950's and 1990's and asking whether it was still possible to make ends meet. The author, after comparing one or two of other rules of thumb, compared what was in a 1950's kitchen with what was in a 1990's kitchen, and concluded, "We're not keeping up with the Joneses any more.... We're keeping up with the Trumps."

St. John Chrysostom was cited in an academic presentation I heard, as presenting an interesting argument for almsgiving: in response to the objection of "I have many children and cannot afford too much almsgiving," said that

having more children was a reason to give *more* alms, because almsgiving has salvific power, and more children have more need for the spiritual benefit of parental almsgiving.

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

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

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

average middle-class family cannot afford to bring up more than a few children in the lifestyle of keeping up with the Trumps?

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

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

woman, but rather prolongs the non-fecund period which comes from God.

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

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

This makes an amusing, if perhaps ironic, contrast to *Humanae Vitae*. Here Zaphiris more or less says that “continence” for the sake of having sexual pleasure unencumbered by children is not *really* continence. Which I would agree with. Zaphiris says that the pill (abortifascient, incidentally, on some accounts today) is merely regulating a natural cycle, while crying “foul!” at the Catholic claim that contraceptive timing is a spiritually commendable

“continence.” The Catholic position is the mirror image of this, rejecting the idea that the pill (even if it were not abortifascient) is merely regulating a natural cycle, and classifying the pill among what Catholic canon law calls “poisons of sterility.” Both *Humanae Vitae* and Zaphiris make a shoddy argument for one of these two methods of contraception and cry “Foul!” about shoddy argument on the other side.

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

Zaphiris’s footnotes:

13. As we know, the Encratites (e.g. Tatian, Cassien, and Carpocrates) condemned marriage because they considered every act of sexual intercourse as sinful. It was sinful because it did not come from God (cf. Epiphanius of Salamine, *Adv. Haer.*, I, III, 46). For them, sexuality was also condemned because of its supposed relationship to original sin. The fleshly union allowed by marriage only further propagated this original sin in the offspring. Thus, because sexuality was not divine, Jesus Christ came to suppress it (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 91, 1; 92, 1). In their doctrine, through the suppression of the fleshly union, Jesus Christ opposed the Gospel of the New Testament to the Law of the Old Testament which had allowed sexual intercourse in marriage. The followers of the encratic movement said that they did not accept sexuality, marriage, or procreation because they did not feel that they should introduce other human beings into the

world and in their stead as their immediate successors in the human race since they would only endure suffering and provide food for death (cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 45, 1).

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

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

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

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

For Paul, marriage is a striking manifestation (exteriorization) of the union between Jesus Christ and his church (Eph. 5:21-33). The Old Testament prophets saw marriage as a dimension of God's covenant with the people. A husband's relationship with his wife is the same as the creature's relationship with the Creator; faithfulness in one is faithfulness in the other and, as with the faithfulness (cf.



Hos. 1:1-3, 5; Jer. 3:1ff.; Ezek. 16:1ff., 23:1ff.; Isa. 50:1ff., 54:1ff.), so too Paul, in the New Testament, pronounced marriage a holy means (*mysterion* or sacrament) of Christ's grace. The marriage of man and woman participates in the marriage of Christ and the church.

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

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

I could interrupt more to ask many more questions like, "Is this what the Eastern Church should teach to be faithful to her tradition, or what Zaphiris wants the framing

metaphor for the Eastern teaching to be as a change to its prior tradition?”

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

There are a couple of things that are significant here.

First the argument being made about being co-legislators is a point of cardinal importance and one that should *ideally* be supported by at least *one* footnote. There is an *absolute* lack of footnotes or even mention of names of authors or titles of text in this section’s quite significant assertions about the Eastern Church. (This raises to me

some questions about the refereeing here. My teachers usually complain and lower my grade when I make sweeping claims without adding footnotes.)

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

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

proclaiming, “Contraception is a *magnificent* exercise of Orthodox freedom, because Orthodox freedom is magnificent and contraception is permissible within the bounds of that freedom.” The whole point at issue is whether contraception is permissible; to argue this way as a way of answering that question is sophistry.

(I might suggest that it is an “interesting” exercise of our status as co-creators with God to try hard to shut down the creative powers God built into sex. Perhaps the suggestion is not indefensible, but it is in *need* of being defended, and Zaphiris never acknowledges that *this* interpretation of our status as co-creators needs to be defended, or buttress his specific interpretation.)

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

While the Eastern Orthodox Church fully acknowledges the role of procreation in the marital sexual act, it does not share the deterministic understanding of this act as expressed by *Humanae vitae*, which ignores love as a dimension of great value in sexual intercourse between husband and wife. Indeed, this love is viewed by the Eastern

church as the marriage partners' own response to the love of God for human beings, a human love as the marriage partners' own response to the love of God for human beings, a human love which is also a paradigm of Christ's love for the church. Finally, one must say that the deterministic Roman Catholic conception of marital sexuality, rooted as it is in scholastic medieval teaching, cannot very well deal with crucial contemporary problems such as over-population, food shortage, poverty, and insufficient medical resources.

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

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

Unless one counts Zaphiris's example above of a theologian saying that marriage is intended for procreation, with footnoted clarification that this is "probably due to the

influence of Greek philosophy,” the surrounding passage (about Thomas Aquinas’s discussion of whether contraception is unnatural) is the first time that Zaphiris mentions a theologian presenting an argument against contraception. And it is a Latin after the Great Schism interpreted in terms of Scholastic influence.

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

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

Incidentally, whatever Aquinas may have gotten from Aristotle, the Greek Fathers had ideas of unnatural vice *without* the help of Latin Scholasticism. There is a firmly embedded concept of unnatural vices, including witchcraft as well as “unnatural vice.” Jude 7 charges the men of Sodom with unnatural lust (*sarkos heteras*). The salient question is not whether the Greek Fathers have an understanding of *some* sins as unnatural, but whether contraception is a sin and, if so, whether it is among the sins classified as unnatural. But it is *not* automatically due to

Western influence for an Orthodox to make claims about unnatural sin.

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

The wedding of Aristotle's means-ends logic to the biblical Creator meant for Aquinas that sexuality, as every other earthly vitality, is governed by laws setting forth God's intention for each creaturely being, which are knowable to every creature for 686 the proper conduct of its life on earth. When the law governing

sexuality and procreation is disobeyed, then, according to Aquinas' theology, the Creation itself is undermined and God's own creative will is defied.

\* \* \*

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

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

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

Note that earlier some of what Zaphiris said *earlier* was presented as a "theological opinion," not necessarily binding on the consciences of other Orthodox Christians even if he was trying to make a case for it. But here we seem to have shifted to something that is binding on all Orthodox Christians: "It is the belief of Eastern Orthodox theology



that only such an anthropology,” apparently meaning the anthropology implied in the last section which makes at least one sweeping claim without footnotes or even the name of an author or text, that is binding on the consciences of Orthodox Christians. Earlier, perhaps the view of St. John Chrysostom might have been acceptable, at least as a theological opinion. Here it begins to look like a blunt declaration implying that Chrysostom’s position is heretical. Is the implication, “If anybody disagrees with this, let him be anathema?” *Is the author specifically anathematizing his own patron saint?*

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

Speaking from this anthropological conception of humanity, we should distinguish three principle aspects in the use of contraceptives—the psychological, the medical, and the moral. From the psychological point of view, contraceptives are permissible only when their use is the result of a common decision reached by both partners. The imposition of contraceptives by one partner in the sexual act must be regarded as immoral inasmuch as it abridges the freedom and possibly violates the conscience of the other partner. Any use of contraceptives which does not respect the psychological condition of both partners and of the sexual act itself must be judged immoral. What should guide sexual partners in the use or non-use of contraceptives is their freedom and reason, their spiritual dignity as creatures of God.

Zaphiris's footnote:

15. [Footnote not recorded in my copy.]

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

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

\* \* \*

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

marriage is both the creation of new life and the expression of deeply felt love.

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

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

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

the deterministic Roman Catholic sense, but rather persons living and acting freely in the natural world.

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

\* \* \*

Zaphiris's footnote:

16. For one Orthodox discussion of the question of insemination, see the excellent book of Prof. Chrysostomos Constantinidis, *Technete Gonipoiesis kai Theologia* in *Orthodoxia*, XXXIII (1958), 66-79, 174-90, 329-335, 451-468; XXXIV (1959), 36-52, 212-230.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Synergism means the collaboration of human beings with God in the continuing creation of the world. We must struggle to understand the right and wrong uses of our freedom, guided by the divine spirit. Our freedom is a mystery of God's own will and freedom. Therefore, no theologian—Eastern Orthodox 689 or otherwise—can specify what finally constitutes

the divine-human collaboration. Practically speaking, we can know when any given act, having taken place we can never be certain of the responsible and creative use of our freedom. We cannot determine *a priori* the movement of the human spirit any more than we can determine *a priori* the movement of the divine spirit. It is certain that, unless we recognize continually the Lordship of God in the world—the Creator judging all the actions of the creatures, we cannot speak truly of a divine-human synergism.

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

Many ethical approaches are presented as meant to steer a middle course between problematic extremes, including ones we might like and ones we might not like. See an attempted middle road between forcing queer positions onto the Biblical text and forcing conservative positions onto the Biblical text in Patricia Beattie Jung, “The Promise of Postmodern Hermeneutics for the Biblical Renewal of Moral Theology,” in Patricia Beattie Jung (ed.), *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology*, Collegeville: Liturgical

Press 2001. I haven't seen this phenomenon before in Orthodoxy, but it is common in the liberal Catholic dissent I've read. The dissenter adopts a rhetorical pose of being eager to seek a measured middle course that doesn't do something extreme, and does not give unfair advantage to any position. But this is done in the course of agitating for change on a point where the Catholic teaching is unambiguous. Jung, for instance hopes for a versions Catholic ethics more congenial to lesbian wishes, but she always takes the rhetoric of moderate and reasonable efforts that will respect Scripture and Catholic Tradition. (Again, I am comparing Zaphiris to Catholic dissent because I have not seen what he is doing here in Orthodoxy before, but have seen it *repeatedly* in liberal Catholic dissent.)

Zaphiris's footnote:

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

We must conclude here by saying that God's fantastic love for human beings—*maniakos eros*[17]—has divinised all creation. With this divinisation, God achieves the purpose of bringing all beings to God's own self. We play a role in this great work of salvation through the creativeness and freedom which God has bestowed on us. These dynamic capacities of our being cannot finally be identified and understood outside the scope of the Christian doctrines of humanity (anthropology), of Christ (Christology), and of salvation (soteriology). The ultimate purpose of our

synergistic relation to God is our own regeneration, as the New Testament states (cf. Rom. 8:28; Phil. 2:13; I Cor. 3:9).

