

**The Seraphinians:
"Blessed Seraphim Rose"
and His Axe-Wielding
Western Converts**



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The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and His Axe- Wielding Western Converts: Was He Half-Converted? Are They?

From the "Major Works" series

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Introduction: My Experience

One Orthodox whom I had until then regarded as an unquestioned friend came to me with great and what was meant to be infectious enthusiasm about his helping me out by labeling me with the current fad diagnosis and embarking on a treatment program via email, with diagnosis and treatment provided on a free of charge basis, and also unsolicited, and unlicensed, and involuntary. (And if you're wondering, "*Whhaaaaa?!?*", that really *is* as odd as it sounds.)

I wasn't interested in the offering.

He tried dozens of times more to catch me up with his infectious enthusiasm. I didn't warm to it.

Sometime along the way, I made my social signals in explicit words. He didn't get it; he continued to try and excite me about his treatment program.

Eventually he seemed to allow himself to recognize that I had given my answer and that answer would remain, "No", but...

He found, in his eyes, a brilliant solution to the problem: he would ahead and forge boldly with the treatment plan, and for some unspecified reason, I was now no longer **allowed** to say "No," *and that was that*. He proceeded with the treatment as planned. I caught him in the act of administering unwanted treatment, and again firmly said, "No."

He said I was "sending mixed messages," and continued moving forward with his project. (He seemed very proud of himself for this way to circumvent my boundaries.) He answered almost half a dozen further requests to stop by saying that, *nope, nope, nope*, I was "*still* sending mixed messages." So I brainstormed several other ways of saying, "No," in the hope of finding one he'd respect. He answered with the following authoritative conclusion: "*You can say what you want to say, but I will do what I want to do.*"

I sent him a "CEASE AND DESIST" letter, Cc'ed to abuse@gmail.com.

He **instantly** got a clue.

[Hmm, depending somewhat on state, "harassment" can be judged a misdemeanor or a felony, potentially good for a few years in jail. I don't know how many counts my email record would document. "Practicing medicine without a license" can be up to eight years. I don't know how many counts a jury might find; it was dozens of times that I said "No," but I do not have a lawyer's informed opinion here. Maybe he realized it would be wiser to stop pushing. Maybe he also realized that his jury might not terribly sympathetic to a defense of, "If you say 'No' too many times, it just becomes *more and more* of a mixed message." I am not a lawyer and I don't know exactly what I would say, but some people would think that saying "No!" "Stop!" again and again when someone who does not respect their wishes is sending *less and less* of a mixed message.]

And on that point I would like to talk about polite company and... *not-so-polite* company.

When one is in polite company, it is rare to make a point-blank demand; one asks, and even when an expectation is being communicated, it is presented as a gentle question. And in polite company, saying "Please" will get you far, and is by far the preferred approach.

However, in certain less polite company, point-blank demands from a position of power are the rule. In impolite company, the magic words are not "Please," or "Would you," or "Please, pretty please, with sugar on

top:" all of those are considered *polite*, meaning *optional*, meaning they will be *trampled over* quite readily. **In sufficiently impolite company, the magic words are "CEASE AND DESIST" or something similar, with a Cc: to an authority.**

To the question of, "A C&D letter is basically involving the police. Aren't Christians supposed to avoid lawsuits against fellow Christians?" I would answer as follows: One "No" should *always* be enough, but in practice it may or may not always be so; sometimes it takes two or three "No"s with escalating clarity and starkness to get it to stick. It shouldn't be needed at all, but it sometimes works. So far my experience has been that if you get to saying "No" four, five, six times and you are simply not being respected, saying "No" a dozen times more (or two dozen times, for that matter) is only going to get you that much more frustration. However, the words "CEASE AND DESIST," carbon copied to an authority have so far never failed me in bringing **instant** clarity, so nothing further was needed to stop the harassment. But if the person harassing you does persist in failing to exercise discretion, you may be able to have someone exercise discretion for them. **People who are unwilling to respect "Stop... Stop... Stop... Stop..." no matter how many times you say it, will often respect "CEASE AND DESIST" instantly.** (And Facebook offers the gentler options of blocking, unfriending, and perhaps reporting, and I would definitely rather deal with things quietly pretty much universally in the context of Facebook. Block / unfriend / report is in many ways like Hell; Hell is where you block / unfriend / report Christ; but with all that said Facebook's controls for harassment make a better picture than not using those controls.

If you can just unfriend, great. If not, "CEASE AND DESIST" may be the new "I appreciate your thoughtfulness, but it just wouldn't fit into my schedule!"

Now let us return to the free, amateur, unsolicited medical treatment programme where my saying "No" dozens and dozens of times was not being respected.

The whole unsolicited medical treatment incident was a piece of cake compared to dealing with Fr. Seraphim's followers. I'm

tempted to call Fr. Seraphim (Rose) of Plantina, "the Half-Converted", and I'm tempted to call most of Fr. Seraphim's followers "half-converted" as well. The term is provocative, perhaps, but not strange, and it conveys the face presented to outsiders reasonably well. Both architect and followers both bring in Western approaches that Orthodox really do not have business pursuing, and they bring in a Protestant rigid and legalistic culture where other Protestant converts start to outgrow and breathe more easily as they sink in to being Orthodox.

I find this a fitting lead-in (perhaps no one else will) to the peculiar phenomenon of Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted and his followers, who might well be called "the Seraphinians", which I am choosing in preference to "the Seraphimites" which sounds like Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted's early sins. Some, or perhaps I should say two, admirers of Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted that I know are at least polite, and someone you'd want for a next-door neighbor. But for every other Seraphinian I have ever run in to, I meet the same list of things that are strange to me. Though I have never heard this stated in words, there seems an attitude that anybody on the inside of the Seraphinian circle (or at least the particular one I'm dealing with) always stands in a position of authority over any non-member. I'm not claiming clairvoyant insight, but lay Seraphinians are faster than any tonsured or ordained Orthodox to initiate the process of spiritual direction without stopping long enough to see if I give my consent. (And once the decision is made to help me out and seem to be big on humility. Or at least, they are big on *my* need for humility and administer unsolicited spiritual direction, the amateur staretz has great difficulties recognizing when I have said, "No, *thank you.*," and very willing to call me out on pride.) However, it seems that every single time of the many times Seraphinians have accused me of pride and sought to straighten me out, it has been from the posture of a superior putting an inferior in his place. I'm not entirely clear on whether individual Seraphinians *have* any particular concept of teaching humility by example. I'm still waiting for a Seraphinian whose approach to teach me humility hinges on them becoming contagiously humble people themselves.

There was one long discussion on Facebook with dozens of messages, and I found that nothing worked with them. (At that point I

did not know about block / unfriend / report.) And usually I can find something that works. After things had taken a nasty turn, my repeated requests to stop criticizing me were met with extended personal attacks.

I did some things that were very unwise. Seraphinians tried to command my respect for Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted and impress on me his level of giftedness; I responded by trying to make a point of, *"You're trying to cow me with Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted's admittedly significant level of giftedness. I am much more gifted than Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted was, and here are several details that prove it,"* intended in the spirit of my brother saying to my little nephew, *"Don't go limp on me, kid. I have three cats."* That was unwise of me: as Proverbs says, "Let thy neighbour, and not thine own mouth, praise thee; a stranger, and not thine own lips." However, *nothing that I said or did, however unwise, justified the harassment that followed.* By the time narrated below, I had been receiving a stream of criticism and cruelty, including criticism in direct response to my simple and repeated requests to stop criticism. And it went on for pages and pages in dozens of added criticism.

The criticisms taken together were beyond occasional self-contradiction to be entirely incoherent on logical grounds; it was almost as if the people criticizing me weren't really trying to advance any position much at all, but instead wanted what would cut the deepest.

This kind of logical incoherence is a problem in itself insofar as it is pushed to others to read; but more than that, it is a red flag of something profoundly wrong spiritually I have, in the past, found that frequently switching position without even the pretension of making a coherent argument, is a **significant threshold** in whether someone is arguing an actual point, perhaps angrily and even making the point vindictively, or whether that person is being sheerly sadistic and is barely even pretending to be moved by anything other than **hate**. Anger is one thing; forcefully driving home a point is one thing; being sheerly sadistic without any real attempt to make a consistent point is another thing **entirely**.

The followers of Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted seemed to feel

entitled to give harassment, and quite extended harassment at that. They seemed to feel entitled to continue harassment without any obvious end in sight for the length of time they were entitled to dish out pain. Furthermore in their eyes, asking for harassment to stop was something I seemed not at all entitled to do, and it was *always* answered with further harassment. It ended only when I quit the group.

Especially towards the end of the conversation, there is a response to my request for no further criticism: "*Time to man-up, buddy.*" [Note: when I call someone "Buddy", it is not a hostile or negative term, but I only ever use it in addressing little boys. I don't think his usage is different.] "Time to man-up, buddy," apparently meant that in his mind I had started it all, and as with the earlier episode with the unsolicited medical treatment, I wasn't *allowed* to say "No" or "Stop," and the real corrective action he intended [meaning, as far as I could tell, a whole new level of harassment with already-done harassment just being for practice] was apparently only just beginning.

After my repeated general requests for criticism to stop, I directly told one person, "*please do not send me any further criticisms, in case my last post was not clear. If you only have criticisms to send me, please do not contact me at all, ever again.*"

But the *special needs advocate* had a plenty of criticism to dish out, no matter how many times I has asked for him to stop:

Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward - with all due respect, you came on to an open board, posted something, insulted people, all but accused Fr. Seraphim of being a heretic and some of his fans of being cultists, and, **to top it all off, many of your own criticisms are out and out WRONG, and you have the audacity to start crying now? Really?**

This started out as criticisms of your criticisms. YOU were the one who made this personal by constantly trying to show off how smart you are (notice I don't disbelieve your claims - they are just meaningless in an Orthodox epistemology). **I am confused and confounded by your reactions and behaviors, sir. They are**

beyond odd (but that's possibly the special education attorney in me speaking . . . possibly . . .)

How can you have a blog and then get so offended by people criticizing what you've written? THAT'S THE WHOLE POINT OF A BLOG! If you just wanted applause, that was the wrong thing to get into.

That's quite a hive-mind they have going on there. ("I have never seen its equal," as Wesley said in *The Princess Bride*.) There is a "fallacy of the excluded middle" at play; my correspondent seemed to believe that if I complain about inappropriate behavior, that must mean I felt entitled to adulation. I didn't ask for adulation or applause; I asked to be treated as a human being. *Like the special needs population he claimed to serve.*

(Come to think of it, I can't recall a Seraphinian as conceiving of another Seraphinian as being at fault. Ask a Seraphinian, and I am 100% at fault, and 100% of the time.)

This is the first and only time in my life I've been told the "WHOLE POINT OF A BLOG" is to solicit criticism. Now some people may assume, reasonably enough, that a goal of conversation includes some place for critique (proper and genuine critique, that critiques the performance without personal attack on the person behind it) but this is no reason to justify extended personal attack, and even then, it is neither front and center nor **"THE WHOLE POINT."** **THE WHOLE POINT** is to communicate and contribute to a conversation, and his assessment of **THE WHOLE POINT** was very much a "wag the dog" balance of priorities. (Criticism and personal attacks, *really?*)

Furthermore, you will form whatever opinion you want of me on the one hand and Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted on the other, but *only* Seraphinians find me to be consistently and frequently wrong about Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted. Some disagree; no non-Seraphinian has told me my criticisms of Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted and his followers are **"out and out WRONG."** Usually I get quite unhappy agreement.

What is not said in a discussion can be more significant than what those in the discussion think needs saying. I do not remember the faintest hint of a Western Seraphinian saying, "Well, Blessed Seraphim Rose's multi-talented giftedness was one of the main reasons we presented to Christos for why he should adore Blessed Seraphim Rose like we do, but it appears that a still higher level of giftedness. Maybe we should like to hear someone like that." The primary response and motivation seemed to amount to, "*Now we have someone we can legitimately punish! We can inflict pain! Woo-hoo!*" (The discussion had several notes slapping me down when I repeatedly asked harassment to stop.) One person on the thread, in response to my request that he stop criticizing me at all, answered, "YOU were the one who made this personal by constantly trying to show off how smart you are (notice I don't disbelieve your claims - they are just meaningless in an Orthodox epistemology)." If he is a lawyer as he claims to be, beyond the question of why this is his request to stop all further criticisms, how come he only pulls out the "*meaningless in an Orthodox epistemology*" hammer in reference to my claimed talents, and leaves them locked away when Western Seraphinians celebrate Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted for his admittedly quite significant level of giftedness. Like relativism wielded by the postmodern west, weapons like these are reserved for attacking outsiders: insiders are exempt. This is the basic point of the first footnote in C.S. Lewis's [The Abolition of Man](#), regarding an anonymized "Green Book" by "Gaius and Titius" which begins by stating that statements that appear to be statements about the external world but are merely statements about our emotions which do not meaningfully correspond to anything external:

NOTES

1. The real (perhaps unconscious) philosophy of Gaius and Titius becomes clear if we contrast the two following lists of disapprovals and approvals.
 - A. Disapprovals: A mother's appeal to a child to be 'brave' is 'nonsense' (Green Book, p. 62). The reference of the word 'gentleman' is 'extremely vague' (ibid.) 'To call a man a coward tells us really nothing about what he does' (p. 64). Feelings about a country or empire are feelings 'about nothing in particular' (p. 77).
 - B. Approvals: Those who prefer the arts of peace to the arts of war (it is not said in what circumstances) are such that 'we may want to call them wise men' (p. 65). The pupil is expected 'to believe in a democratic community life' (p. 67). 'Contact with the ideas of other people is, as we know, healthy' (p. 86). The reason for bathrooms ('that people are healthier and pleasanter to meet when they are clean') is 'too obvious to need mentioning' (p. 142).

It will be seen that comfort and security, as known to a suburban street in peace-time, are the ultimate values: those things which can alone produce or spiritualize comfort and security are mocked. Man lives by bread alone, and the ultimate source of bread is the baker's van: peace matters more than honour and can be preserved by jeering at colonels and reading newspapers.

The point that Orthodox saints are venerated for holiness and not giftedness (our language of 'gifted' is related to Scriptural discussion of 'gifts' as in [1 Corinthians 12](#) or 'talent' as in the middle parable of [Matthew 25:14-30](#), where in original context the term 'talent' literally meant about 75 pounds, usually of a precious metal like silver, and in both contexts have a much broader sense than what is today understood

in terms of IQ) was one that I brought in; I do not remember a single point where a Seraphinian said, "Fr. Seraphim may have had a high IQ, but we venerate based on holiness." Instead I was repeatedly invited to venerate him for reasons easily found in the giftedness literature. But whoa was I wrong when I said, "In that case you should venerate me." (The goal, not terribly hidden, was in fact not to secure a sect of Orthodox venerating me before I have passed through this life, but to stop the incessant streams of beckoning me to venerate Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted because he was so gifted.)

Western Seraphinians, and they alone among Orthodox, seem to feel entitled to specifically punish other laity with no further blessing. This fully includes meeting repeated requests to stop harassment with further verbal abuse. It also includes repeatedly shifting ground and repeatedly self-contradicting to deliver words that sting. And though this is not unique, they are some of precious few Orthodox who consider it their place to veto a "Stop" or "No" if the Seraphinian considers abuse or harassment to be a justified disciplinary measure. (And it is usually lay Seraphinians who are the ones who decide "I'm going to punish you for reasons I believe justify the punishment I prescribe, and you have no right to get out of the punishment.")

Western Seraphinians, and they alone among Orthodox, feel free to administer completely unsolicited lay spiritual direction, with certitude as to my spiritual condition, much beyond any confidence my own spiritual father would *dare* lay claim to, and when I tried to turn things to a friendlier direction by giving a link to my most popular work, was freely accused of, "placing yourself above the saints!"

Western Seraphinians, and they alone among Orthodox, have directly called into question whether I should be calling myself an Orthodox Christian at all if I did not believe in a young earth. (I do not believe the standard evolutionary picture either, but that's beside the point.) Western Seraphinians, and they alone among Orthodox, elevate their origins view to non-negotiable dogma, and are willing to question whether non-young-earthers should be called Orthodox Christians at all. I have never encountered the same micromanagement from Protestants; I might have run into a Protestant missionary who insisted on *Sola*

Scriptura, but I faced no consequences when I listened politely and retained Orthodox beliefs unchanged. The only time when I have ever had some bluntly question whether I should be calling myself Orthodox at all, or had someone bluntly defend the person who made the assault, was by Western Seraphinians on origins questions alone. And... um... if the worst thing about my spiritual state is the flaws in my beliefs about origins, you wouldn't really be wrong to call me a great Saint, seeing as I have less wrong with me than most canonized saints did. (You can forget I said that.)

Western Seraphinians, and they alone among Orthodox, have shown (as best I can tell) an attitude that *any* insider is in a position of authority over *any* outsider and can rightly exercise that authority in giving orders, administering unsolicited spiritual direction, harassing, and punishing anyone who stands up to them. The consistent rhetorical posture that I have seen adopted, among laity as much as any clergy, is of a superior bringing a wayward subordinate in line. (And the first order of business is often teaching a lesson in humility.)

Western Seraphinians, and they alone among Orthodox, have advised me to venerate Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted for his secular IQ as a major feature of his greatness to Orthodox. Now I believe there are some extraordinarily bright minds among the saints, but one does not encounter Akathist hymns specifying how great an IQ St. John Chrysostom had.

Western Seraphinian laity, and they alone among Orthodox, have occasionally made it a priority to teach me humility, possibly a significant lesson in humility. When they have done so, it has very much been from the social posture of a superior putting a presumptuous subordinate back in his place. (Precious few of them, as far as I can tell, have shown the faintest desire to teach me humility by *example*.)

