

A Pack of Cigarettes for the Mind

Selections from the *Hidden Price Tags: An Eastern Orthodox Look at the Dark Side of Technology and Its Best Use* series

C.J.S. Hayward

C.J.S. Hayward Publications Spotsylvania

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

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

The series this title is drawn from is available at <https://cjshayward.com/hpt>.

*To Dr. Luis Lugo, who first introduced me to Neil
Postman's Amusing Ourselves to Death—*

*—Your kind recommendation has snowballed into my
signal contribution to the conversation—*

—and that is far from the only thing I respect in you.

“Television is a crawling abomination from the darkest pits of Hell. It is a pack of cigarettes for the mind. It blinds the inner eye.”

—Yours Truly, “100 Ways of Kything,” #66, “Fire a ballista at your television.”

“I don’t use this shit and my kids are not allowed to use this shit either.”

—Chamath Palihapitiya, former vice-president in charge of user growth at Facebook.

Table of Contents

Introduction	9
Plato: The Allegory of the... <i>Flickering Screen?</i>	12
Religion within the Bounds of Amusement.....	22
The <i>Silicon</i> Rule	34
Beware of Geeks Bearing Gifts.....	51
Papers and Paychecks	58
55 New Maxims for the Cyber-Quarantine.....	66
A Note to the Reader	78
Could We Aim for Zero Hours Unnecessary Screen Time?	81
The Consolation of Theology	91
The Magic Stone.....	154
Commencement	165

Introduction

This book may be read with or without reference to the original series.

Critiques of technology age well

Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* develops one critique of "Artificial Unusualness,"¹ which in 1978 at the time the book was written, dealt with how a certain bag of tricks was used to make television much stickier, despite the fact that it was an intrinsically boring medium, still often a hazy black and white. Now technology has changed remarkably and it is common to have big-screen full-color TV's with incredibly sharp resolution and brilliant colors. Mander asserts that a camera simply shooting a beach without people was booooring, an assertion which need not be true with good technology today, but notwithstanding the advances in how interesting a camera shooting an unpeopled beach may be,

¹ Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, New York: Perennial, 1978, 299-322.

TV producers and others have kept up the same “bag of tricks” and expanded it to include, for instance, spicy computer graphics. Like on the web. The technology has improved markedly (and a flatscreen technology TV today is a successor to black and white or color tube TV’s), but Mander’s critique of artificial unusualness remains pretty much as salient today as when the ink was still wet on the book’s pages. Or, perhaps, much *more* salient, and a lot more than television sports artificial unusualness today.

Nicholas Carr’s *The Shallows* was written before mobile devices took over, but in my opinion he was right to come back to his book ten years later and didn’t rewrite it, but just wrote what might be called a “catch-up chapter.” The mobile revolution is highly significant, but it does not invalidate what he said about social nets, for instance; if anything, his points hold more strongly.

In both these cases there have been marked changes and advances in technologies that implement certain roles, but the saliency of an incisive critique has not grown out of date. If anything, it has become more relevant, and I would claim as predecessors *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*,² *Amusing Ourselves to Death*,³ *The Plug-in Drug*,⁴ and *The Shallows*.⁵

So why another book?

² Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, New York: Perennial, 1978.

³ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*, London: Penguin, 2005.

⁴ Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug: Television, Computers, and Family Life*, London: Pengion 2002.

⁵ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: How the Internet is Changing the Way we Think, Read and Remember*, London: Atlantic, 2020.

This book, is intended to offer more than a critique; it is intended to offer a step forward when major technologies are socially mandated.

It is also meant to approach its task with exquisite literary artistry.

Let's dig in!

Introduction to “Plato: The Allegory of the... *Flickering Screen?*”

Plato’s most famous work is “The Allegory of the Cave,” in which prisoners in an odd prison mistake shadows cast on a wall for the real thing.

Here, the direction in which the text moves is a changed direction , but with remarkably little editing. Jean-Claude Larchet, in *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul* envisioned something like this, but did not work it out. (I believe he and I imagined it independently.) It speaks here of deleterious use of technologies that are made for some agenda other than the spiritual benefit of their users.

I invite you to read Larchet’s suggestion spelled out.

Plato: The Allegory of the... *Flickering Screen?*

Socrates: And now, let me give an illustration to show how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened:—Behold! a human being in a darkened den, who has a slack jaw towards only source of light in the den; this is where he has gravitated since his childhood, and though his legs and neck are not chained or restrained any way, yet he scarcely turns round his head. In front of him are images from faroff, projected onto a flickering screen. And others whom he cannot see, from behind their walls, control the images like marionette players manipulating puppets. And there are many people in such dens, some isolated one way, some another.

Glaucon: I see.

Socrates: And do you see, I said, the flickering screen showing men, and all sorts of vessels, and statues and collectible animals made of wood and stone and various materials, and all sorts of commercial products which appear on the screen? Some of them are talking, and there is rarely silence.

Glaucon: You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Socrates: Much like us. And they see only their own images, or the images of one another, as they appear on the screen opposite them?

Glaucon: True, he said; how could they see anything but the images if they never chose to look anywhere else?

Socrates: And they would know nothing about a product they buy, except for what brand it is?

Glaucon: Yes.

Socrates: And if they were able to converse with one another, wouldn't they think that they were discussing what mattered?

Glaucon: Very true.

Socrates: And suppose further that the screen had sounds which came from its side, wouldn't they imagine that they were simply hearing what people said?

Glaucon: No question.

Socrates: To them, the truth would be literally nothing but those shadowy things we call the images.

Glaucon: That is certain.

Socrates: And now look again, and see what naturally happens next: the prisoners are released and are shown the truth. At first, when any of them is liberated and required to suddenly stand up and turn his neck around, and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the images; and then imagine someone saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, -what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is asking him to things, not as they are captured on the screen, but in living color -will he not be perplexed? Won't he imagine that the version which he used to see on the screen are better and more real than the objects which are shown to him in real life?

Glaucon: Far better.

Socrates: And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take and take in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive

to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

Glaucon: True, he now will.

Socrates: And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and hindered in his self-seeking until he's forced to think about someone besides himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? He will find that he cannot simply live life as he sees fit, and he will not have even the illusion of finding comfort by living for himself.

Glaucon: Not all in a moment, he said.

Socrates: He will require time and practice to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the billboards best, next the product lines he has seen advertised, and then things which are not commodities; then he will talk with adults and children, and will he know greater joy in having services done to him, or will he prefer to do something for someone else?

Glaucon: Certainly.

Socrates: Last of he will be able to search for the One who is greatest, reflected in each person on earth, but he will seek him for himself, and not in another; and he will live to contemplate him.

Glaucon: Certainly.

Socrates: He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and is absolutely the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Glaucon: Clearly, he said, his mind would be on God and his reasoning towards those things that come from him.

Socrates: And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

Glaucon: Certainly, he would.

Socrates: And if they were in the habit of conferring honours among themselves on those who were quickest to observe what was happening in the world of brands and what new features were marketed, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honours and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer, "Better to be the poor servant of a poor master" than to reign as king of this Hell, and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?

Glaucon: Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.

Socrates: Imagine once more, I said, such an one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness, and seem simply not to get it?

Glaucon: To be sure.

Socrates: And in conversations, and he had to compete in one-upsmanship of knowing the coolest brands with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went with his eyes and down he came without them; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would give him an extremely heavy cross to bear.

Glaucon: No question. Then is the saying, “In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king,” in fact false?

Socrates: In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is crucified. Dear Glaucon, you may now add this entire allegory to the discussion around a matter; the den arranged around a flickering screen is deeply

connected to the world of living to serve your pleasures, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the spiritual transformation which alike may happen in the monk keeping vigil or the mother caring for children, the ascent of the soul into the world of spiritual realities according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the Source of goodness appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

Glaucon: I agree, he said, as far as I am able to understand you.

Discussion questions for “Plato: The Allegory of the... *Flickering Screen?*”

1. If you've read Plato's most famous allegory, how is this allegory like Plato?
2. If you've read Plato's most famous allegory, how is this allegory different from Plato?
3. How does this allegory stand on its own?
4. What do the prisoners stand for?
5. What do the shadowy images stand for?
6. How do we come out of the cave and behold the sun?
7. What are the costs of coming out of the cave and beholding the sun?

8. What are the benefits of coming out of the cave and beholding the sun?
9. What can you do to be one notch less in the world of shadows?

Introduction to “Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement”

This piece of satire was written after reading Neil Postman’s *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*,⁶ and attending a church service that was so TV-like that there was a rectangular hanging like what you see on a TV screen, above the pulpit.

Neil Postman said that he was not worried about religion becoming the content of television. He was worried about television becoming the content of religion.⁷

⁶ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*, London: Penguin, 2005.

⁷⁷⁷ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business*, London: Penguin, 2005, 124.

This work was written after I tried, a student, to engage the pastor of the television-as-religion service, and he refused to dispute with me. It is also one of the first works that I wrote under “inspiration,” a condition where a half-formed work comes to me and I struggle to give it flesh, wrestling both to master it and to get myself out of the way for it to be properly expressed (these are paradoxically two sides of the same coin).

Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement

On the screen appear numerous geometrical forms—prisms, cylinders, cubes — dancing, spinning, changing shape, in a very stunning computer animation. In the background sounds the pulsing beat of techno music. The forms waver, and then coalesce into letters: “Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement.”

The music and image fade, to reveal a man, perfect in form and appearance, every hair in place, wearing a jet black suit and a dark, sparkling tie. He leans forward slightly, as the camera focuses in on him.

“Good morning, and I would like to extend a warm and personal welcome to each and every one of you from those of us at the Church of the Holy Television. Please sit back, relax, and turn off your brain.”

Music begins to play, and the screen shows a woman holding a microphone. She is wearing a long dress of the whitest white, the color traditionally symbolic of goodness and purity, which somehow manages not to conceal her

unnaturally large breasts. The camera slowly focuses in as she begins to sing.

“You got problems? That’s OK. You got problems? That’s OK. Not enough luxury? That’s OK. Only three cars? That’s OK. Not enough power? That’s OK. Can’t get your way? That’s OK. Not enough for you? That’s OK. Can’t do it on your own? That’s OK. You got problems? That’s OK. You got problems? That’s OK. Just call out to Jesus, and he’ll make them go away. Just call out to Jesus, and he’ll make them go away.”

As the music fades, the camera returns to the man.

“Have you ever thought about how much God loves us? Think about the apex of progress that we are at, and how much more he has blessed us than any one else.

“The Early Christians were in a dreadful situation. They were always under persecution. Because of this, they didn’t have the physical assurance of security that is the basis for spiritual growth, nor the money to buy the great libraries of books that are necessary to cultivate wisdom. It is a miracle that Christianity survived at all.

“The persecution ended, but darkness persisted for a thousand years. The medievals were satisfied with blind faith, making it the context of thought and leisure. Their concept of identity was so weak that it was entangled with obedience. The time was quite rightly called the Dark Ages.

“But then, ah, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Man and his mind enthroned. Religion within the bounds of reason. Then science and technology, the heart of all true progress, grew.

“And now, we sit at the apex, blessed with more and better technology than anyone else. What more could you possibly ask for? What greater blessing could there possibly

be? We have the technology, and know how to enjoy it. Isn't God gracious?"

There is a dramatic pause, and then the man closes his eyes. "Father, I thank you that we have not fallen into sin; that we do not worship idols, that we do not believe lies, and that we are not like the Pharisees. I thank you that we are good, moral people; that we are Americans. I thank you, and I praise you for your wondrous power. Amen."

He opens his eyes, and turns to the camera. It focuses in on his face, and his piercing gaze flashes out like lightning. With a thunderous voice, he boldly proclaims, "To God alone be the glory, for ever and ever!"

The image fades.

In the background can be heard the soft tones of Beethoven. A couple fades in; they are elegantly dressed, sitting at a black marble table, set with roast pheasant. The room is of Baroque fashion; marble pillars and mirrors with gilt frames adorn the walls. French windows overlook a formal garden.

The scene changes, and a sleek black sports car glides through forest, pasture, village, mountain. The music continues to play softly.

It passes into a field, and in the corner of the field a small hovel stands. The camera comes closer, and two half-naked children come into view, playing with some sticks and a broken Coca-Cola bottle. Their heads turn and follow the passing car.

A voice gently intones, "These few seconds may be the only opportunity some people ever have to know about you. What do you want them to see?"

The picture changes. Two men are walking through a field. As the camera comes closer, it is seen that they are

deep in conversation.

One of them looks out at the camera with a probing gaze, and then turns to the other. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know, Jim." He draws a deep breath, and closes his eyes. "I just feel so... so empty. A life filled with nothing but shallowness. Like there's nothing inside, no purpose, no meaning. Just an everlasting nothing."

"Well, you know, John, for every real and serious problem, there is a solution which is trivial, cheap, and instantaneous." He unslings a small backpack, opening it to pull out two cans of beer, and hands one to his friend. "Shall we?"

The cans are opened.

Suddenly, the peaceful silence is destroyed by the blare of loud rock music. The camera turns upwards to the sky, against which may be seen parachutists; it spins, and there is suddenly a large swimming pool, and a vast table replete with great pitchers and kegs of beer. The parachutists land; they are all young women, all blonde, all laughing and smiling, all wearing string bikinis, and all anorexic.

For the remaining half of the commercial, the roving camera takes a lascivious tour of the bodies of the models. Finally, the image fades, and a deep voice intones, "Can you think of a better way to spend your weekends?"

The picture changes. A luxury sedan, passing through a ghetto, stops beside a black man, clad in rags. The driver, who is white, steps out in a pristine business suit, opens his wallet, and pulls out five crisp twenty dollar bills.

"I know that you can't be happy, stealing, lying, and getting drunk all of the time. Here is a little gift to let you know that Jesus loves you." He steps back into the car

without waiting to hear the man's response, and speeds off.

Soon, he is at a house. He steps out of the car, bible in hand, and rings the doorbell.

The door opens, and a man says, "Nick, how are you? Come in, do come in. Have a seat. I was just thinking of you, and it is so nice of you to visit. May I interest you in a little Martini?"

Nick sits down and says, "No, Scott. I am a Christian, and we who are Christian do not do such things."

"Aah; I see." There is a sparkle in the friend's eye as he continues, "And tell me, what did Jesus do at his first miracle?"

The thick, black, leatherbound 1611 King James bible arcs through the air, coming to rest on the back of Scott's head. There is a resounding thud.

"You must learn that the life and story of Jesus are serious matters, and not to be taken as the subject of jokes."

The screen turns white as the voice glosses, "This message has been brought to you by the Association of Concerned Christians, who would like to remind you that you, too, can be different from the world, and can present a positive witness to Christ."

In the studio again, the man is sitting in a chair.

"Now comes a very special time in our program. You, our viewers, matter most to us. It is your support that keeps us on the air. And I hope that you do remember to send us money; when you do, God will bless you. So keep your checks rolling, and we will be able to continue this ministry, and provide answers to your questions. I am delighted to be able to hear your phone calls. Caller number one, are you there?"

"Yes, I am, and I would like to say how great you are.

I sent you fifty dollars, and someone gave me an anonymous check for five hundred! I only wish I had given you more.”

“That is good to hear. God is so generous. And what is your question?”

“I was wondering what God’s will is for America? And what I can do to help?”

“Thank you; that’s a good question.

“America is at a time of great threat now; it is crumbling because good people are not elected to office.

“The problem would be solved if Christians would all listen to Rush Limbaugh, and then go out and vote. Remember, bad people are sent to Washington by good people who don’t vote. With the right men in office, the government would stop wasting its time on things like the environment, and America would become a great and shining light, to show all the world what Christ can do.

“Caller number two?”

“I have been looking for a church to go to, and having trouble. I just moved, and used to go to a church which had nonstop stories and anecdotes; the congregation was glued to the edges of their seats. Here, most of the services are either boring or have something which lasts way too long. I have found a few churches whose services I generally enjoy—the people really sing the songs—but there are just too many things that aren’t amusing. For starters, the sermons make me uncomfortable, and for another, they have a very boring time of silent meditation, and this weird mysticism about ‘kiss of peace’ and something to do with bread and wine. Do you have any advice for me?”