Zaphiris's footnotes:

18 I Cor 2:7.

19 Rom 12:2.

Moreover, synergism has an ecclesiological dimension, and secondarily a moral dimension. Our role as co-legislators on earth with God can only fully be exercised in relationship to the church, which is the instrument of the communication of the Holy Spirit to humans in their creativeness. This means for Eastern Orthodoxy that the legislative and creative actions of men and women are a liturgy of the church itself. When we live in relation to the church's body, we live within "God's wisdom: a mysterious and hidden wisdom framed from the very beginning to bring us to our full glory." [18] The ecclesio-anthropo-soteriological value of this human liturgy is contained in the relation which exists between God's revelation and our activity. The harmonious cooperation between God and humans makes it possible for our legislative and creative acts to be "what is good, acceptable, and perfect." [19]

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



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

690

### Study and discussion questions

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

10. Why does the Eastern Orthodox Church avoid concrete and decisive answers to problems such as contraception?

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

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

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

## **Discussion questions for “Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article”**

1. What did you believe about contraception on entering the Orthodox Church?
2. What do you believe it now?
3. Can you see why contraception might be on a priest’s shortlist of questions to assess a faithful’s spiritual maturity?
4. Is having sex and hoping not to conceive a child a better way to promote intimacy than trying to make a baby?
5. Is the quoted article the kind of article which should set the pace for the Orthodox Church?

## Introduction to “True ‘Woke’ is Repentance”

People believe that today waking up is essentially about becoming woke. We have a woke King of England.

This piece is intended to take a step back and look at what is truly important, and what is most essential in life.

One interesting feature is that it includes, inline, a version of St. John Chrysostom’s *The Treatise to Prove that Nothing can Harm the Man who Does Not Injure Himself*. The effort in this version is to take the standard reference translation, a Victorian version with long sentences, and make it a little more accessible to today’s reader.

This piece may make a nice companion work to “The Consolation of Theology.”

# True “Woke” Is Repentance

## Am I woke?

**I am trying to redefine and challenge what the waking up in “woke” means.**

First of all, am I woke? What are some experiences from my own life? Let me mention a few:

- 
1. **Terminations.** I have never submitted an accommodation for disability without being terminated, always within a month, and always, always allegedly “for cause.”

I’ve been fired a dozen times, and gave up on talking to HR because they never get it. At one point, when my boss demonstrably lied to me in a meeting for the purpose of scaring me silly, I complained to HR and they thought I was complaining because as a consultant I didn’t have job security, and HR simply

couldn't wrap their heads around any other complaint. I was completely and utterly unable to get the point across that my boss was meeting with me to lie to intimidate me bigtime.

2. **Fr. Seraphim of Platina's devoted crowd.** Fr. Seraphim of Platina is the only Orthodox "saint-figure" I have ever been urged to venerate on grounds of his giftedness. I unwisely enough answered, "If you are going to venerate Fr. Seraphim because he was gifted, you should venerate me more because I am more gifted [insert here a list of achievements], and [*the point I was trying to make*] if you're not going to venerate me more because I am more gifted, neither should you be telling me to venerate Fr. Seraphim because he is gifted.

That was answered by the worst harassment in my life, and the only time I've actually thought my body was shutting down because the degree of hate expressed to me. I wrote a book, *The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts*. I do not want to ask you to read the book if you don't want to, but *please read the one star reviews*. They are more alarming than the positive reviews!

Incidentally, I've noticed on Amazon that kind reviews to my work appear, and vanish without a trace. *This is ongoing*. I've been contacted by strangers with reviews that were censored ("An Intellectual Genius rooted in reality."). I have awfully few posted reviews for someone who has had so many Kindle book giveaways and giving away so many review copies. Very few of the reviews stay around.

- 3. Square peg, round hole effects at Fordham.** You can read a sanitized version of my official writeup after Fordham said I washed out. It's posted as "Orthodox at Fordham," or as it is sometimes titled, "Profoundly Gifted and Orthodox at Fordham." "I have said bitterly enough that they suffer from delusions of adequacy, and were incompetent enough in their treatment of me that at a couple of points my life was in question.

I might comment briefly that the internal-use term in the profoundly gifted community as I have engaged it is not normally "profoundly gifted," but "severely gifted." That has begun to appear in the psychological literature as well.

- 4. C&D letters to try to end harassment.** I have had to send several "CEASE AND DESIST" letters after an ongoing and repeated "**NO!**" was simply being trampled on.

---

Now let me raise a question:

## **Am I woke?**

I've had enough things happen to me, but let me explain why I have severe reservations about the concept of being woke.

## **Emotional Intelligence**

I was big into Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* for a time at least, and the text has some particularly interesting things

to say about the psychology of bullies.

What it says is that bullies do not feel entitled and above everyone else, free to issue aggression. They by contrast see themselves as persecuted victims. They believe everything is deliberately hostile to them. Other kids don't bump into them because kids that age have their bodies changing and are sometimes clumsy. It is intentional aggression, and it is therefore, to a bully, self-defense in a hostile situation to try to strike back hard enough against yet *another* kid who bumps into them and nothing seems to work.

The "un-bullying" of bullies is essentially to explain that not everybody is out to get them, that kids are clumsy at a certain age, and what seem microaggressions are really just random and meaningless. There is nothing intelligent, coordinated, or hostile most of the time when kids just bump into kids.

What Goleman did not say was an interesting implication. Consciousness raising is the opposite project; it is a teaching that bumps in the hallway are part of a coordinated attack. They only *seem* to be random. And the way one would go about making a bully is consciousness raising, or today telling someone to wake up and become woke.

One book I have wanted to write for years but haven't had click is *The History of my Misfortunes*, named after Abelard's *The History of my Misfortunes*, an unwittingly transparent work of a medieval autism diagnosis candidate who was full of himself, offended all sorts of people in all sorts of ways, betrayed people who had put him in a position of trust, alienated his allies, *and presents himself as the perfect innocent victim*. The spin I was going to mention was to talk about various ways I have created trouble for myself, all the things that are not anybody else's fault but my own. And really the only reason I have not moved forward with this is that it could be TMI. It was in the same spirit that I wrote:



## A Professional Courtesy to a Fellow Poet (View original poem)<sup>20</sup>

Out of the pitch black of my sin and vice,  
 Chosen only of my own free will,  
 I thank the God beyond all knowing  
 For my yet still fighting soul.

In the cunning net of His Providence,  
 I have spurned kindnesses for my good,  
 Gifts I have fought as chance left me,  
 Bloodied, but more deeply bowed:

*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?  
 It hurteth thee to kick against the goads.*

Beyond this life of pleasure and pain,  
 Lie the Gates of Heaven and Hell,

<sup>20</sup> The original text of William Ernest Henley's "Invictus" reads:

Out of the night that covers me,  
     Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
 I thank whatever gods may be  
     For my unconquerable soul.  
 In the fell clutch of circumstance  
     I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
 Under the bludgeonings of chance  
     My head is bloody, but unbowed.  
 Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
     Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
 And yet the menace of the years  
     Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.  
 It matters not how strait the gate,  
     How charged with punishments the scroll,  
 I am the master of my fate:  
     I am the captain of my soul.

Battered I still make my choice,  
 Seeking neither to bolt nor bar,  
 From inside, the gates of Hell.

Narrow is the path and strait the gate:  
 The entrance to Glory beyond,  
 All trials and tests named in the scroll,  
 Thy Grace my wounds have bound with salve.

I thank the ranks of men made gods,  
 Who cheer me on to join their choir,  
 Thou blessest me beyond any fate,  
 That I could ever know to ask.

Thy Glory is to transfigure me,  
 To Live, Thou Thyself:  
 I AM the Master of my Fate!  
 I AM the Captain of my Soul!

A few details I could share: I was not happy with my circumstances because I wanted to be somewhere like Narnia and be a king instead of being right where I am. That is an extended unhappiness I have no one to thank but myself. Other things as well, that caused considerable unhappiness for a considerable time, boiled down to nothing but my own *sin*.

And now I've used a dirty word, one that isn't very popular today.

I would like to pause briefly and say that after extended practice jobhunting,\* and talking with jobseekers of different demographics, have instilled in me a strong conviction that **the hiring process is biased against applicants who have a pulse.**

\* Not only have I been fired over a dozen times, but it is very stressful when a boss, who think your request for accommodation reflects a poor work ethic, is a boss trying to fabricate a paper trail of failures to claim for-cause termination.

I would like to get on to adapt St. John Chrysostom said, The Treatise to Prove that No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself. (I say “adapt” because the standard translation uses complex Victorian English and I want something easier to read. (It is also available as an audiobook.) Without further ado,

## **The Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Person Who Does Not Damage Himself**

I understand very well that to people who don't get it, this treatise will appear strange and full of paradox. But they are people who don't get it. They are greedy of things you can get now. They are nailed to this world. They are slaves to physical pleasure. They do not and perhaps cannot grasp spiritual ideas. And no wonder that they will laugh me to scorn. No wonder that they will condemn me for saying ludicrous things from the very outset of this work. *Therefore*, I will not stop the present work. I will instead proceed with a great deal of effort, to prove just what I am seeking to prove.

If those who care about the topic will be kind enough not to make clamor and a disturbance, but hear me to the end, *I am positive they will take my side*. They will

condemn themselves, and realize they were wrong. They will take back, and apologize, and beg pardon for their mistaken opinion. **They will express great gratitude to me, like patients do to doctors who have cured them.**

So do not tell me of your current opinion, *but hear me out*, and then you will be able to make a fair judgment. Then you will not be stopped by your ignorance from recognizing the truth. Even judges in secular causes do not record their decision after the first lawyer spews a river of words, but even if the first lawyer is totally convincing, the judges reserve an unprejudiced consideration for the second. In fact the good thing about judges is they try as accurately as they can to understand what each side claims, and then announce their own judgment.

Now in place of a first lawyer we have a common human assumption. This assumption has taken deep root in people's minds, and says the following things about the world:

All things have been turned upside down. The human race is full of great confusion. There are many people who are wronged, insulted, victims of violence and loss. The weak are harmed by the strong, and the poor by the rich. As it is simply impossible to count the waves of the sea, it is simply impossible to count how very many people who are the victims of scheming, damage, and suffering. Neither the correction

of law, nor fear of being sued, nor anything else can stop this maddening disorder. The evil increases everyday, and the groans, and complaints, and the crying of the people who suffer is universal. Furthermore, the judges who are appointed to straighten out such evils, make it worse themselves, and worsen the disorder. Many of the people who don't get it, who are despicable, blame the Providence of God when they see the peaceful people frequently seized, oppressed, and tortured. The audacious and violent nobodies get rich, and gain authority, and become a force to reckon with, and inflict countless troubles upon the more reasonable people. This goes on in town and country, and in the desert, on sea and land.