And some of the things Western Seraphinians *don't* do, or at least haven't done in my experience, are equally significant. Much of the harassment I've received from Western Seraphinians has been in a context where other Western Seraphinians saw what was going on. I've never seen, not even once, one Western Seraphinian tell someone who

was being nasty, "Aren't you being a bit cruel." I've never seen, not even once, one Western Seraphinian tell another, "Wait a minute. Is that the respect you have for one made in the image of God?" Restraining cruelty on the part of fellow Western Seraphinians does not seem to me to be the sort of thing Western Seraphinians think to do. And part of my concern about the campaign of harassment is not just that it occurred, but it occurred very publicly within the forum, and no one came to my aid. **Ever.**

My experience of Western Seraphinians has been unique among Orthodoxy. It seems that there is one set of cultural rules that apply when one is dealing with Orthodox who are not especially attached to him, and another, unrelated set of cultural rules when one deals with Western Seraphinians.

And there is consistency to the point of forming a hive mind across different encounters with Seraphinians. There are three independent episodes covered in this book: **the one mentioned above**, and those covered in [Unsolicited Spiritual Direction from One of Fr. Seraphim's Most Devoted Followers](#) below, with [Athonite Hieromonks Can Be Card-Carrying Seraphinians, Too](#) As far as message goes, I might as well have been speaking with the same person or group all three times (It was in fact three independent groups.) All of them assume an astonishing authority over me; all felt the desire to rebuke my pride and teach me a lesson in humility, without any evident desire to grow further in humility themselves; most of them have shown much greater concern for my practical spiritual condition in terms of compliance to their standards of adopting Protestant Creation "Science," believing in tollhouses, and constructing an Orthodox worldview, whether I believe any article of the Creed.

Note: I know that Fr. Seraphim has a significant and possibly much less toxic following in native Orthodox lands, compared to his followers in the West. I don't have much account or explanation, but I believe this letter would be incomplete without acknowledging that Fr. Seraphim is highly respected in many native Orthodox lands, and nothing I've seen from followers native to those lands has the strange spiritual tenor of his followers in the U.S. Furthermore, as far as I know, all of the

followers who have harassed me over all the years are Western followers. *As far as explanations for this, I might suggest that the convert Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted has faults in his teaching and writing that lend themselves to being amplified and excited among formerly Protestant converts, but the same faults may fall on deaf ears in lands where the trunk of the nation's culture is or was Orthodox.* I am not sure this is the correct explanation, but Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted **HARMS** Western convert devotees in a fashion that, for whatever reason, seems not to really be an issue in nations built on Holy Orthodoxy, even if it has been defaced by communism.

I will not speak particularly much about aerial tollhouses. The reason is that while the topic was apparently important to Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted, I do not consider myself to have a particularly informed opinion on the matter. There are people I deeply respect who apparently believed in tollhouses and furthermore believe the Fathers consistently taught the existence of aerial tollhouses after death. I also deeply respect others who say that the tollhouses are a Gnostic false teaching popularized in the most Gnostic century in Christian history, and that Scripture and Tradition teach that Christ himself will judge all of us and no demon can stop us before we reach Christ's dread judgment throne ([Matthew 25:31-46](#); [the Creed](#)). I am willing to disclose uninformed opinion, namely that they should be seen as closer to being one image or metaphor among others, but informed opinion is better than uninformed opinion and unequivocal Truth is better than informed opinion. This piece may have, address, and provoke opinion substantially, but even in this I keep trying to pull things to the Truth Who is not merely informed opinion.

Is [Christ the Eternal Tao](#)?

Now for another topic connected to Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted, and one point of contact with him for me. As regards Taoism, I read the [Tao Te Ching](#) at a young age, and it changed my life. It was probably one of two books outside the Bible that most influenced me as an undergraduate. I've studied a lot of philosophy since then, but none has ever made so close an impression as the [Tao Te Ching](#) and no other philosophy has entered my DNA to the same degree, including the neo-Platonism that was simultaneously the air the Church Fathers breathed and a major opponent they wrestled against. I made my own imitation, of very uneven quality, in [The Way of the Way](#). I do not ask you to read it, but it's there. And as someone deeply influenced by the [Tao Te Ching](#), I am at a loss for why Western Seraphinians, who tend to make "exotic" a major if tacit and unspoken criterion for which texts get attention, make so much deal of Taoism and so little detail of Confucianism. The position is put forth (this is a scholar's opinion and not to my knowledge a consensus) that one should not speak of "a Confucian *alternative* to Taoism," but "a Confucian *kind of* Taoism." An arguable personal reference in the [Tao Te Ching](#) can be translated, "Confucius is taught by Tao." And Confucius, in the Analects, consistently and repeatedly speaks of the Tao, and he means the same thing as when Lao Tzu, author of the [Tao Te Ching](#), speaks of the Tao. *My suspicion is that Taoism is pretty exotic to the Western reader, while Confucianism has had enough time to sink into the culture that there's a whole category of off-color jokes beginning, "Confucius say..." because that thinker has ceased to be exotic to Western readers.* I quote both authors periodically, but in general the

difference between Taoism and Confucianism is the difference between pure, strict, and original Platonism, and neo-Platonism as tempered by some degree of Aristotelian influence, is that Plato regarded art as something like a grainy photocopy of another photocopy, while neo-Platonism was much more open about art addressing the senses. Or to put it more sharply, Taoism is a Protestant nave in the iconoclast tradition, but without cross, icon, censer, or candle: you are expected to pray without such distractions. As I wrote in [The Way of the Way](#), fully in accordance with Protestantism and close to the heart of Taoism:

XIII Shadows

When people are unwilling to draw near to God and neighbor, they become religious.

When people shun worship, they create ceremonies.

When people are afraid to pray, they babble endless words.

When people abandon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they try to create order by rules and regulations.

When people refuse to let themselves be drawn into holiness, they ordain priests.

When people flee from confronting the evil that lies within, they become self righteous and holier-than-thou.

When people do not accept the glory of the reality and substance that is found in Christ, they flee to familiar comforts and embrace mere shadows.

If you can understand why that is Taoist, you can understand why Orthodox shouldn't stop at Taoism. Now there are some other things where there is much more contact: the Taoist ruler fills people's bellies and empties their minds, and whether or not the ruler could have invented hesychasm, they are close kin. And at a deeper level the Fathers of the Orthodox Tradition have spoken of imageless prayer in a sense that is much closer to Taoism than Confucianism. One might say that the means in Orthodoxy is Confucian and the goal is Taoist.

Confucianism is an Orthodox nave with cross, icon, censer, candle, and much more to help you along the way. Taoism gives what you should want but precious little in the way of how to reach the goal. Confucianism shares a goal with Taoism, but it offers practical help along the way for people who find Taoist obscurities over their head. And as someone deeply influenced by Taoism, I am at a loss for why a group of authors would embrace Lee Tzu's version of Taoism and not pay at least a little

would embrace Lao Tzu's version of Taoism and not pay at least a little polite attention to Confucius's version of Taoism.

(One brief, dreary note to scholars: it is contested whether they ever met, or even whether Lao Tzu existed at all or was just a quasi-mythological figure that never had real human existence as the gods and men of Greek myths ever had human existence. Those of you familiar with Bible scholarship may find this pattern familiar, draining, and wearysome. I'm going to assume, at least for the purposes of this work, that Lao Tzu lived, was human in the normal sense of the term, and was a contemporary to Confucius.)

When Lao Tzu and Confucius met, each reacted with immediate respect and recognition for each other. After the meeting, an awestruck Confucius said, "*I understand what a bird is. A bird can fly. I understand what a fish is. A fish can swim. I understand what a beast is. A beast can run. But I don't know what a dragon is. I can't make out Lao Tzu. He is like a dragon riding the winds and clouds in the sky. I don't know how to reach him.*" Lao Tzu silently looked into a babbling brook. He did not need words to express his respect for Confucius.

And this is not something unique to Chinese classics. Analogous remarks could be made by someone who understands Hindu literature.

I'll tell a joke I wrote in a "our parish wants to send you off nicely" book for a married couple leaving to teach English in China. "Confucius say" jokes were welcomed. I wrote:

A master was explaining the nature of Tao to a novice. "The Tao is in all literature, no matter how small or insignificant."

The novice asked, "Is the Tao in the children's *I Can Read* book?"

"It is," came the reply.

"Is the Tao even in the advertising copy for USA Today?"

"The Tao is even in the advertising copy for USA Today."

THE TAO IS EVEN IN THE ADVERTISING COPY FOR USA TODAY.

The novice then asked, "Is the Tao in the *Left Behind* series by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye?"

The master coughed, and shifted his position slightly. "The lesson is over for today."

And then I found out that the parishioner I checked the authors' names with had been an editor involved in the series' production. *Oof!*

The actual close to this section? Words from Maximus Confessor who speaks in the second century of *Chapters on Charity*:

37. In the active person the Word grows fat by the practice of virtue and becomes flesh. In the contemplative it grows lean by spiritual understanding and becomes as it was in the beginning, God the Word.
38. The one who is involved in the moral teaching of the Word through rather earthly examples and words out of consideration for his hearers is making the Word flesh. On the other hand, the one who expounds mystical theology using the sublimest contemplative experiences is making the Word spirit.
39. The one who speaks of God in positive affirmations is making the Word flesh. Making use only of what can be seen and felt he knows God as their cause. But the one who speaks of God negatively through negations is making the Word spirit, as in the beginning He was God and with God. Using absolutely nothing which can be known, he knows in a better way the utterly Unknowable.

I am not saying Orthodox need study any ancient Chinese author; Plato was one of the most influential "Christians before Christ", and in [ANF / NPNF](#) one author after another rips into Plato for having virgins in the [Republic](#) strip for exercise (the word 'gymnasium' has ancient roots and comes from the Greek stem for nudity). Some have said that Taoism is the world's most sophisticated or subtle philosophy; *I'd like to know why*. But perhaps we can close by saying that there is room to learn

something from Confucius, and room to learn something from Lao Tzu, and ideally we should hold on to both if we hold on to either.

Furthermore, to those wondering if I will answer the question, "[Is Christ the Eternal Tao](#)," I would answer as follows. Mainland Chinese Christians as regards Bible translation are in the same boat as Westerners in Reformation area Europe. There is one language gap between Romance languages like French or Spanish, or even English which isn't a Romance language but has heavily borrowed Romance vocabulary, and the Latin Vulgate. The classic Chinese translation, from before "the People's victory", is in "the Heavenly script", meaning classical Chinese.

People use other people's languages as examples of something difficult to understand. In English, we say, "It's Greek to me!", which comes from the Latin, "*lingua graeca*". All of China's neighbors, with no exceptions I've heard of, say things like "It's like Chinese grammar." And who do the Chinese pick on? They say either, "It's like the language of the birds," or, "It's like the Heavenly script," meaning classical Chinese, *including the Chinese Bible*.

The Communist revolution profoundly changed and simplified the Chinese language. I am not interested in saying what is good or bad here, but I am interested in saying that it was drastic. There was a compromise made, which was that the Bible remain in the original translation, but the punctuation only will be changed. This isn't changing the use of commas and other punctuation in the King James Version; this is changing the Latin Vulgate from *per cola et commata*, an ancient system of punctuation where you format things to flow like a stanza of a poem without any punctuation marks, meaning that unless you are pretty special, you have to work awfully hard to make sense of the Chinese Bible for your "native" language.

What I am interested in is that the Chinese Bible's Heavenly script opens St. John's Gospel: *In the beginning was the Tao, and the Tao was with God, and the Tao was God*. To the obvious question, "Is bringing in the Chinese concept of the Tao really *appropriate*?" I would answer and say that I am not aware of any word in English that even comes close to "Tao" as a replacement for the Greek original. "Word" really doesn't make

the cut, and it really makes less sense to ask whether the Chinese "Tao" is appropriate in John than to ask whether the English "Word" is appropriate. And whether or not the translation is right, *Faust* makes dramatic deliberations before settling on the most forceful option conceived: "In the beginning was the Deed." In discussions of rendering the Greek, I've met some counter-argument but I am not aware of any equivalent in any language where the translation is held up as being better than the classical Chinese.

One last point before winding up this chapter. Some technologist wrote that what Zen was to the 1970's, Taoism is to the 1990's. I do not consider it escapist (though some reader's comment may change my mind), but it very clearly attracts Western escapists. Fascination with Taoism is a distinctively Western phenomenon; where a culture's soil is Taoist, most people embody Taoism at some level, possibly at a deep level. However, Taoism as the trunk of a culture is no more exotic than brushing one's teeth or turning the lights off before going to bed. Fascination with Buddhism/Taoism is characteristic of the Western left, and Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted's academic focus on Buddhism, and his establishment of a climate where a title like [Christ the Eternal Tao](#) could find *such* good soil.

I have certain works on my site preserved for archival use, but I've long since repented of writing [The Way of the Way](#) and distanced myself from that great tradition.

Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted failed to distance himself, or at least adequately distance himself, from that tradition. He was taking a cue from Taoism as living tradition in need of transmission which was entirely **in the image** of how Buddhism/Taoism is preserved, and some have faulted him for inadequate attention outside of the "Gnostic wonderland" of 19th century Russia where the Church has many centuries of saints. Overall, the role that Taoism/Buddhism played and continues to play out even today, with [Chris the Eternal Tao](#) having a live and active following even now, would appear to be another way in which Fr. Seraphim was half-converted and may or may not have edified his followers.

QUICK! What's Your Opinion About Chemistry?

QUICK! What's your opinion about chemistry?

Readers who also read the popular usability author Jakob Nielsen may have read him give a popularized version of "the query effect," which is essentially that even if people don't have an opinion on something before you ask, if you ask their opinion they will very quickly come to an opinion, share the newly formed with you, and walk away thoroughly convinced of the opinion they just shared.

I haven't actually done taken a survey of fellow parishioners; I think the clergy would not see why that was an activity that belongs at church, and I think they would probably be right. But if I were to follow through on the survey and ask people what their opinion of chemistry was, I would expect some hesitation and befuddlement, people being perhaps a bit uncertain about where the question was coming from or my motives for asking, or what frame I was expecting for their answers, but given a bit of time to answer, something like the following might be expected:

- It's hard.
- It's boring.
- It's fascinating.

- I think it's really cool that a chemist can take two beakers full of clear liquid and pour them together and have it turn colors.
- Our lives are so much better for things that need chemistry for us to be able to manufacture them.
- Chemistry is foundational to how we as a society have raped the environment.
- What difference chemistry makes depends on how you make use of it.
- Chemistry came from alchemy—I'm a bit more curious about alchemy!
- ...

Now what about an answer of "*There are not hundreds of elements, e.g. [hydrogen](#), [helium](#), [lithium](#), etc., but the original four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. Chemistry is intrinsically atheistic, and no Orthodox should believe it."*?

Most readers may be even further confused as to where I may be going this, and suspect that the source of the opinion is occult, or deranged, or on drugs, or some combination of the above. But in fact that is the position of Church Fathers, although I will only investigate one of the Three Holy Hierarchs. In St. Basil's *Hexaëmeron* (Homily [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [8](#), [9](#)), in which we read:

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

Elsewhere in these homilies, St. Basil clarifies that the four elements are earth, air, fire, and water, and claims that this is the (non-negotiable) teaching of [Genesis 1](#).

Now a chemist who communicated well would be hard pressed to summarize chemistry (*not* alchemy) better in so few words as the opponents' position as summarized by St. Basil. Even if modern chemistry is developed in a great deal more detail and scientific accuracy than St. Basil's opponents, it is an apt summary. Compare the words of Nobel Prize laureate Richard Feynman, in the [Feynman Lectures](#) which are considered exemplars of excellent communication in teaching the sciences, in words that might as well have come from a chemist trying to explain chemistry in a single sentence:

If, in some cataclysm, all of scientific knowledge were to be destroyed, and only one sentence passed on to the next generation of creatures, what statement would contain the most information in the fewest words? I believe it is the atomic hypothesis that *all things are made of atoms — little particles that move around in perpetual motion, attracting each other when they are a little distance apart, but repelling upon being squeezed into one another*. In that one sentence, you will see, there is an enormous amount of information about the world, if just a little imagination and thinking are applied.

Feynman and St. Basil's summary of his opponents are saying almost the same thing, and almost with the same economy. St. Basil's description could be used as a highly effective surrogate if Feynman's words here were lost.

If that is the case, what should we make of it? Well, let me mention one thing I hope *doesn't* happen: I *don't* want to see even one pharmacist (or as is said in England, "chemist"), weeping, make the confession of a lifetime, stop using chemistry to ease the sick and the suffering, after a sobbing confession of, *"I thought I was an Orthodox Christian, but it turns out I was really an atheist all along!"*

A sane reading of the Fathers would take a deep breath—or simply

not *need* to take a deep breath—and recognize that something other than legalism is the wisest course for dealing with occasional passages in the Fathers that condemn chemistry, just like with the passages that claim a young earth.

Just like the passages that claim a young earth?

People in the U.S. who are not connected with Hispanic culture will often wonder that Mexicans, either in Mexico or the U.S., do not really celebrate *Cinco de Mayo*, and probably make less of a hubbub of what is assumed to be the the Mexican holiday. But, as my brother pointed out, "*Cinco de Mayo* legitimately is a Mexican holiday, but it's not on par with the U.S.'s Independence Day; it's on par with [the U.S.'s] Casimir Pulaski Day."

It is helpful in dealing with passages from the Fathers to recognize what are genuinely Independence Day topics and what are only Casimir Pulaski Day topics. Independence Day topics include *repentance*, *theosis*, *Grace*, *hesychasm*, and there tend to be numerous treatises devoted to them. Casimir Pulaski Day topics like rejection of chemistry as atheistic, or insisting on a young earth, may be agreed on, but I have not read or heard in thousands of pages of patristic writing where either topic is front and center. So far I have only found brief passages, generally among other passages condemning various opinions in ways that, when they touch scientific subjects, are a bit scattershot—*much as when one is proceeding the wrong way*—as regards contributing to any useful and coherent way of evaluating modern science.