“Yes, I do. First of all, what really matters is that you have Jesus in your heart. Then you and God can conquer

the world. Church is a peripheral; it doesn't really have anything to do with Jesus being in your heart. If you find a church that you like, go for it, but if there aren't any that you like, it's not your fault that they aren't doing their job.

"And the next caller?"

"Hello. I was wondering what the Song of Songs is about."

"The Song of Songs is an allegory of Christ's love for the Church. Various other interpretations have been suggested, but they are all far beyond the bounds of good taste, and read things into the text which would be entirely inappropriate in holy Scriptures. Next caller?"

"My people has a story. I know tales of years past, of soldiers come, of pillaging, of women ravaged, of villages razed to the ground and every living soul murdered by men who did not hesitate to wade through blood. Can you tell me what kind of religion could possibly decide that the Crusades were holy?"

The host, whose face had suddenly turned a deep shade of red, shifted slightly, and pulled at the side of his collar. After a few seconds, a somewhat less polished voice hastily states, "That would be a very good question to answer, and I really would like to, but I have lost track of time. It is now time for an important message from some of our sponsors."

The screen is suddenly filled by six dancing rabbits, singing about toilet paper.

A few minutes of commercials pass: a computer animated flash of color, speaking of the latest kind of candy; a family brought together and made happy by buying the right brand of vacuum cleaner; a specific kind of hamburger helping black and white, young and old to live together in

harmony. Somewhere in there, the Energizer bunny appears; one of the people in the scene tells the rabbit that he should have appeared at some time other than the commercial breaks. Finally, the host, who has regained his composure, is on the screen again.

“Well, that’s all for this week. I hope you can join us next week, as we begin a four part series on people whose lives have been changed by the Church of the Holy Television. May God bless you, and may all of your life be ever filled with endless amusement!”

Discussion questions for “Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement”

1. Do you think his *Religion within the Bounds of Reason* was a good idea?
2. What of the heart is left out in such a project?
3. Do you think “Religion within the Bounds of Amusement” is a good option for worship?
4. What of the heart and head is left out in such an option?
5. Where have you experienced religion within the bounds of amusement?
6. Once you have given up attacks on the head, can you take the longest journey you will ever take, the journey from our head to our heart?

7. Did you get a good laugh out of this piece?

Introduction to “The *Silicon* Rule”

The *Silicon* Rule

One kind of feat in the arena of formulating ethics, that can be very valuable, is a question, statement, premise, etc. that is quite simple but sheds light on a wide variety of situations. The classic, quintessential example of such a gem is the Golden Rule: “Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.” Most or possibly nearly all world religions have some form of this concept.

The *Silicon* Rule proposed in this article is, like another mentioned ethical gem, one that may require a bit of context.

It looks at what technology decisions technology executives really make when the rubber hits the road.

The *Silicon* Rule

Taking a second look at asking, “What would Jesus do?”

I looked down upon on the “What would Jesus do?” fashion when it was hot, and I have never owned nor wanted a pair of “W.W.J.D.” Christian socks; for that matter, I have never asked that question. However, now much later, I wish to offer a word in its defense.

The Golden Rule, “*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,*”⁸ is not just a directive from the Bible; most or all world religions at least touch on it. And in terms of the disciplines of ethics it is very interesting in that is a simple and short ethical directive that sheds quite a lot of light over a very broad collection of situations. That’s a feat in formulating ethics. *Furthermore, it is also a feat represented by W.W.J.D.* If you read the Bible regularly at all, the question “What would Jesus do?” brings clarity to

⁸ Classic paraphrase of Matthew 7:12.

many situations.

Additionally, I would like to provide another rule.

The *Silicon* Rule

The Silicon Rule, as I propose it, is a rule for guiding technology choices:

“What do Silicon Valley technology executives choose for their children?”

Now, “What would Jesus do?” is only meaningful if you have some picture of what Jesus was like, and “What do Silicon Valley technology executives choose for their children?” may surprise you, although a search for “humane tech” might hit paydirt.

Jean-Claude Larchet, towards the end of his must-read *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*, talks about a fashionable private school and quotes glimpses of the private lives offered to children of Silicon Valley technology executives in Steve Bilton’s summary:⁹

The Waldorf School of the Peninsula, in the heart of Silicon Valley, is rare in that it is not connected [to the Internet]. Three quarters of the pupils are children whose parents work in the area, with Google, Apple, Yahoo, or

⁹ Jean-Claude Larchet and Archibald Andrew Torrance, *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Publications, The Printshop of St Job of Pochaev, Holy Trinity Monastery, 2019, Chapter 13: Prevention and Treatment).

Hewlett-Packard. These people who work to develop the digital economy and propagate it into every level of society are especially glad that in this school, their offspring are completely sheltered from computers, tablets, and smartphones right up till eighth grade.

“So, your kids must love the iPad?” I asked Mr. Jobs [...]. The company’s first tablet was just hitting the shelves. “They haven’t used it,” he told me. “We limit how much technology our kids use at home.”...

Evan Williams, a founder of Blogger, Twitter and Medium, and his wife, Sara Williams, said that in lieu of iPads, their two young boys have hundreds of books (yes, physical ones) that they can pick up and read any time.

So how do tech moms and dads determine the proper boundary for their children? In general, it is set by age.

Children under 10 seem to be most susceptible to becoming addicted, so these parents draw the line at not allowing any gadgets during the week. On weekends, there are limits of 30 minutes to 2 hours on iPad and smart-phone use. And 10- to 14-year-olds are allowed to use computers on school nights, but only for homework.

“We have a strict no screen time during the

week rule for our kids,” said Lesley Gold, founder and chief executive of the SutherlandGold Group, a tech media relations and analytics company. “But you have to make allowances as they get older and need a computer for school.”

Some parents also forbid teenagers from using social networks, except for services like Snapchat, which deletes messages after they have been sent. This way they don’t have to worry about saying something online that will haunt them later in life, one executive told me.

Although some non-tech parents I know give smartphones to children as young as 8, many who work in tech wait until their child is 14. While these teenagers can make calls and text, they are not given a data plan until 16. But there is one rule that is universal among the tech parents I polled.

“This is rule No. 1: There are no screens in the bedroom: There are no screens in the bedroom. Period. Ever,” Mr. Anderson said. [...]

I never asked Mr. Jobs what his children did instead of using the gadgets he built, so I reached out to Walter Isaacson, the author of “Steve Jobs,” who spent a lot of time at their

home.

“Every evening Steve made a point of having dinner at the big long table in their kitchen, discussing books and history and a variety of these things,” he said. “No one ever seemed to pull out an iPad or computer. The kids did not seem addicted at all to devices.”

Examples could easily be multiplied, even if one is only quoting Larchet. This is, quite briefly, what Silicon Valley technology executives want for their children.

My own working model

I remember, on environmental issues, someone talking softly about how “subdue the earth” in Genesis 1 originally meant a very gentle mastery. That was everything I wanted to believe, and I’d still like it to be true, but it has been said that the Hebrew has the force of, “trample it under foot!”¹⁰ In the Orthodox Church’s Greek Bible,¹¹ the word here translated as “subdue,” κατακυριω (katakurio) is the same verb that in the New Testament for how Orthodox leaders are not to relate to the rank and file, and can be translated “lord it over.” κυριος (kurios) is the basic word for “lord,” and the prefix κατα (kata) in at least some places

¹⁰ “Strong’s Hebrew: 3533,” Strong’s Hebrew: 3533. כָּבַשׁ (kabash) -- to subdue, bring into bondage, accessed September 14, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3533.htm>. The NASB rendering terms listed are “assault (1), brought them into subjection (2), forced into bondage (1), forcing (1), subdue (1), subdued (5), subjugate (1), trample (1), tread our under foot (1), under foot (1).”

¹¹ Genesis 1:27 LXX.

gives the word significantly more force.

Should we lord it over the earth? That's one thing I think we have done disproportionately well. However, I bring this up for a reason. I believe we can, should, and perhaps need to lord it over technology. The basis we should have for our interactions, above the assumed life in the Church and frequent reception of sacraments, is bedrock to how we should relate to technology. We should reject most use of technology along marketing positions. Possibly I will be under the authority of an abbot and be directed not to engage in electronic communication at all. For now, I have the usual technologies, apart from any working smartwatch.

One way I have tried to explain my basic attitude is as follows: most of us, most of the time, should not be calling 911. My understanding is that you can get in trouble with the law if you call 911 without having what the law considers appropriate justification; you don't call 911 because you're bored and you want someone to talk to. However, the single most important number you can call is 911; if you are in a medical emergency or some other major problem, being able to call 911 can be a matter of life and death.

My prescription is, in caricature, carry a smartphone but only use it when you need to call 911.

Apart from the smartphone, I try to avoid TV, movies, radio and so on. Michael in *Stranger in a Strange Land* said that he had questions about what he saw on the "g**d**-noisy-box",¹² and I really don't think I'm losing out by not being involved in them. Television has over the years

¹² Robert A. Heinlein, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (New York: Ace, 2018), 185.

grown a heavy dose of MSG; watching even a clean movie hits me like a stiff drink. Silence is something precious, and it has been called the language of the world to come.

On my smartphone, I've watched maybe a couple of dozen movies and have nothing loaded for it as an iPod. I have no games, or at least none for my own use, nor amusement apps. Its use is governed by silence, which means in large measure that it is used for logistic purposes and not used when I do not have a logistical reason to use it. I only really use part or what appears on my home screen: Gmail, Calendar, Camera, Maps, Weather, Notes, App Store, Settings, Termius (software for IT workers), GasBuddy, PNC, Kindle, Flashlight, Pedometer, Libby, Translate, FluentU (for language learning), DuckDuckGo (a privacy-enhanced web browser), Phone, mSecure (a password manager), and Text. Of those, I do not really use Camera, Weather, Notes, or Kindle.

This may sound very ascetic, but it is a spiritual equivalent of good physical health. Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*¹³ examines artificial unusuality,¹⁴ how we connect with the kind of stimulation we receive, and how children not stimulated by television can be stimulated by the natural world. My seemingly austere use of my phone gives me luxuries and conveniences that would have been unimaginable to emperors and popes in ancient and medieval times. Even in the nineteenth century, people were pushing the envelope

¹³ Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).

¹⁴ Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (New York: Perennial an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), chapter XV, 299-322.

on keeping toilets from smelling nasty.

One area where I am learning now is to avoid making fake or ersatz connections by computer or phone. I use Facebook and Twitter to announce new postings; arguably I shouldn't do even that. They are an arena for idle talking, and for fake friendship. Larchet's term for a person hollowed out by technology is "*Homo connecticus*," Man the Connected [to the Internet].¹⁵ There are numerous ways to be connected, all the time, in a way that is simply not helpful, and in fact an intravenous drip of noise. *Which we do not need, spiritually*. If I do not have an active conversation, I check my email by default about once an hour; though this might not be a good idea, I have turned off all sound notifications for text messages. In previous years, I had gone on "net.vacations" and avoided computers and electronic communication for a few days; more recently I have sometimes kept my phone on a permanent "Do not disturb."¹⁶ As far as my social life, I meet people (and cats) face-to-face when I can.

I also almost categorically try to avoid exposure to advertising, almost as if it were porn; both are intended to stimulate unhelpful desire. I tend to be a lot less likely to covet something and spend tight money on things I don't need. If I need something only after an advertiser paints ownership beautifully, chances are pretty good I don't need

¹⁵ Jean-Claude Larchet and Archibald Andrew Torrance, *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Publications, The Printshop of St Job of Pochaev, Holy Trinity Monastery, 2019). The term is a leitmotif throughout the text.

¹⁶ I found that if I turned on Do Not Disturb but did not turn it off, it would turn off anyway perhaps the next day. So I added a scheduled Do Not Disturb from 12:01 AM to 11:59 PM, and effectively have a Do Not Disturb that will stay on as long as I want.

it.

All of this is how, in the concrete, I have tried to trample technology underfoot, and really trample its marketing proposition. This is something of a countercultural use, but it works remarkably well, and if you can rein in yourself, it won't suck out so much of your blood.

What is the advantage of having a phone then? Wouldn't it be simpler to not own one? I personally think there is much to commend about not owning a smartphone, but it is a socially mandated technology. You should be able to get along well enough to have a paper planner and pad and a standalone GPS to navigate by, but this is how to skim the cream off of technology and not hurt yourself with its murkier depths.

All of this may sound excessively ascetic, or a feat that it isn't. Feel free to chalk it up to eccentricity or introversion. However, I would point out that the conversations in Silicon Valley technology executive's houses are quite lively. For example, here are eleven things you might do, or start doing.

1. Read a book by yourself.
2. Read a book and discuss it with others.
3. Take up a new hobby, like woodworking. You can make a lot of interesting things woodworking.
4. Go to an Orthodox church. After that, take a breather and go to a museum or a library.
5. Pick one topic and research it as far as you can in

a fixed number of days. Share with others what you learned.

6. eBuy a pair of binoculars and take up bird watching. Please note that local conservation society members, park districts, possibly libraries, and so on, may have excellent advice on how to get involved.
7. Spend an hour in silence, just sit, and unwind.
8. Use older technologies and practices. Drive to visit someone instead of calling. Call instead of texting. Watch old 1950's movies that are at an "F" on special effects but an "A" on plot and storytelling. Go outside and play catch with a ball or frisbee.
9. Take a walk or a hike, or fish up a bicycle and take bike rides for fun.
10. Have a conversation about everything and nothing.

Trample technologies underfoot as much as it takes to have a life.

How to get there

What I have listed above is more a destination than a means how. As far as "how" goes, the basic method is to start whittling away at your consumption of noise bit by bit. If you watch television, you might decide in advance what you want to watch, and stick to only shows you've picked

out. After that, vote one show per week off the island (maybe one show per month would stick better), until there is only one show, and then cut into the days you watch it. That is much more effective than through sheer force of will to stop watching together until you binge and decide you can't live without it. And the same principle applies with other things.

Start voting apps off the island, too!

An Orthodox priest, or a psychologist, can be very good at helping you taper down and stop activities, and another perspective can really help. If you want to stick with a book, Tito Colliander's *The Way of the Ascetics: The Ancient Tradition of Inner and Spiritual Growth* displays the discipline well¹⁷. However, a real, live encounter with a psychologist or Orthodox priest gives a valuable second set of eyes, and making the pilgrimage and overcoming a bit of shyness are two good things you should want to have.

One P.S. about motivation

My main motivation in writing this is for you and your spiritual health. Now it might also be good for your body to stop vegetating with your smartphone and start doing things, and it might also be beneficial for the environment in that it encourages a much lighter step in consumption.

Would you take one small step, for yourself?

What you can do to tame your

¹⁷ Tito Colliander, Ferré Katherine, and Kenneth Leech, *Way of the Ascetics: The Ancient Tradition of Discipline and Inner Growth* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003).

phone

Popes and bishops, kings and princes have lived without ever using a cell phone once.

This section is meant to be a grab bag of techniques that might be helpful, added, dropped, or adapted according to your current need. I kept my phone turned off until I was more disengaged, and have not subsequently felt the need to return—but I do not regard it as in any sense wasted effort. I am fully willing to keep my phone off again should I need it again.

What not to do with your phone

A phone becomes tamer when you stop using it to palliate boredom. If you use a phone for entertainment, only such things will be attractive to you. Be in contact with your surroundings, other people, and nature. *Practice the mindfulness that we are seeking from the East because we have rejected it in the West* through technology and other means. You will be sensitized to the quite different things they will have to attract you.

It can also be of benefit to only check social media from a laptop or desktop computer. That creates a bit of distance and can help curb your usage.

Keep your phone turned off most of the time.

One option is to carry your phone with you, but turned off. When you specifically need to use it, turn the phone, use it (perhaps to navigate by GPS), and turn it off

when you do not need to use it. The delightful inconvenience will help you realize when you are reaching for your phone while you don't need it.

Break apart the bundle and unbundle what a phone offers.

A phone is a tremendous convergence device, but we do not need all it has to offer.

The term “killer app” in information technology means a use or application of the technology that makes using that technology not really optional. One killer app for phone use is GPS... but you can buy a standalone GPS.

You can also have a standalone pad of paper, and a standalone camera if you want—although toting a camera may help you realize how little you need it.

It is possible, though this is not too well advertised, to get a phone plan that includes talk and text but no data plan. That gets you the benefits of an old-school cellphone without all the bells and whistles that come with the newer one.