What we need to discuss has to come in direct opposition to what has been claimed, saying something which is new, and just as I said is contrary to popular opinion, but useful and true. It is profitable to those who will listen to it and be persuaded. What I am trying to do is to prove (please, no commotions) that **no one who is wronged is wronged by someone else, but any *real* damage is self-inflicted.**

But to make my point more clearly, let us all ask what injustice is. Also, we should ask

what human goodness is, and what it is which ruins it. Even further, we should ask what it is to seems to ruin human goodness but really does not.

For instance (because I need to make my point by analogy) each thing is vulnerable to the one evil which ruins it. Iron is vulnerable to rust, wool is vulnerable to moths, and flocks of sheep are vulnerable to wolves. The goodness of wine is harmed when it ferments and turns sour. The goodness of honey is harmed when it loses its natural sweetness, and becomes some sort of bitter juice. Ears of grain are ruined by mildew and drought. Leaves, and branches of vines are ruined by the troublesome plague of grasshoppers, other trees by the caterpillar, and mindless things by disease of various kinds. But to shorten the list and not go forever by going through all possible examples, our own flesh is subjected to fevers, and wounds, and a whole bunch of other bad things.

Therefore, since each one of these things is vulnerable to the thing that ruins its goodness, let us now consider what it is which damages the human race. Let us consider what it is that ruins the goodness of a person. Most people think that there are many things things which have this effect. So I need to expose wrong opinions on the subject, and after refuting them, go on to show what really does ruin our goodness. Even more, *I want to demonstrate clearly that no one could inflict this injury or bring this ruin upon our goodness.* Some say it is poverty, others diseases of the body, others loss of property, others slander, others death. They are

perpetually dismayed and lament these things. When they are commiserating with the people who suffer and cry tears, they explain to one another, "What a terrible thing happened to such and such people! They have been deprived of all their fortune at one blow." Again, someone will say about another, "such and such person has been attacked by severe illness and the doctors don't think he will live." Some bewail and cry out about prisoners, some of whom have been expelled from their country and exiled to another land. Others bewail those who have been deprived of their freedom. Others cry over those who have been seized and taken captive by enemies. Others lament people who have been drowned, or burned to death, or buried by a collapsing house, *but no one mourns those who are living in wickedness*. On the contrary, what is worse than all these wailings, they often congratulate them, a practice which causes all kinds of problems. Come then (only, as I asked you, do not make a commotion), let me prove that none of the things which have been mentioned harm the man who lives in a sober manner, nor can ruin his goodness.

For tell me if a man has lost his all at the hands of slanderers or of robbers, or been stripped of his property by evil servants, what harm has the loss done to the person's goodness?

But if it makes sense let me instead point out in the first place what is the goodness of a human being. Let me start by dealing with a separate case to make it easier to understand and plain to most readers.

What then makes a horse good? Is it to

have a bridle studded with gold and belts to match? Is it silk to fasten the saddle? Is it many-colored, gold-plated clothing? Is it to have reins and bit studded with jewels? Is it gold woven into its hair?

Or is it to have swift and strong legs? Is it to move evenly? Is it to have hooves that are suitable to a well-bred horse? Is it to have a fitting courage for long journeys and warfare? Is it to be calm in the battlefield? Is it to save its rider in the event of defeat? Is it not clear that these are the things that make up the goodness of the horse, not the others?

Again, what should you say makes donkeys and mules good? Is it not the power of carrying burdens contentedly? Is it not the power to easily make journeys? Is it not to have hooves like rock? Shall we say that expensive external adornments give anything to their very own goodness? By no means. And what kind of vine would we admire? One which has many beautiful leaves and branches, or some that has a lot of fruit? Or what do we say makes an olive tree good? Is it to have big branches, and luxurious leaves, or to exhibit a lot of its own fruit dispersed over all parts of the tree?

Well then, let us act in the same way in the case of people too: let us determine what makes a human being good, and let us pay attention to what alone is damage which destroys that goodness. What then makes a man good? Not wealth so that you should fear being poor. Not physical health so that you should fear sickness. Not people's opinion of you, so that you should be alarmed at a bad reputation. Not freedom that you should avoid serving others. Not even life for its own sake, so



that you should find death terrible. Instead of any of these, what matters is that you should hold fast to the truth, and behave rightly in life. Not even the Devil himself will be able to rob a person of these if the person who possesses them will guard them with necessarily care: and *that most malicious and ferocious demon knows this well.*

In the Bible, the Slanderer was allowed to accuse Job of loving God only because God made him rich, and when he was given permission, to destroy all his wealth at once. When Job still clung to righteousness, the Slanderer changed his tune and said that Job loved God only because he was healthy, and was given permission to destroy his health. Job had no idea what is going on, but clung to what is good and made the Devil look like a sleeping fool.

This is why the Devil robbed Job of his wealth. It wasn't to make him poor, but force him to blaspheme in anger. The Devil tortured his body, not because he wanted to make Job sick, but to topple the goodness of his soul. But when he had done all of these things, and let me elaborate:

- When the Slanderer turned Job from a rich man into a poor one, which we consider the worst calamity—
- When he destroyed every single one of his children—
- When he had ripped into his whole body more cruelly than executioners do in a public execution, because their nails do

not tear into the sides of people who fall into their hands as badly as one who is being eaten alive by worms—

- When he got a terrible reputation, for Job’s “friends” who were present with him said “You haven’t gotten the punishment your sins deserve”,—
- When he had not merely expelled from city and home to another city, but had actually made a pile of *shit* serve as his home and city—

After all this, the Devil not only did Job no damage but rendered him more glorious than the schemes he plotted against him. And he not only failed to rob him of any of his true possessions although he had robbed him of so many things, he even increased the wealth of his goodness. For after all these things he was more solidly placed because he had struggled in a more severe battle.

Now if he who went through such horrible sufferings, and not by the hand of human opponents but by the hand of the Devil who is more wicked than all men—if Job sustained no injury, which of these persons who say “Such and such a person harmed and damaged me,” will have any defense to make in the future? For if the Devil,

- Who has so much great malice, after having set all his plans on motion—
- Who attacked him with all his weapons—

- Who poured out all external evils that can happen to a human being—
- Who to the greatest possible extent to the family and body of that righteous man—

...never did him any injury, but as I was saying put Job in a position of even greater spiritual profit.

How shall people be able to accuse such and such a person alleging that they have suffered damage at their hands, and not at their own hands?

What then? Someone will ask, “Didn’t he inflict injury on Adam, and topple his goodness, and cast him out of Paradise?” No: the Devil did not make him do it, but the cause was the lazy apathy, and lack of balance and vigilance of the one who was injured. The Devil applied such a multitude of powerful plans and yet could not subdue Job. So how could he, by weaker methods, have conquered Adam, if Adam had not betrayed himself through his own lazy apathy?

What then? Hasn’t the one been damaged who has been exposed to slander, and suffered confiscation of everything he owns, and has been deprived of everything else, and is thrown out of his heritage, and struggles with extreme poverty? *No!* He has not been damaged, but has even profited, if he be sober.

For, tell me, what harm did this do to the Apostles? Weren’t they always struggling with hunger and thirst and lack of decent clothing? And this was the very reason why they were so famous, and distinguished, and

earned for themselves much help from God.

Lazarus was a beggar at the gate of a rich man, and longed to have the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and did not get even that—until he died and was brought to Paradise. Again what harm was done to Lazarus by his sickness, and sores, and poverty, and lack of protectors? *Weren't they the reasons why garlands of victory were more abundantly woven for him?*

Or consider Joseph, who was the victim of attempted murder, who was sold into slavery, then after resisting many attempts at seduction was falsely accused of not only attempted seduction but attempted rape, *out of complete butthurt after he spurned every single advance she made!* And he was thrown in prison, and by God's providence he rose to authority and kept many people from starving to death? What harm was done to him by his being falsely accused? This happened both in his own land and in the land of strangers where he was falsely accused of rape. Or what harm did slavery or exile do to him? Is it not specifically because of these things that we regard him with admiration and astonishment? And why do I even mention exile to a foreign land, and poverty, and false accusation, and slavery? For what harm did death itself inflict on Abel, although it was a violent and premature death because his brother envied that Abel's sacrifices to God were accepted and the brother's sacrifices were not, a murder inflicted by his brother's hand? Is this not the reason why Abel's praises are sung around the world? Don't you see how the explanation has demonstrated even more than it promised? For

not only has it pointed out that no one is injured by anybody, but also that **those who handle the difficulties wisely themselves benefit all the more from such attacks.**

What is the purpose then, people will ask, of jail and punishments? What is the purpose of Hell? What is the purpose of such great threats, if no one either harms or causes others harms?

What is it that you are saying? Why do you confuse the argument. *For I did not say that no one harms, but that no one is harmed.* And how is it possible, you will say, for no one to be harmed when many are committing harm? In the way I indicated just now. For Joseph's brothers did indeed harm him, yet he himself was not harmed: and Cain laid a trap for Abel, yet Abel himself was not trapped. Joseph's brothers, and Cain, only harmed *themselves*.

This is the reason why there are penalties and punishments. For God does not abolish penalties because of the goodness of those who suffer; but he orders punishments because of the wicked. For they who are treated badly become more illustrious because of the plans schemed against them, this is not the intention of those who scheme the plans, but the courage of those who are their victims. Therefore for the victims the rewards of clinging to the Truth and righteous life are made ready and prepared, but for those who maltreat them, the penalties of wickedness.

Have you had your money taken away? Read the word, "I came naked out of my mother's womb, and I shall return naked. And add to this the Apostle's saying, "for we

brought nothing into this world; it is certain we can carry nothing out.” Do people speak evil about you, and have some loaded you with endless slander? Remember that passage where it is said “Woe unto you when all shall speak well of you” and “rejoice ye and leap for joy when they shall say evil about you.” Have you been brought to the land of exile? Consider that you do not have a homeland here, but if you will be wise you are well advised to regard the whole world as a foreign country. Or have you come down with a dire illness? Quote the apostolic saying, “*The more our outward person decays, so much the more is the inward person renewed every day.*” Has anyone suffered a violent death? Consider the death of John the Baptist, his head cut off in prison, carried in a plate, which the king paid as the reward of his whorish niece’s dancing. Consider the reward which comes through these things: for all these sufferings when they are justly inflicted by anyone on another person, wipe away sins and work righteousness. So there is a great advantage for people who bear such things bravely.

When then neither loss of money, nor slander, nor being yelled at, nor diseases, nor tortures, nor anything that seems fundamentally beyond them all, namely death—when none of those things harm the people who suffer them, but instead profits them all the more, from where can you prove that anyone is harmed when nothing of these things can harm that one? For I will try to prove the reverse, demonstrating that the people who are most harmed and damaged, and suffer the worst evils, are the persons who

do these things. For what could be more miserable than the condition of Cain, who murdered his own brother? What is more pitiable than Philip's wife who beheaded John the Baptist? Or Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery and delivered him into exile? Or the Devil who tortured Job with such great calamities? For he will pay no small penalty for this assault as well as his other sins.