The fourth volume of the [Philokalia](#) touches on scientific subjects as much as anything I've read from the Fathers, but while they assume a quite sophisticated grasp of solid geometry, I have great difficulty reconciling them with a good old-fashioned globe, which does not really depict the earth as a solid sphere partly embedded in a much larger sphere of water.

I'm not going to condemn believing in a young earth as it is a very easy conclusion to reach and it is shared among many saints. But I will suggest that even the conceptual framework of having an origins position

is strange and not helpful, as it is spiritually really not that helpful to weigh in on whether chemistry makes you an atheist. *We're making a really big deal of a Mexican Casimir Pulaski Day, much to the confusion of those connected with Méjico!*

Mainstream origins positions

Let me briefly comment on the mainstream origins positions held by Orthodox. Some things are non-negotiable; among them being that God created the world and that the human race is created in the image of God. Atheism, naturalism or materialism is not acceptable, with or without connection to evolution. The Ancient Near East and pagan Greek philosophy hold to various opinions which are not to be accepted: among these are that a hero or god fought a dragon or demon and ripped her body in half, making half into the sky and half into the earth; that the universe was created by divine sexual activity in a fashion that need not be described to Orthodox Christians; that the world has always existed and is as uncreated as God; and that the world is an emanation from God (divine by nature in a diluted form), in classical pantheistic fashion. All of these are to be rejected, but I am not aware of a camp among today's Orthodox, nor have I encountered a single Orthodox follower, for these kinds of positions. And none of these seem to really overlap any mainstream position.

Among mainstream positions, let me enumerate the following. This excludes being completely not sure, finding the whole question messy and hesitating between two or more basic options (where I am now), and a few others. As far as I remember, this list covers all encounters where I have seen a definite position taken by Orthodox. (Some or all of these positions may admit varieties, specializations, and clarification.)

1: The saints believed in a young earth and that's how I read Genesis.

If you believe this, and don't go further or mix it with anything *non-Orthodox*, this is fine.

2: I believe in an old earth where God miraculously intervened by creating new life forms over time.

This position is now backed by intelligent design movement

texts, such as Philip Johnson's [Darwin on Trial](#). The downside, at least as explained to me by two very hostile Orthodox theistic evolutionists who shut me down before I could make my point instead of letting me make my point and then refuting it, is that the new intelligent design movement was concocted by the Protestant creationist [Discovery Institute](#) to attract people not attracted by young earth creationism's handling of science. Like the position that follows, *most* of its followers don't jackhammer people who disagree.

3: I'm not a scientist, but I believe God could have done it through evolution.

This option, theistic evolution, is perfectly permissible, but I wince as it usually means "I'm coming to grips with the science of a hundred years ago."

One hundred years ago, *evolution* was a live option in the academy. Now people still use the term, but its meaning has been gutted and any belief that life forms slowly **evolve** into different life forms has been dead so long that it has long since stopped even smelling bad. The evidence (the "evolutionary" term being "punctuated equilibrium" or "punk eek") is that the fossil record shows long periods of great stability without real change in what kind of organisms there, abruptly interrupted by geological eyeblinks and the sudden appearance and disappearance of life forms. Or as my "University Biology" teacher at the [Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy](#) said, "*Evolution is like baseball. There are long periods of boredom interrupted by brief moments of intense excitement.*"

This option registers to me as a genuinely comfortable assent to science, but without awareness that the science in question has changed profoundly in the past hundred years.

But I wish to underscore: theistic evolution is (usually) an "I won't drop the hammer on you" signal, and that is an *excellent* kind of signal.

4: I am a scientist, and I believe God probably worked through evolution.

My experience with this has not been the most pleasant; in one case behind the open hostility and efforts to shut me down from arguing (and rudely stop me before I could make my point at all instead of letting me make my point and then explain its flaws) may have lurked an uneasiness that I represented enough authority that I was intrinsically a threat to their certitude that scientific evidence pointed to "evolution" (as the term has been redefined in the sciences of today).

With that stated, I have known several Orthodox physicians, and I expect some of them after extensive evolution-laden biology classes would lean towards theistic evolution. However, I'm not sure as they generally seemed more interested in knowing, for instance, if I was having a nice day, than convincing me of their views about origins.

(I don't remember any clergy or heirarch whom I answered to *bringing up* origins questions, although they have been willing to offer their thoughts if requested; "I'm not a scientist, but I believe God could have done it through evolution" is the most frequent opinion I've seen even among conservative clergy. Priests seem to be focused on bigger questions, like "*What hast thou to confess?*")

All four opinions above are at least tolerable, but there is one additional common opinion that takes "problematic" to a whole new level:

5: God created a young earth and we know because Creation Science proves it.

I am perhaps biased by my frustrating experience with this crowd. I've had people offer to straighten out my backwards understanding of science whose understanding of science was so limited that I could not lead them to see when I was making a scientific argument, as opposed to just arbitrarily playing around

with words. I have an advanced degree from a leading institution and a lot of awards. I am not aware of any of the people who sought to do me the favor of straightening out my backwards views on science as having a community college "learner's permit" associate's degree in any of the sciences. The experience evokes as situation where you've driven racecars and you are talking with someone who can't drive a good passenger car down a mile of an empty street at a mere 20 miles per hour without hitting a garbage can or a telephone pole —*and your conversation partner can't stop talking down to you about how to drive.*

The unyielding position taken by Orthodox young earthers is that Creation "Science" is legitimate science and the fact that it is mostly done by Protestants doesn't mean you shouldn't use it. In a word, saying "Creation Science is legitimate science and Orthodox may use it in our theology and apologetics," is just as wrong as saying, "The inexact science of astrology is legitimate science and Orthodox may use it in our daily lives. Just as wrong, and for the same reason.

The assertion is made that Creation "Science" is just science (after all, how could it not, if it has "Science" in its name?). A slightly more astute reader might listen to artificial intelligence critic John Searle's rule of thumb that anything with the word "science" in its name is probably *not* a science: "military science," "food science," "Creation Science", "cognitive science." My best response to people who think Creation "Science" is science in the usual sense of the term, is to say:

Asserting that "Creation Science is real, legitimate science" is wrong, in the same way, for the same reason, as saying "Pro-choice Catholics are real, legitimate Catholics". Pro-choice "Catholics" do not understand, appreciate, respect, or accept what it means to be a Catholic; Creation "scientists" do not understand, appreciate, respect, or accept what it means to be a scientist. Not only do Scientist and Catholics not accept the obnoxious intrusion, but arguing is pointless and brings to mind Confucius's warning, "*It is useless to take counsel with those who follow a different Way.*"

Astrology. Isn't. Science.

Creation. "Science." Isn't. Science.

The club of scientists and the club of Orthodox doctrine both require a necktie!

The problem with Creation "Science" is not that it is not science. It is painfully obvious to those outside of the movement that it is a feature of the Protestant landscape, perhaps a Protestantism of yesteryear rather than Protestantism today: Wheaton College, which is quite arguably the Evangelical Vatican, has something like three young earth creationists on its whole faculty, and I have never heard the one I know even mention Creation "Science"—he only claims to accept a young earth from reading and trusting the Bible), and the origin and nature of Creation "Science" are well described by a leading Evangelical scholar of Evangelicalism, Mark Noll in [The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind](#).

And—how to make this point delicately... Orthodox Creation "Scientists" seem to be dodging the obvious possibility that Creation "Science" is a feature of heterodox, Protestant belief and practice incorporated into Orthodoxy, because they know very well that incorporating a feature of heterodox, Protestant belief and practice into Holy Orthodoxy is anathema, meaning that Fr. Seraphim was not only led astray personally by adopting Creation "Science" as a tool to combat evolution's dangers, but he also may be influential in helping lead astray a great many Orthodox in his wake as there is now a large Orthodox Creation "Science" camp associated with his wake.

(Kiddies, if you're going to take one feature of Protestantism and incorporate it into Orthodoxy, take Bible studies, [My Utmost for His Highest](#), or some other genuine treasure that tradition has produced. It would be better to do neither, of course, but those are better choices. Taking Creation "Science" from Evangelicalism is like robbing Evangelicalism in a blind alley, and all you take away is its

pocket lint.)

And if you're going to ask, "Wait. Isn't the one position you present as being without significant problems one that you don't particularly seem to believe?", my answer is, "Yes, that's *intended*. That's part of the point of outlining mainstream options for what is a Casimir Pulaski Day question."

And to people asking what I believe, I'll say that evolution doesn't satisfy me. I'm not sure I have the scientific picture right, but the idea of long periods of stability, as indicated by the fossil record, interrupted by changes in geological eyeblinks that rarely or never leave record of intermediate forms, is as I mentioned not really a picture of evolution. The best evolutionary answer, as I understand it, is that when things are on an even keel, there is no reason to change (Philip Johnson of the Intelligent Design Movement / Protestant creationist Discovery Institute asserts the same more generally), but when things are chaotic, changes receive better favor. If that's true, it might explain a lot, but it actually doesn't explain a very basic issue. It is an assertion that a breeding population can produce and maintain a large number of beneficial mutations in a short enough time *to offend all sense of statistics*. And one person holding this position asserted that this is indeed true and gave as an example a claim that people in certain parts of the world have developed HIV resistance in a single generation. And I just walked away from that conversation aghast: *that claim is significantly more unlikely on statistical grounds than saying that a single person won the lottery every day from birth to death at age 100*. (On different grounds, I remember the two hostile theistic evolutionists I mentioned above hearing out someone who didn't get a basic point about poker, but consistently shutting me down conversationally before I could make any point about intelligent design. It seemed almost as if they were afraid of what door might be opened if they let me open my mouth.) I've had multiple evolutionists trying in recent years to convince me, and so far none of them has provided an account of evolution that I can take seriously on (statistical and) scientific grounds.

I'm not sure that the Intelligent Design movement is right, either; in writing a text complaining about Orthodox embracing old-school

Protestant creationism, I'm wary to say the least about openly or secretly embracing new-school Protestant creationism. (There is one difference between the two in that the new Intelligent Design movement can make sense to someone with a scientific formation, where I remember in eighth grade checking out a Creation "Science" book because I was a young earth creationist and I wanted to believe that scientific data supported a young earth, and I rejected it because even though I wanted to believe its conclusions, I would not stoop to the bad argument Gish argued.) I've been told that Michael Behe and his irreducible complexity argument are both respected for his boldness and are claimed to be refuted to the satisfaction of the mainstream academy; however the example I was given by a theistic evolutionist as an article respecting Michael Behe was one I stopped reading in the introduction after two paragraphs of unadulterated, hostile sophistry and loaded language: I said, "Here's where I stopped reading." Last I checked, *both* sides claimed victory. And neither has my trust that they will give a straight answer.

Before I became Orthodox, it was mainly the apologetics of authors like Philip Johnson ([Darwin on Trial](#)) and Michael Behe ([Darwin's Black Box](#)) that disrupted my belief in theistic evolution. Now it is the apologetics of evolutionists that mainly leave me incredulous.

However, I'm not sure I've found a final resting place. I am presently agnostic as to whether Behe's arguments have been successfully refuted; the Intelligent Design Movement and evolutionists paint a very different picture on that account, and I have taken the time to follow Behe's arguments but not those who claim to refute him. Maybe I should, but I would rather say "I don't know" than reach a conclusion prematurely and be adamant.

More than one person who have held this last mainstream position outlined above, the Protestant belief and praxis imported into Orthodoxy, have called into question whether I should be calling myself an Orthodox Christian at all because I didn't believe in a young earth. And I really think that's a bit extreme. In twelve years of being Orthodox, I have on numerous occasions been told I was *wrong* by people who were often *right*. I have been told I was wrong many times by my spiritual father, by other priests, and by laity who usually have had a little bit more

experience, and I suspect that future growth will be fueled partly by further instances of people pointing where I am wrong. However, when I was newly illumined and my spiritual father said that what I had just said sounded very Protestant, he did not thereby call into question whether I should be calling myself an Orthodox Christian. The only context in the entirety of my dozen years of being Orthodox that anybody has responded to my words, faith, belief, practice, etc. by directly challenging whether I should be calling myself an Orthodox Christian at *all*, was half-converted Seraphinians who were exceedingly and sorely displeased to learn I did not share their certitude about a young earth. This seems to say little about my weaknesses (besides that I am the chief of sinners), and a great deal more about an unnatural idol that has blown out of all proportions. The Casimir Pulaski day represented by the theologoumenon of a young earth has completely eclipsed every Independence Day question on which I've been wrong, from my early ecumenism (ecumenism has been anathematized as a heresy), to a more-inappropriate-than-usual practice of the Protestant cottage industry of archaeologically restoring the early Church. In both cases my error was serious, and I am glad clergy out-stubborned me as I did not give in quickly. But they refrained from casting doubt on whether I should be calling myself an Orthodox Christian; they seem to have seen me as both a nascent Orthodox and wrong about several things they would expect from my background. Really, we *do* need Church discipline, but *isn't dropping that sledgehammer on people who don't believe a young earth a bit extreme?*

I believe it is coherent to talk about someone who is both Orthodox and wrong about something major or minor. I believe that Creation "Science" is a thoroughly Protestant practice (that it is not science is beside the point), and militantly sticking with Creation "Science" is one of the ways that half-converted Seraphinians continue a wrong turn. The idea that one can incorporate a framework from Protestants and use Creation "Science" as neutral is like saying that we will better understand God's Creation if we learn the inexact science of astrology.

But quite apart from that, the question of origins as I have outlined it is **itself** a heritage from Protestantism. Evangelicals once were fine with

an old earth, before Evangelicals created today's young earth creationism; the article [Why Young Earthers Aren't Completely Crazy](#) talks with some sympathy about the Evangelical "line in the sand;" Noll tells how it came to be drawn. **The fact that it can be a relatively routine social question to ask someone, "What is your opinion about origins?" signals a problem if this Protestant way of framing things is available in Orthodoxy.** It's not just that the Seraphinian answer is wrong: the question itself is wrong, or at least not Orthodox as we know it now. Maybe the question "Did God create the entire universe from nothing, or did he merely shape a world that has always existed and is equally uncreated with him?" is an Independence Day question, or something approaching one. The questions of "Young or old earth?" and "Miraculous creation of new species or theistic evolution?" are Casimir Pulaski Day questions, and it is not helpful to celebrate them on par with Independence Day.

One friend and African national talked about how in her home cultural setting, you don't ask a teacher "What is your philosophy of education?" as is routinely done in the U.S. for teacher seeking hire who may or may not have taken a single philosophy class. In her culture, that question does not fit the list of *possibles et pensables*, what is possible and what is even thinkable in that setting. *(This whole article has been made to introduce a concept not readily available in the **possibles et pensables** of our own cultural setting, that having a modern style of "origins position" at all is not particularly Orthodox; and that some positions, even or especially among conservatives, are even more problematic.* A transposition to chemistry helps highlight just how strange and un-Orthodox certain positions really are.) And let us take a look at Orthodox spiritual fathers. As advised in the [Philokalia](#) and innumerable other sources, if you are seeking a spiritual father, in or out of monasticism, you should make every investigation before entering the bond of obedience; after you have entered it, the bond is inviolable. I don't know exactly how Orthodox have tried spiritual fathers, but I have difficulty imagining asking a monastic elder, "What is your personal philosophy of spiritual direction?" *Quite possibly there is none.* Even thinking about it feels uncomfortably presumptuous, and while theological opinion does exist and have a place, defining yourself by your

opinions is not Orthodox.

If I were to ask someone in the U.S. "What are your family traditions for celebrating Casimir Pulaski Day?" the best response I could get would be, "Cas-Cashmere *WHO?*"

And now I will show you a more excellent way

I feel I may be sending a very mixed message by the amount I have written in relation to origins questions given that my more recent postings keep downplaying origins debates. Much of what I have written has been because I don't just think certain answers have flaws; the questions themselves have been ill-framed.

But that isn't really the point.

These pieces are all intended to move beyond Casimir Pulaski Day and pull out all of the stops and celebrate Independence Day, with bells on. They may be seen as an answer to the question, "Do you have anything *else* to discuss besides origins?" **If you read one work, [Doxology](#) is my most-reshared.**

1. [Doxology](#)

How shall I praise thee, O Lord?
For naught that I might say,
Nor aught that I may do,
Compareth to thy worth.
Thou art the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven and on earth is named,
The Glory for whom all glory is named,

2. [A Pilgrimage from Narnia](#)

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

3. [God the Spiritual Father](#)

I believe in one God, the Father, Almighty,

I BELIEVE IN ONE GOD, THE FATHER, ALMIGHTY...

The Nicene Creed

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

C.S. Lewis, paraphrased

4: [Akathist to St. Philaret the Merciful](#)

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

5: [A Pet Owner's Rules](#)

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

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

6: [The Orthodox Martial Art Is Living the Sermon on the Mount](#)

A look at India in relation to my own roots and formation

My live story up until now would be immeasurably impoverished if the various ways in which India had entered my life would simply be *subtracted*. I appreciate Indian food, even if I eat it in a non-Indian (Paleo) fashion. And that is not trivial, but there are deeper ways I've been enriched by that great nation. One of these relates to pacifism, where one of India's giants, one certain Gandhi, is perhaps the best-known person in history as I know it for the strength of pacifism.

7: Silence: Organic Food for the Soul

We are concerned today about our food,
and that is good:
sweet fruit and honey are truly good and better than raw sugar,
raw sugar not as bad as refined sugar,
refined sugar less wrong than corn syrup,
and corn syrup less vile than Splenda.
But whatever may be said for eating the right foods,
this is nothing compared to the diet we give our soul.

8: Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret

I would like to talk about repentance, which has rewards not just in the future but here and now. Repentance, often, or perhaps *always* for all I know, bears a hidden reward, but a reward that is invisible before it is given. Repentance lets go of something we think is essential to how we are to be—men hold on to sin because they think it adorns them, as the [Philokalia](#) well knows. There may be final rewards, rewards in the next life, and it matters a great deal that we go to confession and unburden ourselves of sins, and walk away with "no further cares for the sins which you have confessed." But there is another reward that appears in the here and now...