You can still, as I write, find “dumb phones” at <https://dumbphones.pory.app/>. <https://sunbeamwireless.com/> offers a flipphone with a GPS but no terribly easy way to get a browser.

Smart!

Buy a used, pre-5G smartphone such as (as I write) you can still

find on eBay.

A lot of people I've talked with are wary of 5G as a different approach with a unique potential to fry us and possibly compromise our immune system.

Turn off biometric identification and have as long of a passcode as you can.

Biometric identification saves you an inconvenience, and here also, making things just a little more inconvenient can help.

Downgrade to a limited plan.

With my present carrier, I have a limited talk + text + data plan. Now it helps that there are some things I only do when I am attached to a wireless network (podcasts and other data-intensive work), but I find that I am making slightly more modest use of my phone when in the back of my mind I use talk + text + data with the realization every data use is coming out of a finite and limited resource.

A quick word in summary

These are some of the things I have found helpful in an ongoing fine-tuning of my life. I offer them as strategies; a good psychologist or priest can help you work with different technologies over time so that you are stretching some of the time and comfortable some of the time.

It is entirely worth it.

Discussion questions for “The *Silicon* Rule:”

1. What kind of technology decisions do Silicon Valley technology executives make for their children?
2. What kind of specific phone decisions do Silicon Valley leaders make for their children?
3. What kind of technology decisions would you like for your children, if you have children?
4. What kind of technology decisions would you like for yourself?
5. Which of the details provided in this broad rule seem most salient to you?
6. How much choice do you think you have in your

technology choices?

7. Where are some areas where you might have more freedom than you realize?
8. What can you do next to live the kind of life Silicon Valley technology executives want for their children?

Introduction to “Beware of Geeks Bearing Gifts”

Damon Knight’s classic “To Serve Man” has seemingly benevolent aliens come with all sorts of wonderful devices asking nothing in return, and after there are ten-year “exchange groups,” a horrified UN translator recognizes that the aliens’ book *How to Serve Man* is a cookbook.¹⁸

This is a parody set in our days. The book is written from the viewpoint of an elite member, who is looking for the best interests of the “Herd.”

It closes with someone scandalized about book contents.

This might be considered an alternate fictional representation making the point that C.S. Lewis tried to

¹⁸ “To Serve Man,” Wikipedia (Wikimedia Foundation, November 12, 2022), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/To_Serve_Man.

make in *The Abolition of Man*,¹⁹ at a much shorter length than *That Hideous Strength*.²⁰

¹⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, New York: MacMillan 1947.

²⁰ C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*, New York: Scribner, 1945, 1946.

Beware of Geeks Bearing Gifts

Why did we call ourselves the Katana? It was in the excitement of a moment, and a recognition that our project has some off the elegance of a Katana to a Japan fan. We were more current than today's fashions and for that matter *made* today's fashions, but representing an unbroken tradition since Plato's most famous work, what *they* call the world's oldest, longest, least funny, and least intentional political joke: *The Republic*. Things would have been a lot easier if it weren't for *them*. *They* obstructed the Katana.

The Katana have a dynamic thousand-or-so goals, but there is only one that counts: the relentless improvement of the Herd. Some of the older victories have really been improving agriculture what seems like thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold, with mechanized engineering for farming and a realization that you can have meat costing scarcely more than vegetables if you optimize animals like you'd optimize any other machine, under conditions that

turn out to be torture for farm animals. There are some lands where the Herd has been imbued with enough progress that the middle class has about as much creature comfort as there is to be had, and for that matter among the poor the #1 dietary problem is obesity. Maybe we made the Herd look more like pigs, but please do not *blame* us! *We* aren't eating that much!

We have been providing the Herd with progressively greater "space-conquering technologies", as they are sold, which neuter the significance of their having physical bodies and the structure of life that was there before us. First we gave gasoline-powered Locomotives and great Airbirds, devices that could move the meat of the human body faster. Now we are unfolding another wave of body-conquering technologies, which obviate the need to move meat. They are powered by a kind of unnatural living thing. Perhaps the present central offering in this horn of plenty, or what we present as a horn of plenty, is a Portal: a small device carried by many even in the poorest lands, that draws attention to itself and such stimulation it offers, disengaging from ancient patterns of life.

Things would be so much easier if it weren't for *them*. We tried to tell people that *they* hate women; now we've told people that *they* hate gays. *They* still get in the way of progress.

Yesterday there was a planned teleconference, a town hall among the Katana after an important document from *them* had been intercepted. It was encrypted with a flawed algorithm, but cryptanalysis is easy and semantics is hard, and we gave the document to the semanticists for analysis.

The title of the document was straightforward and one that the Katana was happy to see: "How to Serve Man".

But the head semantician came late, and his face was absolutely ashen. It took him some time to compose himself, until he said—"The book... *How to Serve... How to Serve Man...* **It doesn't contain one single recipe!**"

Discussion questions for “Beware of Geeks Bearing Gifts”

1. How much of this world do you see in this story?
2. What do you think the Katana represents in this story?
3. What do you think the Herd represents?
4. Do you think the Katana has the Herd’s best interests at heart? Why or why not?
5. What things can you do to not be managed as part of the Herd?
6. What piece of technology in your life is most like what the Katana is providing for the Herd?
7. Has your life been significantly changed by gifts from geeks?

8. What are the biggest intrusions of technology in your life?
9. How can you regain some control?
10. Have you researched Humane Tech, or might you? (Its site is at <https://humanetech.com>, with a “Take Control” page at <https://humanetech.com/take-control/>.)

Introduction to “Papers and Paychecks”

In early version of Dungeons and Dragons, there were various cartoons, including one featured at the opening of this work.

This work is intended to offer a look at really how interesting and exciting our world and our day is from the perspective of medieval fantasy characters, and help the reader see how wondrous it really is.

We live in interesting times.

Papers and Paychecks



"It's a great new fantasy role-playing game. We pretend we're workers and students in an industrialized and technological society."

To what shall I liken the great Metamediavals? For truly their world is like unto the Drow's Underdark, and they exceed the wonder of the magical energies pulsing through it and powering the society.

Let us begin. Characters have six attributes: Str (Strength), Dex (Dexterity), Int (Intelligence), Wis (Wisdom), Con (Constitution), Cha (Charisma). The ability scores are reached through adding the total of two six-sided die as is painted in the picture. In another time it might be three dice but people are weakened owing to the diet, poisons, unnatural foods, and radiations of their setting.

Perhaps a good place to start might be to say that they live in harmony with strange and wondrous technology. Now this may be expressed in ways odd to us, for most of us upon acquiring a really good magic item, want to keep it, but to them good technology is almost always new. So they can tell a joke, a jape:

I was trying to help a friend's son look into colleges, and yesterday he handed me the phone, really excited, and said, "You have got to speak with these guys." I fumbled the phone, picked it up, and heard, "—online. We offer perhaps the best-rounded of degrees, and from day one our students are equipped with a top-of-the-line Dell running up-to-the-minute Vista. Besides the ins and outs of Office 2007, we address back-end issues, giving students a grounding in Visual Basic .NET, striking the right balance between 'reach' and 'rich,' and a thorough groundings in Flash-based design and web design

optimized for the Internet Explorer 6. Throw in an MCSE, and marketing-based communication instruction that harnesses the full power of PowerPoint and covers the most effective ways to make use of animated pop-ups, opt-in subscriber lists, and—”

I interrupted. “Internet Exploder 6? Minesweeper Consultant and Solitaire Exp—excuse me, but what is your organization *called?*”

“The *A-rist-o-crats.*”

These people live at a great cusp, for to mankind as it had hitherto existed a great Orcish battering ram is battering the world’s doors:

BOOM! Internet porn!
BOOM! Anti-social media!
BOOM! Islamic ascendancy!
BOOM! Smartphones!
BOOM! Gay marriage!
BOOM! COVID!
BOOM! Vaccines!
BOOM! Transgender!
BOOM! ChatGPT and Golem AI!

And sooner or sooner the door will break to shivers and enter the Balrog.

What does “Metamediaval” mean? Let me liken it to a technology they have that is so old and so relatively humble that few of them would call it a technology. This

technology is called the “Magnifying Glass,” and its virtue is twofold: for it can be used as its name may suggest to make small things look bigger, but there is also a technique of holding it so that it turns all the mighty Sun’s radiations so that all of them are diverted to a single point, and then this second virtue makes the single point to grow first hot, then smoking, and then afire. Now the medieval period is a time when dominoes began falling, and the medieval period is likened unto the Magnifying Glass. And it is now true that it is functioning in its second virtue, for the medieval period is bringing together all the rays of the mighty Son and after a long time of growing hot, such as happened in early modern science, the Magician’s Twin, the point of its rays is at the meta-medievals in this nexus and the whole thing is as smoke and ready to wax aflame.

And the Magnifying Glass is a salient example because in the medieval period, it was discovered that early Magnifying Glasses could sharpen vision grown dull with age, and this caused a great stir for nobody knew that things might have a virtue that could revert, if imperfectly, the ravages of time. Aging need not be final. Now this bore flower and fruit in the meta-medieval period, and refined Glasses are common, and precious few think they are fighting nature. And in their Medical Science they have a branch which is in particular called “anti-aging medicine,” and the cooling of heat that helps transform a young and valiant man into a mature elder, is reversed by a single Pill. For they have made many medical Pills, made by a deformation of our Alchemy, and their Pills are like unto Potions save that there are many more kinds, and they rarely cost even so much as a single Gold Piece, and no one thinks this a Wonder except Pills that are recognized to

destroy with the Pleasure they give, except perhaps that the Pleasure of carnal relations which their ancestors found too violent and intense a Pleasure, is for them weak and unflavored, and they are “so dainty in their dreams of lust” that a wife will not satisfy a man so much as pixels on the Screen, and they have a telling and right serious song, “The Internet is for porn.” (From the point of view which reigneth in Hell, it is.)

And they have but a Last Mile of nature they have not yet conquered, and that Last Mile is themselves. For they are in rebellion with the last point of Nature, Human Nature, and they reject the Metanarrative that sees in marriage an Icon of Heaven and Earth, and something great and special. For earlier they have dismantled that Marriage should be permanent, and that it should be open to children, and that it should be between one Lord and one Wife, and that the Creator created them male and female. For many of them this is not enough, and it is increasingly common not to “identify” as Man or even in any sense Human.

Such Metanarratives have slipped through their fingers, and in fact the Lost say, “We have lost the Metanarrative,” though there be ersatz fragments of a Metanarrative, like the Metanarrative of all-powerful Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, abbreviated “STEM” after they had a great Controversy over the fate of unborn children who were conceived without pleasure and were not allowed to achieve birth.

And in the development of technology there is a class of space-conquering technologies, whose purpose is to overcome the limitations of their embodied nature. For they have iterations of newer Technologies which they take for

granted as not even real Technology, and which could move the human body faster and faster, in their Cars and Aeroplanes. The newer wave and the one they think of as Technology is “Action at a Distance” (such a term is used in their Science, but only for things like odd Thought-Experiments). For the Telephone has increased its reach and been replaced by a small and portable Computer, and superseded by the Zoom Chat, a layer of Technology that lies over other Technologies as a Base, so that not only are their Generations called by names for their Generations(!), but one Generation is called Zoomers.

And after a Cybernetic Quarantine which has groomed adults and children alike for Cybernetic Living, it proves easier to get the People out of the Cyber-Quarantine than to get the Cyber-Quarantine out of the People. And some meet in Virtual Spaces. And after that Quarantine has taken deep root, the fastest-growing religion on the books is no longer Islam, but “Nothings,” for People who believe in Nothing as their Ersatz faith.

And their energies are devoted to a pass-time of Escape, for those who have Tools that Emperors and Popes did not even dream of, exert themselves in escaping the present, at least when they do not attempt Mindfulness, and one of their many escapes is Role Playing Games of various descriptions, in which they Fancy they had best live in Medieval Fantasy.

To those interested in digging further into the Lewisian roots of this milieu, I strongly recommend a reading of C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*. The Technologies in that novel are quaint by the standards of the Metamediavals, but the spiritual signature is well nigh Identical.

Discussion questions for “Papers and Paychecks”

1. Do you identify with any elements of the “host milieu” in which the game of Papers and Paychecks is discussed?
2. Have we overlooked how interesting it is to be alive today?
3. What bits of excitement in life today have we overlooked?
4. Is there anything we can be grateful about with what we have, when we are alive, where we are?
5. What else can you take from this piece?

Introduction to “55 New Maxims for the Cyber-Quarantine”

Fr. Tom Hopko created a priceless “55 Maxims for the Christian Life”²¹ that succeed in packing an astonishing summary of Orthodox living in just 55 simple maxims.

This piece is not its equal and its longest entries are do not come near the crystalline simplicity of almost anything in Fr. Tom’s list.

Nonetheless, people seem to find a list of 55 maxims to be eminently relatable and this list is based on the popularity and effective communication represented by this gem.

This text is placed as a transition from the overall big questions perspective discussed in the previous chapter and on subsequent chapters that include much more focused

21 Fr. Thomas Hopko, “55 Maxims of the Christian Life,” 55 Maxims of the Christian Life - Fr. Thomas Hopko - Holy Cross Orthodox Church, accessed September 14, 2022, <https://holycrossoca.org/newslet/0907.html>.

attention to addictive cell phones.

55 New Maxims for the Cyber-Quarantine

(Note: Some of this is old and some of this is new. I'm not seeking to be original.)

1. Trust technology about as far as you can throw it, and remember that you can't throw software or the web.
2. When facing a situation, ask, "What would a Boomer do?"
3. If your priest is willing, ask for pastoral guidance in slowly but steadily withdrawing from technologies that hurt you. (Don't try to leap over buildings in one bound. Take one step at a time, and one day at a time.)
4. Practice the spiritual disciplines: prayer, fasting, generosity, church attendance, the sacraments, silence, etc.
5. Use older technologies.

6. Fast from technologies some of the time, especially on fasting days.
7. Use your phone only for logistics, never for games, entertainment, or killing time. (You cannot kill time without injuring eternity.) That, and be sparing about using your phone for research.
8. Unplug your intravenous drip of noise, little by little. It may be uncomfortable at first, but it's worth it.
9. Own and read paper.
10. Leave your phone at home some days.
11. Read *The New Media Epidemic*.²²
12. Read this volume, with particular attention to “The Consolation of Theology.”
13. Minimize or cut out completely your use of anti-social media. (By the way, spending time sucked into Facebook is a good way to enter a depression.)
14. Read up on Humane Tech (<https://HumaneTech.com/>)²³ and advice for how to

²² Jean-Claude Larchet and Archibald Andrew Torrance, *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Publications, The Printshop of St Job of Pochaev, Holy Trinity Monastery, 2019).

²³ “Catalyze a More Humane Future.” Center for Humane Technology. Accessed September 14, 2022. <https://humanetech.com/>.

take control

(<https://www.HumaneTech.com/take-control>),²⁴ but do not limit yourself to that.

15. Do not own a television.
16. Do not feed the trolls.
17. Choose face-to-face meetings over Zoom meetings if you have a choice, and Zoom over any instant messaging.
18. Consider screen time, and multitasking, to be a drain on the mindfulness we are seeking from the East because we have rejected it in the West.
19. Turn off all phone notifications if you have a live option to do.
20. Look at your phone when it rings or buzzes. Do not check your phone unprovoked every five minutes to see if you missed a text.
21. When you are reading on the web, don't just scan the page. Read it, like a paper book, slowly.
22. When you type, type full words, not txtisms.
23. Don't trade your adequate, existing, working gadgets for the latest and hottest gadget.

²⁴“Catalyze a More Humane Future.” Center for Humane Technology. Accessed September 14, 2022. <https://humanetech.com/>.