Don't you see how the argument has proven even more than was offered, showing that those who are insulted not only suffer no harm from the assaults, but that the whole mischief backfires on those who plan them? For since neither wealth nor freedom, nor life in our native land, nor the other things I have mentioned, but only good actions by the soul, constitute the goodness of a person, naturally when the harm is directed against these false goods, human goodness itself is not harmed in any way.

What then? Supposing someone does harm the moral condition of the soul? Even then if someone suffers damage, the damage does not come from anyone else but comes from inside, and to the person from himself. "How so," do you say? When anyone having been beaten by someone else, or deprived of his property, or gone through some other terrible attack, speaks blasphemously, he is certainly harmed by it, and very great harm, but it does not come from the person who inflicted the attack, but from his own pettiness of soul. For what I said before I will now repeat, no man if he be infinitely wicked could attack any one more wickedly or more bitterly than that revengeful demon who is implacably

hostile to us, the Devil. But yet this cruel demon had no power to topple or overthrow those who lived before the Law, and before the time of grace. This is the power of nobility of soul. **And what shall I say of Paul?** Didn't he go through so many calamities that even listing them is no easy task? He was:

- Put in prison—
- Loaded with chains—
- Dragged here and there—
- Tortured by his countrymen—
- Pelted with stones—
- Wounded on the back not only with whips, but also with rods—
- Immersed in the sea—
- Attacked by robbers—
- Met with strife by his own countrymen—
- A victim of countless schemes and plots—
- Struggling with hunger and lack of clothing—
- Undergoing other frequent and lasting misfortunes and afflictions—

And why do I need to mention the majority of them? He was dying every day. Yet,



though he was victim of so many of so terrible sufferings, not only did he not utter any blasphemous word, but rejoiced over these things and gloried in them. One place he says, "I rejoice in my sufferings," and even more "not only this, but we also glory in afflictions." If he rejoiced and gloried when suffering great troubles, what excuse will you have, and what defense will you make, if you blaspheme God when you do not undergo the smallest fraction of them?

"But I am harmed in other ways," you may say, "and even if I do not blaspheme, yet when I am robbed of my money I am prevented from giving to beggars." This is a mere pretext and pretentiousness. *For if that upsets you, be sure that poverty is no bar to generosity.* For even if you are infinitely poor, you are not poorer than the woman who possessed only a handful of grain, and the one who only had two cents. Each of these, having spent all their wealth on those who were in need, were a matter of such great admiration. Such great poverty was no hindrance to such great and loving kindness, but the gift spent from the two cents was so abundant and generous as to leave the rich completely in the dust, even though they strove zealously to give more money than all the others. Therefore even here you are not harmed but rather benefited. Your small contribution receives a more glorious reward than people who dropped large sums.

But since, if I were to keep on saying these things forever, pleasure-seekers who love to grovel in worldly wealth, and revel in what we have now, would not readily endure leaving the fading flowers (for such are the pleasant

things of this life) or letting go of its shadows: but better people cling to both the one and the other, while the more pathetic and low cling more strongly to the first than the second. So let us strip off the pleasant and showy masks which hide the low and ugly face of these things, and let us show how deformed the whore is. For that is the nature of this kind of life which is devoted to luxury, wealth, and power. *It is foul and ugly, and full of much abomination, disagreeable and burdensome, and charged with bitterness.* For this is the particular feature in this life which deprives those who are captivated by it from every excuse, that though it is everything they hope for, it is filled with:

- Much trouble and bitterness—
- Too many evils to count—
- Dangers—
- Bloodshed—
- Spiritual crags and precipices—
- Murders—
- Fears and tremblings—
- Envy and badwill,
- Hostile scheming,
- Ongoing anxiety and worry.

It derives no profit, and produces no

fruit, from these great evils—except for, perhaps, punishment and revenge, and unending torment.

But although this is its character it seems to most people an object of ambition, and eager contention, which is a sign of the folly of those who are captivated by it, not of the blessedness of the thing itself.

Little children are indeed eager and excited about toys, and cannot take notice of the things that are worthy of full-grown adults. There is an excuse for them because they are too young to expect maturity: but the others simply have no defense, because, although of full adult age, they are childish in behavior and more foolish than children in how they live.

Now tell me why is wealth an object of ambition? *Here is extreme irony.* For you need to start from this point, because to most people who have this terrible malady think it is more precious than health and life, and public fame and good opinion, and household, and friends, and relatives and everything else. More than this, the flame has ascended to the clouds themselves: and this fierce heat has taken possession of land and sea. Nor is there anyone to put out this fire: but all people are busy stirring it up, both those whom it has already caught, and those who have not been caught, so that they may be captured. And you may see everyone, husband and wife, household slave and freeman, rich and poor, each as far as they can carrying loads which supply much fuel to this fire, both during the day and also the night. They do not have loads of wood or sticks (for it is not that kind of fire), but loads of souls and bodies, of evils and sins. For such is the

stuff that lights this kind of fire.

For people who have lots of money do not ever stop feeding this monstrous passion, even if they own the whole world. The poor, worse, try to even get ahead of them. A kind of incurable craze and unstoppable frenzy and unhealable disease possesses everyone's souls. And this desire has conquered every other desire and thrust it away, expelling it from the soul. Neither friends nor relatives are considered: and why do I speak of friends and relatives? Not even wife and children are regarded, and what can be more precious to a man than these?

But all things are dashed to the ground and trampled, when this savage and inhuman tyrant has laid hold of the souls of all those she keeps captive. For as an inhuman master, and harsh tyrant, and savage barbarian, and public and expensive whore she debases and exhausts and punishes those who have chosen to be her slaves with innumerable dangers and torments. Yet although she is terrible and harsh, and fierce and cruel, and has the face of a barbarian, or rather of a wild beast, fiercer than a wolf or a lion, she seems to those she has enslaved to be gentle and lovable, and sweeter than honey. And although she forges swords and weapons against them every day, and digs pits and leads them to precipices and crags and makes endless traps for them, yet she is supposed to make these things objects of ambition to those whom she has enslaved, and those who want to be enslaved. And just as a pig delights and revels in wallowing in the ditch and mire, and beetles love to always be crawling over shit, even so they who are

captivated by the love of money are more miserable than these creatures.

For the abomination is greater in this case, and the mire more offensive: for they who are addicted to this passion imagine that much pleasure is derived from it. This does not arise from its nature, but the human understanding which is afflicted with such a foul and irrational taste. And this taste is worse in their case than in that of animals: for as with the mud and the shit the pleasure is not caused by them, but in the irrational nature of the creatures who plunge into it. So consider it to be in the case of us human beings.

And how might we cure those who want such a thing? It would be possible if they would open their ears to us, and unfold their heart, and receive our words. For it is impossible to turn irrational animals away from their unclean habit, for they do not have human intelligence. But this, the noblest of all tribes, honored with reason and speech, I mean human nature, might be quickly and easily be released from the mire and the stench, and the hill of shit and its abomination. *If we chose to.* For why, O person, do you think wealth is worth such diligent pursuit? Is it because of the pleasure which obviously comes from food? Or because of the honor and company of those who attend on you, because of your wealth? Is it because you can defend yourself from those who bother you, and have everyone be afraid of you? For you cannot name any other reasons, save pleasure and flattery, and fear, and the power of taking revenge; for wealth does not ordinarily make anyone wiser, or more self-controlled, or more gentle, or more intelligent,

or kind, or benevolent, or superior to anger or gluttony or pleasure: it does not train anyone to be moderate, or teach him how to be humble, nor introduce any other element of goodness in the soul to become deep-rooted. Neither could you explain which of these things makes it deserving of such seeking and such desire. For wealth is not only ignorant of how to plant and cultivate any good thing, but even if it finds a bunch of them it messes them up. Some of them it even uproots and introduces their opposites: taking excessive liberties, ill-timed wrath, unrighteous anger, pride, arrogance, and foolishness.

But let me not speak of these; for they who have been seized by this malady simply will not listen to talk about what makes people good and what makes people bad. They are entirely abandoned to pleasure and therefore remain its slaves. So let us not consider these points any further, and let us bring forward the others which remain. Let's see whether wealth has any pleasure, or any honor: *it looks to me like quite the opposite!*

And first of all, please, let us consider the meals of rich and poor, and ask the guests which they are who enjoy the purest and most genuine pleasure. Is it they who:

- Recline for a full day on couches—
- Join breakfast and dinner together—
- Distend their stomach—
- Blunt their senses—

- Sink the vessel by an excessive cargo of food—
- Waterlog the ship—
- Drench it as in some shipwreck of the body—
- Devise fetters, and manacles, and gags—
- Bind their whole body with the band of drunkenness and excess more grievous than an iron chain—
- Enjoy no sound pure sleep undisturbed by frightful dreams—
- Are more miserable than madmen and introduce a kind of self-imposed demon into the soul and display themselves as a laughing stock to the gaze of their servants—
- Or rather to the kinder sort among them as a tragic spectacle worthy of tears—
- Cannot recognize any of those who are present—
- Are incapable of speaking or hearing but have to be carried away from their couches to their bed—

—Or—

Is it they who:

- Are sober and vigilant—

- Limit their eating to what they truly need—
- Sail with a favorable breeze—
- Find hunger and thirst the best relish in their food and drink?

For nothing so helps the enjoyment and health as to be hungry and thirsty when one comes to the table, and to think that simply necessary food is enough, nor imposing a load upon the body too great for its strength.

But if you disbelieve my statement, study the physical condition and the soul of each class. Aren't the vigorous bodies those who live moderately? (Please don't tell me of the rare case that some may be weak from some other circumstance, but get your bearings from what is constantly going on.) I ask, are they not vigorous, and their senses clear, easily working as they should? While the bodies of others are flaccid and softer than wax, and have a many terrible things happen to them? For they soon have:

- Gout—
- Untimely palsy—
- Premature old age—
- Headache—
- Farting—
- Weak digestion—



- Loss of appetite—
- Constant need for medical attention—
- Perpetual dosing—
- Daily worries—

Are these things pleasurable? Tell me! Who of those that know what pleasure really is would say so? For pleasure is produced when desire leads the way, and fulfillment follows: **now if there is fulfillment, but desire is nowhere to be found, the conditions of pleasure fail and vanish.** This is why invalids, although the most charming food is set before them, eat it with a feeling of disgust and a sense of oppression: because there is no desire which gives a keen relish to the enjoyment of even the most charming food.

For it is not the nature of the food, or of the drink, but the appetite of the eaters, which is capable of producing the desire, and capable of causing pleasure. That is also why a certain wise man who had an accurate knowledge of all that related to pleasure, and understood how to moralize about these things, said, “The foul soul mocks at honeycombs.” This shows that the conditions of pleasure are not in the nature of the meal, but in the disposition of the people eating it. That is also why the prophet, in recounting the wonders in Egypt and in the desert, mention this in connection with the others, “God satisfied them with honey out of the rock.” Yet it doesn’t appear anywhere that honey actually sprang forth for them out of the

rock. So what does the expression mean?