9: Why This Waste?

"Why this waste?" quoth the Thief,
Missing a pageant unfold before his very eyes,
One who sinned much, forgiven, for her great love,
Brake open a priceless heirloom,
An alabaster vessel of costly perfume,
Costly chrism beyond all price anointing the Christ,
Anointing the Christ unto life-giving death,
Anointed unto life-giving death,
A story ever told,
In memory of her:

10: The Transcendent God Who Approaches Us Through Our Neighbor

The temperature of Heaven can be rather accurately computed from available data. Our authority is the Bible: Isaiah 30:26 reads, *Moreover the light of the Moon shall be as the light of the Sun and the light of the Sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days.* Thus Heaven receives from the Moon as much radiation as we do from the Sun and in addition seven times seven (forty-nine) times as much as the Earth does from the Sun, or fifty times in all.

11: Open

How shall I be open to thee,
O Lord who is forever open to me?
Incessantly I seek to clench with tight fist,
Such joy as thou gavest mine open hand.

12: The angelic letters

My dearly beloved son Eukairos;

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

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

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

Happy Independence Day! Enjoy the fireworks display.

Creation and Holy Orthodoxy: Fundamentalism Is Not Enough

Against (crypto-Protestant) "Orthodox" fundamentalism

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

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

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

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

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

A telling, telling line in the sand

In reading the Fathers, one encounters claims of a young earth. However, often (if not always) the claim is one among many disputes with Greek philosophers or what have you. (The area and kind of claims that would usually be classified as science or scientific, are understood in the patristic world as philosophy or philosophical.) To my knowledge there is no patristic text in which a young earth is *the* central claim, let alone even approach being "the Article by which the Church stands or falls" (if I may borrow phrasing from Protestant fundamentalist cultural baggage).

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

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

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

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

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

chemistry's molecules and atoms inherent atheists? St. Basil does provide an alternative:

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

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

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

Leaving Western things behind

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

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

Science won't save your soul, but science (like Orthodoxy) is something you understand by years of difficult work. Someone who has done that kind of work might be able to argue effectively that evolution does not account for the fossil record, let alone how the first organism

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

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

What Makes Me Uneasy About Fr. Seraphim (Rose) and His Followers

Uncomfortable and uneasy—the root cause?

Two out of many quotes from a discussion where I got jackhammered for questioning whether Fr. Seraphim is a full-fledged saint:

"Quite contrary, the only people who oppose [Fr. Seraphim's] teachings, are those who oppose some or all of the universal teachings of the Church, held by Saints throughout the ages. Whether a modern theologian with a 'PhD,' a 'scholar', a schismatic clergymen, a deceived layperson, or Ecumenist or rationalist - these are the only types of people you will find having a problem with Blessed Seraphim and his teachings."

"If he's not a saint, who is?"

There are things that make me uneasy about many of Fr. Seraphim and his seemingly half-converted followers. I say *many* and not *all* because I have friends, and know a lovely parish, that is Orthodox today through Fr. Seraphim. One friend, who was going through seminary, talked about how annoyed he was, and appropriately enough, that Fr. Seraphim was always referred to as "that guy who taught the tollhouses."

(*Tollhouses* are the subject of a controversial teaching about demonic gateways one must pass to enter Heaven.) Some have suggested that he may not become a canonized saint because of his teachings there, but that is not the end of the world and apparently tollhouses were a fairly common feature of nineteenth century Russian piety. I personally do not believe in tollhouses, although it would not surprise me that much if I die and find myself suddenly and clearly convinced of their existence: I am mentioning my beliefs, as a member of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, and it is not my point to convince others that they must not believe in tollhouses.

It is with sympathy that I remember my friend talk about how his fellow seminarians took a jackhammer to him for his admiration of "that guy who taught the tollhouses." He has a good heart. Furthermore, his parish, which came into Holy Orthodoxy because of Fr. Seraphim, is much more than alive. When I visited there, God visited me more powerfully than any parish I have only visited, and I would be delighted to see their leadership any time. Practically nothing in that parish's indebtedness to Fr. Seraphim bothers me. Nor would I raise objections to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia's newsletter affectionately calling Fr. Seraphim "our editor." Nor am I bothered that a title of his has been floating around the nave at my present parish.

But with all that said, there is something that disturbs me about most devotees of Fr. Seraphim, or at very least most of his vocal devotees: the half-converted Seraphinians. The best way I can put it has to do with *subjectivism*, which says in essence, "I will accept what I will accept, and I will reject what I will reject, and I will project what I will project." There is something that demands that Fr. Seraphim be canonized as a saint regardless of whether he really should be, almost like "My country, right or wrong!" This isn't the only thing that smells disturbing, but it is one. And these followers who insist that Fr. Seraphim be canonized as a saint seem to quickly gloss over rough spots. Now I do not wish to exceed my authority and speak *ex cathedra* to decisively say which sins should be a bar from sainthood; it is God's job to make saints out of sinners, and any sin that Fr. Seraphim has committed, there are canonized saints who did something ten times worse. However, this is an example of something

that needs to be brought to light if we are to know if Fr. Seraphim should be considered a saint, and in every conversation I've seen, the (ever-so-vocal) half-converted Seraphinians push to sweep such things under the rug and get on with his canonization.

To pull something from putting subjectivism in a word: "I will accept what I will accept, and I will reject what I will reject, and I will project what I will project" usurps what God, O ΩN, supremely declares: "**I AM WHO I AM.**" Subjectivism overreaches and falls short in the same gesture; if you grasp it by the heart, it is the passion of pride, but if you grasp it by the head, it is called subjectivism, but either way it has the same stench. And it concerns me gravely that whenever I meet these other kinds of followers, the truly vocal among the half-converted Seraphinian camp, it smells the same, and it ain't no rose.

Protestant Fundamentalist Orthodoxy

A second concern is that, in many of Fr. Seraphim's half-converted followers, there is something Protestant to be found in the Church. Two concerns to be mentioned are Creation "Science"-style creationism, and the fundamentally Western project of worldview construction.

On the issue of Creation "Science"-style creationism, I would like to make a couple of comments. First, the Fathers usually believed that the days in Genesis 1 were literal days and not something more elastic. I believe I've read at least one exception, but St. Basil, for instance, insists both that one day was one day, and that we should believe that matter is composed of earth, air, fire, water, and ether. The choice of a young earth as one's line in the sand, and not any other point of the Fathers, is not the fruit of the Fathers at all; it is something Protestant brought into the Orthodox Church, and at every point I've seen it, Orthodox who defend a young earth also use Protestant Creation "Science," which is entirely without precedent in the Fathers. One priest said, "It was easier to get the children of Israel out of Egypt than it is to get Egypt out of the children of Israel." *We're dealing with a half-converted camp.* There have been many Orthodox who believe entirely legitimately in a young earth, but every single time I have met young earth arguments from a half-converted Seraphinian, they have drawn on recycled Protestant arguments and fundamentalist Protestant Creation "Science." And they have left me wishing that now that God has taken them out of Egypt they would let God take Protestant Egypt out of them.

I observed something quite similar to this in a discussion where I asked a Seraphinian for an example of Fr. Seraphim's good teaching. The answer I was given was a call for Orthodox to work on constructing a worldview, and this was presented to me as the work of a saint at the height of his powers. But there's a problem.

The project of worldview construction, and making standalone adjustments to the ideas in one's worldview, is of Western origin. There is no precedent for it in the Fathers, nor in medieval Western scholastic

theologians like Thomas Aquinas, nor for that matter in the Reformers. The widespread idea that Christians should "think worldviewishly", and widespread understanding of Christianity as a worldview, is of more recent vintage than the Roman proclamations about the Immaculate Conception and the Infallibility of the Pope, and the Protestant cottage industry of worldview construction is less Orthodox than creating a systematic theology. *If* there is an Orthodox worldview, it does not come from tinkering with ideas in your head to construct a worldview; it arises from walking the Orthodox Way for a lifetime. Protestants who come into Orthodoxy initially want to learn a lot, but after time spend less time with books because Orthodoxy has taken deeper root in their hearts and reading about the truth begins to give way to living it out. Devotional reading might never stop being a spiritual discipline, but it is no longer placed in the driver's seat, nor should it be.

This tree: What to make of its fruit?

This is strong language, but in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), Christ says:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

Not every one who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers."

Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted has borne fruit in his lifetime and after his death. In his lifetime, there was the one fruit I mentioned, a close tie to someone who broke communion with the Orthodox Church shortly after his death. After his death, he has brought Protestants into the Orthodox Church. But in the living form of Seraphinian disciples who seem half-converted, those who have been taken out of Egypt seem not to have Egypt taken out of them; they have asked me to pay homage to Protestant golden calves they've brought with them.

Let me try to both introduce something new, and tie threads together here. Subjectivism can at its heart be described as breaking communion with reality. This is like breaking communion with the Orthodox Church, but in a way it is more deeply warped. It is breaking communion not only with God, but with the very cars, rocks and trees. I know this passion and it is the passion that has let me live in first world luxury and wish I lived in a castle. It tries to escape the gift God has given. And that passion in another form can say, "If God offers me Heaven, and

Heaven requires me to open up and stop grasping Fr. Seraphim right or wrong, I will escape to a Hell that makes no such demand for me to open up to God or His reality." And it is a red flag of this passion that breaks communion with reality, that the most devoted of the half-converted Seraphinians hold on to pieces of fundamentalism with a tightly closed fist. And these Protestant insistences are a red flag, like a plume of smoke: if one sees a plume of smoke coming from a house, a neighbor's uncomfortable concern is not that a plume of smoke is intolerable, but that where there's smoke, there's fire and something destructive may be going on in that house. And when I see subjectivism sweep things under the rug to insist on Fr. Seraphim's canonization, and fail to open a fist closed on Protestant approaches to Holy Orthodoxy, I am concerned not only that Fr. Seraphim's colleague may have broken communion with the Orthodox Church to avoid Church discipline, but that Fr. Seraphim's devotees keep on breaking communion with reality when there is no question of discipline. The plume of smoke is not intolerable in itself, but it may betray fire.

I may be making myself unpopular here, but I'm bothered by Fr. Seraphim's half-converted fruit: the Western Seraphinian movement. I know that there have been debates down the centuries between pious followers of different saints—but I have never seen this kind of phenomenon with another well-known figure in today's Orthodoxy.

So far as I have tasted it, the half-converted Fr. Seraphim's half-converted fruit tastes bad.

Devotees of Fr. Cherubim (Jones) the Half-Converted Demand his Immediate Canonization and Full Recognition as "Equal to the Heirophants"

Adamant devotees of Fr. Cherubim (Jones) the Half-Converted demand immediate canonization and full recognition as "Equal to the Heirophants". They have stepped beside their usual tactics of demanding canonization whether or not Fr. Cherubim the Half-Converted should be canonized, and demanding that any problems be swept under the carpet, to insist that he be called, "Equal to the Heirophants."

Much of the work in his wake was consolidated in the book, *Christ the Eternal Doubt*. Our devotee explained, "Blessed Cherubim Jones saw more than anything the spiritual toxicity of postmodernism. And he sensed, perhaps even more than he realized, that the proper rebuttal to postmodernism is to reconstruct modernism: indeed, there are powerful modernist currents in his thought even when he seems to condemn all Western trends. The great grandfather of modernism was René DesCartes, and Blessed Cherubim Jones uncovered layer after layer of this philosopher whose very name means 'Born Again' and whose *Meditations* put doubt on a pedestal and said, in essence, 'Doubt what

you can; what remains after doubt is unshakable.' And Λογος or Logos is interchangeable, one might almost say homouosios, with logic and with doubt." And to quench the ills of the postmodern world, Fr. Cherubim the Half-Converted mined a vein that would come together in the classic *Christ the Eternal Doubt*.

Fr. Cherubim the Half-Converted has left a considerable half-convertedwake; the tip of the iceberg is in his contribution to a wave of committed Evangelicals deciding that the Orthodox Church is an indispensable aid to pursuing their cottage industry of reconstructing the ancient Church. The sycophant excitedly commented, "Yes; there was an article on this phenomenon in *The Onion Dome*. It was a bit like that article in *The Onion*, um, what was it... there was a woman, a strong woman, who overcame years of childhood abuse to become a successful porn star. And this is nothing next to what happened when he was the only fashionable Orthodoxy the communist East could listen to."

Fr. Cherubim the Half-Converted was indeed very concerned that his version of the Fathers be adhered to. He pointed out that many Church Fathers, in giving the theology of the created world, absolutely denied that matter was made from atoms and molecules, but insisted that science properly interpreted proves that matter was made from the four elements: "earth, air, fire, and water." And he drew a line in the sand here, and most of his Cherubinian devotees are extraordinarily suspicious about whether you can be Orthodox and believe anything like modern atheistic chemistry.

There is some slight controversy surrounding Fr. Cherubim the Half-Converted's teaching on the phantom tollbooth. His position, as carried forth by others, is that practically every major element of [The Phantom Tollbooth](#) is already in the Fathers and is attested in quite ancient liturgy. Consequently, many argue, the book [The Phantom Tollbooth](#) is no mere imaginative children's tale, but an entirely literal factual account describing life beyond the mundane.

But as much as Fr. Cherubim the Half-Converted tried to break free of Western tendencies, the concensus among non-Cherubinians that part of his spiritual ambiance and a legacy among Cherubiniansis, in the

words of one striking television commercial, "[wacky wild, Kool-Aid style!](#)"

Unsolicited Spiritual Direction From One of Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted's Most Devoted Followers

The following is an anonymized Facebook wall conversation after I friended someone who happened to be a devotee of Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted. This is the first conversation I have had in, in which Fr. Seraphim was given the title of "St" before his name.

It is also one of the kindest conversations I as an author have had in which a Seraphinian decided to straighten out my backwards worldview and person: I have seen others freely self-contradict to take whatever position at the moment would let them give stinging words. This conversation was characterized by extraordinarily good social graces on the part of the particular person who decided to straighten him out, this time and pretty much this time alone.

The author hosts a large website with innumerable postings at cjshayward.com, and it is a relatively frequent occurrence for someone, somewhere, to post some critique of something that has been said. However, this discussion was the first time the author can remember in 20 years' presence on the web that he was asked to **take down** one of his website postings: [What Makes Me Uneasy About Fr.](#)

[Seraphim \(Rose\) and His Followers, CJSH.name/seraphim.](#)

The author's spiritual father would rather the author had simply not responded to the initial message. The author did not understand his spiritual father's wishes, on that point, at that time.

The visitor wrote:

"Brethren: it is later than you think. Hasten, therefore to do the work of God."

(St father Seraphim (Rose) of Platina)

Hello Christos, I would like to comment on your quote from your article "What Makes Me Uneasy About Fr. Seraphim (Rose) and His Followers" that I happened to run into when looking for the sermons by Blessed Seraphim Rose. Your quote says: "I am concerned not only that Fr. Seraphim's colleague may have broken communion with the Orthodox Church to avoid Church discipline, but that Fr. Seraphim's devotees keep on breaking communion with reality when there is no question of discipline. The plume of smoke is not intolerable in itself, but it may betray fire." First, I've read all the books by Blessed Seraphim Rose and listened to some of his recorded sermons which I treasure. My spiritual father in California, Fr. John Ocana, knew Blessed Seraphim Rose in person, and told a lot about him. Here is an interview that Fr. John (Ocana) had with Blessed Seraphim Rose (a year, before Fr. Seraphim reposed): <https://sites.google.com/site/phoenixlineohp2/interviewwithfr.seraphim>

Fr. John later became a priest of Russian Orthodox Church (under Moscow Patriarchate) of Saint Herman of Alaska which our family attended. Fr. Seraphim's teachings are heavily based on the Fathers' teachings and on the Holy Tradition, he emulated the example of Saint Seraphim of Sarov whose icon he always had in his hermit's cell in the Northern California. A split in the monastery which Fr. Seraphim founded happened not because of Fr. Seraphim, but in spite of him, because of the fallen nature of human monks who ran it. A lot of miracles have happened by the prayers to Blessed Seraphim Rose. A miracle by the prayers to Fr. Seraphim took place

seraphim rose. A miracle by the prayers to Fr.Seraphim took place in our family as well. We were honored to know Father Lawrence Williams who was a spiritual child of Blessed Seraphim Rose. Owing to many conversations we had, when Fr.Lawrence told us about Fr.Seraphim, we had an incredible opportunity to know more about Blessed Seraphim Rose. I think it will be appropriate if you remove your article from the Internet so that it does not disturb the Blessed memory of Father Seraphim Rose and those who love him and pray to him. May the Lord reason and humble you, as you are still to go a long way to become like Blessed Seraphim Rose! With Love in Christ, [Name], Saint-Petersburg, Russia

Father Lawrence reposed in December, 2010. Here is <http://remnantcor.blogspot.ru/2010/12/memory-eternal-fr-lawrence-williams.html>
<http://remnantcor.blogspot.ru/2010/12/fr-lawrence-40th-day.html>
<https://sites.google.com/site/phoenixlxineohp2/interviewwithfr.seraph>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnQgN1mjqi01>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnQgN1mjqi0>

[Video entitled, "Father Seraphim Rose - Living the Orthodox Worldview"]

I might briefly comment something that might be blaringly obvious to some readers, but still worth pointing out: "**May the Lord reason and humble you,**" repeated throughout the text, is a **curse**, pure and simple, and as such it is forbidden to Christians of any stripe outside of e.g. anathemas regarding heterodoxy. It's not just above laity's pay grade, it's above a spiritual father's pay grade. [The archangel Michael himself seems to have regarded cursing the Devil as above *his* pay grade, as only allowed to God.](#)

The author wrote:

Multiply your praises of the monk by ten and you will equal the length at which other followers have offered me harassment.