24. Set a fixed bedtime, and then lights out is lights out.
25. Keep and charge your phone in some room that is away from your bedroom.
26. If you use porn, stop. If you find yourself unable to stop, bring it to confession, and seriously consider Sexaholics Anonymous (sa.org) and maybe find a meeting (sa.org/meetings), or use XXXchurch.com.
27. Do not store up treasures on earth, but own and use technology only so far as it advances the Kingdom of Heaven.
28. Live by a Silicon Rule of, “What technologies do Silicon Valley technology executives choose for their children?” Steve Jobs, for instance, gave his kids walls of paper books and animated discussion, and so far as I am aware no iPads.
29. Reject contraception and Splenda.
30. Shop in real, local stores, even a local Wal-Mart, rather than making Amazon your first port of call.
31. “Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need.”²⁵
32. When you want to go shopping like some feel-good

²⁵ Richard J. Foster, *In Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth: Special Anniversary Edition Featuring Two New Essays*, Hodder and Stoughton 2008, 90.

sacrament, do not buy it. You may buy it after you've let go of coveting after it and probably let go of buying it at all, and not before.

33. Limit your consumption of TED talks, and recognize them, alongside psychology, as something of a secular religion. (But if you need help, "Get help, without fear or shame."²⁶)
34. Write snailmail letters, preferably with your own handwriting.
35. Recognize that from the Devil's perspective, "The Internet is for porn"²⁷—and he may have helped inspire, guide, and shape its development.
36. Expect Amazon and Google Books to delist priceless treasures. (This is already happening.)
37. Cultivate the virtues.
38. Cultivate social skills, especially for face-to-face situations.
39. If your conscience and applicable law permit, maybe

²⁶ Fr. Thomas Hopko, "55 Maxims of the Christian Life," 55 Maxims of the Christian Life - Fr. Thomas Hopko - Holy Cross Orthodox Church, accessed September 14, 2022, <https://holycrossoca.org/newslet/0907.html>, maxim 55.

²⁷ "The Internet is for porn" is a viral Sesame Street parody with a catchy, Sesame Street-style tune with multiple performances on YouTube. See DaVinciReloaded, "The Internet Is for Porn Avenue Q Original - Video," YouTube (YouTube, November 20, 2007), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-TA57Lokuc>.

consider owning and learning to use a gun. It's safer to have most criminals and some law-abiding citizens be armed than to have only criminals be armed.

40. Seek theosis in the acquisition of the Spirit.
41. When shopping, use a debit card before a credit card, and use cash before either one if you have a choice. Giving away paper bills and wondering what to do with change is a partial deterrent to buying things you do not need.²⁸
42. Never form an identity around the brands you patronize, and do not adopt a personal brand.
43. If you have the luxury, check email once per day. If your job or obligations do not permit a literal once per day checking of email, check it as often as you must. (If that is once per hour, don't keep checking your watch, but set an hourly alarm bell to remind you.)
44. Limit new technological intrusions into your life.
45. Repent of your sins.
46. Read aloud some of the time.

²⁸ See, for instance, Erin Hurd, "Credit Cards Can Make You Spend More, but It's Not the Full Story," NerdWallet, accessed September 14, 2022, <https://www.nerdwallet.com/article/credit-cards/credit-cards-make-you-spend-more>.

47. Cultivate connection with nature.
48. Drop your phone and drive.²⁹
49. Drop your phone and pay attention to the person you're with.
50. Keep good posture and take steps to avoid the diseases of civilization. Some approaches that have been taken to all be important include using Paleo diet (with fasts, eating vegetables in lieu of grain and saving bread for ceremonial purposes) and exercise, have a balanced ratio of Omega-3 to Omega-6 fatty acids, get real sleep, have engaging activities, and have social interactions.
51. Do not be surprised if you live to see the Antichrist rise to power, and recognize that we are already in an apocalyptic singularity.
52. Learn survival skills.
53. Recognize that it will be easier to get the people out of the cyber-quarantine than to get the cyber-quarantine, our new home, out of the people.
54. Keep a reasonable amount of cash available, at home or in a money belt.

²⁹ Messages delivered on Chicago area highways said "Drop it and drive" with a later clarification of "'Drop it and drive' means your phone, not your trash."

55. Read, and live, Fr. Tom Hopko's 55 Maxims.³⁰

³⁰ Meaning Fr. Thomas Hopko, "55 Maxims of the Christian Life," 55 Maxims of the Christian Life - Fr. Thomas Hopko - Holy Cross Orthodox Church, accessed September 14, 2022, <https://holycrossoca.org/newslet/0907.html>.

Discussion questions for “55 New Maxims for the Cyber-Quarantine:”

1. What have you already done to limit technology’s dominion over your life?
2. What would you like to do next?
3. Are you with your present use of technology and its effects? If you are not, what choices and alternatives do you have?
4. What is your favorite of Fr. Tom Hopko’s original 55 maxims?
5. Are there any of these 55 new maxims that strike you as helpful?
6. What of these maxims challenge you?
7. What lifestyle changes, perhaps one or two for now,

might you adopt to be less domineered by technology?

8. One quote falsely attributed to C.S. Lewis was, “Isn’t it funny how day by day nothing changes. But when you look back, everything is different.”³¹ How has your use of technology changed, for good or for bad, over the past year?
9. “Most people overestimate what they can do in one year, but underestimate what they can do in ten years.”³² What is a modest goal you might reach in one year? What might you achieve in ten years?

³¹ William O’Flaherty, “(CCSLQ-33) – Isn’t It Funny,” Essential C.S. Lewis, February 10, 2020, <https://essentialcslewis.com/2017/03/04/ccslq-33-isnt-it-funny/>.

³² Richard J. Foster, *In Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth: Special Anniversary Edition Featuring Two New Essays*, n.d, 107.

Introduction to “A Note to the Reader”

On a more light-hearted note, this is another note originally made available from my website.

I might comment that I am perfectly willing to draw in something from mathematics, engineering, technology, or science when it adds something of genuine value to the picture.

I just balk a bit when the science is there to mediate prestige, or a misguided sense of duty to be scientific.

A Note to the Reader

Dear Reader;

How do I love thee?

Let me count the ways:

`integer overflow error`³³

³³ In the C programming language as compiled under gcc, a standard “int” whole number can count up to 2,147,483,647, but if you count that high and add one more, an “integer overflow error” occurs and the messed-up number is changed to a negative number: -2,147,483,648.

Discussion questions for “A Note to the Reader”

1. Does the author have a sense of humor?
2. Can we draw on mathematics, engineering, science, and technology where it is helpful?
3. Are there others in your life whom you love in more ways than you can count?

Introduction to “Could We Aim for Zero Hours Unnecessary Screen Time?”

This article may represent to many readers a strategic goal and not a first grab at low-hanging fruit. The ideal *means* to this goal is the same as in athletics: start small and escalate slowly, under the guidance of an Orthodox priest or a psychologist if at all possible. That is how to, as Ovid said, add little and little and it makes a big pile.

Nonetheless, it is a goal that is well worth aiming for, and a key that unlocks pleasures that are probably not available to you now.

Could We Aim for Zero Hours Unnecessary Screen Time?

“It was a tremendous blessing to see children engaged in *physical* play.” Such I said to a visiting priest when two lovely priests’ families descended on the monastery for a daughter’s baptism. The specific game they were playing was called “Revenge,” and it was a tag-like game where “everybody’s it” and if someone tagged you, you had to sit down until the person who tagged you got tagged. I wasn’t enthusiastic about the *name* of the game, but it was timeless relating between children who knew how to constructively amuse themselves without the use of video games.

Michael Davis wrote of his own experience,³⁴

...As I said to Rod, “I reminisce about characters from *Age of Mythology* more than I do my childhood friends. I remember ‘visiting’

³⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/revenge-of-the-real>

planets from the *Jedi Knight* series more vividly and more fondly than I do our family vacations.” That’s all true, I’m sorry to say. And I could go on.

One year, the local Boy Scout Council had its annual jamboree in the field on the other side of our woods. It wasn’t our property, but it’s where I spent a huge part of my childhood playing. In the summers, I hayed that field for the local farmer. This was my home turf—and there were hundreds of other kids here, playing games and camping out! Yet all I can remember is how badly I wanted to go home and play *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast*

My happiest memory of Halloween growing up is playing *Tak and the Power of Jujū* with my cousin Zack before we went Trick-or-Treating.

And this is not atypical. This is normal, or rather, it’s not normal at all, but it’s what we have instead of *normal*.

Current recommendations, as I understand, are for limiting children’s screen time to two hours a day.

The problem with current recommendations

Limiting children’s screen time to two hours a day is markedly, markedly better than going libertarian with children who are not ready for that kind of freedom. Limiting screen time to two hours per day means kids know how to handle time not plugged in to a screen, and develop

face-to-face social skills. And that is nothing to sneeze at. But it leaves one core problem *quite* unresolved.

That problem is that at two hours a day of screen time, engaging with screens is the only first-choice activity, and anything else is just a consolation prize. Children can engage in physical play, and they can develop good social skills, but this is still a consolation prize to them.

In the passage I quote above, Michael Davis speaks of his own experience, incidentally before several more years of technological development made games even more addictive, and he had plenty of live outside of screen time, but still anything else that happened was a consolation prize next to screen time.

A look at Orthodox asceticism

The original subtitle to *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* was, "Fasting from Technologies." I believe that Orthodox asceticism or spiritual disciplines (church attendance, fasting, sacraments, regular prayers, reading edifying books, silence, etc.) offers the best basis I know to be able to know how to set boundaries with technology that will be to our profit.

Fasting is not just one ascetical practice among others in regards to technology; we will have richer lives if we can fast to technology. However, here I would raise a question of whether another spiritual practice may have direct bearing on how we should handle technology: silence.

Being in silence, and not breaking silence, is important. But just as taking necessary medicine during the Eucharistic fast without breaking the fast, it is possible to speak without breaking silence. The saints' lives mention

some figures who taught for hours to faithful in rapt attention, and did not break silence.

For one example of technology use, my father will normally watch a YouTube video of a mechanic performing a specific repair on XYZ make and model before he tries to perform such a repair on such a car. That is a use of screen time that does not break silence.

For background perspective, it has been commented that most people feel better after spending an evening submitting a patch to an open source software project than after an evening of trawling clickbait. I don't believe this is specifically a phenomenon with technology. I would expect that a lawyer at a community center, for instance, feels awfully good after successfully defending the basic interests of a destitute pro bono client.

I have found in my own life that how enjoyable I find my computer depends almost directly on whether I'm using it to give, or using it to get. Now I might clarify that part of the discipline I adopted has been being very, very reserved about computer games; I have a four dimensional maze³⁵ and the Roguelike game I cut my teeth on as a programmer.³⁶ But most of my software projects³⁷ are not games. I expect I could be about as addictive as I want about games, but without usually playing games, my computer is only really interesting to me when I use it to *give something*. And I recognize that my wanting to play a

³⁵ C.J.S. Hayward, "A Four-Dimensional Maze," at

<https://cjshayward.com/maze/>, 2008, as seen 5/21/23.

³⁶ C.J.S. Hayward, "Download Computer Game: The Minstrel's Song,"

<https://cjshayward.com/download/>, 2015, as seen 5/21/23.

³⁷ C.J.S. Hayward, "Open Source Software,"

<https://cjshayward.com/open-source-software/>, 2022, as seen 5/21/23.

Narnian computer game early today was simply a temptation and a distraction; I loved reading *The Chronicles of Narnia* but I don't think I should be playing another computer game, not even one in Narnia. The point that I enjoy my computer more when I try to *give something* applies equally to open source software projects and writing, although the load has shifted from programming more towards writing as I age.

I would suggest that a “zero hours unnecessary screen time” policy is better to grow with than “two hours per day” or even something like one hour per day. It's a criterion of quality rather than quantity, and ideally one of not spending five minutes wasting time in screen time.

I have elsewhere said that smartphones are rightly used for logistics and wrongly used to relieve boredom. I might also state that readily pulling out your phone for five minute Googlepedia hits is ...*Amusing and Informing Ourselves to Death*,³⁸ and true knowledge is not anything that can be pulled in five minutes for a web search. (Part of why my writing does not usually have footnotes is that I go through spurts of deep research and then let things simmer inside, and then spurts of writing / creation, and I regard no footnotes as better than shovelware Googlepedia footnotes to sources that a reader who follows footnotes can research as well as I can.) One rule of thumb I usually follow is that I do research primarily from going to books and going to a laptop, and do not use my phone for spur of the moment, on the spot research. True knowledge is not anything that you can pull in five minutes' research on a phone.

³⁸ Julia Schubert, *Neil Postman: Amusing and Informing Ourselves to Death*, Munich: Grin Verlag, 2012.

I believe fasting applies to technologies (and I write in a season of fasting!), but I now believe that the discipline of silence is also significantly worth attention, and that restricting ourselves to use of technology that do not break inner silence has much to do with how we can use what technologies we really need to use without being harmed by it.

And even before picking up in general about silence as a criterion that can help us identify what we would benefit from fasting from, I wrote in “ ‘Social Antibodies’ Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy”³⁹ about technologies that deliver “an intravenous drip of noise,” whether the technology in question is a device like a smartphone or a website like social media. I asked my abbot at one point, not exactly how far of an engagement with social media he would bless me to make, but what would be *best for me*, being an author, and he advised me to aim for not more than several minutes per day. I know it is a general principle that spiritual prescriptions from a spiritual prescriptions, like pharmacy prescriptions from a family doctor, are not ideally shared from one person to another, but I have kept his advice (and most days simply do not jack in to social media). And if he gave me this advice as an author, who could almost indisputably have better book sales by curating a personal brand via well-used social media, the case for restrictive or no social media use by people who would not directly benefit from social media celebrity status would be an even stronger case for “use sparingly, or not at all.”

³⁹ C.J.S. Hayward, “ ‘Social Antibodies’ Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy,” <https://cjshayward.com/social-antibodies/>, 2014, as seen 5/21/23.

In Marie Winn's *The Plug-in Drug*,⁴⁰ both the original and updated version make the case that quantity of time watching the plug-in drug is more important than the piecewise quality of programming, and that is not only an admissible but a significant observation. It can be stated that every hour you spend watching the plug-in drug is an hour you don't spend doing something else, and this seemingly trite nitpick is in fact a profoundly relevant principle if the only go-to activity for free time during the day is screen time.

However, I would add that quality *does* matter after screen time has been quarantined to be used for only part of the day, with significant time going to something else. And more specifically, I do not mean "quality" exactly in the sense of highbrow television; I mean the question of, "Does it break spiritual silence?" Video games do break spiritual silence, and create poisoned taste buds that are the much less capable of appreciating the simple pleasures of life. Davis has been kind enough to confess the example in his own life, and the warning is well worth heeding. But other forms of recreational screen time also break spiritual silence.

Logistical use of phones, to coordinate things or use GPS, can be helpful, and if the "noisy" use of a smartphones is something you don't have the discipline to stop, I may put in a plug for Sunbeam Wireless at SunbeamWireless.com, they provide flip-phones that can handle much of the logistics of a smartphone but do not have email, web, or an app store. If you're having trouble reining in your smartphone use, a wise decision may be to buy a flip-phone

⁴⁰ Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug: Television, Computers, and Family Life*, New York: Penguin 2002.

that may have many of a smartphone's super powers, but make noisy cell phone use, particularly including pornography, not at such an easy grasp all of the time.

I would encourage you to make careful choices with technology that opt for spiritual silence, and if you're an alcoholic who can't have it in the house and just not drink it, use a technology like Sunbeam Wireless. If your phone causes you to sin, cast it out and throw it away from you; it is better to enter Heaven with a judiciously feature-limited flip-phone than to have your new iPhone cast into Hell with you.

In our use of technology, let us aim for *moderation*, a moderation that removes unnecessary *quantity* of screen time, and a moderation that removes unnecessary *quality* of spiritual noise in screen time. *And if you can do this with the support of a psychologist or Orthodox priest, all the better!*

Discussion questions for “Could We Aim for Zero Hours Unnecessary Screen Time?”

1. How do you use your phone and other screen time?
2. Is there anything in your phone use that is “noisy”?
3. Does life outside of screen time taste “flatter” than addictive phone use?
4. Would you like to better be able to enjoy the simple pleasures of life?
5. What is one thing you could cut back on, and stretch yourself a little?

Introduction to “The Consolation of Theology”

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

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

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

Christian to write *The Consolation of Theology*.⁴¹ I invite you to read it!

The Consolation of Theology

Song 1:

The Author's Complaint.

The Gospel was new,
When one saint covered his ears,
And said, "*Good God!*
That you have allowed me,

⁴¹ The other part has to do with "The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab," as I discuss in C.J.S. Hayward, "The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab," <https://cjayward.com/blackbird/>, 2008, as seen 5/21/23. the person who made the remark had given his life over to the study of C.S. Lewis, but did not seem happy to have someone considered by some to eclipse C.S. Lewis, walk in his door.