Because the people who were exhausted by enormous amounts of work and long travel, and who were extremely thirsty, rushed to the cool spring, their craving to drink something served as an incentive. The writer who wanted to describe the pleasure they received from those fountains called the water “honey,” not meaning that the water was converted into honey, but that the pleasure received from the water rivaled the sweetness of honey, because those who drank it rushed to it in their eagerness to have something to quench their thirst.

Since these things are this way and no one, however stupid, can deny it: Is it not perfectly obvious that pure, undiluted, and lively pleasure is to be found at the tables of the poor? While at the tables of the rich there is discomfort, and disgust and defilement? As that wise man has said, “Even sweet things seem to be repulsive.”

But riches, some will say, procure honor for those who possess them, and enable them to take vengeance on their enemies with ease. And is this a reason, please, why riches seem to you desirable and worth chasing after: that they nourish the most dangerous passion in our nature, leading anger into action, swelling the empty bubbles of ambition, and stimulating and urging people to be arrogant? Why, these are just the very reasons we ought to resolutely turn our backs on riches, because they introduce certain fierce and dangerous wild beasts into our heart, depriving us of the real honor we might receive from all. Worse, they introduce deluded men something else which is

the opposite of this, only painted over with a whore's colors, and persuading them to fancy it is the same, when by nature it is not so, but only seems like it to the eye. For as the beauty of whores, made up as it is of dyes and pigments, has no real beauty, but makes a foul and ugly face appear fair and beautiful to those who are deluded by it, when it is not so in reality. In the same way riches force flattery to look like honor.

For I beg you not to consider the praises which are openly bestowed through fear and fasting: for those are only makeup and paints; but let us unfold the conscience of each of those who flatter you in this fashion. Inside it you will see too many accusers to count speaking against you, and loathing and despising you worse than your bitterest adversaries and foes. And even if a change of circumstances should occur which would remove and expose this mask which fear has manufactured, just like the sun when it shines a hotter ray than usual discloses the *real* faces of those women I mentioned, then all will change. You will see clearly that all through the former time you were held in the greatest contempt by those who fawned on you, and you fancied you were enjoying honor from those who thoroughly hated you, and in their heart poured infinite abuse on you, and longed to see all sorts of terrible things happen to you. For there is nothing like goodness to produce honor: honor neither forced nor feigned, nor hidden under a mask of deceit, but real and genuine, and able to stand the test of hard times.

But do you want to take vengeance on

those who bother you? This is, as I was saying just now, the very reason why we should specifically avoid wealth. For it prepares you to thrust the sword against yourself, and renders you answerable Ed to heavier charges at the Crack of Doom, and makes your punishment intolerable.

For revenge is so great an evil that it actually revokes the mercy of God, and cancels the forgiveness of countless sins which have already been bestowed. Christ told a story of a man who owed billions and billions of dollars, and his master forgave them, and then took another man and said "Pay back what you owe!" over a debt of a few thousands of dollars. For he who received forgiveness of the debt of billions of dollars, and after having received so great a benefit by merely for asking it, then made a demand of several thousand dollars from his fellow servant owed to himself. In his harshness to his fellow servant he etched his own condemnation in stone. For this reason and no other he was delivered over to the torturers, and tormented with a torture rack, and required to pay back the billions of dollars. The unmerciful servant was not allowed any excuse or defense to his benefit, but suffered the most extreme penalty, being commanded to repay the whole debt which the loving kindness of God had formerly let go.

Is this then the reason, pray, why you so earnestly pursue money, because it so easily you into this kind of son? No, truly, that is why you should abhor it as an enemy and an adversary teeming with countless murders. But poverty, some will say, disposes people to be uncontent and often also to utter profane

words, and give themselves to despicable actions. It is not poverty which does this, but littleness of soul: for Lazarus was poor—*very poor*—and besides poverty he suffered from illness, a more bitter trial than any form of poverty, and one which makes poverty a harsher blow. And in addition to illness he had a total lack of protectors, and difficulty in finding anyone to supply his needs, which increased the bitterness of his poverty and illness. For both of these are painful in themselves, but when there is no one to minister to the sufferer's needs:

- The suffering becomes greater—
- The flame more painful—
- The distress more bitter—
- The tempest fiercer—
- The billows stronger—
- The furnace hotter—

And if you examine the case thoroughly there was yet a fourth trial besides there—the unconcern and luxury of the rich man who lived nearby. And if you would find a fifth thing, serving as fuel to the flame, you will see quite clearly that he was afflicted by it.

For not only was that man rich man living luxuriously, but two and three times, or really several times a day he saw the poor man. For he had been laid at the rich man's gate, being a grievous spectacle of pitiable distress,

and the mere sight of him was enough to soften even a heart of stone. Yet even this did not draw that unmerciful man to help this case of poverty: but he had:

- His luxurious table spread—
- Goblets wreathed with flowers—
- Pure wine plentifully poured forth—
- Grand armies of cooks, and groupies, and flatterers from early dawn—
- And troops of singers, cupbearers, and jesters—

And he spent all his time in devising every species of dissipation, and drunkenness, and overeating, and in reveling in fine clothing and feasting and many other things.

But although he saw that poor man every day distressed by grievous hunger and the worst illness, and the pain of his many thoughts, and by being destitute, and the ills which result from these things, he never even gave him a thought. Yet the groupies and the flatterers were pampered even beyond their needs. But the poor man, and he so very poor, and surrounded by so many miseries, was not even fed with the crumbs which fell from that table, although he wanted them very much. And yet none of these things injuharmedred him, he did not vent a single bitter word, nor did he utter a profane speech. But like a piece of gold which shines all the more brilliantly when it is purified by overpowering heat, even

so Lazarus, although afflicted with all these sufferings, was superior to all of them, and to the agitation which they often produce.

For if generally speaking poor people, when they see rich people, are consumed with envy and racked by malicious ill-will, and deem life not worth living. This is true even when poorer people are well supplied with necessary food, and have persons to serve their needs; what would the condition of this poor man have been had he not been very wise and noble-hearted, as:

- He was not only poorer than any other poor men—
- Not only poor but also ill—
- Without anyone to protect or cheer him—
- Lay in the midst of the city as if it were a desolate, faroff desert—
- Wasted away with bitter hunger—
- Saw all good things being poured upon the rich man as out of a fountain—
- Did not have the benefit of any human consolation, but—
- Lay exposed as a perpetual meal for the tongues of verminous street dogs, for he was so weakened and broken down in body that he could not drive them away—

**Don't you see that he who does not harm himself suffers no evil?** For I will again take up the same argument.

For what harm was done to this hero by his bodily illness? Or the absence of protectors? Or by the coming of verminous dogs? Or the evil nearness of the rich man? Or by the great luxury, haughtiness and arrogance of the latter?

Did it sap him for the contest on behalf of goodness? Did it ruin his strong character? Nowhere was he harmed at all, but that multitude of sufferings, and the cruelty of the rich man, rather increased his strength. More than this, it became the pledge for him of infinite crowns of victory, a means of adding to his rewards, an increase of his repayment, and a promise of more good things in the world to come. For he was crowned not merely on account of his poverty, or his hunger or of his sores, or the verminous dogs licking them. But because, having such a neighbor as the rich man, and being seen by him every day, and was forever overlooked, Lazarus endured this trial bravely and with much inner strength, a trial which added no small flame but in fact a very strong one to the fire of poverty, and illness and lowliness.

And, tell me, what was the case of the blessed Paul? For there is nothing to stop me from mentioning him again. Didn't he experience innumerable storms of trial? And in what respect was he damaged by them? Wasn't he crowned with all the more victory as a result:

- Because he suffered hunger—



- Because he was consumed with cold and lack of clothing—
- Because he was often tortured—
- Because people threw stones at him—
- Because he was cast into the sea—

But then some say he was Paul, and called by Christ. Yet Judas was also one of the twelve, and he too was called of Christ, but neither his being one of the twelve nor his call profited him, because he did not have a mind disposed to goodness. But Paul although struggling with hunger, and at a loss to get necessary food, and daily undergoing such great sufferings, pursued with great zeal the road which leads to Heaven. While Judas, although:

- He had been called before him—
- Enjoyed the same advantages as he did—
- Was initiated into the highest form of Christian life—
- Partook of the holy table and that most awesome of sacred feasts—
- Received such grace as to be able to raise the dead, and cleanse the lepers, and cast out devils—
- Often heard discussion concerning poverty—

- Spent so long a time in the company of Christ Himself—
- Was entrusted with money for the poor, so that his passion might be soothed by it (for he was a thief)—

Even then Judas did not become any better, although he had been favored with such great kindness. For since Christ knew he was greedy, and destined to eternally perish on account of his love of money, Christ not only did not demand punishment of him for this at that time. But with a view to softening Judas's passion he was entrusted with the money for the poor, that having some means of appeasing his greed he might be saved from falling into that appalling gulf of sin. The thought was to check a greater evil beforehand by a lesser one.

Thus in no case will any one be able to harm someone who does not harm himself: but if a person is not willing to be reasonable, and aid himself from his own resources, no one will ever be able to bring him profit. Therefore also that wonderful history of the Holy Scriptures has portrayed the lives of men of old time, extending the narrative from Adam to the coming of Christ, as if in some great, large, and broad picture. And it shows to you both those who are defeated, and who are crowned with victory in the contest, so that it may instruct you by means of examples that *no one will be able to harm one who does not suffer any self-inflicted wound, even if all the world were to kindle a fierce war against him.* For it is not:

- Stressful circumstances—

- Variations of seasons—
- Attacks from men in power—
- Schemes attacking you like snow-storms—
- Nor a whole bunch of terrible calamities—
- Nor an unbounded collection of all the ills to which mankind is subject—

—which can disturb even slightly the person who is brave, and temperate, and watchful. By contrast, the lazy and low person who are themselves their own betrayer cannot be made better, even with the aid of innumerable helps.

This at least was made manifest to us by the parable in the Sermon on the Mount of the two people, one of whom built a house on the rock, the other on sand. Not that we are to think of sand and rock, or of a building of stone, and a roof, or of rivers, and rain, and wild winds, beating against the buildings, *but we are to extract goodness and evil as the meaning of these things, and to perceive from them that no one harms a person who does not suffer self-inflicted wounds.*

Therefore neither the rain although driven furiously along, nor the streams vehemently dashing against the house, nor the wild winds beating against it with a mighty rush, shook the one house in any degree: but the house remained undisturbed and unmoved. By this understand that no trial can agitate the

person who does not betray himself. But the house of the other person was easily swept away, not on account of the force of the trials (for in that case the other would have experienced the same fate), but because of his own foolishness. For it did not fall because the wind blew on it, but because it was built upon the sand, in other words on laziness and sin. For before the storm beat against it, it was weak and ready to fall. For buildings of that kind, even if no one puts any pressure on them, fall to pieces by themselves, and the foundation sinks and gives way in every direction. And just as cobwebs fall apart, although no real weight is placed on them, but hardened steel remains even when it is struck: likewise, those who do not harm themselves become stronger, even if they receive innumerable blows. But they who betray themselves, even if there is no one to disturb them, fall by themselves, and collapse and perish. For that is how even Judas perished, not only not having been attacked by any trial of this kind, but actually having enjoyed the benefit of quite a lot of help.