And the "Worldview" bit is a red flag. I tried, unsuccessfully, to explain to a follower who presented an article with Fr Seraphim calling for the creation of an Orthodox worldview, that this is a serious concern to offer someone as the proper fruit of a saint at the height of its powers.

There is an Orthodox worldview, but it is almost completely inaccessible to the Western endeavor of worldview construction. It is created by faith and asceticism and not normally approached as worldview.

As Wikipedia quotes, "Conceiving of Christianity as a worldview has been one of the most significant developments in the recent history of the church." That is a hint: the Western enterprise of worldview construction is no more Orthodox than the Immaculate Conception or the Infallibility of the Pope. Possibly less, because the two latter doctrines leave us in the company of devout Rome, while this kind of worldview work is more closely aligned to the secular academy.

If you wish to draw me to Fr. Seraphim, do you wish to apologize for any roughness I've experienced? Or are you just praying God would bring me humility and awe?

P.S. Thank you for not jackhammering me at all in response to either of my two comments. That is a rare treat in dealing with people who draw heavy inspiration from Fr. Seraphim (Rose)!

One P.S. I should add: In another discussion, I commented that one is only obligated to secretly confess one's sins to a priest under the seal of confession, but for various sins, including the one under discussion, Fr. Seraphim probably renounced his sins publicly.

The visitor replied:

Christos, to be like or even close to Fr. Seraphim (Rose) it takes his life of service as a monk and a hermit, his repentance and humility. It is a bad path to start criticizing the deceased and honored priests and monks. We, as Orthodox Christians, dare not to

do it. May the Lord reason and humble you!

The author wrote, trying to shift the conversation in a more positive direction with a link to the most popular and most reshared work on his site:

My last response was intended as a compliment.

[Name], have you explored anything else on my site? "Doxology", for instance, at <https://cjschayward.com/doxology/>?

The visitor replied:

Christos, I appreciate your hard work, but don't raise yourself above the saints!

The author wrote:

One other thing, and I'm not sure I've found a good way to say it.

You assume a great deal more authority and insight regarding my spiritual state than does either my priest or my spiritual father: "May the Lord reason and humble you!"

It never fails to amaze me how much authority devotees of Fr. Seraphim can assume over Orthodox who have not fallen under his spell... his charm... his influence. Your authority over me in this note is really quite impressive!

May I interest you in some way of relating besides spiritual direction and teaching me humility?

The visitor responded:

Christos, as Christians we should be direct and true. Both my husband and I do honor Fr. Seraphim Rose. But neither him, or I have ever heard any Russian Orthodox Christian in Russia (we live in Saint-Petersburg) dare to criticise Fr. Seraphim Rose's service, or life.

It is unethical for an Orthodox Christian to criticise a deceased servant of the Lord, and tarnish his/her memory. You aspire to serve the Lord, serve him in humility without trying to bring down the authority of the deceased servants, it concerns all of them who are in Heaven. Forgive, me, brother in Christ, for my directness.

God bless you, Christos!

[The author did not see the above note until he had finished the note he was working at a time. It is, perhaps, better and humbler, to assume the position of a schoolmarm and treat a man of comparable age as a boy under her dominion, than to go all-out and assume the position of an Elder.]

The author wrote:

Ok, let me issue an ultimatum. I am willing to have you as a friend. I am not willing to have you as Amma.

CEASE AND DESIST ALL FURTHER DIRECTION. This includes trying to teach me lessons in humility, asking that God humble me, and anything like your latest words, "Christos, I appreciate your hard work, but don't raise yourself above the saints!" Don't try to make me better or humbler. Relate to me as a peer, as a friend, or not at all.

And later:

P.S. I was collating our conversation and I noticed Remnant ROCOR among the first links you used to correct me.

Are we in communion?

After this some of the visitor's posts started to disappear. The last question remains unanswered.

Might the author delicately suggest that it would be more respectful towards the deceased monk to use his books as frisbees or something worse than that, than to claim profound spiritual profit from his writing

and simply reject communion with the Orthodox Church?

If someone has read the entire collection of works written by Fr. Seraphim, claims great spiritual profit, and entirely rejects being in communion with the Orthodox Church, *IT DID. NOT. WORK!*

Athonite Hieromonks Can Be Card-Carrying Half-Converted Seraphinians, Too

In my privacy policy, I state that things people share with me are confidential; but also that harassment, spam, etc. will be treated as inappropriate. This email conversation was with a public figure; I thought about registering a formal complaint, but after prayer am posting a slightly anonymized note; I refer to my interlocutor simply as Fr. Monachos, i.e. "Monk".

Some distance into the conversation, at an unintended turning point, I wrote:

I wanted to give a couple of other links.
<http://JonathanHayward.com/powerbible.cgi> has the same kind of interface as <http://OrthodoxChurchFathers.com/> in power user mode. It's very powerful once you figure out what the two panels are and how they work together. And I thought you might appreciate <http://cjshayward.com/customer/> - nothing religious and completely secular on the surface, but motivated by something foundational to theology in any genuinely Orthodox sense.

Thank you,

At some point in the conversation, the visitor's reply was the beginning of a change in the conversation:

Dear Jonathan,

Thanks for all those links! I can see you are a lot like me: your thirsty mind has led you into all kinds of fields!

Since I also have spent a considerable amount of time reading about evolutionism and creationism, I was curious to see what you wrote. I was surprised to see that you, an Orthodox Christian, are opposed to the young-earth theories.

Have you read that book by Fr. Seraphim Rose about Genesis? From reading it, it seems quite clear to me that the holy Fathers believe in a young earth. It seems to me that the only way that a multibillion-year-old creation could be compatible with Genesis is if one extends the six days of creation into billions of years. But this claim is so untenable that I've written an article about it. (I can send it to you if you're interested.)

So if you have a moment, I would like to hear how you have managed to believe in an old earth without disregarding Genesis and the holy Fathers. I don't mean that sarcastically, but I sincerely believe that I might have something to learn from your insights.

In Christ,

Fr. Monachos

P.S. I have a soft spot for mathematicians because my brother is a math professor!

In between came the following thread before I took a stab at answering that question:

I hope I'm not bothering you by mixing traditions, but I wanted to send you a link to [God the Spiritual Father](#). I have a great respect

for monastic fatherhood.

He responded:

Dear Jonathan,

Thank you for all those articles and for your thoughtful responses to my emails. I'm not much of a philosopher, so I don't have much to offer you in return.

I think you would get a lot out of reading that book by Fr. Seraphim Rose. If I remember correctly, the book also presents his correspondence with Kalomiros, and it shows quite clearly that Kalomiros's criticism of Fr. Seraphim was ungrounded. The book also has many patristic quotes that you might not have seen. I put those patristic quotes regarding a young earth at the end of that article of mine, and I've attached it to this email. But I also wince when I look at it, because I, too, am guilty of using my dianoia and not purifying my nous. The article doesn't have any original thought of mine, but it's just a bunch of regurgitated information, much of which you might already be familiar with.

I agree with you that working on all these theories and all this knowledge--which puffs up--isn't nearly as important as working on our souls.

in Christ,

Fr. Monachos

Note: The article attached was [**How Long Were the Days in Creation Week?**](#)

I wrote:

Thank you; Fr. Seraphim's book is on my list of books to read now. (As is your article.)

Something I didn't make clear is that I don't specifically agree with Kalomiros that God created the world through the processes of evolution without intervening in the process. The reason I mention him is that as I understand he is an extreme Orthodox traditionalist who took the step of having all his works approved in some form by the EP, so he is not a loose cannon, halfway converted, or a liberal theologian. It doesn't mean he is right (I don't think he is), but he came to mind as a precedent for someone genuinely Orthodox not believing in a young earth. I don't believe I've found a final resting place; it's just that while I have called my beliefs into question, I haven't found a spiritual push to revise them, especially compared to sins that I unambiguously do need to repent of and passions I need to give asceticism. My beliefs are "not changed", not "confirmed decisively."

I thank you for your correspondence and your prayers.

I added:

I've read your article; I didn't read it initially because I prefer to carve out some time for things like this rather than just give them a quick glance.

Besides Fr. Seraphim's work, which I am not sure how to get a copy of but should be able to get through inter-library loan, I am praying over how much of the hexaemeron tradition to include in my reading for the Apostles' Fast. I have sampled it but not drunk it deeply, and my hesitations are not over whether it is worth reading as whether I would be approaching it wrongly, making it into quasi-science rather than cut from mystical theology I should be reading for the fast (less of a danger in the Philokalia which could be called "the science of unseen warfare" but which does not so readily lend itself to that trap).

With thanks, and praying to be open to God's leading,

Homotopos

HE WROTE.

I think you are wise to give more emphasis to the practical, personal application of our faith rather than to its theoretical aspects. After all, the demons are experts at the theoretical aspects of theology, but it doesn't do them any good, whereas some uneducated grandmothers in the old country don't even understand the Creed, but they are all set for Paradise.

By the way, [Name] responded to my note you forwarded to her, and she was delighted. Thanks.

I bit my tongue at a bit of an undercurrent in his writing and wrote:

You're welcome.

Welcoming your prayers that I grow in the practical, personal application,

Earlier, he said he might have something to learn from my insights; I tried to offer a more serious answer with my insights to him.

I wrote:

Father, bless. Glory be to God.

I haven't read Fr. Seraphim; I have read [Alexander Kalomiros arguing a theistic evolution](#); I have read some of the Fathers, and not seen a conclusive answer to today's form of the question; when I followed Kalomiros's sources, they didn't seem to imply a young earth, but they also did not seem so clear and decisive in supporting Kalomiros's claims. Kalomiros quotes [St. Basil's Hexaemeron, homily II](#) as saying, "Therefore, if you say a day or an aeon, you express the same meaning", and while St. Basil **couldn't** have been trying to agree with today's science, a glance at that Hexaemeron homily seems not to be decisive that one day be taken literally.

But that is slightly beside the point; perhaps more to the point is that the Protestant fundamentalist version of a young earth says, "Genesis 1 is literally true, and evolution is false, and Genesis 1 is literally true as an answer to the same questions addressed by evolution." Besides the beginning snippet of [the second page of The Commentary](#), a more substantial treatment is given in [Religion and science is not just intelligent design versus evolution](#), which is not just about origins but which I consider among the best I have to offer on this topic.

Kalomiros, right or wrong, criticized Fr. Seraphim for, in effect, not a thorough enough conversion in his beliefs about origins. What I've read in the Fathers does not give a clear answer that I can tell to today's form of origins questions, which may in part be a signal that I don't have a complete enough understanding of the hexaemeron tradition, but may itself be a clue. John Calvin did sincerely read the Fathers for what they said to Reformation questions about the Eucharist, and this is why he didn't understand the Fathers appropriately: he was reading them as if they were written around the concerns of "what, philosophically, happens in the consecration of the Eucharist", and once you assume the patristic witness is answering the questions of the Reformation, you cannot understand the Fathers. And something similar may play into asking Genesis 1 and the Fathers to answer the same questions, on the same terms, as the science of today.

[Religion and science is not just intelligent design versus evolution](#) was written in part to say that there are science-like aspects of [academic] theology that are not helpful and should ideally be expunged, but another concern, if a lesser one, has to do with scientific data: even if trying to be like science is a bad thing for theology, there are some very problematic assertions about God that seem to come with looking at scientific data and having to interpret it as being true for a young earth. There is, for instance, the reconciliation that the earth was created in six days as old in its creation, like a novel where the protagonist is created by the author as an adult from the beginning. The Logos by whom through whom

the world was created is Truth, and the theories I can remember for how we are to account for scientific findings have always disturbed me, and to preserve the literal reading of Genesis 1, make God a deceiver in the Creation that is supposed to proclaim his glory. So far, every attempt I've seen to account for what has been observed in God's creation and reconcile it with a young earth seem to go out of the frying pan and into the fire, amounting to the claim that God was deceptive in how he created his Creation.

And I look at this and wince, because it speaks out of the complexity of the dianoia and not out of the drinking that is knowing and the knowing that is drinking of the nous. As time has passed, I have been less and less concerned with the Western project of straightening out my Weltanschauung or worldview, and more to seek an enlightened nous; [Name] may have picked out [Religion and science is not just intelligent design versus evolution](#) as among my best work, but I am trying to noetically move to works like [Maximum Christ, Maximum Ambition, Maximum Repentance](#) and [Doxology](#). My final response is not to decisively say that I think my beliefs there are right; my final response is that I would be better engaged trying to worship and invite others to the same.

I followed up:

Father, bless.

I just posted something about this topic, at <http://jonathanscorner.com/creation/>.

I'm not sure how to introduce it. It seems almost certain to me that you won't like it; but I found myself trying to convince myself not to send it to you.

He answered as below. With the long list, some formatting has been lost; it looks less polished here than in the original email::

Dear Jonathan,

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and your article with me. I like it much more than you thought I would, even though I know I am the one who came across in that article of mine as a "Protestant fundamentalist dressed up in Orthodox clothing."

I basically agree with what you have to say except for two points:

1. Most of the scientific arguments for a young earth (especially the geological ones) are much stronger than you think they are. I've attached to the end of this message a list of them I compiled several years ago. But don't bother reading it unless you really want to.
2. It is one thing to discredit the scientific statements of the saints and another thing entirely to discredit statements in the Bible (or to try and explain them away). Even if we disregard the patristic quotes claiming that the days in Genesis were really just 24-hour periods, we would still have to come up with some scientifically sound explanation of Genesis. I found the following Wikipedia article at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Earth_creationism that gives three such options:
 1. The Framework Interpretation,
 2. Day-Age Creationism, and
 3. Cosmic Time

Option #1 comes across as a lame attempt to explain things away. Option #2 does not sound scientifically sound to me, for the reasons I mentioned in my article. Option #3 might be sound, but I haven't spent the time to examine it thoroughly.

Anyway, I fully agree with you that there are much more important matters we need to be concerned about.

in Christ,

Fr. Monachos

P.S. Here's that list I mentioned:

II. Geological Evidence for a Recent Creation:

The helium in minerals indicates that rocks (with an alleged radiometric "age" of billions of years) are really only 6,000 years old.

(See #10 at: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/4005.asp>

If you want to read all the details of this argument, see:

<http://www.trueorigin.org/helium01.asp> and

<http://www.trueorigin.org/helium02.asp>)

The amount of helium in the atmosphere suggests that the earth cannot be billions of years old.

(<http://www.creationism.org/books/TaylorInMindsMen/TaylorIM>

More details can be read at:

http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v20/i3/old_earth.asp

and

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/tj/v8/i2/helium.asp>)

Radio-halos in rocks shorten geologic "ages" to a few years. (See

#9 at: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/4005.asp> and

more details at the bottom of:

<http://www.creationism.org/ackerman/AckermanYoungWorldCha>

and at:

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v23/i4/geologictime.as>

The absence of uranium in polonium radio-halos is evidence

that they were created ex nihilo (instant creation out of nothing)

<http://www.creationism.org/books/TaylorInMindsMen/TaylorIM>

and

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v10/i2/time.asp>)

The continents should be much more eroded than they are if they are really hundreds of millions of years old, as evolutionists claim.

(<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v22/i2/ages.asp>

and more details at:

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/tj/v14/i1/landforms.asp> and

some of the numbers at:

<http://www.grisda.org/origins/13064.htm>)

The oceans can't be more than 62 million years old, given the amount of hydrochloric and uranium salts they contain. (See #5 at: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/4005.asp> and <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v14/i1/seasalt.asp> and

<http://www.creationism.org/books/TaylorInMindsMen/TaylorIMI>

If you want all the detailed calculations with a critique and a rebuttal, see: http://tccsa.tc/articles/ocean_sodium.html)

There is too much water being added to the earth's atmosphere by small comets for the earth to be billions of years old.

(<http://www.creationism.org/onlinebook/Comets6.html#wp1>

Mountains are being uplifted much too fast for them to be millions of years old.

(<http://www.grisda.org/origins/13064.htm>)

There isn't nearly enough volcanic ejecta for the earth to be old.

(<http://www.grisda.org/origins/13064.htm>)

If sedimentary rocks have been piling up for millions of years as evolutionists claim, there should be numerous meteorites embedded in them. However, almost none are to be found except in the very highest layers. A simple explanation for this is that the layers of sedimentary rocks were deposited very rapidly.

(<http://www.creationism.org/onlinebook/AstroPhysicalScience> and

<http://www.creationism.org/ackerman/AckermanYoungWorldCh>

The same thing can be said about rock slides.

(<http://www.creationism.org/onlinebook/AstroPhysicalScience>

Meteor showers are not diffused by the Poynting-Robertson effect, indicating that meteors are less than 10,000 years old.

(<http://www.creationism.org/ackerman/AckermanYoungWorldCh>

The erosion rate of the world's major waterfalls (For example, the Niagara Falls:

<http://www.creationism.org/books/TaylorInMindsMen/TaylorIMI> and

http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v22/i4/niagara_falls.a

The rates of sediment deposition of the world's major rivers.

(<http://www.grisda.org/origins/13064.htm> and for data on the Nile Valley see

THE VALLEY

<http://www.creationism.org/books/TaylorInMindsMen/TaylorIM>

There is not enough sediment on the ocean floors for them to be three billion years old, as evolutionary theory claims. They can be no older than 12 million years old. (See #4 at:

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/4005.asp> and some calculations in #2 at:

<http://www.grisda.org/origins/13064.htm>)

The presence of carbon-14 in diamonds and coal and in all deep geological strata indicates that they must be much less than millions of years old. (See #11 at

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/4005.asp>)

Given the high rate of population explosion, the human race is either about 6,000 years old, or it managed to balance precariously close to the verge of extinction for millions of years.