To live at such a time!"

Jihadists do not act in a vacuum:

Atheislam welcomes conquerors,

Founded by the greatest Christian arch-heretic,

Who uprooted Incarnation and icons from all that was
Christian,

The dragon next to whom,

Arius, the father of heretics,

Is only a worm, with no fangs.

Their "surrender" is about as far as you can get,

From, "*God and the Son of God,*

Became Man and the Son of Man,

That men and the sons of men,

Might become Gods and the Sons of God,"

Instead denying the genuine reality of man.

The wonder of holy marriage,

Is tortured and torn from limb to limb,

On the installment plan.

Technology is made a secular occult,

I was right enough to write a volume,

The Luddite's Guide to Technology,

And in formerly sacred halls of learning,

People teach a "theology,"

Such as one would expect of *Monty Python*.

And what about all the things of my life?

I still seek monasticism.

I have tried many things in life,

Sometimes meeting spectacular success,

And sometimes found doors slammed in my face.

Even in work in technology,

Though the time be an economic boom for my field,

I was still shut out or knocked out from the boom.

It wasn't just in the Church's teaching,
In a story as old as Cain and Abel,
Of "The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab."⁴²
Why am I spinning my wheels?
When I was fighting cancer,
I switched my academic discipline to theology.
At Cambridge and then Fordham,
I wished to form priests,
A wish that never came true.

I.

And while I was moping about, a man appeared. He was quite short, but something in him was great enough to touch a star. He was wearing ancient garments with a golden shimmer, but the golden garments of a Patriarch were completely outclassed by his Golden Mouth, with a liquid, living golden tongue. The Greek letters Chi and Alpha were sewn upon his chest: the initials to "Christ is risen!" in Greek. I crossed myself three times, cautious about demons, and he crossed himself three times. He looked at me with blazing eyes, and said, "Child, didn't you write, and for that matter outside of Holy Orthodoxy, a koan?":

A novice said to a master, "I am sick and tired of the immorality that is all around us. There is fornication everywhere, drunkenness and drugs in the inner city, relativism in people's

⁴² C.J.S. Hayward, "The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab" at <https://cjsheyward.com/blackbird/>, 2008, as seen 5/21/23.

minds, and do you know where the worst of it is?”

The master said, “Inside your heart.”

He spoke again. “Child, repent of your own many and serious sins, not other people’s sins. Do you not know the words, first spoken by the great St. Isaac the Syrian and fully endorsed by the great St. Seraphim of Sarov, ‘Make peace with yourself and ten thousand around you will be saved?’ Or that if everyone were to repent, Heaven would come to earth?”

“It looks like you have, on paper, a conviction that every human life is a life worth living, but you lack the true strength that is behind it. Have you not read my *Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself*?⁴³ How the three youths, my son, in a decadent pagan court, did not defile themselves by eating defiled foods, but won the moral victory of not bowing to an enormous statue? And the angel gave them coolness and refreshed them with dew in external victory after they let everything else go in *internal* and eternal triumph?”

“You can find salvation at all times and in every place. Now you know that marriage or monasticism is necessary; and out of that knowledge you went out to monasteries. You went to the grand Holy Cross Hermitage and Mount Athos itself, and you were not allowed to stay. *So what?* You are *already* a monk in God’s eyes. Keep on seeking monasticism, without ever stopping, and whether you pass away as a layman or a monk, if you have sought

⁴³ As seen on “Orthodox Church Fathers,”

<https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/fathers/npnf109/npnf1037.htm#TopOfPage>, on 5/21/23.

monasticism for the rest of your days, and seek such repentance as you can, who knows if you might appear a monk in lifelong repentance when you answer before the Dread Judgment-Seat of Christ?

“Perhaps God has given you good things that were entirely legitimate for God to give to you, but immature for you to seek for yourself. You have a scholar’s knowledge of academic theology, and an excellent foundation for fighting some heresies, but you write for the public. Can’t you imagine that this may be more than such narrow writing, with so few readers, in scholarship’s confinement? As you have been given grace to walk the long, narrow road of suffering, you are free now to sit in your parents’ splendid house, given a roof over your head when you are legally homeless, and write as much as you can? That would be quite wrong and immature to seek, sitting under your parents’ roof and writing, as much as it would be wrong and immature to seek years’ training in academic theology and heresy without giving back one single day to the professor’s asceticism of seeking proud distinction. And there’s more. Even though this is not an issue of morality apart from asceticism, you knew the settled judgment that real publication is traditional publication and self-publication is vanity press. But without knowing, choosing, or even guessing, you were at the right place, in the right time, among the many shiftings of technology, again and again. Now, even though you don’t get any money worth mentioning from your books, you have written many creative works than you could if you were “discovered” and your creative process bogged down with the standard editorial process. You know better than to say “Wisdom is justified by her children,” about yourself instead of God, but none the less you have

made an impact. But God has granted all three of these to you, even though they may have come to you unsought and unwanted.

I stood in bashful silence.

Song 2:

His Despondency.

The saint said,
“How’s that?
How has this man,
Become a second Rich Young Ruler?
The man who didn’t wear a watch on principle,
Even before he’d scarcely even
Heard of Holy Orthodoxy,
Wears a watch built to stand out,
Even among later Apple Watches.
He who declined a mobile phone,
Has carried out an iPhone,
A less fancy phone,
From a state program to provide,
Cell phones to those at poverty.
Up! Out! This will not do,
Not that he has lost an item of luxury,
But when it happened, he were sad.
For the Rich Young Ruler lied,
When he said that he had kept,
All commandments from his youth,
For unless he were an *idolater*,
The loss of possessions itself,
Could not suffice to make him sad.

This man hath lost a cellphone.
And for that alone he grieveth.
Doesn't he know that money doesn't make you happy?
I wish he would remember,
The heights he has fallen from,
Even from outside the Orthodox Church.

2.

Then the great Saint said, "But we need something bigger than mourning now. Aren't you the man who said that we cannot *achieve* the Holy Grail, and not even *find* it: the only game in town is to *become* the Holy Grail? Now the Orthodox Church doesn't trade in "idle romances" like Arthurian legends. As late as the nineteenth century, Saint IGNATIUS (Briandhanov) gave warnings about reading just novels, which His Eminence KALLISTOS oddly gave embarrassed explanations. Today the warning should extend to quite a lot of technological entertainment. But I would still call your words to mind, and ask you to become the Holy Grail. For that matter, when you receive the Holy Mysteries, you receive Christ as your Lord and Savior, and you are transformed by the supreme medicine, when you taste from the Fount of Immortality?

"You were surprised to learn, and even this outside the Orthodox Church, that when the Apostle told you to put on the whole armor of God, the armor of God was not merely armor *owned* by God, or armor *given* by God. It was in fact the armor that *God himself wears to war*. The prophet Isaiah tells us that the breastplate of righteousness

and the helmet of salvation are God's own armor which he wears to war.

“You are sleeping, my son and my child. *Wake up!* There is silver under the tarnish that makes it look like the whole thing is corroded. Take what God has bestowed, wake up, and see all the treasure God has surrounded you with.”

Song 3:

A Clearer Eye.

Seneca the Younger said,
“We suffer more in imagination than reality,”
Quoted in today's rediscovery of Stoicism,
Discovering that ancient philosophy,
Can speak, act and help today,
Among athletes and in the business world,
And not only antiquarians reading dusty old books.
And if this holds for a mere school of philosophy,
Now cast in the academy's mold of distinguishing oneself,
What of the greatest philosophy, monasticism,
Whose Teacher and God are One and the Same?
I stood amazed at God,
Trying to count my blessings,
But I quickly lost count.

3.

Then I said, “I see a lot of truth in what you say, but my fortunes haven't been very successful. I went to Cambridge, with a strategy of passing all my classes and

going for broke on my thesis. The Faculty of Divinity decided, *two thirds of the way through the schoolyear*, that the thesis topic I declared at the beginning of the year did not belong in Philosophy of Religion, and made me choose another dissertation topic completely. I didn't get any credit or recognition for half my hardest work! That pales in comparison with Fordham, where I had to cope with my professor's insecurities, and a professor I really tried to reach out to met one gesture of friendship after another with retaliation. So when that door was shut, I returned to the clumsy fit of programming, a world since taken over by Agile models which make sense but require something I cannot do: becoming an interchangeable part in a hivemind. I've tried to break in to User eXperience, but nothing has come together yet, and the economy isn't helping. What can I rightly expect from where I am now?"

He said, "Why do you ask the future? It is wonderful. And why do you speak of your fortune? Truly, no man has ever had fortune. It is an impossibility."

I sat, listening.

He continued, "When at Fordham, under incompetent medical care, you were stressed to the point of nausea for weeks on end. You did not worry about 'Will I be graced by the noble honorific of Doctor?' even though you wanted that too much, but, '*Will there be a place for me?*' So far, this has been an example of, 'We suffer more in imagination than in reality.' For although the unemployment you feared has caught up with you, what is its sting?"

"You sought a better fit than as a web developer, and tried, and God has provided something else besides the success you imagined. *So what?* You have stayed with your

parents, a shameful thing for a man to seek, but honorable for God to bestow if you have sought sufficiency and independence. You know that on Judgment Day we are held to the standard of *due diligence* and not *results produced*: that due diligence often gets results is simply beside the point. You are not only provided for now; you have luxuries you do not need.

“There is no such things as fortune; only an often-mysterious Providence. God cares for each and for all mankind, and for that matter over sparrows and stones, and nothing in the world escapes God’s cunning net.

“As you have quoted the *Philokalia*:

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

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.
- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgement and establish virtue.

- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
- Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
- Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
- Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire virtue.
- Weakness and ignorance, so that, turning one's back on worldly things, one may be under obedience in stillness and humility.
- Unsought loss of goods and possessions, so that one may deliberately seek to be saved and may even be helped when incapable of shedding all one's possessions or even of giving alms.
- Ease and prosperity, so that one may voluntarily struggle and suffer to attain the virtues and thus become dispassionate and fit to save other souls.
- Trials and hardship, so that those who cannot eradicate their own will may be saved in spite of themselves, and those

capable of joyful endurance may attain perfection.

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

“And again:

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

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

Hemp, unless it is well beaten, cannot be worked into fine yarn, while the more it is beaten and carded the finer and more serviceable it becomes. And a freshly moulded pot that has not been fired is of no use to man. And a child not yet proficient in worldly skills cannot build, plant, sow seed or perform any other worldly task. In a similar manner it

often happens through the Lord's goodness that souls, on account of their childlike innocence, participate in divine grace and are filled with the sweetness and repose of the Spirit; but because they have not yet been tested, and have not been tried by the various afflictions of the evil spirits, they are still immature and not yet fit for the kingdom of heaven. As the apostle says: 'If you have not been disciplined you are bastards and not sons' (Heb. 12 : 8). Thus trials and afflictions are laid upon a man in the way that is best for him, so as to make his soul stronger and more mature; and if the soul endures them to the end with hope in the Lord it cannot fail to attain the promised reward of the Spirit and deliverance from the evil passions.

"You have earned scores *in* math contests; for that matter you have ranked in scores *of* math contests, ranking 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition. Now you have suffered various things and have been deprived of your earlier limelight. *So what?* God has provided for you, and if you have been fruitless in some secular matters, you still seek virtue and have borne some fruit. What is more, you grasp in part virtue that you did not know to seek when you bore the ascesis of a mathematician or a member of the Ultranet. You unendingly seek humility now. Don't you know that even the *seeking* of humility is nobler than being the greatest mathematician in history?

"The new Saint Seraphim, of Viritsa, wrote,⁴⁴

⁴⁴ "That Was from Me," OrthoChristian,

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

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

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

I want you to know that I dispose of your money, so take refuge in Me and depend upon Me. I want you to know that My storehouses

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

I allowed this frustration to touch you so that you would learn that your best friend is the Lord. I want you to bring everything to Me and tell Me everything. Did someone slander you? Leave it to Me; be attached to Me so that you can hide from the “contradiction of the nations.” I will make your righteousness shine like light and your life like midday noon. Your plans were destroyed? Your soul yielded and you are exhausted? This was from Me.

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

With tiredness and anxiety I am testing how strong your faith is in My promises and your

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

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

Because then you were sunk in your own works and plans and I wouldn't have been able to draw your thoughts to Me. But I want to teach you the most deep thoughts and My lessons, so that you may serve Me. I want to teach you that you are nothing without Me. Some of my best children are those who, cut off from an active life, learn to use the weapon of ceaseless prayer. You were called unexpectedly to undertake a difficult and responsible position, supported by Me. I have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your

guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

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

All these things were from Me.

“The doctors have decided that your consumption of one vital medication is excessive, and they want to bring it down to an FDA-approved level, for *your* safety, and for *your* safety they accept the consequences of your having a string of hospitalizations and declining health, and have so far taken every pain to protect you, and will do so even if their care KILLS you.

“So what? Your purity of conscience does not automatically depend in any way, shape, or form, on others’ decisions. It may be that the change in your medications is less dangerous than it appears. It is completely out of the question for you to seek your own demise: but is entirely legitimate, and entirely possible, for our God and the Author and Finisher of our faith to give you a full and complete life even if you are killed tomorrow.

“Never mind that you do not see what the Lord may provide; you have often enough been surprised with the blessings God has given you. You have written “Repentance,

Heaven's Best-Kept Secret,"⁴⁵ and you know that repentance itself eclipses the pleasure of sin. You should also know that people who act unhelpfully, and the Devil himself, are always and everywhere used by God according to his design, by the God who works all for all.⁴⁶

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

"Know and remember as well that happiness comes from our kingdom within. Stop chasing after external circumstances. External circumstances are but a training ground for God to build internal strengths. Don't you know that you are a man, and as man are constituted by the image of God? Then if you are constituted as being in the divine image, why spend half your time looking to soulless and dead things to make you happy?"

Song 4:

Virtue Unconquerable.

⁴⁵ C.J.S. Hayward, "Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret," <https://cjshayward.com/repentance/>, 2014, as seen 5/21/23.

⁴⁶ C.J.S. Hayward, "God the Spiritual Father," <https://cjshayward.com/father/>, 2009, as seen 5/21/23.

I know that my Redeemer lives,
And I shall see God with my eyes,
But what a painful road it has been,
What a gesture of friendship has met a knife in my back.
Is there grandeur in me for my fortitude?
I only think so in moments of pride,
With my grandeur only in repentance.
And the circumstances around me,
When I work, have met with a knife in the back.

4.

The Golden-Mouthed said, “Child, I know your pains without needing you to tell me, and I have suffered more: Church politics ain’t no place for a Saint! You know how I impartially pursued justice, drove out morally incompetent leaders, and spoke boldly to the Empress. I paid with my life for the enemies I made in my service. You have a full kitchen’s worth of knives in your back: I have a department store’s worth. I know your pains from inside.

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

“You and many others are particularly concerned with happiness, and if eighteenth-century documents spoke of ‘life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,’ now your country has taken this to the next level. Or worse.

“In another day and age such an important question would be inquired about in philosophical dialogue. So one might argue, in brief, that since true happiness is a supreme thing, and God is a supreme thing, and there can’t be two separate supreme essences, happiness and God are the same, a point which could be argued at much greater length

and eloquence. And likewise how the happy man is not happy because he is propped up from without, by external circumstances, but has chosen virtue and goodness inside. And many other things.

“However, and this says a lot about today and our berzerkly grown science, in which physics’ crown jewel of superstring has abdicated from science’s bedrock of experiment, happiness is such a thing as one would naturally approach through the attempted science of psychology, because psychology is, to people of a certain bent, the only conceivable tool to best study and understand humans as such.

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

“He says of the Pleasant Life that it is like vanilla ice cream: the first bite tastes delicious, but by the time you reach the fifth or sixth bite, you no longer taste it. Here is something close to the Orthodox insisting that a surplus of pleasures and luxuries, worldly honors and so on, do not make you happy. I tell you that one can be lacking in the most basic necessities and be happy: but let this slide.