Would you like me to illustrate this argument in the case of whole nations? What great forethought was bestowed on the Jewish nation! Was not the whole visible Creation arranged with a view to their service? Was not a new and groundbreaking method of life introduced among them? For they did not have to send things down to a market, and so they had the benefit of things which are sold for money without paying any price for them. Neither did they:

- Cut furroughs nor drag a plow—

- Nor harrow the ground—
- Nor cast in seed—
- Nor did they have any need of rain, and wind, and annual seasons, nor sunshine, nor phases of the moon, nor climate, nor anything of that kind—
- They prepared no threshing floor—
- They threshed no grain—
- They used no winnowing fan for separating the grain from the chaff,
- They turned no millstone—
- They built no oven—
- They brought neither wood nor fire into the house—
- They handled no spade—
- They sharpened no sickle—
- They required no other art, I mean of weaving or building or supplying shoes—

...but the Word of God was everything to them. And they had a table prepared off hand, free from all toil and labor. For this was the nature of the manna: it was new and fresh, nowhere costing them any trouble, nor straining them by labor.

And their clothes, and shoes, and even

their physical frame forgot their natural weakness. The clothes and shoes did not wear out in the course of so many years, nor did their feet swell although they made such long marches.

Of doctors, and medicine, and all other concern about that kind of art, there was no mention at all among them. So completely banished was weakness of every kind: for it is said "He brought them out with silver and gold; and there was not one feeble person among their tribes." But like men who had left this world, and were conveyed to another and better one, even so they ate and drank, neither did the sun's ray hurt their heads when it grew hot; for the cloud parted them from the fiery beam, hovering all around them, and serving like a portable shelter for the whole population. Neither at night did they need a torch to disperse the darkness, but they had the pillar of fire, a source of unspeakable light, supplying two needs, one by its shining, the other by directing the course of their journey. For it was not only a bright light, but also guided that countless host along the wilderness with more certainty than any human guide. And they journeyed not only upon land but also upon sea as if it had been dry land. They made an audacious experiment upon the laws of nature by treading on that angry sea, marching through it as if it had been the hard and resisting surface of a rock. Indeed when they placed their feet upon it the element became like solid earth, and gently sloping plains and fields. But when it received their enemies it behaved like a sea, and to the Israelites indeed it served as a chariot, but to their enemies it

became a deathtrap. It brought the Israelites across with ease, but drowned their pursuers with great violence. The chaotic flood of water displayed the good order and obedience which marks reasonable and highly intelligent people, fulfilling the part at one time of a guardian, at another an executioner, and exhibiting these opposites together on one day. What shall one say of the rocks which poured forth streams of waters? What of the clouds of birds which covered the whole face of the earth by the number of their carcasses? What of the wonders in Egypt? What of the marvels in the wilderness? What of the triumphs and bloodless victories? For they subdued those who opposed them like people keeping a holiday rather than making war. And they vanquished their own masters without the use of weapons. They overcame those who fought with them after they had left Egypt, with singing and music. *What they did was a festival rather than a military campaign, a religious ceremony rather than a battle.*

For all these wonders took place not only for the purpose of supplying their needs, but also so that the people might preserve more accurately the teaching which Moses taught about the knowledge of God. Voices proclaiming the presence of their master were uttered on all sides of them. For the sea loudly declared this, by becoming a road for them to march upon, and then turning into sea again. The waters of the Nile uttered this voice when they were converted into the nature of blood. The frogs, and the great army of locusts, and the caterpillar and blight declared the same thing to all the people. The miracles in the

desert, the manna, the pillar of fire, the cloud, the quails, and all the other incidents served them as a book, and writing which could never be erased, echoing daily in their memory and resounding in their mind. Nonetheless:

- After such great and remarkable Providence—
- After all those unspeakable benefits—
- After such mighty miracles—
- After care indescribable—
- After continual teaching—
- After instruction by means of speech—
- After admonition by means of deeds—
- After glorious victories—
- After extraordinary triumphs—
- After abundant supply of food—
- After the plentiful production of water—
- After the ineffable glory with which they were clothed in the eyes of the human race—

Being ungrateful and senseless, they worshiped a calf, and paid reverence to the head of a bull, even when the memorials of God's benefits in Egypt were fresh in their minds, and they were still in actual enjoyment



of many more.

But the Ninevites, although a barbarian and foreign people who had never participated in any of these benefits, small or great, saw neither words, nor wonders, nor works when they saw a man who had been saved from shipwreck, who had never associated with them before, but appeared then for the first time. He entered their city and said “Three more days and Nineveh will be overthrown,” and the Ninevites were so converted and reformed by the mere sound of these words, and putting away their former wickedness, advanced in the direction of goodness by the path of repentance, that they caused the sentence of God to be revoked, and stopped the threatened disturbance of their city, and averted the Heaven-sent wrath, and were delivered from every kind of evil. “For,” we read, “God saw that every man turned from his evil way, and was converted to the Lord.” I ask how they were turned. Although their wickedness was great, their sins unspeakable, their moral sores difficult to heal, which the prophet plainly showed to say “their wickedness rose even unto the Heavens:” indicating by that distance just how wicked they were... nevertheless such great sin which was piled up to such a height as to reach even to the Heavens... they abolished, removed out of sight, and put away all of this in a brief moment of time through a few words what they heard from one man’s mouth and he an unknown shipwrecked foreigner. And they had the happiness of hearing the declaration “God saw that every one turned from his evil way, and He repented of the evil which God said He

would do to them.” Do you see how he who is moderate and watchful not only suffers no harm from the hands of people, but even turns back wrath sent from Heaven? But despite this the person who betrays himself and harms himself by what he does, even if countless benefits were received, does not receive much of an advantage. So, at least, the Jews did not benefit from those great miracles, nor were the Ninevites harmed by having no share in them. However, seeing that they were inwardly well-disposed, having laid hold of a slender chance they became better, barbarians and foreigners as they may have been, ignorant of all divine revelation and dwelling some distance from Palestine.

Again, was the goodness of the “three children” corrupted by the troubles they faced? While they were still young, mere youths of really a child’s age, did they not undergo the terrible affliction of captivity? Did they not have to make a long journey from home, and when they arrived in the foreign land were they not cut off from the Jewish homeland, from home and Temple, and altar and sacrifices, and offerings and drinking offerings, and even singing Psalms? For not only were they cut off from their home, but as a consequence they were furthermore cut off from much of the worship they knew. Had they not been given into the hands of men, wolves rather than humans? And, most painful disaster of all, when they had been banished to so distant and barbarous a country, and suffering captivity, weren’t they without Jewish teachers, without prophets, without a ruler? “For,” it is written, “there is no ruler, nor prophet, nor governor,

nor place fore offering before Thee and finding mercy.” Worse than this, they were thrown into the pagans’ royal palace, as upon some cliff and mountaintop, and a sea full of rocks and reefs, being compelled to sail over that angry sea without a captain or signal or crew or sails. They were cooped up in the royal court as in a hostile prison. For so far as they knew spiritual wisdom, and were superior to worldly things, they counted their journey there as their trouble getting worse. For if they had been outside the court, and living in a private house they would have had more independence. However, having cast into that prison (for they deemed the external splendor of the palace no better than a prison, no safer than a place of slippery rocks) they were immediately subjected to something cruel, and worse than embarrassment. For the king commanded them to receive food from his own table, a decadent, idol-stained, *defiled* table, something which was absolutely forbidden to Jews, and seemed more terrible than death. They were lonely men hemmed in like lambs among so many wolves. And they were forced to choose between being consumed by famine, or rather led off to execution, and tasting defiled and unclean foods that were forbidden to Jews. What then did these youths do, forlorn as they were, captives, strangers, and slaves of those who commanded these things? They did not consider that this dilemma or the absolute power of the ruler to justify their giving in; but they tried every plan and method to enable them to avoid sin, although they were abandoned on every side. For they could not influence people by money. How should they,

being captives? Nor by friendship and social influence: how should they, being strangers? Nor could they get the better of them than any exercise of power: how was it possible to slaves like them? Nor could they win by force of numbers: how could they, being only three strong? Therefore they approached the eunuch who possessed the necessary authority, and persuaded him by their arguments. For when they saw him fearful and trembling, and in agony and alarmed for his own safety, and the fear of death that agitated his soul was intolerable: “for I fear,” said he, “my lord the king, lest he should see your faces sadder than the other children like you and so you shall endanger my head before the king” having released him from this fear the three children persuaded him to grant them the favor. And given that they brought to the work all the strength which they had, God also henceforth contributed His strength to it. For it was not God’s doing alone that they achieved those things for the sake of which they were to receive a reward, but the beginning and starting point was from their own initiative. Having manifested that to be noble and brave, they won for themselves the help of God, and so accomplished their aim.

*Do you not then see that if a person does not injure himself, no one else will be able to harm him?* Consider the following: They were,

- Scarcely older than children—
- Captivity and destitution—

- Exile into a foreign land—
- Great fear of death attacking the eunuch's mind—
- Poverty—
- Being so few in numbers—
- Living surrounded by barbarians—
- Having enemies for masters—
- Surrender into the hands of the king himself—
- Separated from all their relatives—
- Removal from priests and prophets—
- Removal from all others who cared for them—
- Being completely cut off from drink offerings and sacrifices—
- Loss of the Temple and Psalmody—

And yet none of things harmed them: but they had more public fame than when they had all these things in their native land.

And after they had accomplished this first and had placed the glorious crown of victory on their heads, and had kept the Jewish Law even in a foreign land, and trampled underfoot the tyrant's command, and overcame the fear of the avenger, and yet receiving no harm from anywhere, as if they had been

quietly living at home and enjoying the benefit of all benefits of Jewish society which I mentioned... after they had so fearlessly accomplished their work, they were again summoned to other contests.