(<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v23/i3/people.asp>) and also

<http://www.creationism.org/books/TaylorInMindsMen/TaylorIM>

and #6 at: <http://www.grisda.org/origins/13064.htm>)

If the Stone Age really did last 185,000 years, they would have buried 8 billion (!) bodies with artifacts. Since this number is 6 orders of magnitude greater than the number of skeletons and artifacts actually found, it is quite likely that the Stone Age was really a few orders of magnitude shorter. (See #12 at:

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/4005.asp>)

Since Stone Age men were as intelligent as we are (according to archeological evidence) it is highly unlikely that the 8 billion of them that would have lived for the 185,000 years until the invention of agriculture would not have figured out that plants grow from seeds sooner. It is more likely that the Stone Age lasted only a few hundred years. (See #13 at:

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/4005.asp>)

Evaporite deposits are too chemically pure to have been formed over thousands of years, as evolutionists claim.

(<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v21/i4/geology.asp#f>

There are oils and gasses beneath the earth that should have dissipated long ago due to the high pressure they are under.

(<http://www.creationism.org/books/TaylorInMindsMen/TaylorIM>

All the ancient civilizations (Abyssinian, Arab, Babylonia, Chinese, Egyptian, Hebrew, Indian, and Persian) believed that the earth was created just a few thousand years ago.

(<http://www.creationism.org/books/TaylorInMindsMen/TaylorIM> and

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v24/i1/belief.asp>)

Dinosaur tissue was discovered that was still soft, which indicates that dinosaurs could not have been extinct for tens of millions of years, as evolutionists claim.

(http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs2005/0325Dino_tissue.as

Ancient cultures on every continent have legends about dragons (dinosaurs) and some even made pictures and carvings that look just like the reconstructions made by modern paleontologists, which suggests that dinosaurs were contemporaneous with modern man.

(<http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs2007/0115angkor.asp>

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v21/i1/aborigines.asp>

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v24/i2/thunderbirds.a>

Dragons are also described as living creatures in ancient written documents: in Pliny's Natural History (70 A.D.), Aelian's De Natura Animalium (220 A.D.), and Jordanus' The Wonders of the East (550 A.D.) The Old Testament mentions twenty-five times the animal called "tannim" in Hebrew (which is translated as "dragon" in the KJV), and the only animal that could fit the description of the beast in Job 40:15-24 (he eateth grass as an ox... his strength is in his loins... he moveth his tail like a cedar) is the vegetarian brachiosaurus with its huge hind legs and tail as large as a tree.

(<http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/Magazines/tj/docs>,

The dragon is the only one of the twelve animals in the ancient Chinese zodiac that is supposedly mythical. (Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Lamb, Monkey, Cock, Dog, and Pig). But since the stars in the zodiac reminded them of things they had seen, it is unreasonable to assume that the dragon was mythical.

Given the rate at which languages change and given the similarities that still exist between modern languages, it is much more reasonable to conclude that man has existed for a few

more reasonable to conclude that man has existed for a few thousand years rather than a few million years.

(<http://www.creationism.org/books/WilliamsEvolManDisprvd/8e>)
Red blood cells and hemoglobin have been found in an unfossilized dinosaur bone. But since these could not last more than a few thousand years, this precludes the possibility that they lived 65 million years ago as evolutionists claim.

(<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v19/i4/blood.asp>)
and

http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs2005/0325Dino_tissue.asp
Likewise, live bacteria were found in amber supposedly 35 million years old. Since bacteria cannot stay intact for such long periods of time, the amber must not be as old as the radiometric dating claims it to be.

(<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v19/i4/focus.asp#spe>)
DNA should not be able to last more than 10,000 years, based on its observed rate of disintegration. But DNA is now being found repeatedly in organic matter that radiometric dating claims is hundreds of millions of years old. Given the unreliability of radiometric dating, the most reasonable conclusion is that all those samples are in fact only thousands of years old, even though such a conclusion would destroy the evolutionists' time scale.

(<http://www.creationism.org/onlinebook/AstroPhysicalScience>)
Numerous human artifacts have been discovered encased in coal. Since coal is supposed to be millions of years old, this provides more evidence that the evolutionists' time scale is seriously flawed.

(<http://www.creationism.org/onlinebook/AstroPhysicalScience>)
Amino acids racemize in 20 million years at most. But many samples of amino acids that were supposedly as old as 3 billion years have been found that were not fully racemized yet. This also suggests that the evolutionists' time scale is blatantly wrong.

(<http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v15/i4/hands.asp>)
By calculating the age of "Mitochondrial Eve" based on unobserved (i.e., hypothetical) rates of assumed macroevolution, she lived 200,000 years ago. But when her age

is calculated based on observed rates of mutation, she lived only 6,000 years ago, according to an article in Science.

(See #8 at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/4005.asp> and more at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/tj/v12/i1/eve.asp> and

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/re1/chapter6.asp>

The quote from Science is in footnote #10 at

<http://www.creation-science.com/onlinebook/FAQ14.html#wp104>

"Genetic Adam" must have also lived only a few thousand years ago, based on the lack of mutations in contemporary men's Y chromosome.

(<http://www.creation-science.com/onlinebook/FAQ13.html#wp162>

"Living fossils" (such as the coelacanth and the Neopilina mollusk), which were used as "index fossils" to date other fossils and geological layers, turned out to be alive still, which means that all dates that relied on such index fossils are meaningless.

(<http://www.creation-science.com/onlinebook/AstroPhysicalScience> and <http://www.cs.unc.edu/~plaisted/ce/challenge9.html>)

Human footprints have been found in sedimentary rocks that are supposedly millions of years old. This shows that the evolutionary chronology is drastically wrong.

(<http://www.creation-science.com/onlinebook/AstroPhysicalScience>

The Redwall Limestone and Muav Limestone layers in the Grand Canyon offer clear evidence that they were not formed over millions of years. (See the middle of

http://www.creationresearch.org/crsq/articles/25/25_4a2.html)

This is a **pristine** example of the **Protestant praxis** of a Gish Gallop, a technique of shady debating that some use heavily in timed debates. The "Gish Gallop" is named after the (Protestant) Creation Research Institute's Duane Gish who popularized the fallacy (the formal name is "spreading"), and the basic way it works, also called "starting ten fires in ten minutes," is to spew as many alleged proofs in a short span as possible. Refuting them takes slow, meticulous attention, meaning that some people will be convinced in an audience because the Gish Gallop laid a hundred scientific-sounding assertions on the table, and the opponent who is attempting a responsible response will even on under

best circumstances refute a few of the spewed-forth claims, but not a chance of seriously addressing them all. This is a Protestant practice, of Protestant coinage, and if it has changed by those who incorporate this foreign object into Orthodoxy, the change is too subtle for me to pick up. *I have never seen a Gish Gallop occur anywhere, on any side, from anyone outside of a Protestant-style young-earth creationism.*

For that matter, I have never seen a Gish Gallop in favor of evolution **anywhere**. I had the evolutionary-driven "BSCS Blue" textbook in an early biology class; I had a university-level biology class with as much evolution as the people in charge wanted (and these are people who would agree with the claim that "evolution is the one theory in biology without which nothing else makes sense"), and I've had both polite and rude correspondence from both religious and materialist evolutionary adherents try to argue me into accepting Darwinism as the only rational action. I have never been given a Gish Gallop for any position other than Protestant-style young-earth creationism. And I know enough biology to know that compiling a Gish Gallop to appear to support some current variant of Darwinian evolution would not be particularly difficult, as it also would not be particularly difficult to create a Gish Gallop to give the impression that the world clearly consists of four elements and chemistry is atheistic. A Gish Gallop asserting any of a number of right or wrong positions should not be hard to pull off. *But I have never, ever seen the literary genre of Gish Gallop used support any position other than young-earth Creationism on terms given their final form by Protestant Creation Scientists.*

As an aside, I wish to respond to one of the monk's points specifically, just for interest's sake. This aside is in italics, and you don't need any special scientific literacy to see what is wrong: with due respect, the monk only has something of an excusable gap in his *Athonite heironomk's* simple Biblical literacy.

A passage from perhaps my final novel, [The Sign of the Grail](#), discusses what in the Bible the monk seems not to grasp:

Fr. Elijah said, slowly, "I have a question for you, and I want

you to think carefully. Are you ready for the question?"

George said, "Yes."

"Can we know, better than God, what the Bible should say?"

"No."

"But quite a lot of people do think that. A lot of people seem to be trying to help the Bible doing a better job of what it's trying so hard to say, but can't quite manage. Or something like that."

"I've read some liberals doing that."

"It's not just liberals. Let me give one example. George, have you been big in Creation and evolution debates?"

"Not really."

"Christians have several options, but for the Newsweek crowd, there are only two options. Either you're a young earther, or you're an evolutionist, and the new 'intelligent design' is just the old creationism with a more euphemistic name. Rather depressing for a set of options, but let's pretend those are the only two options."

"Now are you familiar with what this means for dinosaurs?"

"Um..."

*"The connection isn't obvious. We've seen, or at least I have, cartoons in magazines that have cave men running from T. rexes or hunting a brontosaurus. Which is, to an evolutionist, over a hundred times worse than having cave men whining loudly about the World Wide Wait. There's a **long** time between when the last dinosaurs of any kind, and the first humans of any kind, were around. As in hundreds of millions of years longer than humans have been around in any form. On that timeline, it's a rather big mistake to have humans interacting with dinosaurs."*

"But if you have a young earth timeline with the whole world

But if you have a young earth timeline, with the whole world created in six days, then it's not such a ludicrous idea that humans might have interacted with dinosaurs... and your English Bible offers an interesting reason to believe that humans have seen living dinosaurs. Have you read the book of Job?"

George said, "Um, no. It's one of a lot of..."

*Fr. Elijah interrupted. "There's a lot in the Bible to read, and even people who read the Bible a lot don't read it quickly unless they're speed-reading, and then it still takes them a couple of weeks. If you can call that 'reading the Bible;' I've tried it and I think it's one of the sillier things I've tried—a sort of spiritual 'get rich quick' scheme. I was smart enough to stop. But if you check your English Bible, you will see in Job a creature called the 'behemoth,' perhaps because the translators on the King James Version didn't know how to translate it, and the 'behemoth,' whatever that may be, is a mighty impressive creature. We are told that it is not afraid though the river rushes against it, suggesting that whatever the behemoth is, it is a big beast. And we are told that it stiffens or swings its tail like a cedar, the cedar being a magnificent, and quite enormous, tree which reaches heights of something like one hundred fifty to two hundred feet. And regardless of where you stand on Creation and evolution, the only creature that has ever walked the earth with a tail that big, or anywhere **near** that big, is one of the bigger dinosaurs. So the Bible offers what seems to be excellent evidence that people have seen dinosaurs—alive.*

*"Which is all very lovely, of course given to the English Bible. But first, the 'behemoth' is in fact an overgrown relative of the pig, the hippopotamus, and second, it isn't really talking about his **tail**. The same basic image is translated unclearly in the Song of S—"*

George spat out a mouthful of soda and took a moment to compose himself. "I'm sorry. Did I—"

Fr. Elijah looked around. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that as you were taking a sip. Let me get you a napkin. Here."

George said, "Ok, so maybe there are some other vivid images that have been, boulderized—you know, edited for television. Anything more? Were any ideas censored?"

Not to put too fine a point on it, but here in the Bible, in the author who has been called the Shakespeare of the Old Testament, the behemoth is the hippopotamus ('pehemoth' in Egyptian), and the text is not talking about dinosaurs; it's bringing a bit of poetic gusto to an admiring mention of the rising motion of an enormous erection. The poetic image of the cedar is a reference to the hippopotamus's "tree." The admiring reference to the behemoth's cojones, in the other half of the verse's Semitic parallelism, seems to survive translation better.

I wrote:

You aren't the only person; I see the phenomenon again and again. In your article, the opening note meticulously analyzes the Hebrew without reference to the Septuagint. The second departs from Orthodox kinds of evidence even more by importing statistics. But you aren't the first or last.

Regarding your links, they are what I meant by comparing them to a fundamentalist who has read anti-Orthodox works written by fundamentalists and "knows all about" Orthodoxy. Precious few, if any, arguments were not written by fundamentalists. I'm a bit disturbed that that is the bulk of your answer when I raise concerns about Orthodox taking their bearings from fundamentalists.

"The opening note meticulously analyzes the Hebrew without reference to the Septuagint:" that is a Protestant thing to do, not Orthodox. **The collection opens with Protestant exegesis.**

He wrote back:

Even though I put it at the end of my article, the real bulk of my answer is found in the patristic interpretations of Genesis and creation (which was twice as long as those statements about Hebrew

words). I warned you that all the rest would be "regurgitated" arguments that were not mine!

It doesn't concern me that the majority of scientific evidence nowadays (whether pro-young-earth or pro-old-earth) is coming from the non-Orthodox. After all, the majority of people on earth are not Orthodox. It therefore makes perfect sense to me that an Orthodox Christian who wishes to find scientific support for his opinion on the age of the earth will resort to the findings of non-Orthodox scientists. So I don't see how I am any different from you, in this regard, unless of course you are not relying on any scientific evidence from the non-Orthodox.

I wouldn't say that I, as an Orthodox Christian, am taking my bearings from fundamentalists. I would merely say that I am taking my bearings from patristic opinions, and then seeing to what degree their opinions are scientifically justifiable. Had the holy Fathers been old-earth creationists, I would have collected the opposite bunch of arguments.

If some Native American Shaman has conducted a careful, thorough, and unbiased scientific experiment that leads to the same conclusion already reached by the Orthodox holy Fathers, I see no reason to reject his research simply because his religion is incompatible with ours. It goes without saying, though, that his "pious" commentaries on his research are likely to be a bunch of hogwash, in the same way that the "pious" commentaries in those links I gave you are likely to be foreign to genuine Orthodoxy.

I refrained from several comments; here I would point out that his collection opens with the "pious" commentary of Protestant exegesis.

He seems to greatly overestimate his degree of independence from *Protestant piety*.

I answered, reminding him of a fine point of ecclesiology that he seemed to be forgetting:

First, my priest knows what I believe, and I will answer to him about it.

Second, I tried to write something better than what I had been writing on origins, and posted a poetic [Why this Waste?](#)

That ended that thread of the conversation.

At first, it began amiably; then he asked my opinions and said he was open to what he might learn, "I don't mean that sarcastically, but I sincerely believe that I might have something to learn from your insights." But when I did explain, out came the Seraphinian straightening out—out came the claim that Creation "Science" is full-fledged science when it is a fake parody of science. So Orthodox Christians can use physics, and that is science without any deformity of dogma, and Creation "Science" is nothing more. But, as repeatedly argued earlier, **Creation. "Science." Isn't. Science.** It's as wrong as practicing astrology because you take at face value its claims as an inexact science (or trying to be a pro-choice Catholic.) And if you're going to say, "Everybody knows that astrology isn't science," I might say, "Everybody who does not believe in astrology knows that it is not a science, and everybody who doesn't believe in Creation 'Science' knows that it is not a science."

The monk seemed to be trying to impress on me that if I did not believe Protestants' Creation Science was the best available science, my faith as an Orthodox Christian was injured. (And on a side conversation he said "I am surprised to see that you don't believe in toll-houses," and out came a little more jackhammering.)

This is the one time in my life so far that I've shut down conversation with a priest and reminded him that someone else has responsibility for my pastoral care and implicitly that I was under the authority of a canonical bishop who *alone* was responsible for Church order in his diocese: there was no need for the monk to call into question whether I should really be so bold as to call myself an Orthodox Christian if I disagreed with him about origins.

An Unanswered Question

In dealing with people who find it obvious that Creation "Science" is legitimate science and expect me to recognize it as science, I have concocted this question.

After an hour of thought, I have a question for you.

Are you able to produce for me, anything meeting the qualifications of:

1. Peer-reviewed, refereed:
2. Journal article or academic book,
3. Published in a venue that is not primarily concerned with promoting young-earth creation,
4. Anywhere in the (empirical) sciences,
5. Any time in the past thirty years:

that recognizes Creation "Science" as legitimate science?

<http://academia.stackexchange.com> may, or may not, be of help to you.

So far no one has shown me an appropriate citation, or for that matter much of anything.

Brushes with Elder Ephraim

I have never met or attempted to speak with Elder Ephraim, but I've had, shall we say, a few run-ins. And there is a family resemblance; it is my understanding that Elder Ephraim's monastery has an icon of Fr. Seraphim. And independent of these run-ins, my parish priest warned me that Elder Ephraim's constellation of monasteries in the U.S. was... how to put this delicately... a bit "cultic."

I was received into the Orthodox Church at Nativity 2003 and returned home after the completion of my program. I went to the parish church, and, being unemployed, was given rides to church by a monk who happened to be a half-converted disciple of Elder Ephraim.

I got some sense that his actions towards me might have been on some level treating me as his Elder treated him, and this monk definitely worked hard to straighten me out.

For instance, he accused me of not trying to listen to and learn from the Church. I replied that I was spending 45-60 minutes a day reading the Bible in Latin and Greek. He said that that wasn't good; a neophyte like me needed saint's lives. I explained that I was spending 30-45 minutes a day reading the [Prologue](#). Still "Not good enough;" I needed to be reading individual books containing a single saint's life at length.

Another time, he said that I was "always doing something" and never taking time for silence. The allegation surprised me a great deal; I was working on projects and trying to make myself useful during my time of

unemployment, but I was working perhaps 30 hours a week. I could see an allegation of laziness, but why was I being rebuked for excessive work? He asked when was the last time I'd spent an hour thinking "about how great a sinner you are?" He prescribed for me that I should look up a dictionary definition of humble and think about it for an hour. Taking his words as bitter medicine for my wordsmith's pride, I opened a dictionary and read:

Humble, *adj.* Possessing the attribute of humility.

I did my honest best to think for an hour about **that**.

He wasn't satisfied.

After some amount of this bullying, I told him, "I'm going to tell my spiritual father about our interactions; I don't think it's appropriate for you to assume the place of my spiritual father." I told my spiritual father, and he said about the monk's trying to teach me to learn from the Church, he said, "Sounds like you were in a no-win situation!" Usually my spiritual father offers some spiritual word of consolation or advice, but here I think he wasn't trying to show me a more Orthodox Church so much as be socially polite in the wake of strange behavior. (He said he would be very grateful as a priest to have a parish whose members read the Bible for 30-45 minutes per day in *any* language.)