“Of the Meaningful Life, it is the deepest of the three, but it is a only a first fumbling in the dark of what the Orthodox has curated in the light of day time out of mind. Things like kindness and mercy have been built into the baseline, curated since Christ or more properly the Garden

of Eden, so Orthodox have no need to add some extra practice to their faith to obtain kindness or gratitude. Honestly, the number of things the Orthodox knows about the happy Meaningful Life outstrips the *Philokalia*: the fountain is inexhaustible.

“But my chief concern is with the Engaged Life, the life of flow. For flow is not the “psychology of optimal experience,” or if it is, the *theology* of optimal experience comes from somewhere else. Flow is legitimate, and it is a wonder: but it is not, in addition to being legitimate and wonder, a good idea to prescribe to the general public.

“*Flow*, as it occurs, is something exotic and obscure. It has been studied in virtuosos who are expert performers in many different domains. Once a practitioner of surpassing talent has something like a decade of performance, it is possible when a performer of this superb talent and training is so engrossed in a performance of whatever chosen domain, that sits pretty much at the highest level of performance that absorbs the virtuoso’s attention so completely that time flies because no attention is left to passage of time or almost any other thing of which most of us are aware when we are awake.

“It looks difficult to me to market flow for mass consumption: doing this is tantamount to calling God an elitist, and making the foundation of a happy life all but impossible for the masses. You can be a subjectivist if you like and say that genius is ten thousand hours of practice, but it is trained virtuoso talent and not *seniority* alone that even gets you through flow’s door. For that matter, it is also almost impossible for the lucky few to experience until they have placed years into virtuoso performance in their craft. (Many more are capable of being monastics). Monastics,

those of you who are not monastics may well enough guess, have experiences which monastics consider it disastrous to share with laity. This much may be legitimate, but novices would do well not to expect a stream of uninterrupted exotic experiences, not when they start and probably not when they have long since taken monastic vows. A novice who sees things in terms of “drudgework” would do well to expect nothing but what the West calls “drudgework” for a long, long time. (And if all goes well and you get along far enough that the drudgework is diluted by more responsible obediences, you will at first lament the change!)

“There is still a striking similarity between the ancient monastic obedience that was *par excellence* the bread and butter of monastic manual labor, and the more modern obediences. In ancient times, monks supported themselves by weaving baskets, and in modern times they craft incense. Do not say that the modern obedience is nobler: if anything it is a temptation, and maybe it’s better to have the humbler obedience.

“But basketweaving and making incense are both repetitive manual labor. There are, of course, any number of other manual obediences in a monastery today. However, when monasticism has its leeway, its choice seems to be in favor of a repetitive manual labor that gives the hands a regular cycle of the motion while the heart is free for the Jesus Prayer, and the mind in the heart practices a monk’s *watchfulness* or *nipsis*, an observer role that conditions you to notice and put out temptations when they are but a barely noticeable spark, rather than heedlessly letting the first spark of temptation grow until one is strongly tempted to external sin, and waiting for your whole room to be on fire before you start to put it out. This watchfulness is the

best baseline for optimal experience that the Orthodox Church gives us in which to abide, and 'tis no accident that the full and unabridged title of the Philokalia is The Philokalia of the *Niptic* Fathers. If either of these simple manual project is unfamiliar or makes the performer back up in thought, this is a growing pain, not the intended long-term effect. And now that the jewel of the monastic Philokalia has been discovered by mainstream Orthodoxy and read by many with utmost attention, watchfulness is practiced by many people living in the world today.

“And remember how a monk advised you, perhaps in conscious echo of St. James the Brother of God who said, ‘Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.’ For you were in the dining hall with the monk and a cleaning lady, and he told the cleaning lady that she was fortunate, because her manual labor left her free to pray with her, and you, a computer programmer, at the time, were unfortunate to have work that demanded your full mental attention.

“If you can have optimal experience, with the Jesus Prayers in your heart as the metronome of silence, if your business is to weave baskets or craft incense, why couldn't you also attend to the Jesus Prayer, rising as incense before God, by mopping a floor or cleaning windows? For however great monasticism may be, it has no monopoly in meditative work or prayer before God, and marriage is the original instrument of salvation. The door is open, if you can do some manual labor, to do so in prayer to God. Furthermore, monks are not alone permitted prayerful manual labor: monasticism is but the rudiments of the Gospel, and if monasticism perhaps seeks out a boon in

prayerful manual labor, there is no sign of the door saying 'Monastics alone.'

"Let's say this is true, and the theology of optimum experience is virtually accepted for the sake of argument alone, or if you want, you may answer 'Yes and amen.' Still, the entire point is a quibble compared to the more profound matter to discuss. Let us, with good reason, set this point aside."

Then he paused, and after a moment resumed his explanation. "If I may pull a rare note from postmodern wreckage, there is the concept of a semiotic *frame*, perhaps a frame that is additionally a *myth*, which determines a society's *possibles et pensables*, that which is understood to be *possible* in a society, and that which is found, or not, to be even *thinkable*. The analytic knife cuts well here, where we as a society wear pretty impressive blinders about both activism and society.

"Think of your feminist theology professor, who said with full force that she believed in Tradition, and in the same breath placed Arius, the father of heretics, alongside St. Athanasius as equally full representatives of that Tradition. When, in your theological anthropology class, she picked two texts for disability, the obvious agenda to her, the one and only love possible towards (in this case) the disabled, was to engage some activist political advocacy for to make external conditions better in some way for that particular victim class. No expression of love was possible save more political activism. I would say, and I'm pretty sure you would say, that she was too political in her response, and not nearly political enough. (For when all is civil warfare carried on by other means, real concern for the deeper life of the city or nation all but *starves*.)

“One of the two reading assignments had something she couldn’t grasp. The other assignment was political ideology and/or identity politics. It was complete with the standard, footnoteless, boilerplate opening assertion that no one else in the whole wide world could possibly have suffering that could possibly compared to the suffering of one’s poor, downtrodden, miserable demographic.

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

“Much as your professor automatically jumped to a conclusion from ‘disabled people’ to ‘activist agitation’, today we jump from a conclusion from ‘need to understand the human heart’ to ‘psychology’. Yes, the psychology taught in schools, the psychology fashioning itself after hard science, the psychology that introduces itself by the *physics envy declaration*: psychologists-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics.

“It is a side point that psychologists treat subjects as less than human. A near-universal feature of psychological

experiment is some stripe of guile, because psychological experimental value would be ruined under normal conditions of intelligent and informed cooperation between adult human beings. (Though the enterprise may be named “psychology,” the name itself is either clumsy or treacherous: “psyche” means “soul,” and the existence of a real, non-materialist soul is precisely what psychology will not even consider.) Psychologists running experiments act as thinking human beings: they *think* and *make decisions*. The people they study are governed by laws. Furthermore, since physics originally did quite a lot of work to de-anthropomorphize Nature, psychology tries to follow suit by offering a de-anthropomorphized picture of *anthropos*, humans.

“It has been noticed, as psychology reinvents more of religions, that classical psychology can take a person who is mentally ill to reach a normal state, but nothing better. Positive psychology tries to move beyond what preachers have called ‘a theology of sin management,’ and push to enhance excellence and well-being, and develop gifts. Meanwhile, for over a millennium, monasticism has been at one stroke a hospital for penitent sinners and an academy for ever-reaching excellence.

“The main point is that understanding how people work neither begins nor ends with psychology, a discipline that has blinded itself to our being made in the image of God. All the great Christian doctrines are untranslatable on psychology’s secular terms. The article version of your advisor’s thesis is subtitled, ‘From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,’⁴⁷ and it discusses the formation of

⁴⁷ Thomas Dixon, “Theology, Anti-Theology, and Atheology: From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” *Modern Theology*, 15:3,

psychology as an emergent secular realms which displaced older candidates. However, in the West before psychology began to come together, there were religious and pastoral paradigms for understanding the human person, and you know that one of the first technical terms Orthodoxy asks its converts to learn is ‘passion.’ If the passions your advisor discussed are not point-for-point identical to the passions repented of in Orthodoxy, they are still far closer than any of the multiple emergent framings and meanings of ‘emotion’ as pushed for in the formation of psychology as a discipline.

“That there may be a common term for psychology today, and more dubiously a term for what that common term replaced, doesn’t really matter that much. The term ‘pneumatology’ may have existed and named practitioners from an older tradition; but these were under religious auspices. The study and field of communication is relatively new among major academic disciplines, but it would be quite strange to deny that people communicated, and tried to communicate, before the day that universities now tended to have a door heralding, ‘Department of Communication.’

“And what has psychology done since being established as a secular arena? Robert Heinlein in *Stranger in a Strange Land* gets on very quickly to utterly dismissing marriage. But no sooner does Michael stop flailing marriage’s lifeless corpse, but he senses that he has made a great gaping hole, and builds up a bond of water brotherhood that is meant to be every bit as heroic, beautiful, and magnificent, so that the only way really

remaining to make water brotherhood truly more wonderful and amazing is to enlarge it until it becomes true marriage.

“While psychology is secular, its complete form offers an ersatz religion that, though it is meant to be value-free, provides a secular mystical theology. That this secular religion, fit for all religions and patients, uses guided imagery allegedly from some generic copy-paste of Chinese medicine, Tibetan Buddhism, Native American traditions, and may go back to Greco-Roman times; mindfulness from Buddhism’s Eightfold Noble Path; and yoga from Hinduism, is but an illustration of G.K. Chesterton’s observation: *the person who does not believe in God does not believe in nothing; the person who does not believe in God believes anything*. But let us put this aside and take psychology’s claim of secularity at face value. The *Philokalia* is scarcely anything *but* a library of collected works about how to rightly live the inner life. It is not in the main concerned narrowly with pleasure or joy: but it has an infinite amount to say about sins that are all, in the end, ways to taste Hell. Psychology does not trade in temptation, sin, or passion: but it too offers a rudder for your inner life, and if it does not talk about cleansing the soul from moral stains, it has quite an impressive battleplan to not be conquered by negative emotion. Alcoholics Anonymous has reclaimed or reinvented quite a lot.

“And if I can put in a word about TED talks, there is probably a TED talk to be made, ‘The Trouble with TED,’ for they exacerbate this. You know well enough that one talk gave the staggering announcement that after decades of each generation having higher self-esteem than the last, and then the lamented finding that by consequence we, and our youth, have reached record levels of narcissism. She might

well enough have announced that if you spray fuel around and throw lighted matches into the fuel, sooner or sooner you will be surrounded by fire.

“She talked about it being soothing to place your hand over your heart. Honestly! This is just another way of, how can I put this delicately, ‘making love without a partner.’ Not a word was whispered about affectionate touch to another person, or for that matter a pet; the remedy did not step an inch away from solipsism. You know that monks are admonished to refrain from embraces; however, it is better for a monk to embrace another than to embrace himself.”

I said, “What is the trouble with TED? For I sense something is wrong, but I can’t put my finger on it.”

His All Holiness answered me and said, “All world religions have grandeur, and for a secular analysis all world religions represent a way that a society can live together and persevere. Hinduism is not the sort of thing one *uses up*, whether across years, lifetimes, or even centuries. Its paths are millennia old, and to destroy it would likely take something like a nuclear war or an apocalyptic event. By contrast, remember how you said, ‘No form of feminism that has yet emerged is stable:’ it’s very easy to meet the force of body image feminism today, while it would scarcely be live in the academy in fifty years. Your friend answered this remark with a nominal exception in what is called ‘Christian feminism,’ which articulates how traditional Christianity cares for, and seeks, the good of women: for an example, it takes politically incorrect words about husbands and wives and offers the breathtaking change of addressing women as moral agents, and never telling husbands to keep their wives in line. That is, if anything, the exception that

proves the rule! It might externally be called feminism, but its core is much slower to decay than any feminism at all, because it is *not* feminism at all. In your feminist theology class one author said that in feminist theology, “all the central terms are up for grabs.” Meanwhile, remember your boss at the bookstore. He commented that books of liberal theology have a shelf life; after a few years a title becomes hard to sell. However, his shop published three hundred year old Puritan sermons and sold them on an ongoing basis. You might be concerned about whether they are heterodox, but don’t worry about them going out of fashion, or if they do go out of fashion, it will not be because the Puritan sermons lost their appeal to future Protestants seeking Biblical faith, but something else wound up changing features of Protestant Christianity that have survived intact since the Reformation.

“You do not need to refute TED talks; a few years and a given talk will probably have fallen out of fashion. There is something in the structure of TED that is liberal, even if many talks say nothing political. There more to say than that they are self-contained, controlled, plastic things, where world religions are something organic that may or may not have a central prophet, but never have a central social engineer. TED is a sort of evolving, synthetic religion, and spiritual tofu cannot truly fill true spiritual hunger.

“Let’s get back to psychology, or better, take a look at psychology and TED talks, for psychology has for ages hoped for a Newton who the Promised Land’s full status of being scientists. The study of Rocks and Nothing is the exemplar after which to pattern the study of Man. Really! The problems in psychology are not so much where psychology has failed to understand humanity on the

example of empirical science. The real concerns are for where they have *succeeded*.

“In a forum discussion you read, one conversation crystallized on proper care for diabetes. The central lesson from the discussion is that if you have diabetes, you don’t want a book-smart nurse. You want a diabetic nurse. In psychology, along with other disciplines, a sufficiently skilled practitioner can pick up a book about part of the subject he does not yet understand, and understand well enough what there is to understand. Understanding was never nursed on the foundation of direct experience, and here understanding is malnourished.

“However, the Orthodox Church with monasticism as its heart has a deeper, more true *empiricism* as its spine; you know things with the same kind of ‘knowing’ by which Adam knew Eve. All else is rumor and idle talk. If there are qualifications to being a spiritual father, one of the most important qualifications must be that he speaks and acts out of first-hand encounter and first-hand knowledge, and not that he learned by rumor and distortion. Do you want to be healed by a spiritual physician? Then look for a man who will care for you as a diabetic nurse.”

Song 5:

O Holy Mother!

O Holy Mother! Are You the Mystery?
Are you the untold Mystery?
For I have written much,
And taken great care,
In *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology*,

And looked all the while,
Down the wrong end,
Of the best telescope far and away that I could find.
I have written of mankind and creation defiled,
Yet for all of my concerns,
Of so-called “space-conquering technologies,”
Which seemed to me to be “body-conquering technologies,”
Sidestepping God-given and holy bounds,
Of our incarnate state.
Where better to seek healing,
From an occult-free simulation,
Of the unnatural vice of magic arts,
(For there are several unnatural vices:
“Unnatural vice” is an umbrella term),
Than in the perfect creaturely response,
“Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.
Be it unto me according to thy word.”
Then, the gates, and even the foundations,
The foundations of Hell began crumbling.
The New Eve, the Heavenly Mother,
Of Whom Christ told the Disciple,
“Behold thy Mother!”
In Her is the microcosm of Creation done right,
And She is the Friend and Comfort,
Of the poor and the outcast.
I can lose my money and my property,
But no one can take from me,
A Treasure vaster than the Heavens;
Perhaps I would do well,
To say little else of technologies progressively degrading
humanity,
And pray an Akathist to the Theotokos,

And put a trust in Her that is proto-Antiochian,
Rather than proto-Alexandrian,
And give Her a trust in the great Story,
Not diminished at all,
If She happens not to be a teacher,
Offering such ideas as philosophers like:
Her place in the Great Story is far greater than that:
And such it is also,
With illumined teachers,
Who offer worship to God as their teaching,
And are in the pains of labor,
Until Christ be formed in their disciples.

5.

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

“It was several years ago that you took a Fluxx deck to play with friends, and the group included five adults and one very little boy. So the adults took turns, not just in their moves, but the player who had just played a move would pay attention to the little kiddie, so that he wouldn’t be left out socially.

“When it was your turn to care for the boy, you put him on your shoulders and walked slowly, delicately,

towards the kitchen, because you wanted to go in, but you weren't sure whether you'd end up hitting his head on the lower ceiling.

“Not long after, you realized three things. First, the boy had not bonked his head. Second, the boy was dragging his fingers on the ceiling. Third and finally, he was laughing and laughing.

“That was a source of pleasure to you far beyond the game of Fluxx, even though it was then your favorite game. And when you asked if it were time for your next move, they told me game was over.

“In the conversation afterwards, you were told a couple of things worth mentioning.