And again they were the same men; and they were subjected to a more severe trial than the earlier one, and a furnace was lit, and they were confronted by the barbarian army in company of the king. The whole Persian force was set in motion and everything was devised which would tend to deceive or confront them: different kinds of music, and various forms of punishment, and threats, and what they saw was alarming on every side, and the words they heard were more alarming than what they saw... nevertheless, as they did not betray themselves, but made the most of their own strength, they never sustained any kind of damage. They even won for themselves more glorious crowns of victory than before. For Nebuchednesor tied them up and threw them into the furnace, but he failed to burn them, but instead helped them, and made them more illustrious. And although they were:

- Deprived of Temple (for I will repeat my former remarks)—
- Deprived of altar—
- Deprived of homeland—
- Deprived of priests and prophets—
- Although they were in a foreign and barbarous country—

- In the very midst of the furnace—
- Surrounded by all that mighty warhost—
- With the king himself who had done all this looking at them—

They set up a glorious trophy. They won a notable victory. And they had sung that admirable and extraordinary hymn which from that day to today has been sung throughout the world and will continue to be sung for future generations:

“Blessed art Thou, O Lord, God of our fathers,

and to be praised and highly exalted for ever;

And blessed is Thy glorious, holy Name

and to be highly praised and highly exalted for ever;

Blessed art Thou in the Temple of Thy holy glory

and to be extolled and highly glorified for ever.

Blessed art Thou, Who sittest upon cherubim and lookest upon the deeps,

and to be praised and highly exalted for ever.

Blessed art Thou upon the Throne of Thy Kingdom

and to be extolled and highly  
exalted for ever.

Blessed art Thou in the  
firmament of Heaven  
and to be sung and glorified for  
ever.

“Bless the Lord, all works of the  
Lord,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, you Heavens,  
Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, you angels of the  
Lord,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all waters above  
the heaven,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all powers,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, sun and moon,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, stars of Heaven,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.



Bless the Lord, all rain and dew,  
Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all winds,  
Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, fire and heat,  
Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, winter cold and  
summer heat,  
Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, dews and snows,  
Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, nights and days,  
Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, light and  
darkness,  
Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, ice and cold,  
Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, frosts and snows,  
Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, lightnings and  
clouds,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Let the earth bless the Lord;

Let it sing praise to Him and  
highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, mountains and  
hills,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all things that  
grow on the earth,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, you springs,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, seas and rivers,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, you whales and all  
creatures that move in the waters,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all birds of the air,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all beasts and  
cattle,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, you sons of men,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, O Israel,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, you priests of the  
Lord,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, you servants of  
the Lord,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, spirits and souls  
of the righteous,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, you who are holy  
and humble in heart,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, Hananiah,  
Azariah, and Mishael,

Sing praise to Him and highly  
exalt Him for ever.

For He has rescued us from  
Hades and saved us from the

hand of death,

And delivered us from the midst  
of the burning fiery furnace;

From the midst of the fire He has  
delivered us.

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is  
good,

For His mercy endures for ever.

Bless Him, all who worship the  
Lord, the God of gods,

Sing praise to Him and give  
thanks to Him,

For His mercy endures for ever.”

**So when a person does not harm himself, he cannot possibly be hurt by another.** I will not cease constantly harping on this saying. For if captivity, and slavery, and loneliness and loss of country and all kindred and death, and a great warhost and a savage tyrant could not do any damage to the innate goodness of the three children, *even though they were captives, slaves, and aliens in a foreign land.* To the contrary, the enemy’s assault became to them instead the occasion of greater winning. What shall be able to harm the reasonable and moderate person? There is nothing, even if the whole world would be up in arms against him. “But,” someone may say, “in their case God stood beside them, and plucked them out of the flame.” Certainly He did: and if you will play your part to the best of your power, the help which God provides will definitely follow you.

Nevertheless the reason why I admire those youths and I call them blessed, and admirable, is not because they trampled on the flame and vanquished the power of the fire. It is because they were tied up with ropes and thrown into the furnace, and delivered to the fire for the sake of living the Truth. For this is what constituted the completeness of their triumph, and the wreath of victory was placed on their heads as soon as they were thrown into the furnace, and not a moment later. It was before the events occurred which were woven to them, when they spoke with much boldness and candid freedom of speech to the king when they were brought into his presence. "We have no need to answer thee concerning this thing. For our God in Heaven Whom we serve is able to rescue us out of the burning fiery furnace: and He will deliver us out of thy hands, O king. But even if He cannot, let it be known to you O King, that we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

After they spoke these words I proclaimed them conquerors. After these words, having grasped the prize of victory, they went on to claim the glorious crown of martyrdom, by following up the confession they made in words with the confession they made through their deeds. But when they had been thrown into the furnace, the fire had respect for their bodies. The fire took off the ropes they were tied up in, and allowed them to go down into it without fear, and forgot its natural force, so that the furnace of fire became a fountain of cool water. This marvel was the effect of God's grace and the divine wonder-

working power. Yet the heroes themselves even before these things took place, as soon as they set foot in the flames, had erected their trophy. They had won their victory. They had put on their crowns. They had been proclaimed conquerors both in Heaven and on earth. So far as they were concerned, there was nothing more to ask for their splendor.

What then would you have to say to these things? Have you been driven into exile, and expelled from your country? So were they. Have you suffered captivity, and become the slave of barbarian masters? Well! You will find that this also happened to these men. But you have no one present there to put order to your life nor advise and instruct you? Well! These men lacked such attention too. Or have you been tied up, burned, and killed? For you cannot tell me of anything more painful than these things. But look at this! These men who went through them all, were made more glorious by each one of them, yes, *much more glorious*. More than this, they increased the store of their treasures in Heaven.

And the Jews indeed who had:

- Both Temple and altar—
- Ark and cherubim—Mercy-seat—
- Veil and an infinite multitude of priests—
- Daily services—
- Morning and evening sacrifices—

- Continually heard the voices of the prophets, both living and dead, sounding in their ears—
- Carried about with them the memory of the wonders which were done in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and all the rest—
- Turning the story of these things over in their hands—
- Had them inscribed on their doorposts and enjoyed the benefit of much supernatural power and every other kind of help—

—were yet in no way profited, but rather harmed:

- Having set up idols in the Temple itself—
- And having sacrificed their sons and daughters under trees—
- In almost every part of the country in Palestine having offered these forbidden and condemned sacrifices—
- perpetrated countless other deeds that were still more monstrous—

But these three men, although in the midst of a barbarous and hostile land, living in a tyrant's house deprived of all that care I have been talking about, led away to execution, and

subjected to burning, not only suffered no harm there from anyone small or great, but became all the more famous.

Knowing then these things, and collecting other instances like this from the inspired divine Scriptures (for it is possible to find many such examples with various other persons) we declare that neither a difficulty arising from seasons or events, nor compulsion and force, nor the arbitrary authority of rulers provide enough of an excuse for us when we sin. I will now close my discourse by repeating what I said at the beginning, that *if anyone be harmed and damaged he certainly suffers this as entirely self-inflicted damage, not at the hands of others even if there may be innumerable many people harming and attacking him*. If you does not suffer this at your own hands, *not even all the creations which inhabit the whole earth and sea if they combined to attack you would be able to hurt you* if you are vigilant and sober in the Lord.

Let us then, I plead to you, be sober and vigilant at all times. Let us endure all painful things bravely so that we may obtain those everlasting and pure blessings in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power, now and ever throughout all ages.

Amen!

## **How does this relate to Fr. Seraphim's militant following?**

How does this relate to Fr. Seraphim's militant following, such as I wrote about in *The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and His Axe-Wielding Western*



*Converts?* I pity them, and pray, “Holy Father Seraphim, pray for your followers, that they may not suffer harm on my account,” and I consider them to be benefactors.

(Perhaps unwilling and unwitting benefactors, but benefactors nonetheless.)

In *Profoundly Gifted Survival Guide*, I wrote:

I wrote in another blog post that I believed I had experienced what I would call “fame lite.” Leonard Nimoy, in *I Am Spock* talks about how Hollywood has teachers for all kinds of skills they would need to portray that skill in movies: musical instruments, riding a horse, and so on and so forth. However, there was something that no teachers were to be found in Hollywood: dealing with fame. Nimoy learned, for instance, how to enter a restaurant through the kitchen because there would be a public commotion if Spock walked in through the front door. And on that count, I do not obviously suffer the consequences of real fame. I’ve been asked for my autograph, *once*. I’ve had someone call out publicly, before I entered Orthodoxy, “*That’s Jonathan Hayward!*”, *once*. I have repeatedly had pleasant meetings with people who know me through my website. And since then, the only new tarnish to my claim of undeserved “fame lite” is in recent years when a job opportunity was really a cloak for attempted seduction. If that was because of my website or reputation; I am not sure it was.

Fr. Seraphim’s militant followers have kept an eagle eye to ensure that positive reviews for any of my works don’t stay up on Amazon too long, if they have any excuse to have it taken down. Consequently, if you look at my author page on Amazon, you will see what looks to me like the

customer review title of an author who's written a lot of mediocrities. Editorial reviews help sales, but Amazon customers are used to buying things that have ★★★★★☆ to ★★★★★★ and usually hundreds, if not thousands, of customer reviews.

**My magnum opus is *The Luddite's Guide to Technology***, and at the time of this writing, has ★★★★★☆ and four customer ratings. There is no hint in this, to the Amazon customer, that the title merits study.

So why do I say that Seraphinians are my benefactors? C.S. Lewis wrote wonderful books and definitely did not just have "fame lite"; he had "full-blooded fame" and spent much of his later life in essentially pastoral correspondence with his readers. It would be quite wrong on my part to think myself entitled to write what may be good books but be too good to spend lots of time answering heartfelt correspondence from my readers. But I seem shielded from a benefit I would be immature to seek.

Furthermore, I am well-known with a good reputation, at least among conservative converts to Orthodoxy. I was informed a couple of years ago that in Facebook conversation, my name, listed as "Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward," had condensed to "CSH," in other words, "C.S. Hayward." That would also be bad enough for me to seek, but I have it. And I have just a pleasant degree of experience of meeting people and finding that they already know and like me, through my website.

People who are enough in the know, know that a pedestal can be a heavy cross to bear. Fr. Seraphim himself tried to avoid being put on a pedestal, but it happened to him anyway. At present I am on a pedestal but one that could be much larger and worse than it actually is, and part of my smaller and less burdensome pedestal is due to the hate of Fr. Seraphim's followers.

Furthermore, it is well-known in Orthodoxy that if you have a spiritual director and are obedient, part of what is done for you is that your spiritual director and not you

will answer for your sins. What is less well-known is that if someone really maltreats you, they will answer for your sins like a spiritual director was. And this is something I wish were not so, and reason to pity Fr. Seraphim's followers, however hostile. When I die I want my sins to fall on Christ, and maybe my spiritual director. But they may fall on people who are already poor spiritually.

Being woke, as it is commonly understood, means being sensitized to notice subtle terms of political terms of disenfranchisement. In this and other cases I do not wish to explore, the term "subtle" simply does not apply. But I do not need to perhaps look cues for other even more subtle ways haters try to sabotage and oppress me. There is still plenty that is un-subtle!

## ...and true awakening

People today are big on being woke, of *waking up and smelling the shit*. And so it is in Orthodoxy too. But the real waking up smelling the shit is not the shit of political disenfranchisement, but **the shit of our own sin**. *Pure and simple*.