I also spoke with our priest, and met an infuriating question: he asked why I'd allowed the monk to have "so much power over you", framing things as it being my fault that I hadn't stopped things much sooner. I held my tongue; the words I restrained myself from snapping back, "**Because he's an Athonite monk? And I'm a peon?**"

I was then the parish's adult most recently received into the Church. Perhaps others' attitudes didn't really think of me in terms of "the most junior adult parishioner." Others might have held an attitude that is now my own, that it is a wonderful privilege to roll out the red carpet to new members. But I did think of myself as the most junior adult parishioner. And the monk had plenty of options if he wished to pick on someone his own size; picking on the newcomer isn't just being a bully. It's being a coward too. (If there's much difference between the two.)

oward, too. (It there's much difference between the two.)

At my then immature age in the Orthodox faith, just a few months, I was following standard anthropological rules for making sense of a situation you don't understand yet. One of those rules is that people usually act in the role they genuinely possess in the situation. And if you try for monkey-see-monkey-do, you'll usually solve a little more of the puzzle. Hence it was not necessary for me to ask the parish priest why he wore fancier robes than anyone else, nor to challenge the expectation that I bow down at least somewhat when receiving absolution at confession. Nor would it have been necessary for me to ask other laity why they didn't bless me the way the priest did. And the standard anthropological rules worked with pretty much everyone in the parish.

There were other strange things, and in some sense I'm not sure how far Elder Ephraim is to be blamed. The amateur spiritual father had struggles, was trying to get to Arizona, but... he said it was for the sake of his aging mother that he shaved, and some thought that some estrangement to his Elder might have figured into that as well, but perhaps we shouldn't dig too far, especially as this does not concern me. What does concern me was completely unsolicited spiritual direction (while shutting down my attempts to open conversation), together with an unusual degree of faultfinding.

I don't know what he thought about origins; or rather I'm almost positive I know, but he never discussed the matter with me. He tried to teach me, but when I tried to open a theological conversation, I was shut down. Now there's a reason that may not be as bad as it sounds; at that very immature point in my faith, I had not internalized one deacon's insistence that "*Theology is not philosophy whose subject-matter is God!*" I very much wanted then to spark a theological conversation as I understood such... perhaps generosity or social grace would say, "But you were still barely past 'newly illumined.' That failing of yours was 'developmentally appropriate,' and the correction you were given would better be given to some who were above your pay grade." However, he did have a consistent habit of shooting me down, for instance deciding that I was not learning from the Church's teaching, and then shooting me down and telling me to read the saints after I said I spent a good chunk of time

in the Bible, and then shooting me down again when I said I was spending almost as much time reading the saints. Some of his unsolicited spiritual direction might have been "even a stopped clock is right twice a day" valid, but with him as much as anyone else, the *unsolicited* spiritual direction was...

...a case where he could initiate a serious conversation with me, but I was shut down on trying to initiate a serious conversation with him.

This case is a bit different from most others, because I trusted and obeyed his unsolicited spiritual direction, taking it as bitter medicine for pride. But it was spiritually profitless, or maybe it felt such. I have never less felt the Spirit's motion on reading a theological text as when he assigned the saint's life or other text. Maybe spiritual life isn't about feeling spiritual by what you read, but what he was ordering me *never* came close to matching what my conscience seemed to say.

That is the longest time I've spent in Elder Ephraim's ripples without reference to Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted. There have been other odd things.

I remember hearing some time back that Elder Ephraim's married disciples were to call for his permission before having sex. Now that sounds a little less strange if you have read an appropriate reading list and understand, to pick one of many examples, that St. Maximus the Confessor had nothing of Bertrand Russell's concept of "companionate marriage," that, in a word, you marry your best friend (his other advocacy being free love—but woe to the man who lay a finger on *his* wife!), where St. Maximus says that it is wrong to approach a woman who is not one's wife or approach one's wife for a purpose other from procreation. This much is common to the Fathers, but since hearing years back that Elder Ephraim's disciples had to get permission to engage in the marriage act, research turned up one of his disciples explaining that Elder Ephraim is at least advising his spiritual children to avoid sex as much as possible. The impression I receive is partly one of an Orthodox disciple who understands very well certain things understood in the ancient Church that are almost impossible to understand today, and partly evocative of [I Tim 4:1-3](#), which says:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in the last time some will pay attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron. They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created for those who believe and know the truth.

In describing my encounters with Elder Ephraim, I keep finding myself in the position of leaning towards an ironic lukewarm defense given to one composer: "Wagner's opera is not as bad as it *sounds*."

One friend, who was not really a member of Elder Ephraim's camp, came back after a journey to Elder Ephraim's monastery in Arizona. And I asked socially polite questions, and a little bit into the conversation he looked like he was weighing whether to give a candid remark and possibly offend me. And when I remained silent after his conversation, he said that in the nave the monks looked like they didn't want to socially be disturbed from praying the Jesus prayer, and he was utterly ignored by the monk manning the bookstore.

Now some parts of this could be more appropriate than they seem, especially to someone not terribly familiar with Orthodox monasticism. Monastics are to be alone; the term 'monastic' itself means something like 'loner', and ordinarily in a monastery, either the Abbot / Abbess, or another monastic given an appropriate blessing and obedience, is the sole person who should ordinarily talk with visitors. And it is in fact inappropriate for someone to interrupt a praying monk to talk about weather or Da Bears, but there's another side. I'm not completely sure what spiritual conversation my friend was expecting, if anything; I doubt he expected most monks to join his enthusiasm for motorcycles. (I refrained from commenting on what as an Emergency Medical Technician student were called "donor bikes;" my late teen aged father asked his father, a general practitioner, to ride a motorcycle, and was not exactly told, "No," but was instead told, "Yes, if you watch the next three motorcycle accident victims I treat in the Emergency Room." But I simply kept my mouth shut, and my friend never seemed to take offense.) But that's quite beside the point of appropriate interaction between pilgrims and monastics at a monastery.

Let me tie this in to what the Fathers say about almsgiving. The Fathers say to us—and here I don't really mean people long ago and far away, but you and me personally—that we should be giving towards other people. And one monastic forcefully made the point that if someone on horseback, an emblem of wealth and prestige, reaches down a begging hand, you put something in it.

But monastics are specifically said to be "above alms": they are not responsible for giving their last penny because they (theoretically) don't have even a penny to give. *But even then, that is no excuse to fail to give something.* The obligation of the penniless monastic is to give such things as a kind and encouraging word. And the monk who meets the beggar with kindness is in continuity with the non-monastic who gives just a little money (most of the Orthodox speakers emphasize that we are not obligated to give much). And this monastic almsgiving has to do with what Elder Ephraim's disciples failed to give. The prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," is a prayer that may on a literal plane only call oneself a sinner in need of mercy, but the prayer reaches out broad arms and encompasses the world: and without stopping the Jesus Prayer, a monastic who has not received a blessing to speak with visitors can nonetheless enfold each and every visitor in prayer.

In every monastery visit I can recall, to other monasteries, I was warmly received, and didn't *notice* whether there were lots of monastics open to talking with me. Now this was reception by the Abbott or some delegate in full accordance to the rule about who greets visitors, but it was a warm enough reception that I didn't really notice that others were not striking up a conversation with me. Even if we ignore Orthodoxy for a moment and look at what Protestants call "presence evangelism", someone who walks out of a Protestant Sunday service and finding something really nice, ordinarily have *not* had the experience of two minutes' worth speaking about the weather with every single member of the congregation: even in Protestant circles, there is really not much expectation that a proper welcome includes immediate interaction with a particularly large slice of the congregation's members. That kind of claim usually means that the visitor had a couple of conversations, or a few, and a general atmosphere of warmth, and perhaps one might say a warmth

and respect for people that was manifest even with the majority involved in other conversation.

And it was that general atmosphere of warmth that was lacking 100%. Monks are above alms; they are not obligated for that matter to give a word to a visitor. But there is such a thing as social silence that has a full welcome. I don't remember if my friend described experiencing such things before; he was surprised when it happened. And in any case it was inappropriate for the monk handling the book store to be so stony. Silence can be beautiful, or it can be chilly, or ominously deadly. There's a difference. Monastics can give a gift when they do not even have their next meal: and a monastic chanting the Jesus Prayer can in spirit and in truth encompass the entire world, including a visitor, in praying that the Lord Jesus Christ would "have mercy on me, a sinner."

Another brush with Elder Ephraim comes from various homilies at ordinary warning people who say a starry-eyed, "Cool! I can go to Arizona and have an Athonite spiritual Elder!" And each time the priest says, "*Be careful about what you are getting into.*" Certainly, you can go to Arizona and gain an Athonite spiritual father. You can also, with equal ease, go to confession, get excluded from communion for years, and go to the hierarch finding out that the hierarch's hands are really are tied in this situation: the only option, if it is an option, is to negotiate with your Athonite spiritual father. And if he won't negotiate—**tough**.

I had heard earlier that Elder Ephraim was requiring his disciples to contact him and get a blessing before engaging in sex. I mentally composed a response of "Great sensitivity in imitating the approaches of ages past, great insensitivity in dealing with the people of today," and delving into a few self-righteous details. But now I did research and found that he is not telling married couples to fill out a permission slip to meet each other, he is simply advising people to try to avoid sex altogether.

Meanwhile on the web I repeatedly hear Elder Ephraim referred to as "a great Saint." Come to think of it, I'm not sure when the last time is I heard of Elder Ephraim "merely" called a "saint;" he is always, with wonder, called a "great Saint" (capital 'S' may be optional). Meanwhile, anywhere else it is the wise and common practice of the Orthodox Church

to allow a little time for dust to settle over a reposed member's grave before worrying about whether canonization is appropriate. There doesn't seem to be much of any following that admires Elder Ephraim that doesn't canonize him as a *great* saint before he has even reposed. Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted has at least one requisite to canonization that Elder Ephraim does not yet have: he has *reposed*, and even then people are restrained enough that few call him "St. Seraphim" (the usual "as far as we can go without permission" honorific is "Blessed", and "Seraphim Rose" is rarely named without "Blessed" before, or even worse the abbreviation "Bl." If one speaks of "Blessed Seraphim Rose", there is some degree in openness in stating that this is what one wishes to be true, but (if the jackhammering attitude may be put away for a minute) some other term, such as the correct way of naming a non-canonized monastic where there is no need to distinguish surnames, is "Fr. Seraphim", is not a failure to pay due respect. To write "Bl. Seraphim Rose", as I have seen trickle down from the most abrasive of Fr. Seraphim's fan club, places "Blessed" as a standard honorific that is formally due as "Prof." is due to a professor, and leaves at least an ambience or suspicion that merely calling him "Fr. Seraphim" is failing to render due honor). This is in contrast Elder Ephraim, a figure which one would not expect to have pathological obedience in his following. It shouldn't terribly hard to say, "Spiritual children, please let the dust settle over my grave before worrying if I'm a great saint."?

I've really wondered, if Mount Athos was going to send one of their precious Elders to the U.S., *why did it have to be Elder Ephraim?*

Work-Mystic (its introduction)

Gentle Reader;

An intriguing book... *found in questionable quarters*

I have found a watershed moment after a friend gave me a copy of Elder Thaddeus's [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#). I don't know that everybody will have a watershed moment; perhaps others will understand its central point much more naturally than I do. But I am very grateful to be given the book.

Before going further, and talking about "work-mysticism", there are some hesitations I would like to mention. And I really don't know how to say this with due kindness and courtesy to fans of Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted, including one dearly loved member of my parish.

[Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) bears the "warning label" of the St. Herman of Alaska brotherhood started in connection with Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted. Let me blandly state that I have associated Fr. Seraphim's half-converted following with some harassment, and it has resonated with others when I've said Fr. Seraphim's following "tastes like Kool-Aid." [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#), like other titles from that movement, is exotic to the Western reader, really *too* exotic, *almost as if works were chosen on unconscious, tacit criteria that included appearing sufficiently exotic to a certain kind of Western convert*, and bears the mark of a rebellion against the common things of the West, where a more Orthodox response would be to be alienated from Western things without expending the energy to constantly fight it. It is also characteristic, though not universal, to read texts associated with Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted and get the feeling of a magic spell falling over me: after praying and being comfortable with the decision I read the "Nine Enneads" of [Christ the Eternal Tao](#), but not more; my conscience felt almost like an instruction to "take two stiff drinks and stop cold."

One person who commented to me over email knew quite specifically that I was a member of ROCOR (quite probably the one Orthodox jurisdiction with the most nostalgia for nineteenth-century Russia, and also Fr. Seraphim's jurisdiction), and tried to specifically

make the point that nineteenth century Russia was no golden age. That much was not news to me; the priest who received me into the Church repeatedly emphasized, "There was never a golden age." He didn't mention nineteenth century Russia so much, but he talked about the Age of the Councils as being an Age when Ecumenical Councils were called because of how truly bad the problems and heresies were. But the other correspondent argued to me that nineteenth century Russia was a "Gnostic wonderland," with something for every idle curiosity, and in his opinion the *worst* century in Orthodox history, *and this is a problem for Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted because Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted got his bearings in Orthodoxy primarily from nineteenth century Russia.* [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) tells of an elder who answered questions by speaking out of the [Philokalia](#). I've read the [Philokalia](#) more than once, and [the ascetical homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian](#), and the [Bible](#) many times more, and everything that is interesting about [Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives](#) is something I have never picked up even a little from [the Bible](#), [St. Isaac](#), and the [Philokalia](#). Perhaps I haven't read them enough, or grown enough, or something else enough, but I have not been able to pull a hint of Elder Thaddeus's main points in any of the older classics mentioned.

The Canon Within the Canon

In Protestant theology, there is a concept of a "Canon within the Canon", which stems from observation that different figures will disproportionately cite certain areas of Scripture. The whole concept is not particularly Orthodox, even if one might tally up different proportions in counting references to Scripture among different Orthodox theologians.

When I was studying at a liberal theology department, one assigned article said that the first order of business was to identify the "Canon within the Canon." Sorry, thank you for playing, but *no*. It may turn out in retrospect that some figure disproportionately cites specific areas of Scripture, but starting by identifying a Canon within the Canon is like trying to pull off a Ph.D. thesis when one is beginning kindergarten; it's well beyond putting the cart before the horse.

Furthermore, in which regard I've had a professor comment about needing some Canon within the Canon, liberal "theologians" who wish to neutralize any sense that the Bible is authoritative and speaks today begin their assault by emphasizing Scriptural passages permitting slavery. I cannot ever recall one of these nascent hatchet jobs mentioning or discussing the book of Philemon, in which the Apostle maneuvers St. Philemon into having to receive St. Onesimus back and even **freeing** him in a setting where St. Philemon was under terribly strong social pressure to crucify St. Onesimus even if he had no desire to do so. If you set the tone of your article with a focus on slavery as the paradigm of how we

should relate to the Bible, and never mention Philemon, please don't waste my time reading it.

A different, *adapted*, sense of "the Canon within the Canon"

I would like to talk about something besides the Bible, and I am genuinely not interested in knowing whether Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted had some kind of "Canon within the Canon" in Biblical references or whether any such Canon was any good. *That's beside the point for what I am interested in here.* Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted addressed a great many topics and was a prolific writer; for instance, he questioned whether American Orthodox might be overly harsh in our treatment of the Blessed Augustine, who at any rate was called a Church Father by an Ecumenical Council.

I am, up to a point, sympathetic to the complaint of someone who I knew as a Seraphinian and an Orthodox Reader, then was further tonsured a Subdeacon, fell in love with "mere Christianity" in the sense articulated by C.S. Lewis, and whose LinkedIn tagline since devolved to "Parish Administrator at Trinity Parish of Newton Centre, Episcopal". While a seminarian at Holy Cross, he expressed frustration that other seminarians consistently referred to Fr. Seraphim as "that guy who taught the tollhouses." And I can see a legitimate frustration: Fr. Seraphim said and taught a great deal, and reducing him to a single issue is a disappointment regardless of whether he was correct in the matter.

However, there seems to be a very narrow "Canon within the Canon" in terms of points half-converted Seraphinian followers consistently impress on outsiders, almost to the point that it doesn't matter that Fr. Seraphim wrote with such breadth and depth. In my own experience, the self-selected "Canon within the Canon" as delivered by Seraphinians consists of:

1. Aerial tollhouses.
2. Young earth creationism backed by Protestant Creation "Science."

3. The need to work on building an Orthodox worldview.

Now I have said I have little in the way of informed opinion on tollhouses, but I am a bit disappointed that it made the cut as "Canon within the Canon." Wouldn't it be better, for instance, to talk about Fr. Seraphim's genuine appreciation of broad stripes of Western culture, such as his love of Bach? (I'm fond of Bach too, by the way.) But I have never heard a half-converted Seraphinian talk about Fr. Seraphim's appreciation of Bach. It is apparently a more pressing matter to be concerned about my spiritual state, and try to help me out, if I don't believe in tollhouses, at least not on Fr. Seraphim's terms. It is one thing to believe aerial tollhouses are a detail of the Church's teaching. It is another thing, when you have a certain "budget" of your listener's attention and sympathy, to spend a significant amount of that "attention and sympathy budget" on tollhouses. (What is going on here?) Tollhouse may be real and true, for all I know, but even Orthodox who believe in them should resist what is overly reminiscent of making a new insertion into the Creed.

The second element of the "Canon within the Canon" for Fr. Seraphim's half-converted followers is the acceptance of young earth creationism that is backed by a very Protestant Creation "Science," which most conservative Protestants have long since abandoned, enough to make a Seraphinian willing to question whether someone who disagrees should be called Orthodox. I have already discussed this, and will not comment further here.