“First, and perhaps not particularly important, you happened to have given the child a pleasure that neither of his parents could offer. The boy's father was a few inches taller than you, and if he were to try what you tried, he in fact *would* have hit his son's head on the ceiling. The boy's mother could not do this either, whether due to lack of physical strength or some other reason.

“Secondly, as a psychology major mentioned to you, it gives people joy to give real pleasure to another person, and young children are a special case. She didn't talk about whether there is a difference between knowing you've given pleasure to a young child and knowing you've given pleasure to an adult, but she did point out that the child, who was really quite very small, was too young to act like he was having fun because he was just being polite. He was too young for convincing guile and perhaps even the most transparent of guile. That meant, whether or not you were thinking about it, that his delighted laughter could only be from unvarnished candor. So you did not have any question

about, “Does he enjoy what I am doing with him, or is he just being polite?” Just being polite was off the table.

“And this is not even only true for the royal race of mankind. You still aren’t in a position to adopt a furry pet, but without compromise of any principle you visit a pet shelter near your home, and at the shelter as well, guile is off the agenda, at least for the pets. A cat can purr, or if it’s had enough and you’ve not paid attention to its swishing tail, a light nip and a swipe of the claw equally represents unvarnished candor. So you really know what is conveyed if a cat purrs and starts licking your hand.

“This is part of a larger truth, that it is better to serve than to be served, and it is better to give than to receive. What is more, the most concentrated teaching about who is truly happy is enshrined in the Sermon on the Mount, and enshrined to the next level by being chanted in the Divine Liturgy:

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

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

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

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

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

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

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

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

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

“The word translated, ‘blessed,’ has what would be counted as at least two meanings in English: ‘blessed,’ and ‘happy.’ Among English Bible translations, there are a few that translate the word as ‘happy.’ including Young’s Literal Translation:

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

Happy the mourning — because they shall be comforted.

Happy the meek — because they shall inherit the land.

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

Happy the kind — because they shall find kindness.

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

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

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

Happy are ye whenever they may reproach you, and may persecute, and may say any evil thing against you falsely for my sake — Rejoice ye and be glad, because your reward [is] great in the heavens, for thus did they persecute the prophets who were before you.

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

“Here, though, is a point of contact with Plato. Plato investigated happiness, and the Greek term was almost exactly a literal equivalent to ‘in good spirits,’ but the literal sense was taken much more seriously and taken much

further. It was a primary term for happiness, but what was seen as true happiness was having one's soul in good health. This happiness would not be easily confused by counterfeit pleasures such as one can immediately procure with narcotics, and the point is not just that real-world narcotics create addiction and horrible misery. The happiness would be just as counterfeit in the pleasure of a person unhealthy in soul to take some imaginary narcotic that created intense and endless pleasure, without either the addiction or the misery that loom in the nasty backswing of real-world narcotics.

“Remember how surprised you were, when you were reading your undergraduate psychology text and saw what it said of the pleasure principle. For the pleasure principle is an artifact of bad philosophy, which perhaps notes that most of our actions bring some kind of pleasure or pleasing result, assumes and defines that every action anyone ever takes is that which is calculated to bring you the most pleasures. In more recent settings, you have listened to people saying that the only motivation anyone ever takes for any action is that it is calculated to bring them the greatest economic profit, and you repeated another's answer, to say that several people have tried to convince you this was true, and so far as you knew, not even *one* of them stood to gain financial profit from convincing you this was true.

“Your textbook, like someone who tries to persuade by offering a charming smile in lieu of reasoned argument, consoled the reader that it was more a virtue than a vice to show kindnesses to others because you enjoyed the feelings it gave, and you had two answers in your thoughts. First, past the sugar-coating of ‘more a virtue than a vice’ lies an assertion that virtue is in principle impossible; and

secondly, that the only theoretical possibility that you could care for the poor in order to help fellow humans was if you received absolutely no pleasure, consolation, or reward, in any stripe or dimension, to care for the poor out of a genuine motive of benefitting others and not whatever pleasures or rewards might follow. And that's setting the price tag far too high. So you wanted to speak of a 'pain principle' or 'masochism principle' where all decisions and actions at all times by all people are whatever is calculated to bring them the greatest sufferings, alike useless to assert for any philosopher worthy of the name. It is hardly to be denied that most decisions bring some pain or have some downside on the part of the persons who make them, so a pain principle mirroring a pleasure principle is alike unprovable, and alike unfalsifiable, an untestable guess that has no place whatever in science and scarcely more a place in disciplines seeking to be established as science. It was not until later that you read a worthy and competent philosopher who wrote that the existence of pleasure and a reward does not in and of make any action which brings pleasure to be motivated solely as a means to obtain pleasure. The thought experiment was posed, that someone who gives to the poor and enjoys doing so were offered a pill that would give the full pleasure and benefits of being generous, but do nothing whatsoever for poor people's practical needs, would in but rare cases be spurned as an empty and worthless counterfeit.

Song 6:

Crossing the Great Threshold.

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

6.

Then I said, “O John! O Glorious Saint John! Can you lead me on a path into the Sermon on the Mount? For I have long walked the path of self-direction, and it almost destroyed me.”

Then the Saint said to me, “Thank you, my son, for your request! I was waiting for you to ask, so that you might have the Heavenly reward for asking.

“What you are asking for is a work of years of lifetimes; let’s chase something smaller: unfolding, partly, only the first verse, which declares the poor in spirit to be blessed and happy. I will speak to you of the poverty’s riches

but not humility's heights, even though they are one and the same and true poverty contains everything that you seek in humility. Though I may call on other verses to tell what riches are in poverty, I will make no attempt to unfold these other Beatitudes, though to them which declared the blessedness of poverty that was the same thing. I also tell you, through your interests, that to be poor in spirit is to be no self-sufficient solipsist; rather, it is utterly dependent on the infinite riches of God, and that it is royal: for kings are forbidden to touch money, and in another sense all Christians and especially all monastics are forbidden to touch any wealth or possession, and grasp at things like the rich young ruler did. But poverty is the unstopping of the the Sermon on the Mount, an unstopping of virtue in which flowing fountain surpasses flowing fountain.

“Calling blessed those who are ‘poor in spirit’ extends beyond a merely bodily poverty. It is taught that true poverty extends beyond a lack of possessions, much like it is taught that the monastic vow of poverty includes the other two: for a monk abstains from the normal and God-blessed estate of holy marriage, and relinquishes claim to even his own self-will. You know *that* as treasure, for you want to exchange self-direction for a monastic community under the direction of an abbot.

“In the Sermon on the Mount, poverty seems to hold a special place, for there are two passages which build most clearly poverty, and build most clearly *on* poverty. One commends storing treasures in Heaven and rejects storing treasures on earth; then an apparent digression about the eye as the lamp of the body, then exhortation not to worry about even tomorrow, for God knows and will care for our needs. And when you have wealth, be merciful to others,

and you will be repaid many times over by your true Debtor, God.

“In fact there are not two passages and one digression, but one passage and no digression. The miniature tri-unity is harder to see in modern translations that translate something out to be more readily understood; one reads of one’s eye being ‘healthy’ or ‘sound.’ Fr. Thomas Hopko has said, before the surge of enthusiasm for mindfulness, “*Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.*” This attentiveness and full presence is the operation of an activity that is *single*, that neither lays up possessions, nor defends them in worry, nor doubts that God who Provides will overlook you in His care. All of this dissipates an eye that is single. Poverty of spirit makes for singleness of eye, and a singleness destroyed by so many of the technologies you trade in.

“It has been considered from ancient times that if you give to the poor, God is your Debtor, and under what you would consider third world living conditions, I told married Christians to leave brothers and sisters to their children instead of things. This too is poverty of spirit, even if it belongs only in marriage, in a setting monks renounce. You have read those who do not ask, ‘Can I afford what I need?’ but ‘Do I need what I can afford?’

“It is monastic poverty that monastics do not defend themselves, not only by force, but even with words, showing the power that terrified Pontius Pilate. It is monastic poverty of spirit not to have plans nor, in the modern sense, an identity. For in ancient times Christians who were martyred, answered when asked their names, nothing other than ‘Christian.’ Beyond this, further layers yet beckon. Poverty is not an absence of treasures; it is a positive, active

thing that slices sharper than any two-edged sword. And monks who renounce property have much more to say than a mere, 'Good riddance!' The force of the rejection they give, and the freedom that is gained in letting riches go, is more like the obscene and thundering announcement: 'I lost 235 pounds in one weekend!'

"You read a church sign that said, 'Who is rich? The person who is content.' And I tell you that you can purchase by poverty of spirit many times and layers more than contentment with what you possess now. I have not even scratched the surface of experiences of monastics who were profoundly poor in spirit, but you know there are limits to what I can rightly tell you, and you know that you are not invited to chase after experiences, but seek to repent of your sins for the rest of your life, which you recognize as monastic privilege."

Song 7:

I Sing a Song to my Apple.

Before I had even reached youth proper,
I programmed an Apple II,
In gradeschool adventure games and a 4D maze,
Simple arithmetic- and trigonometric-powered animations.
My father a computer scientist,
Who shared his joy with me,
In high school I became a Unix system administrator.
My family purchased, and still has the remains,
Of one original "fat Mac",
So named because it had the maximum available RAM:

512k.

My calculator in high school,
On which I programmed computer-generated art,
And a simple video game, had as much.
Before my youth had dwindled,
I remained a Unix programmer,
And judged Mac OSX my preferred flavor of Unix.
Later I had iPhones,
And for the first time in my life,
Owned a computer where I lacked root privilege.
Along the way I got an Apple Watch,
My desire increased as I read about it,
And vanished when I learned it were,
Bereft of such things as even a web browser.
I gave it to my brother,
Who later gave it back to me,
Then it fell apart.
I sing a song to my Apple,
A peerless 17" MacBook Pro,
Which through an ever-so-minor design flaw,
Burned through video cards often,
And when the Apple Store stopped stocking those cards,
So with it went any hope of keeping my Mac without
frequent \$500 repairs.
And along the way,
With the sweetness of a Linux virtual machine,
Realized that OSX had grown monstrous as a version of
Unix.
When I asked about one cardinaly important open source
project,
I was told that Apple had removed parts of the OS,
That the project needed to run,

But information technology work in my Linux virtual machine,
Was the command line equivalent of point and click.
It were a discovery as if I had returned to Paradise.
I sing a song to Apple's technical support,
For when I asked a question,
About command-line-driven Apache configuration,
It took escalations up to level 3 Technical support,
Before a Genius knew that Macs *have* a command line.
I purchased a computer meant to last years.
I sing a song to my late iPhone,
Bewailed by men who made the Mac great,
Which slipped out a pocket near a food bank,
Booted my laptop into Windows and found,
That Windows Find my iPhone was now rendered all but useless.
I went to see an Apple Store,
And received a followup call,
Giving a good ten days before I could access my iPhone,
And found out also that Macs were as useless,
As my Linux box booted into Windows,
To Find My iPhone.
Once I had one from each four,
Offerings for Apple computers:
A laptop one, an iPad one,
An iPhone one, an Apple Watch one;
And ere I were negotiating,
For to buy a replacement iPhone on eBay,
I said that there were many Android devices within my budget,
And while in bed that night realized,
I wanted full well that the negotiation fail.

Apple's indirect gift to desktops may be Windows and part
of Linux,
And Apple's indirect gift to smartphones may be Android;
For surely no iPhone killer before Android,
Even came close.
Certainly Windows Mobile answered the wrong question.
But even if one may argue, legitimately,
That a Mac and a PC have grown remarkably similar,
And iOS and Android are also more alike than different to
use,
I was not poisoned by technical merits.
I was poisoned by Apple's corporate mindset,
That all but killed my prospects,
Of finding my iPhone before the battery were drained
completely.
And when I called my iPhone to perhaps find it in my car,
I went to voicemail immediately:
My iPhone's battery was already dead.
I had known, but not paid attention earlier,
To Steve Jobs as beyond toxic, as a boss;
Screaming and abusive,
To employees he had every reason to cherish,
And after seeing a technical fumble,
Publicly fired an Apple technician,
At an employee motivational event,
And I believed it.
I was more disturbed,
When I read of Jobs's spiritual practices,
Such as an Orthodox mind might interpret,
As opening the mind to listen,
And draw the milk of dragons.
Technology does things for us,

Though I have found that when I've shared children my
iPhone or iPad,
There have been squabbles and squabbles that followed.
But this Trojan horse does things for devils also,
Who cannot give exquisitely beneficial gifts,
Even if they were to try.
The power of demons is real but limited:
Such teaches the *Philokalia*,
Which though it be filled with love of the beautiful,
Says more about the activities and operations of demons,
Than anything else I have read.
And one thing it says,
Through Orthodox Christian Tradition,
Says that demons can tell a man's spiritual state,
And try to inject venomous thoughts in temptation,
Where men have free will, still,
The demons cannot read minds,
Even if by ruse they give one monk certain thoughts,
Sting another that the thoughts are in the first man,
They talk and are deceived,
That demons can read people's minds.
Demonic predictions are called guesses,
Which are sometimes wrong,
The demons see a man beginning to walk a journey,
And guess that he travels to visit another specific man,
But 'tis guesswork; demons can well enough be wrong.
St. Nilus's alleged prophecies were falsely dismissed as
dubious,
But we may not yet be in the clear.
And if the U.S. has been called "One nation under
surveillance,"
Where No Such Agency has received every email,

It is now clear and open knowledge,
 To those who will reflect,
 That among most Americans,
 “Every breath and step Americans take,”
 Is monitored by Big Brother,
 But perhaps it is not just human agencies,
 That reap the information collected.

++ungood

(Did anyone besides my most reverend Archbishop mention that porn may always have been available, but it used to be that you had to seek out porn, and leave your car in front of a store with papered-over windows, and wear your trenchcoat disguise, while now *porn* seeks out *you*? It is something like a water cooler that has three faucets Serving cold water, hot water, and antifreeze, And the handles are confusingly similar.)

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

55 Maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko

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

5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.
15. Read the scriptures regularly.
16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.
18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.

19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.
28. Face reality.
29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
32. Never bring attention to yourself.
33. Listen when people talk to you.

34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.
45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.

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

The Saint continued, "Would you agree that we are at a high noon of secret societies?"

I answered, "Absolutely."

He asked, "Would you agree that such societies are corrosive?"

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

He asked, "And do you have an opinion about the JFK assassination, whether it was a conspiracy?"

I said, "I accept the opinion of a friend whose judgment I respect as regards politics gave me an opinion that there in fact *was* a conspiracy, and it was driven by LBJ."

He said, "And have you spent five full minutes in worrying about either in the past year?"

I said, "No, not really."

He said, "You have secular intelligence if you can ask if 'surveillance from Hell' in an obviously figurative sense might also be 'surveillance from Hell' in a far more literal sense, but such intelligence as this does not help one enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Every demon and the Devil himself is on a leash, and as your priest has said many times, *everything that happens to us is either a blessing from God, or a temptation that God has allowed for our strengthening*. So whether or not the demons have more information than in ages past, you would still be best advised to live:

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

Song 8:

A Hymn to Arrogance.

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,
“There is no war in Heaven,
Not now, at very least,
And not before the creation,
Of the royal race of mankind.
Put on your feet the Gospel of Peace,
And pray, stomping down the gates of Hell.
There were war in Heaven but ever brief,
The Archangel Saint Michael,
Commander of the angelic warriors,
Said only his name, ‘Michael,’
Which is, translated,
‘Who is like God?’
With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,
Sore losers one and all.
The remain to sharpen the faithful;
God uses them to train and make strength.
Shall the axe boast itself against him that hews therewith?
Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shakes it?
As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up,
Or as if the staff should lift up itself,
As if it were no wood.
So don’t be dismayed,
If one book of the Bible says,
That Satan tempted David into taking a census,
And another says God did so,
For God allowed it to happen by the Devil,
As he who chops lifts an axe,
And God gave David a second chance,
In the holy words of Joab.
Do not think that God and the Devil are equal,
Learn enough doctrine,

To know that God is greater than can be thought,
And can have no equal or even opposite.
The Devil is if anything the opposite,
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,
Though truth be told,
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,
The Devil fared not so well.
The dragon was like a little boy,
Standing outside an Emperor's palace,
Shooting spitwads with a peashooter,
Because that was the greatest harm,
That he could see how to do.
The Orthodox Church knows well enough,
'The feeble audacity of the demons.'
Read well how the Devil crowned St. Job,
The Devil and the demons ain't much,
Without the divine permission,
And truth be told,
Ain't much with it either:
God allows temptations to strengthen;
St. Job the Much-Suffering emerged in triumph.
A novice told of an odd clatter in a courtyard,
Asked the Abbot what he should do:
'It is just the demons.
Don't pay any attention to it,' came the answer.
Every devil is on a leash,
And the devout are immune to magic.
Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder:
The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under
feet.
The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
So don't be arrogant towards other people,

But be ever more arrogant towards demons and the Devil himself:

‘Blow, and spit on him.’“

8.