Furthermore, the Orthodox understanding of repentance is to wake up from your slumber, and arise from your sleep. Repentance is unconditional surrender, but it is also waking up from sleep *par excellence*.

I have spent much of my life unhappy, and been slow to wake up. For all my privilege, I was an escapist. I wanted to leave the world, wanted to have something from another world, such desires as power Within the Steel Orb. I found the here and now to almost always be desolate.

At one point a priest mentioned me that monks in the desert were always warned of the temptation to escape the world. And I repented, let go of having something sexy or enticing or otherwise an exception to this desolate world, and when I wrote a blank check to God and most bleakly accepted that my place was in this desolate world, my eyes

were opened and I saw, as for the very first time, that the here and now I was in were not desolate, but beautiful. And that marked a beginning of being glad to be alive. And in the wake of this, I wrote “Paradise:”

## Paradise

O Lord,  
Have I not seen,  
How thou hast placed me in Paradise?

And how have I said,  
That a first monastic command,  
Is, “Go home and spend another year with your family?”  
While I have spent a few?  
The obedience is not limited,  
By a count of years,  
But by obedience,  
This being a first *obedience*.

Gifts I have fought as chance left me,  
Bloodied, but more deeply bowed:

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?  
It hurteth thee to kick against the goads.

I stand, or sit,  
Not scholar, nor user experience professional,  
Making use of a life of leisure,  
Learning leisure well, to lord it over leisure,  
Once I made a vow before a wonder-working  
icon in Brooklyn,  
That I might receive a doctorate,  
Earned or honorary,  
And since then have prayed that my vow not be

granted,  
An honorary doctorate not to receive,  
Because I do not want it enough to even travel,  
To give the icon a kiss of veneration!

An Invitation to the Game is an icon,  
Of children in a proletariat of excessive leisure,  
Excessive leisure being a training ground,  
Before a new life in a new world begins.

God the Spiritual Father looks after,  
Each person he has made,  
As a spiritual father looks after each disciple,  
God looketh after each,  
In the situations he placed each:

## **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.

What have I to add,  
To words such as these?  
This time is a time of purification and training,  
And as in times past,  
In an instant, I may be taken to a monastery,  
As I was taken to study theology,  
Six months' work to obtain student loans,  
Falling into place one business day before  
leaving.  
Thou teachest me,  
And I know thou art willing to save:  
Whether or not my plans are the best.  
Whether I ever reach monasticism,  
Thou art potent to save.  
I might need to seek monasticism:  
God can save me with or without.

So I learn patience,  
Fly through FluentU and learn Russian,  
And here I sit,  
In a place thou hast opened my eyes to see as  
Paradise,  
And with lovely food pantries,  
And visits to pets at a lovely cat shelter,  
And thou ever ministerest to me.

Though thousands around me be addicted to  
television,  
And ten thousands can't stop checking their  
cell phones,  
Thou hast delivered me,  
And taught me to lord it over technologies,  
Perchance a prophet in the way,

To the technology user who still suffers,  
To those who remain entangled in the Web.  
Thou hast delivered me from mortal danger:  
Perhaps thou givest me more time to repent.  
Or perhaps thou givest merely,  
More time to repent.  
Glory to God for all things!

Thou givest me simple pleasures,  
Who knew tidying up a besmudged keyboard  
could be fun?  
Whither I go, thou art with me;  
Thou preparest a table before family and  
friends.

“World” refers not to God’s creation,  
But to our collections of passions,  
Seeing through a glass, darkly,  
What bathes in the light of Heaven:  
Hell is a state of mind,  
But Heaven is reality itself.

I am perhaps not worthy of praise,  
To say such things in middle-class comfort.  
I seek monasticism, to be a novice,  
Which is meant to be exile,  
Yet an abbot’s work,  
Is to help me reach freedom from my passions,  
And what true joy I have in luxury,  
Only know further in monastic exile.  
Years I have waited:  
Now I am willing to wait years more.  
Only if I may pursue repentance,  
On such terms as it is offered me.  
Glory to God who has allowed me such luxury!  
Glory to God who has allowed me such honors!  
Glory to God who has shown me that these

avail nothing,  
 And seek the true fame,  
 Fame before God himself!

Be thou glorified, O God, in me,  
 Though I know nothing,  
 Though I am nothing,  
 Be none the less glorified in me.  
 The Infinite can do the Infinite in the finite:  
 Be thou therefore glorified and praised in me,  
 Though I am nothing before thee,  
 Yet thou grantest me breath and life,  
 Joy,  
 And ever offerest me salvation.

Glory be to God on high!  
 Glory be to God for Paradise!  
 Which Paradise is in all things!  
 Glory to God for all things!

Amen.

In *The Paradise War*, one of the characters says, “You aren’t happy unless you’re miserable!” And strange as it may sound, I am never so happy as when I discover a repentance.

The Philokalia says that people hold on to sin because they [wrongly] think it adorns them. And the pattern for repentance is often the same. There is some struggle, something I think I desperately need that conscience or authorities tell me I need to let go of, and when I let it go and let go of all it represents for me, bleakly certain that some shining part of me will be lost and gone forever, I repent, then realize I was holding on to a piece of Hell, and am blindsided by a reward I would not have thought to seek. Repentance is bliss, as is well powers a passage in C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*:



[The passage is long enough to be dubious to include within fair use. You can check it out with a free archive.org account and read it at

<https://archive.org/details/complectcslewis000olewi/page/522/mode/2up> ]

The Orthodox Church understands repentance to be a fundamental spiritual awakening, far more profound than getting bit by a political bug.

Repentance is not just True Awakening. It is also Heaven's best-kept secret.

## **Curiouser and curiouser**

Furthermore, as far as awakening goes, it is the dogmatic theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church that it was always Plan A for our race to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was initially forbidden, but the ban was only temporary, until Adam and Life could grow strong enough to eat such foods. The reason Adam and Eve fell after eating the fruit was not that they ate something that they were not meant to eat; it is because they went behind God's back and were like an infant trying to eat solid food when it needs breast milk.

Among the seasons of the Orthodox Church, Lent is the central season, a season of the repentance that brings Heaven here now, and builds up into the season of the Resurrection, a season of Heaven on earth, and then after a season where the Risen Christ helped his disciples on to more solid food, ascension where Christ rose to Heaven and brought the Church with him. Then comes Pentecost, which is my chief interest here, and not only because it marks the beginning of the Orthodox Church's road through time and history.

When Christ was teaching the disciples, he was always bringing them to higher things. With years of face-to-face discipling, they didn't get it. When Christ rose, they

didn't get it. When he spent forty days trying to introduce more solid food, they didn't get it. When the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, *they got it*.

Pentecost marks the season of awakening par excellence. It was at Pentecost that the disciples maturely ate and received of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and went from cowering behind locked doors to going fearlessly to proclaim good news throughout the known world. One of them was threatened by authorities with crucifixion; he answered, "If I feared the Cross, I would not be preaching it." Another who had denied his master three times before he "got it," when he was sentenced to death by crucifixion, said that he was not worthy to die like his Lord, and asked instead to be subjected to upside-down crucifixion—the one form of torture and execution worse than his Lord's. Almost all of them died martyrs; they had something fundamentally beyond anything the world knew. Such things as Basil's response to threats come to mind:

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

Saint Basil said, "If you take away my possessions, you will not enrich yourself, nor will you make me a pauper. You have no need of my old worn-out clothing, nor of my few books, of which the entirety of my wealth is comprised. Exile means nothing to me, since I am bound to no particular place. This place in which I now dwell is not mine, and any place

you send me shall be mine. Better to say: every place is God's. Where would I be neither a stranger and sojourner? Who can torture me? I am so weak, that the very first blow would render me insensible. Death would be a kindness to me, for it will bring me all the sooner to God, for Whom I live and labor, and to Whom I hasten."

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

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

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

And we, too, are to maturely eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

## **"Want to try some Snow Crash?"**

Neal Stevenson in *Snow Crash* introduces a concept of Snow Crash that is not a narcotic, but is often laced with narcotics. Well into the book we learn that Snow Crash, the mysterious phenomenon, is a bigger, better, and geekier version of the Japanese animation technique that was banned when it caused mass epileptic seizures in its

audience.

A political bug that is laced with a feeling of having made a spiritual breakthrough, that perhaps you are awake and the whole world is asleep, is false treasure. Such memes deprived of the breakthrough sensation, not laced with a narcotic, would not go very far. Laced with a sense of delightful spiritual awakening, political bugs bite people and get them to go places wisdom would not go.

It has been observed that gifted people are often very liberal, but *profoundly gifted people are often very, very conservative, or at very least populist*. Part of the taste that is exhilarating to most of the gifted population has a taste more like flat beer to the profoundly gifted.

If you would like to know if you're having a real spiritual breakthrough, one question I would ask is, "What sin are you repenting of, recoiling from it in horror and tremendously glad to be clean?" If there is no clear answer to this question, the yellow metallic shine is fool's gold.

## Conclusion

Do you desire to be woke? *Awaken!*

You desire a good thing...

...but there is a lot of fool's gold to be had...

...and the real gold takes some digging.

Some have cynically said, "Truth is a commodity that, however scarce, has always had a supply far in excess of the demand." I don't know whether that is true, but I have outlined what "True Woke" really means.

It is well worth pursuing.

Would you seek it?

## **Discussion questions for “True ‘Woke’ is Repentance”**

1. Is being “woke” the only game in town today?
2. What in this piece has helped you wake up some?
3. What do you have to be grateful for?
4. What do you have to repent of?
5. What do you have to be grateful for that you can repent of?

## Conclusion

One friend and fellow writer, years before I joined the Orthodox Church, commented that my works seemed to run out of steam. That remark was pretty much spot on, and since then I have been more careful to write works that stay within my energy level; the reason *The Consolation of Theology* ends where it does was that I wrapped it up sensing that my energy was starting to decrease and would decrease further if I continued.

As regards today's attention span, all of the works in *Hidden Price Tags*, but especially the longer ones, are a challenge to the reader's attention. One friend and coworker said that "one of your emails is worth ten by someone else," and even my shorter works tax many readers' attention.

In that sense, my audience is a decided minority even given that I am writing proper books as such. At least my *living* audience, I should say, because I am attempting works that are built to last and are meant, God willing and if the Lord tarries, to be timeless and speak to others in similar situations.

Even among books on technologies, I unhesitatingly draw on books immediately about television (Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the **Elimination** of Television*, and more recently Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug*) as astonishingly relevant to technologies not available when the titles were

written. And books on Orthodox asceticism have a longer shelf life.

This series is in fact intended to benefit future readers. It encapsulates my signal contribution to the conversation so far, it is offered in paper with the hope that paper copies outlast me, and it is licensed CCo so that, once I am no longer in the picture, it should be legally easy to reconstitute my most important collection.

Here's to you, my reader, whether you buy this book the year it was written, or born after my death! *Cheers!*