For the third element, let me try to clear one distraction out of the way. I wrote [The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#) and share some of Fr. Seraphim's concerns in [The Orthodox World-View](#), however truth is mixed with the kind of strange inaccuracy that leads one to wonder what rendered Fr. Seraphim so trusting in dealing with rumors and so willing to disseminate them:

“The increasing centralization of information on and power over the individual, represented in particular by the enormous new computer in Luxembourg, which has the capacity to keep a file of information on every man living; its code number is 666 and it is

nicknamed "the beast" by those who work on it. To facilitate the working of such computers, the American government plans to begin in 1984 the issuance of Social Security checks to persons with a number (apparently including the code number 666) stamped on their right hand or forehead—precisely the condition which will prevail, according to the Apocalypse (ch. 13) during the reign of antichrist. Of course, it doesn't mean that the first person to get himself stamped 666 is the antichrist, or the servant of antichrist, but once you are used to this, who will be able to resist? They will train you first and then they will make you bow down to him.

Whaaaa?

"Code number"? What on earth is that? To an information technology professional, it sounds like a made-up term from bad science fiction. I am a seasoned professional, and though computers may have model numbers, this is the first I've heard of a "code number," whatever *that* is.

We live in increasing surveillance and abnormality, but have U.S. seniors collecting social security really had to be inscribed with the mark of the beast for three decades and counting? And computer speeds have been increasing at a geometric rate, to the point that if you have a smartphone, it is more powerful than all the computers that existed when Fr. Seraphim's lecture was given. Today's NSA is trying to do pretty much what Fr. Seraphim claimed, but there's no way you could build a computer, however enormous, with technologies that existed in 1982. And there is more to say.

However, I am not interested in further exploring this line of critique because there is a serious concern to be had about worldview and the Western cottage industry of worldview construction that doesn't have an Orthodox bone in its body.

In some sense I may be personally have been spoiled a bit, and had things unusually easy. In my newly illumined eagerness I asked my spiritual father or godfather what seemed a natural and positive question to help me construct an Orthodox worldview. One or both of them

emphatically said, "**No.**" I had an invitation to walk the Orthodox Way, and I had every encouragement and support in that endeavor. But it was very directly pointed out that I had received *no invitation* to construct an Orthodox worldview at all. That response caught me off-guard to say the least; in schooling years before it just seemed obvious that loving God with your mind largely meant worldview construction as is the fashion in the West. I couldn't conceive of faithfulness that did not continually try to sharpen my worldview. (Now there are some things that I do that shape my worldview at a deep level; among these are silence, saying my prayers, attending Liturgy and bringing my sewer of sins to confession, and so on and so forth. But even Bible reading is not intended for worldview construction in the secular sense.) But now I am grateful to my godfather or my spiritual father, whichever one (or both) it was, who made it starkly clear that I was expected to drop my efforts at constructing an Orthodox worldview.

"Thinking worldviewishly", as the great Protestant philosopher Arthur Holmes put the matter, is a seismic shift in the spirit of this world and this age. The Wikipedia documents the term's German roots, which should raise a few alarms. One friend years back spoke of German theologians as being *pinheads*, by which he meant that they "didn't believe a word of the Creed." A social exaggeration, perhaps, but less of an exaggeration than you might think. Among the theologians I studied at Fordham's "Karl Rahner camp", Dietrich Bonhoeffer was the only German theologian I read who appeared to be able to say the Creed without crossing his fingers. Our department also studied theologians who were Nazis â€” former members of the Nazi partyâ€”; perhaps no one was enthusiastic about the Nazi allegiance but I never heard a professor apologize to students for the fact that the curriculum intended to shape us professionally and academically was so inclusive, it included quite a lot of texts by Nazis. And going beyond the very German concept, the Wikipedia specifically looks at worldview in relation to Christianity: "According to Neo-Calvinist David Naugle's *World view: The History of a Concept*, 'Conceiving of Christianity as a worldview has been one of the most significant developments in the recent history of the church.'" Worldview construction, and the entire enterprise of worldview tinkering, comes from well outside the Church. Anyone who sees the significance

and does not see the ingestion of worldview operations into the Church as a seismic shift is *really, really out to lunch*.

Now the evils Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted cites as warrants for worldview construction are real, genuine, and if anything worse than things were in his day...

...but two wrongs don't make a right. A Church defaced by junk media exposure is still better than a Church both defaced by junk media exposure and further defaced by the secular endeavor of worldview construction.

I have unflatteringly compared Creation "Science" to pocket lint next to the real and genuine *treasures* to be found in Evangelicalism. However, from my not-too-extended readings of Fr. Seraphim the Half-Converted and publications of the St. Herman of Alaska brotherhood, where half-converted Seraphinians dig in their heels and cast severe doubt on the spiritual health of anyone who disagrees with them, the points in question are not Fr. Seraphim's *treasures*. Fr. Seraphim writes about concrete pastoral love, worship of Christ, and so on and so forth. I imagine that he's wincing that the "Canon within the Canon" for even his most loyal followers are primarily limited to his views on Creation "Science," tollhouses, and worldview construction. I honestly feel sorry for him; compared to some of his patristic interests, Creation "Science" / tollhouses / worldview construction represent Fr. Seraphim the thinker's pocket lint, and a true and proper reception of the monk may mean significant departure from what his most vocal followers say. (This situation, incidentally, has historic precedent.)

Part of what concerns me is that it's not just Fr. Seraphim's critics who remember him by his failings; loyal Seraphinians give the impression that tollhouses, origins, and an Orthodox worldview are the only things Fr. Seraphim really wrote about. Fr. Seraphim self-corrected about innumerable things; his half-converted following appears not to do so, and so far as I tell have not had the "Emperor's new clothes" moment where a Seraphinian says, "Wait, we're importing a major feature of older Protestantism into Orthodoxy, which is not acceptable, and is still not acceptable if you confuse yourself into believing it's science and assume

that putting the word 'science' in its name makes something a science." (Again, John Searle, a leading naturalist critic of the AI movement and its "cognitive science," commented that anything with the word "science" is not a science: "food science," "military science," "Creation Science", "cognitive science.") Tollhouses, origins, and worldview are immovable among Seraphinians; but while Fr. Seraphim self-corrected about quite a lot, his following has yet to self-correct what seems to be a broken record with three tracks.

One almost, and with acknowledgment that this is not the intent, suspects an updated wording of the unchangeable Creed, agreed to by every Seraphinian insider and therefore not needing an Ecumenical Council to ratify:

The Nicaeo-Constantinopolitano-Seraphinian Creed

A Church historian might (or might not, or might very differently) summarize the Council of Chalcedon as follows regarding the Creed:

The original Ecumenical Council, summoned by Emperor Constantine to try to heal the wound when his Empire was being torn apart by arguments and heresies, was in Nicaea. Some centuries later the Emperor Marcian wanted to go down in history as a second Emperor Constantine, and with that desire in mind (although there were other issues that could have justified calling a Council as well), summoned another Ecumenical Council. Part of what contributed to Constantine's fame was that the Council of Nicaea had established what Creed Christians should adhere to. And therefore, Emperor Marcian wanted to go down in history as having set a new Creed.

The various Fathers of the Council stood in unmixed opposition to the concept. Write a new Creed? But the Creed had already been written, and it was already in its final form. The final form to which the Fathers gave their abiding assent was as follows:

The Nicene Creed (original)

We believe in one God,
The Father Almighty,
Maker of all things visible and invisible;
And in One Lord, Jesus Christ,
The Son of God,
Begotten from the Father, only-begotten,
That is, from the substance of the Father,
God from God,
Light from Light,
True God from true God,
Begotten not made,
Of one substance with the Father,
Through Whom all things came into being,
Things in heaven and things on earth,
Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down,
And became incarnate
And became man,
And suffered,
And rose again on the third day,
And ascended to the heavens,
And will come to judge the living and dead,
and in the Holy Spirit.
but as for those who say, There was when He was not,
And, Before being born He was not,
And that He came into existence out of nothing,
Or who assert that the Son of God is of a different hypostasis or
substance,
Or created,
Or is subject to alteration or change
- These the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.

And the Fathers at the Council were taken aback when they were informed that they were going to produce a new Creed, or at least a new wording to the Creed, whether they wanted it or not. ("Fathers", in this

context, means various grades of bishops and appointed subordinates deciding something at a council.)

One debate among scholars might be mentioned here. It is an issue concerning scholarship and less directly an issue concerning Creeds, but the more conservative stance is that the Creed is a particular Creed as established in one specific wording, and the more liberal concern is that a Creed is anything which is interchangeable in its wording with some classic formulation, and there is a 6th century manuscript witness that can be interpreted as having a Filioque clause. Other scatalogical details that could be mentioned include that the added words regarding the Holy Spirit do not, on a Sadducean legalistic reading, specifically state that the Spirit is divine in the fullest and absolute sense the Father and the Son are divine: someone who is trying to be a pest can read the text as Arius read the Son: an extra-special creature, but a creature and not properly God none the less.

I don't want to stick with this point too far, but I would suggest that while the liberal position may be true (and makes better sense of the manuscript traditions than the conservative position), it could not have been believed by the Emperor, nor could it have been believed by the Fathers. If all that was at stake was the formation of an additional wording of the Creed, it would have neither been worth the bother for Emperor Marcian to demand in his efforts to be the next Constantine, nor would it have been worth the bother for the Fathers to unite in resistance against such a modest trifle of a request. In the end the imperial steamroller won the day, and the Fathers, all of whom said, "No, the Creed has been articulated in its decisive form," made an adapted Creed that contributed much to the sense of victory that carried the end of the Council:

The Nicaeo-Constapolitan Creed

We believe in One God,
The Father Almighty,
Maker of Heaven and earth,
Of all things visible and invisible;
And in One Lord, Jesus Christ,
The Only-begotten Son of God,
Begotten from the Father before all ages,
Light from Light,
True God from true God,
Begotten not made,
Of one substance with the Father,
Through Whom all things came into existence,
Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down
from the heavens,
And was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
And became man,
And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate,
And suffered and was buried,
And rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures
And ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father,
And will come again with glory to judge living and dead,
Of Whose kingdom there will be no end;
And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver,
Who proceeds from the Father,
Who with the Father and the Son
Is together worshipped and together glorified,
Who spoke through the prophets;
In one holy Catholic and apostolic Church.
We confess one baptism to the remission of sins;
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, And the life of the
world to come. Amen

It's been some time since then; the position between Nicaea and Chalcedon was, "The Creed has been given its decisive form," and after

Chalcedon the take has been, "The only authority that can change a Creed is an Ecumenical Council." When Orthodox speak sorely of the Filioque clause as "an *unauthorized* addition to the Creed [emphasis original]", the point is not that somehow text was added to the Creed, but that the Pope, claimed in other contexts to have been offered primacy but claimed supremacy, did on his own authority what Orthodox bishops would only dare to do in the context of a full Ecumenical Council.

While Rome has continued to hold what it calls Ecumenical Councils, without any need for Orthodox involvement, the Orthodox Church understands 'Ecumenical' to mean something like 'the whole civilized world' or 'every place that there are Christians.' Therefore, aside from the question of being summoned by imperial authority like the Seven Ecumenical Councils, Orthodox have problems but do not consider ourselves able to do. The present Creed is not something we can really change even if we want to. But not all changes require a full Ecumenical Council to take effect, for the same reasons laws become dead letters.

Consider the following Nicaeo-Constantipolitano-*Seraphinian* Creed:

The Nicaeo-Constapolitano-Seraphinian Creed

We believe in One God,
The Father Almighty,
Maker of Heaven and earth,
*Through means that would only be guessed,
By heretics who walked the earth millenia after Christ,
And thereafter drawn from heresy into a faction of Holy
Orthodoxy.*
Of all things visible and invisible;
And in One Lord, Jesus Christ,
The Only-begotten Son of God,
Begotten from the Father before all ages,
Light from Light,
True God from true God,
Begotten not made,
Of one substance with the Father,
Through Whom all things came into existence,
Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down
from the heavens,
And was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
And became man,
And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate,
And suffered and was buried,
And rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures
And ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father,
And will come again with glory to judge living and dead,
Ratifying the verdicts of aerial tollhouses,
Of Whose kingdom there will be no end;
And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver,
Who proceeds from the Father,
Who with the Father and the Son
Is together worshipped and together glorified,
*Who inspired the prophets
To lay the foundations to constructing an Orthodox worldview;
In one [possibly True] Orthodox Church.*

We confess one baptism to the remission of sins;
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, And the life of the
world to come. Amen

Now on a literal level, only the most deranged would think it an
improvement to the Liturgy to include a version of this of the Creed.
Whatever else Western Seraphinians have wrong (*or right*), they have
shown no impetus to up-*date* the Creed...

...but something tells me that the Seraphinian "Canon within the
Canon" shows a curious habit to up-*stage* the Creed.

That's worse.

"CEASE AND DESIST" Is the New "I really appreciate the thought, but I'll have to take a pass on it this time."

There are some things you need to know if you're being harassed by half-converted Western Seraphinians.

But first, let me tell you two things that **won't** work. "*You'll catch more flies with honey than with vinegar*" is a common saying and a good rule of thumb, and it doesn't work in dealing with the kind of people who harass you. Trying to reason also doesn't work. Individual Seraphinians may be very good at logic or very bad at it, but in neither case will reasoning bring the spiritual about-face they need.

The standard advice on Facebook from Facebook is simple:

Facebook offers these tools to help you deal with bullying or harassment. Depending on the seriousness of the situation:

- **Unfriend** the person. Only your Facebook friends can contact you through Facebook chat or post on your Timeline.
- **Block** the person. This will prevent the person from adding you as a friend and viewing things you share on your timeline.

- **Report** the person or any abusive things they post.

The best protection against bullying is to learn how to recognize it and how to stop it. Here are some tips:

- **Don't retaliate.** Most bullies are looking for a reaction, so don't give them one.
- **Don't keep it a secret.** Reach out to someone you trust, like a close friend, family member, counselor or teacher, who can give you the help and support you need.
- **Document and save.** If someone has posted something you don't like, you can print it or take a screenshot in case you need to share with someone else later.

The only modification I would propose to Facebook's suggestions: With Seraphinian harassment, I have **never** regretted escalating too far or two quickly. Facebook says, "Depending on the seriousness of the situation." In this case, "the seriousness of the situation" almost automatically means *unfriend*, *block*, and *report immediately*. And follow up on the other steps, too.

Different social media will have their own lawyer-vetted "rules of engagement"; if I were being harassed on another forum, I would search for "[Name of site] harassment help."

As a side note, one lighter step than email to abuse@[their email provider] would be to simply create an email filter to keep emails but hide them from your sight. If you do not know how to this, ask the fifteen-year-old you know who takes apart and reassembles computers how to help you. It might not hurt to offer a slight bribe, like some gift certificate or freshly-baked cookies, although I would hope that such a teen would recognize you're distraught and help you out, and you owe it to yourself to see that those emails (including Facebook notifications) do not appear in your inbox for now.

A C&D letter can work wonders in the roughest circumstances; so can an email carbon copied to an authority, and I've gotten the best

mileage out of doing both at once.

If you're trying one of these, and it's not working, or you don't see what to do for your situation from above, I would recall a conversation faced by my mother some years back. (This was a few years back, meaning talking on a cell phone while driving did not have any particularly bad reputation.) And she had a big truck tailgating her in an unnervingly strange fashion, so that she was unnerved and wondering if she should call 911 for the strange driving situation. Now I don't want to invite people to make lots of frivolous 911 calls. However, the rule of thumb I might suggest is: **If something creepy is going on, and you're genuinely wondering if this situation merits calling 911, those two things themselves are probably a sign you should stop overthinking the matter, and call 911.** And if you are distraught and have trouble explaining some weird form of harassment, 911 operators are trained to deal effectively with callers who are stressed and not as clear-headed as they'd like to be.

Now if you're looking at this and saying, "*This flies in the face of everything I've heard about good social graces,*" I might suggest, "*Yes; that's intended.*" People who harass you after you repeatedly ask them to stop have pissed on your honey-sweet offering. The social rules in this situation are completely different. "Polite" in any usual sense means "optional and ignored." End of discussion.

A psychiatrist who has studied elsewhere suggests that the patients he studies do not respond to politeness or decency—but they do respond to force. They responded to a clear and polite request with a veto. Because it's optional, and therefore there is no need to do anything with it but opt out. Then when Peck produced a live threat with possibilities for real consequences, they fell in line *immediately*. This is a pattern.

For more detail, see [Scott Peck, *People of the Lie*, starting around page 58.](#)

But most importantly, take care of yourself. If as Fr. Thomas Hopko concluded [his excellent collection of 55 maxims](#) "Get help when you need it, without fear and without delay."

This is wise advice across the board, and sometimes in a stressful situation we can forget to take care of ourselves, almost as if we were sick. But request a pastoral visit, or have lunch with a friend, or seeing a counselor, or making time for a gentle walk or intense exercise... Get help when you need it, without fear and without delay.

Conclusion

I spoke briefly with a friend of Fr. Seraphim himself and said, "I'd like to clarify and arguably curtail my remarks." She had said something about Fr. Seraphim as a co-struggler, and my clarification is that I do not see Fr. Seraphim as having *no* place in Orthodoxy; the role of a "co-struggler" is one I would readily enough accept, and usually when he said, "There's something seriously wrong in Western culture," that reflected an accurate and possibly insightful perception of something seriously wrong in Western culture.

However, while I accept Fr. Seraphim as one who tried hard to fight the good fight, I become nervous when people treat him as much as possible as a canonized saint before any glorification, including the title "Blessed Seraphim Rose" (one priest asked, "*Blessed'? When did that happen?*"), and I become increasingly nervous when he becomes the pole star. C.S. Lewis, to quote a Protestant great, wrote, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

I've found that nasty things follow when people say by their deeds, "I believe in Bl. Seraphim Rose as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." *No saint save Christ alone deserves that place.*

Fr. Seraphim, born Eugene Rose, became a hieromonk whose struggles simply command respect...

...But "*Blessed Seraphim Rose*" isn't a saint...

...it's really a flavor of Kool-Aid.