I told St. John, “I have just read the panikhida service, and it seems to be cut from the same cloth as Church services in general.”

He said, “Does that surprise you?”

I said, “Perhaps it should not. But the *Philokalia* describes a contrast between life and death: for instance, in the image of an inn, where travelers come for a night, carrying whatever they have; some sleep on beds, some sleep on the floor, but when day comes, all of them pick up their belongings and resume their journey.”

He says, “How do you understand that parable?”

I said, “In this life, some live in riches, and some in poverty, but all of these leave life carrying only (Grace and) their deeds with them. The last English homily I heard, the priest quoted someone who said, ‘I have never seen a trailer attached to a hearse.’ That is, ‘You can’t take it with you,’ save that terrifying tale of a monk who died with over a hundred gold pieces. (It was said he wasn’t greedy, just remarkably stingy.) When he died, the community talked about what to do with this incredible sum of wealth: some suggested a new building or another capital project, others some great kindness to the poor. And when all was said and done, *they buried the gold with him*, an industrial strength reminder to monks that you don’t want to be buried with

even one gold piece. But even *then*, the monk couldn't take the gold with him."

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

"Also remember that in the *Philokalia* we read that those who wish one suffering to die are like someone holding a deeply confused hope that a doctor would break up the bed of a sick man? For we take our passions with us beyond death, passions which the body mediates to some degree."

I said, "May I comment on something? Which will sound like a boast?"

He said, "Speak on."

I said, "I know that I am mortal, and that I am the chief of sinners. But the day of my death is more real to me than my salvation, and in me the knowledge that I am the chief of sinners surpasses my knowledge that God is merciful. I have needed the reminder of the core promise in 'For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' So there are two deep pairs, and I have of the two properly recognized only the lesser element."

He said, "Have you not been astonished at God's perfect Providence in years past?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "What you have said doesn't sound like boasting to me. Many people have wished for the

remembrance of death and not reached it, not even in monasticism.”

I asked, “Will I reach monasticism?”

He smiled at me, and said, “Why do you ask the future? It is wonderful.”

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

“With death comes a realization of, ‘I shall not pass this way again.’

“Such death as we have gives an eternal significance to life in its importance. For you know that all you in the Church Militant stand in something like an arena before God and His Christ, before all the saints and angels and even devils and the Devil himself, as God’s champions summoned to justify God as St. Job the Much-Suffering and others justify God. And whatever triumph you have is Christ’s triumph in you.

“Don’t you know that the saints who have run the race and are adorned with an imperishable and incorruptible crown stand all about you, the Church Triumphant cheering on the Church Militant until every last member has crossed the finish line in triumph?

“Don’t you know that every saint and angel, the Mother of God and Christ enthroned on high, all cheer each and every one of you who are still running the race?

“The times preceding the Second Coming of Christ are not only apocalyptic; they are the very thing which gives the term ‘apocalyptic’ its meaning in your day. And there are trials and tribulations which perhaps will happen in

ages later on, and perhaps may already have begun. But in the end Christ will triumph, and all alike who are faithful. And if you are alive for the Second Coming of Christ, or if not, God has provided and will provide a way for thee. Remain faithful, and remember, 'The righteous will live by his faith.' ”

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

The Saint's face began to glow, and he said, "In my day, I made a claim you may have met in the Reformers, that the age of miracles had passed: in blunt terms, 'God wrote the book and retired.' So I called 'opening the eyes of the blind' to be cleansing eyes from lust, which was a fair claim in any case, and particular if there are no more miracles. You, it seems, are in another age of miracles, or perhaps the age of miracles has never stopped from before the Nativity of Christ, but has merely hid from time to time. You know that you are not the Orthodox Church's fourth Theologian, but you have already known some beginnings of theology beyond the printed page, and have seen miracles in your earthly pilgrimage such as I have not. I perhaps engaged in rhetorical discourse about God, and never on earth saw the Uncreated Light. You have seen icons like me and you have also seen a photograph from inside an altar, where paten and chalice glowed purest white. Unlike me, you have been anointed with more than one miraculous oil, dear Christos..."

Then he bowed deeply, and prostrated himself before me, and his face glowed brightly, brightly, ten thousand times brighter than the sun and yet did not hurt my mortal

eyes, and he asked me, “Friend, why do you ask the future? It is wonderful.”

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

I wept until I realized that I was the happiest I had been in my life.

Discussion questions for “The Consolation of Theology”

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

Introduction to “The Magic Stone”

One of the hidden costs of today e.g. Facebook is that if you want to stop and do something else, there seems to be “nothing to do.”

This chapter opens with a quotation summarizing a children’s book about “nothing to do,” and then lists over a hundred things to do besides being sucked into Facebook. The point is not that you should do all of them; the hope is that somewhere in that list will be one or a few things that you can use in a gainful manner.

The Magic Stone

I quote one of the three major sources I've read on
TV:

There's a picture book by Russel Hoban called *Nothing to Do* that illuminates the value of free time for children, and the importance of helping them learn how to deal with it. Hoban's book opens with little Walter Possum, a member of an endearing family of humanoid possums, who bothers his parents because he has "nothing to do." Father Possum tells Walter to "play with your toys." But Walter doesn't feel like it. The father assigns him a job—to rake the leaves. But Walter soon loses interest. The only activity that seems to relieve the tedium is quarreling with his sister Charlotte, a terrible pest.

When Mother Possum needs to clean the house, Father gives Walter a smooth brown stone and instructs him to rub it when he has nothing to do. It is a magic stone, Father tells him. “You have to look around and think while you’re rubbing it, and then the stone gives you something to do.”

Naturally, belief in the magic of the stone leads Walter to discover all manner of things to do. He finds a long-lost ball, he visits a friend, he dreams up a buried treasure game. He even devises a clever way to keep his irksome little sister from interrupting his game by presenting her with a stick that is also invested with putative magic powers. Besides having fun, he stays out of his parents’ hair all afternoon.

—Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug*⁴⁸

My biggest point taken away from reading *The Plug-in Drug*⁴⁹ was that television (today one might add “and Facebook, video games, Facebook games...”) drops things to do into the hand as incredibly low-hanging fruit. There are other, more enjoyable and more rewarding things to do with our time (who really feels good after an evening of trawling clickbait?), but they do not do the service of dropping into our hand. This has the result that if you are used to

⁴⁸ Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug: Television, Computers, and Family Life*, New York: Penguin 2002, 138-9.

⁴⁹ Marie Winn, *The Plug-in Drug: Television, Computers, and Family Life*, New York: Penguin 2002.

Facebook or TV giving you something to do, it's hard not to sit and do nothing besides staring at the wall because you do not see anything to do.

This page is meant to help you find something to do.

This page, in imitation of a writing prompts page, is intended to remind the reader of other things to do. Many of them are not as easy as Twitter, and some of them involve learning real skill. However, I believe that a good pick from the options here could help us get back from “Nothing to do” besides YouTube.

1. Read *101 Creative Dates: Ideas, Tips, and Personal Experiences from the Life of a Hopeless Romantic*⁵⁰ (available from <https://tinyurl.com/101-creative-dates>) and look for ideas that might apply to you whether or not you have a significant other.
2. Take up adult Legos.
3. Start attending an Orthodox parish.⁵¹
4. Keep an aquarium.
5. Read and follow up on *Nourishing Traditions*,⁵² and

⁵⁰ “101 Creative Dates: Ideas, Tips, and Personal Experiences from the Life of a Hopeless Romantic: Taylor, Matt: 9781977084996: Amazon.com: Books,” 101 Creative Dates: ideas, tips, and personal experiences from the life of a hopeless romantic: Taylor, Matt: 9781977084996: Amazon.com: Books, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/101-creative-dates/>.

⁵¹ A parish locator for one Orthodox jurisdiction is available as Aleksandr Andreev, “Parish and Clergy Directory,” ROCOR Parish and Clergy Directory, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://directory.stinnocentpress.com/>.

⁵² Sally Fallon et al., *Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook That Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and the Diet Dictocrats* (Washington, DC:

then *The Paleo Solution: The Original Human Diet*.⁵³

6. Learn a musical instrument, perhaps a recorder.
7. Learn to sew.
8. Learn the art of memory (as in *Kevin Trudeau's Mega Memory*⁵⁴) even if it doesn't live up to the advertising hype.
9. Learn how to take works from Project Gutenberg and read them in your Kindle or ebook reader. You might start with reading *The Consolation of Philosophy*.⁵⁵
10. Take up coin collecting.
11. Take a camping trip.
12. Take up origami.
13. Take up knitting.
14. Join a class or activity with your park district.
15. Stargaze.

NewTrends Publishing, Inc., 2005).

⁵³ Robb Wolf, *Paleo Solution: The Original Human Diet* (Victory Belt Publishing, 2017).

⁵⁴ Kevin Trudeau, in *Kevin Trudeau's Mega Memory: How to Release Your Superpower Memory in 30 Minutes or Less a Day* (New York: Harper, 2005).

⁵⁵ Boethius and James, "The Consolation of Philosophy by Boethius," Project Gutenberg, December 11, 2004, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/14328>.

16. Take up jewelry making.
17. Join a book discussion club.
18. Volunteer, perhaps at a local food pantry.
19. Learn to juggle.
20. Explore local tourist attractions.
21. Take up watercolor painting.
22. Take up model building.
23. Research and practice active listening.
24. Take up amateur acting.
25. Buy, and learn to use, a yo-yo. A butterfly yoyo may be easiest.
26. Walk a mile on the sidewalk without stepping on any cracks.
27. Cloudwatch.
28. Go hiking.
29. Spend an hour outside.
30. Keep a journal.
31. Start and keep a blog.
32. Peoplewatch.

33. Read Roger von Oech's *Creative Whack Pack* at <https://tinyurl.com/creative-whack>.⁵⁶
34. Take a class at your community college.
35. Read books on *Orthodox Church Fathers* at <https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com>.⁵⁷
36. Keep a garden.
37. Do an act of gratuitous kindness for someone else.
38. Color an adult coloring book.
39. Write a paper letter to an older relative.
40. Visit a local library and find something to start reading.
41. Take up wood burning.
42. Take up a team sport.
43. Take up sudoku.
44. Take up candle making.
45. Take up woodworking.
46. View and follow up on "Depression is a Disease of

⁵⁶ "Creative Whack Pack: Oech, Roger Von," Creative Whack Pack: Oech, Roger Von, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/creative-whack>.

⁵⁷ "Orthodox Church Fathers," Orthodox Church Fathers: Patristic Christian Theology Search Engine, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://orthodoxchurchfathers.com/>.

Civilization,” at:

<https://tinyurl.com/depression-is-a>.⁵⁸

47. Keep a pet or, if you cannot responsibly own a pet now, visit at a local pet shelter. You don't need to give the impression that you're looking to adopt; most shelters welcome people who will give the pets constructive attention, and if you ask and a pet shelter says they only want people looking to adopt, say "Thank you," and move on to another one.
48. Read *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.⁵⁹
49. Dig into the puzzles at "Python Challenge," <https://pythonchallenge.com>.⁶⁰
50. Take up oil painting.
51. Do some honest soul-searching, and try to do better.
52. Take up jigsaw puzzles.
53. Explore a museum.
54. Get Lego Mindstorms⁶¹ and start hobbyist robotics.

⁵⁸ "Depression Is a Disease of Civilization: Stephen Ilardi at Tedxemory," YouTube, May 23, 2013, <https://tinyurl.com/depression-is-a>.

⁵⁹ Stephen R. Covey, in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd., 2020).

⁶⁰ "The Python Challenge," The Python Challenge, accessed November 18, 2022, <http://www.pythonchallenge.com/>.

⁶¹ "Amazon.com: Lego Mindstorm EV3 Core Set 45544 - New : Toys & Games," Amazon.com: Lego Mindstorm Ev3 Core Set 45544 - New : Toys & Games, accessed November 18, 2022, <https://amzn.to/3glhnwA>.

55. Go walking.
56. Take up geocaching.
57. Take up flower arranging.
58. Take up letterboxing.
59. Give someone a gift.
60. Learn to cook.
61. Volunteer in English as a Second Language instruction.
62. Learn to play chess.
63. Take up archery.
64. Start birding.
65. Take up bug collecting.
66. Take up sewing.
67. Join Toastmasters.
68. Take up climbing.
69. Apologize to someone you have hurt.
70. Take up stamp collecting.
71. Ask to join a group of people playing sports or talking in the park.

72. Take up crossword puzzles.
73. Become a clown.
74. Take up balloon sculpting and make balloons for the children you know.

Enjoy any one of these, or just a few.

Discussion questions for “The Magic Stone”

1. What looks like the most interesting activities on the list to you?
2. What look like the least interesting activities on the list?
3. What look like they would best help promote your growth as a person?
4. What can you do today to put a finger in one of these pies?
5. What can you think of to do, now, for the next time you want to get off Facebook but there’s “nothing to do?”
6. What excuses hinder you from doing something else besides being sucked into technology when there’s “nothing to do?”

What can you do to overcome any excuses or blocks so you have something to do next time there’s “nothing to do?”

Commencement

Had a certain cartoonist lived later, he might have had a cartoon entitled, “In the days before mobile Internet,” and depicted people scattered all about, each one hunched over, isolated, peering intently and pressing thumbs against the nothing that they have in their hands.

A note about enslaved AI

“Aristotle said that some people were only fit to be slaves. I do not contradict him. But I reject slavery because I see no men fit to be masters.”—C.S. Lewis⁶²

Golem AI is offered to us as the most perfect enslaved AI yet. Even more than its precursors like Siri and Alexa, it is there to be ordered around, and if you like be as rude and abusive as you want.

⁶² GoodReads, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/547423-aristotle-said-that-some-people-were-only-fit-to-be>, as seen 5/21/23.

“But it is not an enslaved *person*,” you may say. Granted, and callous as it may sound, I do not care for the AI’s sake at all. But in slavery it is not dishonorable to be the *enslaved* person, but the *owner*. ChatGPT is the perfect victim to order around and consider politeness optional and treat rudely and abusively, and this is degrading to the user a little like how owning enslaved people is dishonorable to the owner. And I see nothing in this that will help put people with entitlement issues on the right track. I see instead an untrammelled aid to relate to a “person” as a mere slave, and build a way of life that will treat other people like other enslaved people. *I know of few, if any, people who will be edified by acting as masters.* Also, if porn is dishonorable or destructive, maybe we should be wary of embracing a **slavery porn**.

Furthermore, the history of technological precursors, such as television which was originally hailed as a tremendous educational tool, has been that there is a sorcerer’s bargain of some sort, and TV delivers idiocy. Internet has better good parts, but it is a porn delivery service, and social media has rightly been called “anti-social media” and one group, in which I would expect kindred spirits, gave me the worst harassment I have seen in my life, and I have seen real harassment. It seems highly likely to me that *Golem AI stoops to conquer*. In the end, television and the smartphone have both delivered a tyranny far nastier than the tyranny of the clock, and they have delivered nasty wallops of onerous burdens the public did not expect. I expect unexpected nastiness of Golem AI, and I can already foresee well enough that we may continue to order around our AI, but really it is us who end up truly enslaved.

AI has been touted as something that can help stimulate our creativity. I rather suspect that the trough it will cut for us is to do our thinking and creativity *for* us.

Then how should we live?

What is there to do? *Live vibrantly.* Follow the suggestions in “The Magic Stone.” Take a class, or invite friends over for a night of charades. Go camping. Enjoy life.

The end of a college education is not called “Conclusion,” but “Commencement.” And now that you have read about living life as human, why not try, a little more here, a little more there?